

The Fog of War is Nothing to the Fog of the Muslim World.
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The Arab Spring came and quickly left, followed by what we call \223young democracies, \224 the results of \223elections.\224 Why did we think that these elections would produce the modern, western values of tolerant and participatory governance? In every political revolution, intellectuals do the first heavy lifting, only to be replaced (and killed) by something akin to totalitarianism. Every revolution \223eats its children,\224 and this was so in Iran, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya, and will be when the old-style autocrats in the rest of the Arab world are overturned.

These countries will not become liberal democracies. They will become \223Islamic Republics,\224 which means that Islam will dictate the culture and the Republic part will either dissolve in ethnic and Islamic sectarian violence or with a dictator supported by the military.

The US cannot get off this tiger\222s back (the Middle East), much as we would like to, because we are the world\222s major power and must remain engaged. (Would we prefer Russia to do it?) If it were not for oil, we could consider letting the Middle East self-destruct, but we cannot. World economy depends on it.

All the ranting of Mr. Romney\222s chest-thumping advisors that \223America is not showing muscle\224 overlooks how different this world is today than it was even during the Cold War. We have mistakenly promoted democracy (elections) without the institutions that make it work: literacy, separation of powers, private property rights, human rights, and free press and courts. Democracy without those institutions is little more than ignorant mob rule. And our military might cannot set it right.

Even worse, in modern democracies we can count on polling, statistics, and letters to the editor to let governments (and observers like us) know the public mood. How can we know these things in Muslim countries, where for the most part people are illiterate, do not have phones (for poll takers to call), and certainly will not permit poll takers (or census takers) to go house to house asking intimate questions. It does not happen. Muslim governments just make up these numbers for public consumption.

The horrors in Libya seemed to take everybody by surprise. Reporters asserted that Libyans, unlike most Middle Easterners, loved the United States and were grateful to the US and NATO for ridding them of their dictator. I am sure that the many elite, English-speaking Libyans in Benghazi in the new government feel that way. But why should Libyans as a whole feel that way?

Who has taken stock of how many weapons have fallen into the hands of all sorts of militias with all sorts of agendas? Have the former supporters of Gaddafi reason to love us? And for the illiterate masses of fundamentalist Islam, how could they possibly love the freedom of American culture? It is offensive to them in every way, particularly freedom for women and religious tolerance.

In Egypt, Mr. Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, has been elected president. He most certainly does not love America, but now that he must lead, he has to be a bit more pragmatic than he would like. Holding his nose, he agrees to respect the treaty with Israel because without it, he could lose billions of dollars of American largesse. But when mobs stormed the Israeli or American Embassies, he waited a long time before reluctantly and mildly condemning these mobs.

However, even when Islamists win an election, there are always those who are even worse, even more fanatical, who resent and will resist. The Salafists throughout the Middle East are already creating chaos in the hope of eventually taking power. They are challenging Morsi; elections don\222t matter to them.

What we thought was the usual Muslim hysteria industry over an insulting film (disrespecting Mohammad) was also a staged and coordinated Al Qaeda attack on American Embassies; it was no coincidence that they chose September 11.

The fog of knowing even population size, as well as public opinion, will remain to baffle analysts of the Middle East. One thing for sure, optimism isn\222t on the table.

674 words

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