

## “Foreign Policy Must Be About Priorities”\*

Richard N. Haass

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**Editor’s introduction:** Speaking before a U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing on the crisis in Libya, Richard N. Haass takes a skeptical view toward the U.S. intervention in the North African nation, suggesting that deploying military forces to counteract the imminent slaughter of civilians assumes too much certainty about future developments. He further contends that due to its Muammar al-Qaddafi-induced isolation, Libya is of little strategic importance to the future of the Middle East. In response to praise for the multilateral intervention, he states that “multilateralism is not a reason for doing something,” rather it is only “a mechanism for distributing burdens.” Haass points out what he perceives as a discrepancy between the declared objectives of the United States in Libya and the means it is prepared to deploy to achieve them. In view of this discrepancy, he recommends the adoption of more modest goals.

**Richard N. Haass’s speech:** Mr. Chairman:

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Thank you for asking me to appear before this committee to discuss recent U.S. policy toward Libya. Let me make two points at the outset. First, my statement and testimony reflect my personal views and not those of the Council on Foreign Relations, which as a matter of policy takes no institutional positions. Second, I will address today's topic from two perspectives: first, the lessons to be learned from recent U.S. policy toward Libya, and second, my recommendations for U.S. policy going forward.

Analysis must be rigorous. In two critical areas, however, I would suggest that what has been asserted as fact was in reality closer to assumption. First, it is not clear that a humanitarian catastrophe was imminent in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi. There had been no reports of large-scale massacres in Libya up to that point, and Libyan society (unlike Rwanda, to cite the obvious influential precedent) is not divided along a single or defining fault line. Gaddafi saw the rebels as enemies for political reasons, not for their ethnic or tribal associations. To be sure, civilians would have been killed in an assault on the city—civil wars are by their nature violent and destructive—but there is no evidence of which I am aware that civilians *per se* would have been targeted on a large scale. Muammar Gaddafi's threat to show no mercy to the rebels might well have been just that: a threat within the context of a civil war to those who opposed him with arms or were considering doing so.

Armed intervention on humanitarian grounds can sometimes be justified. But before using military force to save lives, we need to be sure of the threat; the potential victims should request our help; the intervention should be supported by significant elements of the international community; the intervention should have high likelihood of success at a limited cost, including the cost to our other interests; and other policies should be judged to be inadequate. Not all of these conditions were satisfied in the Libyan case. Such an assessment is essential if we are asking our troops to put their lives at risk, if we are placing other important interests at risk, and if we are using economic and military resources that puts our future more at risk.

Second, it was (and is) not obvious that what happened or happens in Libya would or will have significant repercussions for what happens elsewhere in the region. Libya is not a particularly influential country; indeed, Gaddafi's isolation in no small part explains why it was possible to get Arab League and UN support for a resolution supporting armed intervention. The dynamics in Syria or Bahrain or Egypt, not to mention Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, will be determined mostly by local factors and forces and not by what happens in Libya.

American policymakers erred in calling explicitly early on in the crisis for Gaddafi's removal. Doing so made it far more difficult to employ diplomacy to help achieve U.S. humanitarian goals without resorting to military force. It removed the incentive Gaddafi might have had to stop attacking his opponents. The call for Gaddafi's ouster also put the United States at odds with much of the international community, which had only signed on to a humanitarian and not a political mission when voting for UN Security Council resolution 1973. It increased the odds

the intervention would be seen as a failure so long as Gaddafi remained in power. And, as I shall discuss, requiring Gaddafi's removal actually makes it more difficult to effect the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973 and stop the fighting.

Multilateralism is not a reason for doing something. Multilateralism is a mechanism, no more and no less, for distributing burdens. It can add to the legitimacy of an action; it can also complicate policy implementation. Such pros and cons need to be assessed. But multilateral support does not make a policy that is questionable on its merits any less so. To think otherwise is to confuse ends and means.

