



What kind of weather will the Arab Spring bring to the Middle East?

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What are the commonalities and differences among the uprisings across the Middle East? Who are the winners and losers of the Arab spring? What are the implications of the situation in the Arab world on the United States and Turkey? At this first joint Hollings Center-Kadir Has University event, Lara Friedman answered these questions and made a number of predictions on how recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa might play out.

In her talk, Friedman noted that several common themes define the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Jordan and Bahrain:

- they are all genuinely indigenous (and have nothing to do with the Bush administration's democracy promotion agenda),
- they are strongly nationalistic at the expense of pan-Islamist or pan-Arabist tones,
- they are leaderless,
- they all brought a sense of lingering and expectant empowerment particularly in countries where the uprisings succeeded in toppling governments.

The differences among these countries are also noteworthy. For instance the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt were born out of very different socio-political dynamics. Friedman lived in Tunis previously and argued that the Tunisian regime's oppression was met suddenly and unexpectedly by explosive frustration. In Cairo, people already had a tradition of using the street as a venue to show opposition, and the events of January 25 onwards that forced Mubarak out of presidency were a culmination of that existing political protest culture. The state apparatus and structure are also different in all of these states. Friedman described the state structure in Yemen, for instance, as a "gentlemen's agreement" among the tribes and the President, and once the President is out of the picture, it is anyone's guess what will transpire.

Friedman was cautiously optimistic about the future of the so-called Arab Spring. She emphasized significant challenges ahead:

- Public opinion is volatile – in the case of Egypt for instance, there was unified opposition against Mubarak, but once he was gone, people factionalized quickly. The imminent referendum after Mubarak's departure divided people between those who wanted radical change and thus a complete renewal of the constitution, and those who wanted to go back to stability and would remain content with partial reform.
- There appears to be little desire or capability for politics. Opposition movements are young and dynamic, but their strength –such as their civil society, leaderless roots– may prove to be their weakness as well unless they shift away from protest modes and create political machinery.
- There is an unrealistic understanding of the timeline of democracy. Democratization will certainly pave the way for more transparent and participatory rule, but it will not solve all of the problems,

especially economic ones like poverty and corruption. Disappointment in the short term is inevitable.

- With the opening up of the political space, Islamist parties will now have their chance to have a say in the running of their countries. Whether their rise will place religion centrally in politics remains to be seen.

As for the winners and losers of the Middle East uprisings and regime changes, Friedman named the following:

- If the foremost winners are the Arab publics, the foremost losers are the status-quo leaders. Some had to step down and others had to make major concessions.
- External forces such as al Qaeda are losers. They were using ubiquitous regime oppression across the Middle East to recruit and rhetorically whip up disgruntled publics..
- The Muslim Brotherhood is a winner for managing to endure the political embargo of the Mubarak regime, and they will be significantly represented in the upcoming elections in Egypt.
- Iran is neither a clear winner or loser. Ahmedinejad is given certain plaudits for long being a critic of U.S.-backed governments like Mubarak's, but many Arab publics see Ahmedinejad as a brutal and oppressive dictator.

The situation in the Arab world has implications for Turkey and the United States. Friedman suggested that the United States is caught in a dilemma--to intervene or not intervene.. On one hand, the more the U.S. meddles with the internal affairs of these countries, the more it will be blamed regardless of the outcome. On the other hand, opposition movements are desperately in need of international support in their struggle against incumbent regimes and some expect outside countries to advocate in their favor. From a *realpolitik* perspective, Friedman suggested that the United States cannot afford to be marginalized. However, as long as it does not have an effective strategy to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the US will not be seen in the Middle East as having the moral high ground.

By the same token, Turkey does not want to be an outside spectator of the events in the Middle East, but is facing the challenge of balancing its *realpolitik* interests with an ideological position. The more it puts itself forward as a democratic inspiration, or a political model in the Middle East, the more it will have to show that it is indeed supporting the Arab street against unpopular regimes. In this sense the United States and Turkey have the same dilemma.