

Thank-You Arab Spring, Why the United States gets the Last Laugh

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Abstract

The Arab Spring was supposed to be a turning point for the repressed and marginalized citizens of the Middle East. Despots that ruled with an iron fist could no longer control and oppress the masses the old-fashioned way. With a turn of events, it appeared that the twenty-first century had paved the way for a technological revolution that empowered a new generation. A generation that embodied different demographics, religions, and classes yet they were unified under a single resilient voice calling for change. Such rhetoric may sound familiar throughout the Western world; however the thought of speaking out against your government in the Middle East was foreign to the millions living in the region. For the past eighteen months, it appeared that the capitals of many Arab states were no longer in the back-pocket of the United States. With Arabs democratically electing new legislatures and new leaders, there appeared to be a nascent tone catering to the needs of the local populous and not to those in the West. But has the influence of the U.S. really waned in the region or has the old guard simply stayed in place and slipped into a newer uniform? The following will address how U.S. foreign policy with Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt has ensured the integrity of U.S. national interest despite the changing landscape caused by the Arab Spring.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Arab Spring, Currency Evaluation, U.S. Foreign Policy

Introduction

In Syria, the economy is crippled and the state looks towards an ominous future. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and the neighboring Gulf states have allowed an influx of U.S. navy ships and military personnel to reposition in the region. In Egypt, the authorities have superseded the results of the national elections. This may sound like Syria after they lost the Golan Heights, Saudi Arabia following the Gulf War and invasion by Iraq into Kuwait, or Egypt once they signed the peace treaty with Israel, when in fact this is the Middle East of today. Following a year and a half of what many assumed was a destined manifestation for the Arab people has turned into a temporary aberration. The Syrian opposition and pro-government forces are demoralized and in a perilous state. Egypt has turned the seat of the long lasting Pharaoh known as Hosni Mubarak into a puppet post leaving the military council as the supreme rulers of the country and the Middle East Gulf countries are stockpiling their military and weapon arsenal using U.S. defense companies faster than they can fill a barrel of oil. Russia has seen their few allies fall and the others on life support while they turned other regimes into enemies. Iran remains cornered as their hope for a Shia revivalism diminish. Furthermore, the Arab Spring has

neither unified the opposition nor has it created a coherent voice that could bring together the fragmented region. In Tunisia we saw the disgruntled lower class take to the streets, while Egypt brought out the tech savvy and cosmopolitan youth. Libya's opposition force was a ragtag team of tribes from the east while Syria has opened the flood gates of radical and fundamental Islamist pouring in from Iraq. The Middle East may have shifted on its access as a result of the Arab Spring, however the region is leaning more and more towards the interest of the United States.

Saudi Arabia & the Rest of the Middle East Gulf Countries

How does one measure the relationship between the world's major oil consumer and the world's major oil producer? Some argue that trust between a non-secular monarchy and a secular democracy has been built on the foundation of an understanding of each other's mutual interest. Others will argue that one state is exploiting the other's resources. But who's really exploiting who when one has a population of 300 million obsessed with energy and another with unemployment at nearly 25 percent (if you count the female population) and a median age of 15 years. Saudi Arabia leads the states that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the oil conglomerates of the regions, (Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman). These states with a large emphasis on Saudi Arabia have always valued their security in order to maintain social order among their citizens. With this in mind, there is almost a sense of entitlement of Saudi Arabia for the United States. Verbiage from the Monroe Doctrine were echoed by President Jimmy Carter as he declared any outside force that attempts to infiltrate Middle East security will be regarded as a threat to the United States and military force will be used as retaliation. This was before U.S. military troops were in Iraq [2003], before troops were in during the Gulf War [early 90's] and even before troops was in Lebanon [early 80's], proving the substance in Carter's statement. President Carter understood the role of the U.S. and endorsing such commitments to the region would produce lasting results favoring national interest.

The partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia dates back to the days of Franklin D. Roosevelt. The intimate relationship between both states which is often misunderstood by the rest of the world due to clandestineness has flourished as a result of U.S. military and economic dominance as hegemon. Following 9/11 the warm lasting relationship between Saudi Arabia and the U.S. started to cool, yet the U.S. remained the largest purchaser of Saudi oil and continued to supply their military with state of the art technology, (Brooks, 2005). In exchange the U.S. had significant leverage on the cost of oil throughout the global market as well as a strategically positioned ally in the region and a tool to channel their foreign policy to other states throughout the Middle East.

