

America should support liberty and justice in M-E

MUNIR QUDDUS.....

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Millions of Americans pledge their allegiance to their nation by emphasising their commitment to the twin principles of liberty and justice so nobly enshrined in the American Constitution.

Americans generally believe that these values embedded by the Founding Fathers in the nation's constitution are among America's most important gifts to the people of the world, especially a world steeped in "tyranny and injustice" for millions.

Given that liberty and justice for all are part of America's DNA, why have American governments across the political spectrum followed foreign policies that have largely ignored these foundational values? The common refrain that we must be pragmatist and look after our national interests, and that the world is a brutish place, and basing the nation's foreign policy on these high-minded ideals would be foolish, is looking increasingly unconvincing.

In the first months of 2011, the fallacy in this strategy has become increasingly evident, as dramatic expressions for liberty and democracy have unfolded in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Algeria and other countries in the Middle East. The world may be a messy place, but people everywhere crave for the American values of freedom, justice, and protection of the basic human rights. Indeed these are universal values.

The principles of liberty and justice are not unique to the United States Constitution. Many older

documents and religious scriptures have celebrated these values. This may come as a surprise to some but constitutions in Islamic nations such as Egypt speak to these fundamental rights and values as well. Importantly, Islamic scriptures celebrate these ideals and principles.

The Quran, considered as the foundational Islamic scripture, celebrates human rights and justice in a number of verses. "The Quran is the greatest proclamation of liberty!" proclaimed Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. According to an authentic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad said, "The best fighting in the path of God is (to speak) a word of justice to an oppressive ruler." In other words, speech against tyranny is an important form of jihad or resistance.

Unfortunately, millions of citizens in Islamic states are stuck in autocratic settings. The Arab world, with roughly 18% of the world's Muslim population, has been a "democracy-free zone," resisting gales of democracy blowing in many parts of the world in recent decades.

Arab nations including Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia, are among the least democratic nations in the world. However, winds of change are blowing. The people are rising after decades of oppression and silence. In the past few weeks, long standing brutal autocrats have fallen in Tunisia and Egypt. Reforms and concessions, unimagined just a few days ago, have been offered to placate the restless public.

Emboldened citizens have discovered the streets and are demanding freedom and justice in Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Algeria. The murderous response by the security forces in Bahrain, against people who were demonstrating peacefully, shows that some of these



justice, liberty and the rule of law as Americans and citizens of the West are. Many already enjoy democracy and relative freedom.

Among the world's 1.4 billion Muslims, many millions reside in democracies in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Turkey, Lebanon, and Indonesia among others. In a few impressive cases, women have led democratically elected governments, as well as the opposition.

However, a large part of the Arab world remains trapped in a vicious cycle of dictatorship and tyranny. Hundreds of thousands of Tunisians, Egyptians and now Libyans and the people of Bahrain have braved bullets and brutal beatings to protest peacefully against overpowering dictatorships. Their brave and dignified struggle has become a beacon for freedom loving people everywhere.

If America stands for liberty and justice at home, it must also stand for these principles for the citizens of Bahrain, the Libyans, the Palestinians, the Tunisians, the Egyptians, the Yemenis, the Algerians, the Saudis, and all citizens under oppressive regimes in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world. As Martin Luther King aptly said: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

I believe that America's unequivocal support for liberty and justice for citizens in the Middle-East is imperative, and in its best long-term interests. It is time for President Obama to make a bold statement on America's enduring support for liberty and justice for all people, just as President Kennedy did near the Berlin Wall in the summer of 1963. Who knows what walls come down this time?

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regimes are run by cruel and desperate autocrats who will not give up their power easily.

Why is all of this relevant for America? It is no secret that with few exceptions, American governments in the past, both Republican and Democrat, have provided moral support and weapons to despots in the Middle East. This has greatly tarnished the good name of America, and overshadowed the enormous sacrifice Americans have made in the cause of liberty and justice during the Second World War, and more recently in the

Balkans and other parts of the world.

However, the most important reason why the United States must realign its foreign policy towards the people of the Middle East is the ongoing global war on terror. Al Qaeda and its extremist allies are ceaselessly wooing the Muslim youths to their violent causes.

As we have seen in Iraq, Pakistan and other places, terror thrives in societies racked with tyranny and injustice. As a long-term strategy, the United States foreign policy must always be aligned with the

forces of democracy. It is time that Americans share their gift of democracy built on liberty with people across the world in words and in deeds.

After September 11, many Americans have erroneously come to believe that Islam and Arab cultures are fundamentally incompatible with liberal democratic values. The largely peaceful people's revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt have buried this myth. The Arab street can resist oppression using non-violent methods. Muslims are no less attracted to a society built on

Demise of US hegemony in Middle East

PETER CUSTERS.....

"UNPRECEDENTED" no doubt is the right word to describe the events. On January 25, a small band of perhaps two hundred protesters gathered in Tahrir Square of Cairo. They shouted slogans calling on Egyptians to emulate the Tunisians.

As the protesters crossed the bridge over the Nile river and broke the police barricades, their number rapidly multiplied into tens of thousands. Many of them had responded to the call which, before the start of the Tahrir action, had been launched on the social medium Facebook. And ever since then Egypt has been in upheaval.

For several decades, Hosni

wounded activists. The West's policymakers and even Egypt's opposition parties were taken by surprise by this solidarity.

While Mubarak's regime feverishly tried to disrupt news reporting by international media, foreign journalists enthusiastically carried the news of the people's revolt to the world.

