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Anti-American—and anti-Israeli—triumphalism as normal and de rigueur. Welcome to the new Arab world

Prediction is always risky or plain silly, but my guess is that when the dust settles, which it will, in a month or two or three's time, one will see that Western—and Israeli—interests in the Middle East will have been substantially undermined and anti-Western—and anti-Israeli—interests substantially bolstered. Similarly, one will see that the regimes which are, by nature and tradition very brutal, such as Iran's, Syria's and possibly Libya's, will weather the storm whereas those which are softer, more inclined to measures of liberalisation, partly because of attentiveness to messages from Washington, will either have fallen or will have given ground, and a large measure of power, to anti-Western, often Islamist, elements within each country.

The regimes that have already collapsed, and will either collapse in the near future, or will suffer a large measure of curtailment of their power, are those of Lebanon, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Jordan and the Gulf states. (people tend to forget that Lebanon, not Tunisia, was the "first to go", though there the threat of radical action rather than actual street violence was the precipitant). In the Gulf states, with large Shi'ite populations—such as in Bahrain, where the Shi'ites constitute the overwhelming majority—Iran's influence will vastly increase, in one or two of them, perhaps to the point of domination. One has yet to see how what is happening will affect eastern Saudi Arabia, via its large Shi'ite minority. (In recent days, I haven't seen much written about Iranian involvement in the Bahrein upheaval. I have little doubt that it was intense.)

In all the others—Lebanon, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia (where is Morocco?), Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen—help to the American "War on Terror" will be considerably reduced, or will vanish altogether, as the new regimes bow to the "will of the people" and anti-Western Muslim or secular parties.

Obama's enlightened liberalism, encouraging street protests and discouraging the regimes' clampdowns, or, alternatively, his calculation that the tiger will in any event win out so best to ride him and appear benevolent towards the regime-changers, will in the end result in growing American alienation in the Middle East.The masses will rage against America however much

money Washington pours in in emergency funding (vide grassroots anti-American feelings in Pakistan, despite largescale American post-disaster assistance).

Similarly, a greater frostiness will enter into attitudes across the Middle East towards Israel (a frostiness, to be sure, that will aid the Israeli right in rebuffing efforts to conciliate the Palestinians and will encourage the Palestinians in their obduracy and inflexibility on such issues as refugee return, settlements, etc.). In Egypt, opposition elements are already calling for revocation of the 1979 peace treaty with the Jewish state or, at the least, "reconsidering it" and a permanent end to the multi-billion dollar gas exports to Israel. (It appears that the gas pipeline, cut by sabotage near El Arish in Sinai a fortnight ago, has not yet been re-activated, whether for technical or political reasons is unclear. Israel, and perhaps Wahington, are quietly trying to press the Egyptians to renew supplies.) The post-Mubarak caretaker military regime responded to the treaty controversy with a general statement about Egypt "respecting its international commitments"—but shied well away from explicitly including the treaty with Israel (some generals may themselves oppose the treaty; and certainly such an explicit commitment would have riled the masses, which the military regime is keen to avoid.)

The latest news from Cairo (Monday) is that the caretaker government has decided to lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip, which supplemented the Israeli siege of the Hamas-controlled territory since the fundamentalists took over in 2006-2007. Hundreds of Gazans will start crossing the Gaza-Sinai border tomorrow; it is unclear whether the Egyptians will attempt to control the flow of arms and ammunition to Gaza as they did during the Mubarak years.

The Egyptian masses, like those in other Arab countries, are in some measure anti-Israeli because of decades of deliberate unrestrained anti-Israeli (and, often, anti-Semitic) media incitement. There is substantial support for the Hamas, which is the Palestine branch of Egypt's fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood movement.

In Egypt, while peace was the official policy, government spokesmen often publicly castigated Israel (sometimes justifiably) and took great offense when Israelis said anything critical about Egypt. There was never any symmetry.

But more importantly, the Cairo govermment—contrary to its treaty obligations—allowed the media completely free rein in damning the Jewish state and its behavior, while internal criticism of the regime itself or other aspects of the regime's policies was severely restricted. Israel was the one area where, under the dictators Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak, "freedom" was given its

head. A good example was furnished a few weeks before the January uprising when the Egyptian media ran stories charging that the Mossad had organized a recent spate of shark attacks on swimmers in the Sinai resort of Sharm al Sheikh. It was explained that this was a means of harming Egypt's tourism industry.

Over the years, Egyptian newspapers regularly charged Israel with using poison gas against Palestinians or poisoning Egypt's water resources, etc. As well, the regime severely limited visits by Egyptians to Israel, perhaps fearing that they might bring back a balanced or even attractive picture of the Jewish state.

I fear that this order of anti-Israel—and perhaps anti-American—incitement will become routine and de rigeuer. And the picture of Iranian gunboats traversing the Suez Canal in a display of triumphalism and in encouragement to Islamists around the Arab world will soon go unremarked.

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