Most citizens of the Kingdom still consider inflation, unemployment and poverty as the direst issues facing their future. For reasons mentioned, Saudis are able to look past U.S. foreign policy, when it does not align with their interest, and instead take value in a partnership with the U.S. as a leading strategic economic super-power. "Not until the close of the World War I did the Arab world conclude that the West was imperialistic," (Salhi, 2004). When it came to bilateral negotiations with the U.S., Saudi Arabia did not view the relationship as a threat. This played a critical role in the months following the start of the Arab Spring. In Tunisia, Egypt, and

Libya, the people took to the streets because of their economic conditions and disparity in wealth between the ruling class and the rest of the population. In Saudi Arabia, by contrast, the short-lived protesters of the Eastern Province were motivated by Sunni-Shia divide. In a country dominated by the Sunni Muslims, the majority of the population possess a lack of pity for the Shia Muslims, thus the protesters had no support and the inability to maintain their rallying cry. Even with a high unemployment rate, most Saudis feel they are living a comfortable life-style with free health-care, education, no taxes, and little to no utility expenses.

Saudi Arabia sacrificed a great deal of their sovereignty in order to allow a super-power to command the life-line of their national identity; energy. But other than having the global super-power as your number one client, American oil companies have blessed Saudi Arabia with the technology unparalleled to anyone at the time resulting in, "Close to one-quarter of the world's proven oil reserves, [they also] one of the lowest production costs," (Long, 2004). The United States positioned Saudi Arabia from the beginning to become self-sufficient in extracting and producing oil in order to better serve the local population. Working with U.S. companies like present-day Chevron and Exxon (Esso and Mobil at the time) fueled the Kingdom's profits and their people's wealth. Despite the dichotomy of both states, U.S. government officials coached their Saudi counterparts how to appeal to their masses regarding American's deep involvement in Saudi Arabia's natural resources. U.S. relationship with the kingdom extended beyond the oil industry as the state played a key role in the economic development. Saudi Arabia was able to keep their population content as revenues from their economy were redistributed to the Saudi population as well as the "exploited" class. "By emphasizing the way in which all lived within the boundaries of the state shared common national characteristics, a basis of unity was created which did not rely upon the person of the ruler but rather on the nature of the community," (Gill, 2003). Today, the national oil company of Saudi Arabia, Saudi Aramco, employs more of their own local population than any other national oil company in the region.

"Imperialism has been reconceptualized away from a focus on colonial control and, instead towards a greater emphasis on military and economic power," (Black, 2008). And for that, the Saudi monarchy turned to the United States rather than to Europe as their strategic partner knowing the Americans would never have the motive to claim territory as their own. The Saudi Kingdom felt the need that in order, "To compete in the world market, required planned and sustained state intervention," (Barkey, 1991). Whereas one nation may interpret state intervention as vulnerability and opportunity to exploit, the United States embraced Saudi Arabia's keen interest in entering the global market. Washington knew that social policy and human rights was a matter for Geneva to take care of whereas investment and economic growth was America's playing field. For that, the U.S. lobbied and guided Saudi Arabia to become a member of the World Trade Organization. And from that moment, the United States strategically planted the seeds that ensured U.S.-Saudi kinship that could overcome any external threat, internal revolution, or better yet, an Arab Spring. "The state has been involved in the economy at different levels ranging from acting as a simple allocate agent to a builder of infrastructure or an active competitor in the market," (Barkey, 1991).

The biggest challenge facing Saudi Arabia and the entire Middle East is the restless young population. With 30 percent of the population between the ages of 15-29 (Assaad, 2010),

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and 59 percent under the age of 30, they have been the driving force behind the Arab Spring. By having, “eight out of the ten best universities in the world,” (Zakaria, 2007) the United States could once again position themselves as the messiah that would be an outlet for Saudi’s youth. With only 80 percent of the Saudi youth literate, development in a state’s infrastructure is tied closely to growth in literacy. “Parts of social revolution accompanying industrialization was the enormous growth in adult literacy,” (Gill, 2003). Saudi Arabia has the 3rd lowest literacy rate among the G20 nations ranking only slightly ahead of South Africa and India. Two-thirds of Saudi Arabia’s graduate students are Islamic studies majors. In order to supplement the discovery of oil in the Kingdom, the United States identified a new tactic to garner Saudi Arabia’s youth blessing while maintaining the U.S. monetary reserve simultaneously. To pay for abundance oil imports without completely off-setting the trade deficit, the United States would invite thousands of Saudi students to attend American universities at the expense of oil being purchased from the Saudi market. With oil pegged to the dollar, the Saudis realized this would maintain the flow of oil into American SUVs while providing their youth with the skill sets to take on critical careers in science and engineering. Saudi students were exposed to the luxuries of Western life with a bottomless expense budget. While there was a level of trepidation with the possibility that these Saudi students would return home with the urge to expose the sins of the West in the Muslim world, the fear never came to fruition since these student were immediately given high-level and critical position throughout the Kingdom because of their education. This was no accident considering soon after 9/11, U.S. immigration laws made it nearly impossible for young students from the developed world to come study in the United States. However, when law-makers realized that Saudi or Qatari students were not coming to the United States to take American jobs, the U.S. consulates offices in the Middle East Gulf became assembly lines granting study-visas by the thousands. Today there are nearly 30,000 Saudi students studying in the United States.

