

**THE TRILATERAL COMMISSION PLENARY MEETING
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SESSION 8: ARAB SPRING: THE MIDDLE EAST IN TRANSITION

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As the last speaker, on the last panel, on the last day, and on a subject that has been riveting to all of us and has, in fact, come up in almost every discussion that we've had, it's hard to add anything very fresh. So perhaps the strategy that I'll take is to comment on some of the issues that have been raised by others. I will try to fill in the dots and add a little more context.

We have talked about the nature of the upheaval as being one in which the people have demanded good governance. The Arab Spring was initiated and led by the younger generation. I'd like to add a third "g" to *governance* and *generation*, and that's *gender*. Throughout the upheaval we've seen women participating in the streets shoulder- to-shoulder with men in a truly popular movement. This has been true, not just in Egypt and Tunisia where women were certainly evident, but also in Bahrain which turned more violent. I had lunch the other day with a young woman who was a human rights leader in Bahrain. Women were marching in the Pearl Roundabout. We saw women wearing abeyas but still marking in Yemen. In fact, we saw women demanding their political rights and asking for civic participation throughout the region. So let's add a third "g" for gender.

A word on the Palestinian/Israeli issue mentioned by others on the panel. Yes, the Arab Spring has surprised observers for not being ideologically anti-Israel. The movement has been more inward looking. The people were demanding good -governance, of; an end to corruption, more accountability, and greater civic participation. The tone of popular movements has not been anti-American. Indeed, the Palestinian/Israeli conflict has not been one of the prevalent themes chanted from the streets. But it soon will be.

Popular grievances over the treatment of Palestinians are an issue, and I totally agree with Dr. Shibley Telhami and Ambassador Fahmy, that lies just below the surface. It is hard to go anywhere throughout the Arab world, as I have recently in traveling around and talking to my counterparts, where the Palestinian-Israeli conflict isn't either the first, and if s not the first, then the second issue that comes up.

There is a reasonable argument to be made that in a period of great change and transition, it's not the optimum time to enter into peace talks which will involve courageous compromise. But I think there's a stronger argument that when the transitions throughout the region are in a positive direction toward more openness and more civic participation, then that this is exactly the time that you want to show progress on an issue on which the sense of injustice and grievance is so great.

So I would argue that the status quo is not an option. Reaching a just solution to the Palestinian Israeli conflict is one issue that can't be kicked down the road any longer. We, as an international community, must be bolder in support of the rights for the Palestinian people. Now, whether that means support for Palestinian membership at the UN, as the Palestinians are proposing to do, or at the negotiating table with Israel, is open for discussion. The point remains that an Arab Spring has not sidelined the Palestinian Israeli conflict. It is a very important issue that will really have to be addressed by President Obama pretty quickly.

The conventional wisdom in Washington is that it's much wiser for a president to push this issue to

his second term so that it is not a political impediment to reelection. Although President Obama promised to take-up the Palestinian Israeli issue in his first term, the administration initiative led by Senator Mitchell is stalled. Let's face it, it's pretty much dead. The conventional wisdom for President Obama is to take it up after 2012 or he'll lose support in the election. I don't think leaders have the luxury to choose the timing on some of important issues. I suspect the momentum of the Arab Spring will, if it hasn't already; bring this issue to the forefront in the near future.

On a third issue of al-Qaeda's narrative, I agree with Shibley, that al-Qaeda has lost a good piece of the sting in its narrative throughout the Middle East. When people went to the streets, it wasn't to chant al-Qaeda slogans. It was to ask for openness and democracy and civic participation rather than the extremist narrative of violence.

Now would be a good time for leaders to do to stand up and say, "You know, the war on terror is over. It ended in Tahrir Square." To be clear, I am not implying that the threat of al-Qaeda's terrorism isn't still present. And it doesn't mean that there aren't very real security concerns throughout the Middle East that have been somewhat exasperated by the changes that we see. Certainly terrorism is still a threat in Yemen where the United States has been directly attacked a couple of times. Greater upheaval and chaos in that country should concern us, as it does in Libya.

Since 2001, we've put together an architecture of cooperation on counterterrorism throughout the region that has been dependent upon many of the same leaders that have been ousted, or will soon go—President Mubarak, President Salah, even Gaddafi. This means it is incumbent upon the international community, the countries you represent, to start to think about a readjustment to the security arrangement with emerging leaders. How will we address counterterrorism and al-Qaeda in the future throughout the region?

Look, here's what we know in Libya, for example. During the height of the most ugly violence and terrorism in Iraq, U.S. troops captured some rather remarkable documents from the al-Qaeda in northern Iraq that recorded the demographics of many of the suicide bombers who were recruited from North Africa -- from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, but mostly Libya. An estimated 19 percent came from one small town in Libya, Dharma, which is only a few miles away from Benghazi, now the center for the anti-Qaddafi liberation movement. We don't have a very good handle on what's happening there now. Are the young people still attracted to al-Qaeda? Is al-Qaeda still active in the area that is now the liberation zone that we, NATO, are helping, and that the West is being asked to provide arms and training?

I think President Obama is quite wise not to rush into providing arms without asking basic questions and finding those answers. I read in the press that there's a CIA team in that area now trying to do just that, get more information. We have some first-rate diplomats who are in the Benghazi area talking to the liberation leaders to determine their capacities or capabilities. Are the rebels working together? Can they put it together?

Much has been said on the economy, and I agree that the upheaval is led largely by middle-class, educated young people whose grievances center on jobs, justice and dignity. These principles have wide appeal the Middle East. So far, food and economic security have not been major issues, but they soon will be. Because, with political upheaval, economic shocks are more deeply felt. We talked about the economic issues is in this room yesterday. I raise it now because there are certain things we do know that are of looming concern.

We do know that the food prices are going to continue to climb. Fuel prices are already up 20 percent and increasing. This will impact the poor. Governments that are in a political upheaval that are not oil producers like Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, cannot sustain subsidies to their poor for very long.

Let's bring the discussion home. These economic issues will require the international community to provide assistance. We all want prosperous, democratic societies to emerge from the Arab Spring. We want these countries to be put on a sustainable basis. That will require international assistance.

In the near term, what can we do? We ought to be thinking about some of the suggestions mentioned yesterday, such as debt restructuring. We ought to think about lifting tariffs for one year so that the manufacturing industries can get a boost. In the long term, Bob Kimmitt's suggestion about a regional, multilateral development bank is a good one. Those talks should start now. Free trade agreements, enterprise zones, and as Ambassador Fahmy pointed out, re-shifting some of our bilateral assistance to areas like capacity building, political-party training, civil society exchanges, should be explored.

These are the discussions that we ought to be having in our capitals now because I think we all have a stake in the success of what is so far been a very positive trend. Thank you.

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