

Middle East: the Undoing of America's Mendacious Foreign Policy

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There may be plumes of acrid smoke rising from burning tyres in cities across the Middle East, but there is the discernible whiff of something else – fear. And it is not so much fear among the tens of thousands of people who are taking to the streets facing down paramilitary police forces in Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan, Egypt and elsewhere to protest against their governments. It is rather more the fear among the rulers of these unwieldy regimes – a fear, or at least grave concern, that must also be seeping into the corridors of power in Washington and other Western capitals.

Dozens of protesters have been killed or injured by police firing on civilians inspired by the popular uprising in Tunisia, which has seen the president of that country fleeing to neighbouring Saudi Arabia. Egypt – the most populous of the 22 League of Arab countries and a crucial pillar of US foreign policy architecture in the Middle East – is now the focal point for the wave of street demonstrations sweeping the region. At least four people have been killed in that country and over 700 arrested in the past few days as thousands of citizens pour on to the streets of Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and other major Egyptian cities in defiance of a government ban on such demonstrations. Like their counterparts in Tunisia and other Arab countries, the protesters in Egypt are demanding the overthrow of the government – and not just the figureheads like Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, but the entire ruling elite.

Despite the vicious repression of these regimes and the evident ease of deploying lethal force, the people are refusing to be intimidated off the streets. There is a palpable sense of momentum for long-overdue radical change in the region – driven by decades of frustration and anger with the rulers of these countries over a raft of social and political issues. There could hardly be a more comprehensive checklist of causes for revolutionary upheaval: massive poverty, unemployment and lack of housing, education, health, free speech, labour rights, voting rights – a veritable tinderbox of grievances all compressed beneath an egregiously wealthy elite who continue to sit on this incendiary mass only by the use of brutal state security apparatus. Notably, most informed sources agree that it is not Islamic fundamentalism fuelling the widespread popular unrest, but rather it is simple economic and social injustice and desire for basic democratic rights.

High on the checklist of grievances across the Arab region is Palestine, and what its peoples rightly see as the long-held abject deference of their rulers to the US-Israeli criminal occupation of Arab territories and violation of international law and human rights. The 30-year regime of Egypt's Mubarak – the second biggest recipient of US military aid in the Middle East after Israel – goes much further than deference. It has actively colluded with

what can only be called the decades-long US-Israeli campaign to destroy Palestinian rights. After launching its latest criminal war on the people of Gaza by Israel and its enablers in Washington, which saw more than 1,400 Palestinians killed, Mubarak's regime still refuses to open the Raffah Crossing – the only land bridge that can bring badly needed humanitarian aid to people living amid rubble in that territory.

What we are seeing across the Arab world is not just the undoing of corrupt regimes. We are seeing the undoing of America's entire foreign policy in that region. No wonder there must be deep misgiving in Washington over the recent turmoil in this key energy-producing region. For decades, US administrations have, through a cocktail of ignorance and arrogance, deluded themselves that they could get away with a mendacious contradiction. That contradiction is the espousal of democracy and peace in the Middle East while at the same time sponsoring regimes that act in every way to undermine any path to democracy and peace. And the vast majority of people in the Middle East see through this delusion. They are well aware that at the root of democratic change in the region is not just getting rid of internal corrupt rulers – it is the overthrow of Washington's imperialist policy, which has long subjugated Arab countries to despotic rule.

It would be laughable if it were not so serious. For the US government, past and present, is showing itself to be the most able demolition engineer of its own foreign policy in the Middle East.

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