The Arab Spring: Power Comes from the Barrel of a Gun

Before we continue our conversation about the links between Islamist extremists and Western government agencies, let us briefly review a few conclusions from previous articles about what came out of the Arab spring. First of all, it is no secret that events during the Arab Spring were inspired by the US government and supported by its European counterparts. If that were not the case, President Obama would not have said, “Mubarak has to go,” among other things, and he would not have made his interest quite so plain.

Second, the goal of the color revolutions in the Arab world was clearly nothing more than property redistribution on a particularly large scale — not a desire to spread Western-style democracy there.

Third, the US government and Islamist organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood became partners because they share a spiritual affinity and because the latter are virtually the only force in the Islamic world capable of armed rebellion.

Fourth, the Islamists are cooperating with Western government agencies not because they respect Western values but out of sheer opportunism. Property redistribution in the Arab world is their goal also, and in that they are functioning as a junior partner.

How might future relations between the Islamists and their White House patron evolve? What happened in Benghazi suggests that these relations may change for the worse and do so quite unexpectedly.

Mao Zedong once said: “Power comes from the barrel of a gun.” No government, not even the most democratic, likes losing control. They can even be said to hate losing control with all their heart and always resists losing it.

For example, no country did more to help China gain its independence than the Soviet Union. If the Soviet Armed Forces had not defeated the Kwantung Army, China today would be ruled by Japan. Mao and the Chinese Communist Party owe Moscow literally everything. In political relations, however, that kind of thing means absolutely nothing. Once the Chinese Communist Party became firmly established, it called the Soviet Union a “paper tiger,” orchestrated a provocation against it at Lake Damansky, and then invited the imperialist Nixon to visit Beijing. Mao shook Nixon’s hand and smiled warmly, just as he had once smiled at the communist Stalin.

It is no wonder that political crackdowns got underway so quickly in some Islamic countries undergoing democratization and anti-American and anti-Israeli sentiments then began to emerge.

For example, after Mohammed Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood leader, became Egypt’s president, he issued a series of edicts preventing the courts from dissolving the upper house of parliament or the Constituent Assembly. Islamist supporters hold most of the seats in them.

ElBaradei, one of the leaders of Egypt’s revolution, twittered: “Morsi today usurped all state powers and appointed himself Egypt’s new pharaoh. A major blow to the revolution that could have dire consequences.”

One more thing should be borne in mind. The pharaohs built Egypt’s pyramids, and millions of tourists come to see them from all over the world. Who would pay to see Mr. Morsi or Mr. ElBaradei and the achievements of the revolution? To increase tourism the country needs peace in the streets. Revolutionary excesses that involve the use of stones and tear gas can only attract thrill seekers.
The Western liberal media have begun publishing pessimistic assessments of the democratic changes in the Arab world.

Daniel Pipes, president of the Middle East Forum, asks in The Washington Times: “Who is worse, President Mohammed Morsi, the elected Islamist seeking to apply Islamic law in Egypt, or former President Hosni Mubarak, the dictator ousted for trying to start a dynasty?”1 And he answers his own question by saying, “…Islamists are worse than dictators.”

The issue is not who is worse, but who is better, and for whom — and whether “terrorists” and “dictators” aren’t two sides of the same coin. The difference is that dictators are terrorists who have gained power, whereas terrorists are only seeking it. Indeed, isn’t that what we’re talking about — not Islam?

The fact that when Morsi came to power he quickly went from being a democratic president to being a pharaoh does not especially bother the West.

Possible zigzags in the foreign policies of the newly formed Islamic democracies do cause some concern in Western political circles. Unfortunately, the Islamists are a long shot from being the faithful servants of the US government in the Middle East. The fact that the goals of the Islamists and the US State Department coincided at a certain point does not mean that they will continue seeing eye to eye.

Hosni Mubarak, who, as it turns out, was a dictator, took a reasonably balanced approach to Egypt’s foreign policy. Morsi’s government is currently quite shaky and highly dependent on the mood of the “street.” The entire world was rocked by the anti-American riots that took place last fall in several Arab countries, including Egypt. They were caused by the appearance of a notorious anti-Islamic film on the Web. The US government immediately denied any involvement in its creation. I assume that that’s true. The film “Innocence of Muslims” is certainly provocative. But if American intelligence did not produce it, that gives rise to a rather obvious question. Who actually controls the “street” in Egypt?

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had the following reaction to the anti-American demonstrations in the Arab world: “The people of Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Tunisia did not trade the tyranny of a dictator for the tyranny of a mob.” Howard LaFranchi of the Christian Science Monitor had a harsh criticism of Egypt’s president: “…Mr. Morsi has looked like something less than a steadfast friend in failing to act quickly against the protests... When he did speak, he seemed to offer only a tepid rebuke of anti-US violence.”

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The paradox here is that if Morsi really were a dictator and truly possessed total power in Egypt, he would have quickly suppressed the anti-American riots. However, Morsi isn’t a dictator yet. Thus, the US government and the EU need to choose whom they want to be dealing with: tyrants who exercise firm control over their people, or democratic presidents who depend on the will of the voters. The latter are not as well disposed towards the United States and the EU as politicians in Washington like to think.

Writing in the newspaper Project Syndicate, the prominent politician Joschka Fischer admits: “All of us tend to make the same mistake repeatedly: we think at the beginning of a revolution that freedom and justice have prevailed over dictatorship and cruelty. But history teaches us that what follows is usually nothing good.”

In short, history has once again confirmed that we have learned nothing from it. Politicians work to their own good, and millions of ordinary people are held hostage to their actions.

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