Beyond arming Saudi students with textbooks, the United States has taken advantage of the volatile region and has armed the ruling family with every state of the art technologically advanced weapon with the exception of a nuclear missile. But up until just recently, the Saudi government had not always opened their cash vault to U.S. military spending. Because of U.S. continuous investment in their own military, the latest advancement in technology, and build-up presence in the region, Saudi Arabia felt fixated on maintaining the relationship with the United States. For Saudi Arabia, “U.S. conventional and nuclear forces cut the cost of defense and provided great increments of security” (Murden, 2002). American military spending was larger than the next largest military budgets combined and accounted for, “40 percent of the world’s total military spending,” (Black, 2008). Of course the U.S. nuclear build up was the result of the Soviet Union and the Cold War and that is where the relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia began to venture beyond only oil interest. Saudi Arabia was just as concerned with the Soviet Union as was the United States. “For the United States, maintaining the flow of oil and containing the spread of communism were at the heart of security policy, and Saudi Arabia, a large oil-producing country with a small population, looked to the United States to provide a security umbrella for the external threats from the Soviets and client radical states,” (Long, 2004). Ensuing World War II and phasing into the start of the Cold War, the U.S. signed an agreement to train and equip Saudi defense forces on Saudi soil. Since then, Saudi military personal only know how to use American weapons as that was their sole source of armament.

However the comfort level of allowing so many American troops to be based in Kingdom began to wane following 9/11.

Yet again today, with the blessing of the Gulf leaders in the Middle East like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the U.S. has increased their inventory of stealthy F-22 and F-15c warplanes in two separate bases throughout the Persian Gulf. In addition, the U.S. Navy has doubled the number of vessels and minesweepers throughout the Strait of Hormuz. The exodus of U.S. troops from Iraq has not translated into a shrinking presence in the region. Many Arabs throughout the region breathed a sigh of relief under the presumption that the U.S. footprint was shifting from the Middle East to the Far East. While this did carry some merit, the sigh of relief was short-lived. The disturbance caused in Bahrain and the turbulence in Syria has kept many Royal families up all night fearing a Shia revivalism in their back yard. This has caused unease amongst the Sunni population of the Gulf with calls for military intervention by the West in case the threats in Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere approach their borders. All of which, ensuring that the Gulf leaders maintain their loyalty and allegiance to Washington.

The prime fear of the Middle East Gulf countries is Iran. Many speculate that U.S.-Saudi foreign policy towards the Iranian regime is to serve the interest of Israel. While that may be valid, Israel is not the only country to benefit from isolating the Khomeini regime. “A third of the Saudi public would approve U.S. military strike against Iran’s nuclear program, and a fourth is willing to say it would support an Israel operation,” (Pollock, p.2009). The Aytollah Khomeini has directly threatened Saudi rulers as well as encouraging coups as method to spark instability in the Gulf region. The Kingdom forebodes a threat from Iran as they watched a Shia revival sweep through the region including the close and tiny neighbor, Bahrain. As a result Saudi Arabia has turned to its super-power partner once again just it did following Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait to use their United Nations Security Council vote and leverage over other states to push for sanctions on the Iranian regime.

It is hard to ignore the fact that the Arab Spring occurred in the midst of a global economic crisis. To add fuel to the fire (no pun intended in reference to the Tunisian fruit vendor), Middle East governments were trying to prevent collapse of regional economies such as what occurred in Dubai. The Middle East largest trading bloc, the European Union have been suffering from a catastrophic economic situation leaving regional governments looking towards the United States for means to keep their economies afloat. That is not to say the U.S. has been immune with their personal economic struggles however minute in comparison to Europe. With Greece and Spain looking more and more like Tahrir Square while the protestors of the Arab Spring were demanding jobs, better salaries, and greater standards of living, the U.S. looked much more appealing for the Gulf leaders in terms of guidance and advice.

