
Editorial: North Africa and Middle East rising

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The North Africa and Arab Spring has met with mixed responses from the West. To understand these rather hesitant and confused responses from the US and its European counterparts, a number of historical and economic factors need to be placed on the intellectual table.

It is important to note that, following the collapse of the Russian Empire (USSR) we are now witnessing a decline in the (largely American) Empire. President Obama plays the part of Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev. First, each actor is/was charged with 'managing' the decline of an empire. Second, each was/is a product of a historical movement; and although each may be cast captain-of-the-ship, their ships chart their own historical course. Gorbachev is now the object of derision in his own land, comforted somewhat by flowers from the Ronald Reagan library. President Obama's fate remains undecided. But one thing is certain; he will not be lionised in the Russian State Library.

Returning the rise and fall of the American Empire; it was constituted after WW2, where a bankrupt and exhausted Europe vacated large swathes of its economic 'pie' and political influence to 'Johnny come-lately' America. American cleaned-up and inherited vast reserves of cheap oil that was secured by corrupting indigenous elites who were militarised (courtesy of Eisenhower's Military-Industrial Complex) and paid-for by mortgaging hapless repressed populations of poor countries.

The new American Empire was by a two-part harmony: first, front-line oil states like Saudi Arabia, whose medieval regimes (tell it to women, gays, etc.) who kept the oil flowing at bargain-basement rates in exchange for unlimited, interest-free credit card access to Harrods.

Second, in order to keep the region in order, the USA needed some non-oil cops to police the region. Egypt and (nuclear endowed) Israel were clear-cut members of this club and continue to enjoy unwavering US support, although strains between Israel and Egypt may jeopardise further US largesse for the latter.

Other members of the North Africa and Arab Spring fall into a black-hole of Western neglect, either because they lack natural resources or they still stand a chance of keeping a Western Military presence in place (Russian still struggles with the same issues of retaining the love and affection of its own 'captive' states). In the West's black-hole, we find Syria (who really cares about Syria!) even though they deployed Iranian tactical support for killing its own people. Syria just received a rap on its tourist-travel-raptures passport knuckles.

The powers-that-be in Jordan and Bahrain hope to survive with tepid reforms with tacit Western support. Notwithstanding Western media reports and popular outrage atrocities in Libya, the US slid-out of the military front-seat, and ceded the field to a less than inspiring NATO and France – who assumed the moral high-ground with new oil opportunities in its sights. Deepest down in the black hole of Western neglect are the Palestinians (for obvious reasons) and Yemen – a 30 year brutal dictatorship, but remain a strong and faithful ally.

So the 'incoherence' of the Western response to the North Africa and Arab Spring is not so incoherent after all. This is an easy dance to follow. The West is not interested in supporting a popular uprising but in preserving its economic and military advantages. Egypt is back in the hands of the military who will appease the protesters by throwing Mubarak to the dogs, appoint Mabarak Mach 2, and send roses to Israel. Libya's Colonel Muammar Gaddafi will probably be 'Bin Ladened' and replaced with another oil friendly provider.