Inconsistency is unavoidable in foreign policy, and in and of itself is not a reason for rejecting doing something that makes sense or for undertaking something that does not. Some humanitarian interventions may be warranted. But inconsistency is not cost free, as it can confuse the American public and disappoint people in other countries, in the process opening us up to charges of hypocrisy and double standards.

It is acceptable in principle to intervene militarily on behalf of interests deemed less than vital, but in such cases—what I would deem “wars of choice”—it must be shown that the likely costs are commensurate with the interests involved and that other policies would not have done equally well or better in the way of costs and outcomes. Otherwise, a war of choice cannot be justified.

As I expect you have gathered from what I have said here today and both said and written previously, I did not support the decision to intervene with military force in Libya. But we are where we are. So what would I suggest the United States do in Libya going forward?

We must recognize that we face a familiar foreign policy conundrum, namely, that there is a large gap between our professed goals and the means we are prepared to devote to realizing them. The goals are ambitious: protecting the Libyan people and bringing about a successor regime judged to be preferable to what now exists. But the means are limited, as the president is clearly looking to our partners in NATO to assume the major military role and has ruled out the introduction of American ground forces.

Whenever there is such a gap between ends and means, a government has two choices: it can either reduce the ends or elevate the means. The Obama administration has up till now mostly emphasized the latter course. The no-fly zone was quickly augmented by additional air operations designed to degrade Libyan government forces. This proved insufficient to tilt the battlefield decisively in favor of regime opponents.

Now there is apparent interest in arming opposition forces. I would advise against taking this path. We cannot be confident of the agenda of the opposition towards either the Libyan people or various U.S. interests, including counter-terrorism. Nor can we be certain as to which opposition elements with which set of goals might in the end prove dominant. Arms once transferred can be used for any purpose. Bad situations can always get worse.

The only way to ensure the replacement of the current Libyan regime with something demonstrably better would be through the introduction of ground forces that were prepared to remain in place to maintain order and build capacities in the aftermath of ousting the government. As we have seen in Afghanistan and Iraq, the only thing certain about such a policy trajectory is its human, economic, and military cost. U.S. interests in Libya simply do not warrant such an investment on our part. And it is obviously far from certain whether any other outside party has both the will and the capacity to introduce ground forces on a scale likely to make a decisive military difference.

There is little reason to conclude that the Libyan opposition will any time soon be able to defeat the Libyan government. It appears to lack the requisite cohesiveness and skill. The combination of a no-fly zone, bombing, and arming might, however, have the effect of leveling the playing field and prolonging the civil war, leading to more civilian casualties in the process. This would be an ironic result of an intervention designed to promote humanitarian ends. The Libyan government may implode, but we cannot base our policy on this hope.

This all argues for reducing the immediate aims of American foreign policy and giving priority to humanitarian as opposed to political goals. This would entail undertaking or supporting a diplomatic initiative to bring about the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1973 and, most importantly, a cease-fire. A narrow cease-fire is probably unrealistic, though. What would also be required to gain the support of the opposition would be a set of political conditions, possibly including specified political reforms and a degree of autonomy for certain areas. Sanctions could be added or removed to affect acceptance and compliance. Gaddafi might remain in office, at least for the time being. The country might effectively be divided for some time. An international force could well be required on the ground to keep the peace.

Such an outcome would be derided by some. But it would stop the civil war and keep many people alive who would otherwise perish. It would create a window for political reform and possibly over time lead to a new government without Muammar Gaddafi. The United States could use this time to work with Libyans in the opposition and beyond to help build national institutions without the added weight of ongoing fighting.

A compromise, negotiated outcome would also be good for this country, as it would allow the United States to focus its resources—economic, diplomatic, military, and political—elsewhere. Far more important than Libya for U.S. interests in the region are Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, and Iran. The United States also needs to reserve resources for other parts of the world (the Korean Peninsula comes to mind), for possible wars of necessity, for military modernization central to our position in the Pacific, and for deficit reduction.