Curbing economic woes has a ripple effect stretching into a state’s foreign policy. The U.K. has slashed their foreign ministry budget closing nearly a quarter of their embassies abroad and military leaders throughout Europe have made significant cutbacks in their global footprint. Under normal circumstances, this sort of information may phase a government however when your arch enemy in Iran is meddling with your internal social affairs, leaders in the Gulf needed reassurance that they had the military backing from the United States in case drastic measures needed to be taken. The United States has become the global hegemon de facto once again.

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Former Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates described in a press conference about Europe's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, "We are seeing the demilitarization of European forces throughout the continent with decrease in military spending in a time of war." The United States is able to wield their power at the expense of Europe ceding their own power. "The USA takes a leading role not because it is able to dominate the other powers, but rather because, apart from its regional dominance of the Americas and Pacific, it is the sole state able to play a part in regional situations around the world," (Black, 2008).

While we are far from the days when President Franklin D. Roosevelt sat with King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud on a cruiser in the Suez Canal in 1945, the U.S. has made great strides to improve the relationship and position with the Middle East Gulf countries. In 2005, Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice stated that "for 60 years . . . the United States pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region here in the Middle East -- and we achieved neither." David Long put it best when describing the Saudi-US relationship, "The relationship is like a marriage from which there is no divorce. The question is whether the marriage will remain stormy or again calm down over time," (Long, 2004).

With an aberration of events cascading from the Middle East, Iran acting more hostile and aggressive in the region, and Europe consumed in their own debacle, the United States remains the cornerstone for stability for the governments of the GCC.

The Thorn That Was Syria

Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger once said, "You can't make war in the Middle East without Egypt and you can't make peace without Syria." Syria represents a mosaic of different sects, alliances, and identities all of which complicate the landscape of the state but even more so for the already fragile region. For Turkey, Syria serves as a key security interest in maintaining their large Kurdish population. For Iran, Syria represents a key ally in the Arab world. For Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries, Syria serves as a buffer zone for Shia dominated Iran and for Israel Syria plays an existential role maintaining political balance. Each one of the states just mentioned is a critically important ally of the United States or a staunch adversary threatening national security. Syria has never posed as an imminent threat like Iraq did during the Saddam Hussein regime or Iran under the current regime; however they have always been a thorn in U.S. foreign policy. Due largely in part to the collapse of the Soviet Union, since the 1980s, Syria has not been directly involved in terrorist activity but rather simply supported and hosted different terrorist elements.

The United States foreign policy of maneuvering around Syria in order to maintain national interest in the Middle East has always been by isolating the Syrian regime. Dating back to the father of Bashar Assad, former President Hafez Assad, he witnessed the influence of his regime decrease as the U.S. brokered the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1979. The Assad regime quickly realized the effort by the U.S. to secure an Arab-Israeli peace process excluded Syria and so obstructing the process became the government's number one strategic priority. Yet through the 1980's and 1990's, Syria was nothing more than a hermit nation closed off to the rest of the world. The United States was able to abate any sort of significant military build-up or economic

influence that may deter from Western interest. The Golan Heights was in no immediate danger from Syrian intervention, Western Europe paved the way for new economic power players in the region like the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, and the United States was able to fend off national threats and maintain the flow of oil at relatively low prices from key partners like Saudi Arabia.

Yet, the dynamics of Syria's role in the region began to take a new turn when Hafez Assad passed away and his Western-educated ophthalmologist son, Bashar Assad assumed power. Bashar was never meant to assume power following the reign of his father but after the death of his sturdy brother, Basil Assad automobile accident, Bashar was called back home and the grooming process began.

Once Bashar Assad was sworn into power, Syria was still slow at generating any progress. But then there was the Iraq invasion by coalition forces that ousted Saddam Hussein. While Hafez Assad had jumped on the coalition band-wagon in support of the invasion in 1991, Bashar Assad expressed fierce opposition to the plan put in place by the George W. Bush Administration. Syria was once again in the limelight and now a critical player in the region due to the fact that Syria shared a 400 mile border with Iraq. The border became a point-of-entry for Islamist terrorist seeking to disrupt U.S. operations in Iraq.

Bashar Assad denied such claims but could only sit and watch as a major oil pipeline from Iraq to Syria was cut by the Americans and further economic sanctions placed on the state. Before Bashar Assad became president, his father shared with him one of the most critical secrets for successfully leading Syria: perception trumps reality with your people and the rest of the world.