For years, the West had tolerated and patronised Mubarak's dictatorship, arguing that his regime was a bulwark against the threat posed by Muslim fundamentalists. However, the revolt was neither prepared nor led by the Muslim Brotherhood, the country's main Islamist organisation. Its leaders were taken by surprise as much as policymakers in Brussels and Washington, and

thousands in Tahrir Square after his release from jail.

The revolt was unprecedented indeed. In a move that pleased his Western allies, Mubarak gave up his post as president of the ruling party. Yet the entire state apparatus was still intact, including the powerful army, notorious intelligence services and the groups of hired musclemen.

It would be wrong to be over-enthusiastic about the role of the Egyptian army, though the army generals had refused to openly interfere on the side of the Mubarak regime, and had stayed "neutral." Yet, will the Egyptian officers continue to stand by if fundamental American and Western interests are threatened?

Historically, the Egyptian army can be proud of having espoused Arab nationalism. Yet, ever since

Nor is US sympathy restricted to arms supplies alone. The US and the Egyptian armies hold bi-annual joint exercises in which a reported 25 thousand American soldiers take part. Hence, it would be a bit naive to presume that the Egyptian army has overnight become a pro-people's force.

Nevertheless, the significance of the Egyptian revolt extends well beyond the borders of Egypt, towards the whole of the Middle East. Surely, though Egypt has become the epicenter, events did not start in Cairo but in Tunisia, when the people of Tunis forced Ben Ali to flee in January. Nor is resistance limited to these two countries alone.

Mass protests by people disgruntled about state repression, unemployment and high food prices are also taking place elsewhere, notably in Algeria, Yemen and Jordan. And although the outcome is uncertain, US and European interests may yet be affected by ongoing events.

For decades, discontent has been simmering throughout the Middle East, over the US's unreserved support for Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine and over its intimate connections with repressive Arab regimes. When the oil exporting countries of the region in 1973 for once stood up against the West, and Opec took control over the international price of oil, US functionaries devised a new trading scheme.

Under this system, oil rich countries were encouraged to buy US armaments in exchange for their increased oil wealth. The trading system created havoc in the region, as millions of Arabs were slaughtered in international and fratricidal wars. The people of Egypt and the Middle Eastern states know that they are not up against just Mubarak, or against domestic dictatorships. Hence, it is quite well possible that today's revolt in the Arab world will mark an important chapter in the demise of US hegemony.

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Mubarak had largely succeeded in keeping the lid on public protests -- but the people suddenly shook off all their fears. Tahrir Square became the scene of million-strong rallies demanding that Mubarak step down.

Although there was a tense moment when paramilitary groups, thugs on camels and armed civilians mobilised by the regime swept down on opponents in central Cairo, the protesters refused to budge. Instead, they set up a permanent camp on the Square. Doctors formed a mobile hospital for the treatment of

its support base to all accounts is limited, to less than a fifth of the Egyptian population.

In fact, although opposition political parties had been invited to negotiate a transition by Mubarak's regime, none of them was in charge of the revolt. As an example of the internet action mentioned above already indicates, it is a new generation of young Egyptians who have taken centre stage. This was well symbolised when the Google manager who launched the Facebook action on January 25 was given an average of \$1.3 billion as military aid.

Whereas other Middle Eastern countries, such as Saudi Arabia, need to buy all their weaponry from the US, Egypt's regime has annually been receiving an average of \$1.3 billion as military aid.

Sent from Lieden, The Netherlands
Special to The Daily Star

READERS' REACTIONS

A reminder of our values

Let the spirit and vigour felt on the occasion of Ekushey inspire us all to introspection, instead of pointing the fingers at others, and let our hearts be tuned to our duties sincerely and honestly, to our professions with dedication, to our moral obligations, and to the philanthropic habits inculcated through proper education, and through the family in particular.

Md. Russell Talukder

According to late Dr Ahmed Sharif so-called democracy can satisfy US foreign policy, but not the poor masses. The current politics and establishment can't achieve full implementation or even half implementation of a nationalistic goal. So, I request the government not to get trapped in a new form of autocracy through so-called democracy prescription for the poor masses of Bangladesh. Of course, I am not indicating dictatorship of military or weak politics of BNP. Only nationalism is the short-term goal and socialism is the long-term goal. Think, think, think in February rather than fake crying to cheat the people.

Dr. Karim

Bureaucracy and the Upazila Parishad by Dr. Mohammad Mohiuddin Abdullah

Because of the colonial mentality of both the bureaucrats and the politicians, Upazila Parishad has failed to perform to the satisfaction of the people. Even during Ershad's regime, it functioned better than now. Only the good intention of the politicians is sufficient to formulate policies for efficient local government.

Mostafa, K

Challenges of Census 2021 by Dhiraj Kumar Nath

The article is an appreciable one. Enumerators should be properly trained. Regarding urbanisation, it is not only creation of more divisions and municipalities, but also of the upazilas, that has caused an increase in urban population. River erosion too is a reason. A list of language-fighters should also be prepared during the census -- this is vital point from our historical/national point of view.

Ranesh Maitra

1. Thanks for the article
2. Suggestions of advisers of past caretaker governments should be seriously considered by the current government.
3. Some talented OSD's and past advisers should be involved in nation building.
4. In every developed country, the government makes plans for age groups like 20-30, 30-40, 40-50 and above, before making a national development plan. I haven't noticed that in Bangladesh.

Dr. Karim