



EDWARD DJEREJIAN

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Volker PERTHES, Chairman and Director of *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)*

Thank you. We will come back to that and we will also try to find out what the different roles of Egypt and Saudi Arabia will be in a changing region. However, let us move on to the outsiders, as it were. Ed, you have been the Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs under James Baker at a time when we had high hopes for peace. You have also been Ambassador to both Syria and Israel and have been dealing with the Middle East at the James Baker Center for Public Policy since you left the administration. You have probably not always been happy when looking at US policy towards the region. From the distance of Houston, how do you see Washington coping with the changes in the Middle East?

Edward DJEREJIAN, Founding Director of James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, former US Ambassador to Syria

Thank you, Volker. I would like to pick up on something that you said at the beginning and Thierry spoke about in his remarks about the definitional problem we may have with what we call the Arab Spring or the Arab Awakening. I have to confess that I recently shared a podium with His Royal Highness Prince Turki where I referred to the Arab Awakening and he looked at me and said 'Oh, I didn't realise I'd been asleep all these years'. I will therefore use the term 'Arab Spring'.

To try to characterise the approach of the United States administration to the Arab Spring, firstly, I do not think that a coherent strategy has been formed. In describing Washington's approach, we must think of two large categories or trends. One is American values and principles. After all, we are a revolutionary country, based on liberty, freedom, human rights, equality before the law and so on. Our approach as a country towards the Arab Spring is therefore going to be defined in large part through the long arc of history in promoting these individual freedoms that America stands for. I think that this is one of the imperatives of American foreign policy towards the Arab Spring.

The other one, frankly, is national security interests and these will sometimes seem to conflict in terms of what we do. However, I agree strongly with what Amr Moussa and Prince Turki have said, which is that America must look at the Arab Spring in a differentiated manner – one size does not fit all. If you analyse the recent actions of Washington, you can see this differentiation at work. For example, after President Mubarak's departure, we worked very closely in Egypt with the Egyptian military, with which we have had very close ties for many years and I think that that relationship was beneficial in perhaps helping the situation where the military became the vehicle for political transition. In Tunisia, it was similar. In Libya, very famously our then Secretary of Defence, Bob Gates, said that the United States did not have vital interests in Libya and that they would therefore not take the leading role but would look to European partners, especially France and Britain and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to take the lead. President Obama was criticised by his opponents in the United States for 'leading from behind', but I personally think that that was the right decision. The United States does not have to be in the lead on every one of these initiatives. If you look at the broader picture, the United States is still engaged very heavily militarily in Iraq, where we hope that we are at the end game, as well as in Afghanistan. It would therefore be perhaps even reckless for the United States to go into another military venture in yet another Arab or Muslim country.

I therefore believe that this policy of differentiation will be a characteristic of no matter what administration is in office in Washington. Look at our approach to Bahrain, which was basically rhetorical, urging the King of Bahrain to negotiate



with, talk to, open a dialogue with the protestors, while very conscious of two factors, that one of our closest allies in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, was supporting the regime in Bahrain, but at the same time, frankly, that the headquarters of United States Fifth Fleet is there in Manama in Bahrain. These are therefore national security interests that any President of the United States is obviously going to have to balance carefully with what I call the long arc of history.

Lastly, as His Royal Highness said, reform is an imperative. How does a country like the United States, France, England or Germany approach from the outside viable and effective policies towards the Arab Spring? I think that there is going to be much more of a role for economic and social development rather than political alliances. As Amr Moussa said, you cannot have political reform without economic reforms. Both therefore have to go in parallel and I think that that is where the outside world can probably help the specific Arab countries in terms of reform.

We must not forget the centrality of the political dialogue and narrative in the broader Middle East of the Palestinian issue and Arab-Israeli conflict resolution. While this has not been at the forefront of the protesters in the streets of the Arab world, it could very well become a major issue that can foster the forces of radicalism in the Middle East from any side, secular or religious. Conflict resolution, especially of the Palestinian issue, needs to be an imperative of American politics.