Bashar not only counts on terrorist organization to prop up his regime but they have been embedded into the fabric of the country's foreign and even domestic policy. The 2006 war that paved the way for establishing Hezbollah as a reckoning force in Lebanon also re-established Syria's legitimacy. With the Bush administration complacent to call a cease fire on Israel, distrust for U.S. flourished and Assad's long time support of Hezbollah came into fruition with acceptance through the streets of Damascus. If Israel could not be defeated by Syrian blood, why not outsource that battle to a group that is willing to make those sacrifices. And for that, while Assad always used terrorism as a leveraging tool to maintain his influence with the U.S., with the Syrian people it was used to remind them that it was a necessary tool to defeat the Israelis. "Because of Hezbollah's popularity in Syria following the war, the Syrian public was sympathetic to the president's argument" (Landis, Pace, 2006).

"Today, the regime has absorbed these tools as part and parcel of its legitimacy, thereby compromising its independence" (Haddad, 2005). As the unrest continues, Syrian protestors not only chant anti-Assad slogans but also slogans against Hezbollah. While merely speculation, many Syrians believe that Hezbollah elements are on standby throughout Syria to resist a powerful offensive by the opposition. Syria no longer dictates terrorist groups in the region but instead has turned to rely on their ruthlessness to maintain the status quo.

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Yet ironically enough, the terrorist proxy he so longed to support and protect have been incapable of protecting the regime and the Syrian state from external radical and fundamental forces (al Qaeda to be more precise). The same exact 400 mile stretch border between Iraq and Syria has been the point of entry for attacks against the Assad regime. The brutality occurring between the Alawite, minority ruling elite (a Shia Muslim sect) and majority yet neglected Sunni population has turned Syria into the newest playground for sectarian violence.

The reluctance by the U.S. to get involved in Syria is caused by both Hafez and Bashar Assad whom have warned that if they were to ever be removed from power, a vacuum would be created leaving the Muslim Brotherhood or radical Islamic groups to take over the state. Rightfully so, this claim is accurate since the Syrian population is made up of an assortment of different sects and ethnicities too weak to overcome radical elements. “Although it is impossible to ascertain the extent to which the public sympathizes with the Muslim Brotherhood, growing religiosity and a dearth of credible liberal trends would make the Muslim Brotherhood a formidable political force if it were allowed to mobilize” (Landis, Pace, 2006). Unlike in Egypt where the Muslim Brotherhood remained on the sidelines during the Mubarak overthrow, in Syria they would achieve power by creating pandemonium among the different groups and cause havoc for neighboring Israel (in the Golan Heights), Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq (all key U.S. partners in the region). And as the United States looks towards Syria and wonders if it is the next Iraq during the years of sectarian violence, one must realize that unlike Iraq, Syria’s powerful neighbors have much more at stake than did Iraq’s neighbors during the reconstruction years.

Today the greatest threat for the U.S. and the region in terms of Syria’s future is Iran. While the Saddam regime had always reinforced Iran’s inability to wander into the Arab world, his ouster meant all lanes were open into Syria. The Syrian-Iranian relationship began to flourish with increased trade to even an increase in pilgrimage tours to holy sites throughout Syria. Saudi Arabia watched in fear as Iran garnered more influence throughout the Levant area of the Middle East (primarily Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria) and as a result, the Kingdom was forced to bolster their relationship with the Assad regime. Saudi Arabia and the Middle East Gulf countries were never really at odds throughout modern history, but now it appeared everyone was tugging to get Bashar Assad’s attention.

Elevating Syria to the regional power they once were was the newly forged alliance with Turkey. A one-time foe, Turkey was Syria’s gateway into Europe. In 1998 Turkey almost engaged Syria in a full-offensive military strike for providing refuge of PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan. As tens of thousands of military troops approached the Syrian border, Syria quickly realized their military capabilities were dwarfed compared to those of the Turkey. They immediately handed over Ocalan and the Syrian-Turkish relationship began to see brighter days.

On the surface, the U.S. welcomed the new partnership between both countries. Turkey was an ally of the U.S. and key member of NATO not to mention they were a democratic Islamic state seeking to embrace Western political and economic values. Conversely, Syria’s relationship with an emerging economic leader like Turkey meant U.S. sanctions on Syria had a limited affect. Incidentally, what complicated the Syrian-Turkish relationship was the medaling

by the U.S. to forge relations between Turkey and Israel. This was clearly seen as a threat to Damascus and furthermore pushed Assad towards the Iranians to counter the emergence of Israel with Syria's neighbor. "Syria and its ally Iran saw themselves as directly targeted by this new axis and moved into even a closer partnership" (Seale, 2000).

For just a moment, it appeared that Washington was going to have to start paying attention to Syria just as the days during Kissinger. Fortunately, the presumption was short lived when young students in the southern town of Derra spray painted anti-government messages on their school wall and became victims to the regimes brutal retaliation using torture. The decade of prosperity for so many Syrians that included the privatization of many industries, the rise of the middle class and acceptance by the West was short and temporary.

Today, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and many parts of the world have turned their back on the Assad regime. Even Russia has recently mounted pressure on Bashar Assad to take drastic actions to stop the violence or Moscow may have to find a new partner in the region. In any case, whether the Assad regime remains intact or collapses, Syria's economy has been sent back decades, their military exhausted, and their regional influence vanished. This one time thorn in U.S. Middle East foreign policy has become a wilted leaf.

Rude Awakening in Egypt

Millions across Egypt cheered when after only 18 days of protest, Hosni Mubarak announced he would be stepping down as president. However the fall of the Hosni Mubarak's 30 year reign revealed that he truly yielded minimal power compared to Egypt's military generals. Remaining in the shadows of the corrupted Mubarak inner-circle, the military generals have garnered a great deal of respect and trust with the populace. Therefore, while consolidating power from the presidency came with some resistance from the urbanite youths of Tahrir Square, the chants were quickly subdued as the masses were consumed with their very first democratically held presidential elections. This is extremely significant for the United States since many presumed the fall of Hosni Mubarak meant Washington lost a close ally in Egypt.

While Hosni Mubarak was a partner, the true alliance was between Egypt's military generals and Washington, D.C. Since the inception of the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, the \$1.3 billion of aid has been for the Egyptian military and not the Egyptian people much less the President. "Although there are no verifiable figures on total Egyptian military spending, it is estimated that U.S. military aid covers as much as 80 percent of the Defense Ministry's weapons procurement costs," (Sharp, 2012).

Since Hosni Mubarak took the post of the presidency following the assassination of Anwar Al-Sadat, Mubarak has visited the United States a total of 23 times (history.state.gov, 2012). However, the International Military Education and Training (IMET) assistance for Egypt, military generals have been visiting and training in the United States every year since 1978, totaling 34 visits.

Washington looked in trepidation as the Muslim Brotherhood won a plurality of seats in the parliamentary elections held in early 2012. As there appeared to be a change in the national

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discourse throughout Egypt, the military-led Supreme Council of the Armed Forces came to the rescue, reassuring Washington's fears and maintaining the status quo that had been in place for over three decades. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces regularly intervened in the process of amendments or changes to the constitution and even retained the power to nominate the cabinet. United States interests were still in-tact. Ironically enough, as the Supreme Council was attempting to curb the Muslim Brotherhood's power, the Council's action forced the Muslim Brotherhood to go against their promise not to field a presidential candidate due to the simple fact the presidential seat would be their final outlet to yield any power in the country. Yet to no one's surprise, the Military Council dissolved the influence of the presidential seat to the mere capacity of a figure-head role.

The beleaguered Egyptians who tirelessly and relentlessly fought to change the status quo day-in and day-out in Tahrir Square were given a rude awakening. Hosni Mubarak's brutality and corruption was made possible by generals who idly stood by standing behind the curtain. The disclosure millions neglected to read when they refinanced their home leading to the subprime crisis was similar to the millions of Egyptians whom neglected to wake up to the fact that Mubarak was not running the show. The people of Tahrir Square were able to accomplish in shedding a light on the Supreme Council nefarious power. So far, however, the Egyptian people have not had the stamina or will-power to stand in Tahrir Square shoulder to shoulder demanding the change they assumed they had achieved. Even if the momentum was there, the presidential election between the Muslim Brotherhood's Muhammad Mursi (Freedom and Justice Party) and Ahmed Sakhif (Independent Party) was such a close and decisive race, the Egyptian people are no longer united as one. Muhammad Mursi now must incorporate all the Egyptian people not because morally that is the correct move to make as a democratically-elected president but because that may be the only leverage he has against Supreme Council to grant him some authority. In doing so, his hard line rhetoric resulting in his election must be toned down which may be an arduous considering the Muslim Brotherhood have been silenced in Egypt for nearly fifty-years. "The military is squeezing the Brotherhood, and the Brotherhood has no clear counter" (Martini, 2012).

When one looks past Mubarak's brutality against the opposition and vast corruption, it was the military carefully calibrating his every move and propping Mubarak as simply a figure head put in place to assuming responsibility for Egypt's lack of growth and lack of opportunity for the people. Nevertheless, peace with Israel remains intact and U.S. interest continue to flourish.

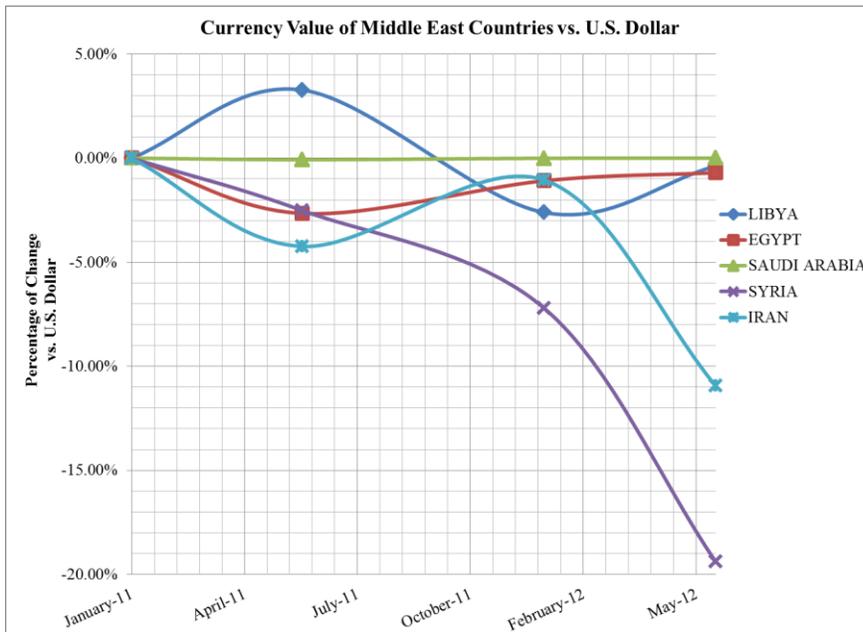
The Currency Game

One of the key indicators economist and global leaders use to gauge the health of a country is by the value of their currency. Currency rate of one country can forecast their long-term growth, how accessible borrowing is on the international market, consumer confidence, consumer pricing, and inflation just to name a few.

Since the start of the Arab Spring in January 2011, countries that were economically friendly with the United States have seen the value of their currency remain steady even with

turmoil and change at the leadership level. However, regimes that have been resistant to the wave of change hitting the Middle East have seen the value of their currency plummet. The obvious cause for currency devaluation is sanctions put in place by the United States and endorsed by many countries around the world. What is important to understand is that for all Middle Eastern countries, their economic well-being is directly correlated with their relationship with the United States. For example, even when cruise missiles were flying down on Libya’s infrastructure or Egypt watched as their tourism sector came to a complete halt, their economies and currencies maintained value and quickly recovered from raucous that was caused by the Arab Spring. The same can be mentioned about Tunisia and even Yemen. However, with minimal to no external intervention in countries like Syria and Iran, they have seen consumer prices soar, their currencies lose nearly a quarter of their value, and risk the potential of tipping the point of tolerance with their middle class of whom has ensured their longevity. In ensuring the currency values for Libya, Egypt, and most importantly Saudi Arabia to remain steady, as a result the U.S. is able to maintain exports to these economies and the presence of U.S. multinational companies. In fact, the Egyptian stock market, the EGX30 was the second best performing global market year-to-date for 2012 and the best performing regional market with an increase of 30 percent. The chart in figure 1 identifies currency values against the U.S. dollar for Libya, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and Iran from the start of the Arab Spring in January 2011.

Fig 1.



The significance of the information coming from the data reveals that a state can usher in turbulent and unsettling social change yet the pressures put in place on the state’s economy go undeterred as long as the United States is a trading partner. This reconfirms the economic super power the United States remains to be despite the rise of new economic power from emerging countries such as Turkey, South Korea, and Brazil. And one cannot mention emerging economic super power without identifying China, however even with China’s unyielding support and billions in investment in Sub-Sahara Africa that has not translated into prosperity for the African

population. The same can be applicable to Russia or Turkey's economic open-door policy with states like Syria and Iran.

The global economy of the twenty-first century has proven that markets with sluggish or undervalued currencies could still strive in making their exports much more appealing. However, whenever 57.4 percent of your trading market has sanctions banning exports from your country, levitating the Syrian currency becomes a challenge (Aljazeera.com, 2012). What has kept the Assad regime in tact since the Arab Spring is the content middle-class throughout Damascus and Aleppo. Eventually when Syria's legitimate merchants have to compete with smugglers on the black market because of the sanctions, there will be a tectonic shift in their acceptance of the regime caused by the economic train wreck that appears inevitable. "Eventually, a shadow economy dominated by Assad's cronies will be all that is left. Should he fall, so, too, would the entire economic systems" (Byman, 2012).

Conclusion

From the London School of Economic, Fawaz Gerges recently published a book titled, *Obama and the Middle East*. In the book he scrutinizes the admiration's handling of the Arab Spring and goes on to say, "They face an uncertain future. The Arab authoritarianism that stabilized and protected US interests for a half century is beginning to seem not so stable. Neither are American power and influence as stable and durable as they used to be. A powerful current of revolutionary social change is eroding the very foundations of America's friends and foes alike. Although the character of the new Middle East remains unknown, one thing is clear. It will never be the same again," (Gerges, 2012). Gerges does not realize that the Middle East landscape of twenty-years ago included a hostile PLO in Palestine, a Syria determined to sabotage any peace treaty with Israel, a weak Gulf economy, a Libya determined to develop weapons of mass destruction, an Algeria in a civil war, Iraq on the doorsteps of Kuwait, and an Iran that looks no different than it does today. Today on the other hand, Saudi Arabia is a member of the G-20 and WTO, Syria is paralyzed, Fatah in Palestine has made efforts to work with Israel, and there are more U.S. multi-national companies in Iraq and Libya than at any other point in history. Arab people do not tolerate al Qaeda and have voiced their frustration with their own regimes and not that of the West.

"That does not lessen my commitment, however, to governments that reflect the will of the people. Each nation gives life to this principle in its own way, grounded in the traditions of its own people. America does not presume to know what is best for everyone, just as we would not presume to pick the outcome of a peaceful election. But I do have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. Those are not just American ideas, they are human rights, and that is why we will support them everywhere. There is no straight line to realize this promise. But this much is clear: governments that protect these rights are ultimately more stable, successful and secure. Suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away. America respects the right of all peaceful and law-abiding voices to be heard around the world, even if we disagree with them. And we will welcome all elected,

peaceful governments – provided they govern with respect for all their people” (whitehouse.gov, 2009). Gerges or other critics may harp on how Obama has abandoned these principles. But the U.S. pressured Mubarak to step down and prevent genocide of Libya’s eastern province by Ghadafi-loyalist. They have called out Russia and China based on their voting record in the U.N. Security Council regarding Syria and the U.S. has prevented Iran from blocking a passage-way for a third of the global energy supply through the Strait of Hormuz. The U.S. efforts are far from perfect, but in comparing with other global leaders and their foreign policy (Russia’s support for Syria’s regime and China’s support of Sudan), the U.S. tends to lead a better example.

The Arab Spring has marked a new turning point in Middle East history just as the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the creation of the State of Israel, or the discovery of oil by King Fahad of Saudi Arabia. The Middle East is myriad by pivotal moments forever changing the landscape of the region.

One virtue all Arabs can unanimously identify themselves as is to be very nationalistic. Ironically enough, that same virtue is what keeps the social fabric of unity so fragmented and filled with holes. That is the opportunity the United States has identified as key to maintaining their role throughout the region. The Saudis loath the Iranians and are hesitant of the Qataris, western Libyan tribes are at odds with the tribes of the East, minority groups in Egypt are fearful with the rise of the Brotherhood, and the Sunni Syrian middle-class are precarious of the status quo as they sit and watch radical elements take over their country. And while the world needs a tranquil Middle East in order to maintain the energy demand and global security, the fragmented region is becoming more and more dependent on outside elements to maintain their sanity.

The school of thought brought about by the rise of China and other middle powers that global problems are no longer solved, crisis managed, or global rules defined, let alone implemented, the old fashioned way, by a few mostly Western powers has proven to be false. Russia is struggling to hold on to their last true ally in the region, China wants to keep their hands clean and not ignite their own Uighurs population, and Turkey has been cornered with thousands of refugees sitting on their border. Just as the United States came to the rescue of the developed world with the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the start of the twentieth century, the same shall be held true at the start of the twenty-first century as the rest of the world stands and watches what the fate of the Middle East will be for decades to come.

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