Foreign policy must be about priorities. The United States cannot do everything everywhere. This consideration would have argued for avoiding military intervention in Libya; now it argues for limiting this intervention in what it seeks to accomplish and what it requires of the United States.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before this committee. I look forward to your questions.

# A Renewed Sense of the Possibility of Change\*

## The Peoples of Central Asia Respond to the Arab Spring

Paul A. Goble

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**Editor's introduction:** Speaking at a hearing of the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe on “Central Asia and the Arab Spring: Growing Pressure for Human Rights?” analyst and writer Paul A. Goble asserts that the post-Soviet states of Central Europe have taken heart from the events of the Arab Spring. These peaceful, non-Islamist revolutions have given the lie to autocrats' claims, he argues. He predicts that a Central Asian Spring will follow. Goble goes on to outline, nation by nation, the particular risks of regime change in the countries of that

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region and offers advice for the United States and the international community to help ensure progress toward genuine freedom for Central Asian countries.

**Paul A. Goble's speech:** Nowhere in the world has the Arab Spring given greater promise of real political change toward democracy and freedom than in the authoritarian states of post-Soviet Central Asia. The reasons for that are clear but not always clearly understood. It is not because these countries are also Muslim majority states, and it is not because they too are ruled by brittle authoritarian regimes. There are Muslim majority states where the Arab Spring has not had an impact, and there are authoritarian regimes which, either by brutality or accident, have blocked the spread of the idea people in the Middle East are seeking to promote.

Rather it is because the events in the Arab world have dispelled the myth promoted by these governments that fundamental change is impossible or dangerous and that the populations must put up with the status quo because these regimes enjoy international support as bulwarks against Islamist fundamentalism and supporters of the international effort against terrorism in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Those arguments did not save the authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and elsewhere in the Middle East, and they will not save the authoritarian regimes in post-Soviet Central Asia. The peoples of those countries have been transfixed and transformed by the Arab Spring. They see that the arguments of their rulers no longer are convincing, and they see that the West and above all the United States, which often has pursued a policy of convenience with regard to these regimes, has changed as well. As a result, an increasing number of the people of these countries are ready to try to gain what is their natural right, freedom and democracy.

But just as the Arab Spring has affected the people, so too it has impressed the rulers in Central Asia. It has convinced them that they must take even more draconian measures in order to retain their hold on power. And the changes the Arab Spring have wrought in the consciousness of the peoples of Central Asia thus pose a serious challenge to Western governments including our own. Some of the regimes in that region may believe that they can get away with suppressing the opposition with extreme violence and that as long as they blame Islamists or outside agitators, as Uzbekistan president Islam Karimov did this week, all will be well. Consequently, the United States must find a way of encouraging these governments to give way to democracy rather than taking actions to defend their own power that will ultimately lead to a conflagration.

That is no easy task, but the Obama administration deserves a great deal of credit for the way in which it managed the situation in Egypt. And that approach, one that led to the exit of an increasingly weak authoritarian president and opened the way to the possibility of genuine democratic change, in which the next elections will not be the last ones, provides a serious model for how the United States should behave when, as I hope and believe, the Arab Spring will be succeeded by a Central Asian Spring, allowing the peoples of that region at last to gain what they were denied in 1991—genuine freedom, real democracy, and the human rights that all peoples should enjoy.

In my brief remarks today, I would like to focus on three things: first, the way in which the Arab Spring has affected thinking in Central Asia both among the populations and among the powers that be, underscoring the differences among the peoples of those states; second, the particular risks of regime change in the countries of that region, again country by country; and third, the way in which the U.S. and the international community can best proceed to ensure the next step toward genuine freedom for the peoples of this region.

#### SPRING IS NOT AN IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

The peoples of the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia have been told by their rulers that they must accept the status quo both because it is the only one that can prevent still worse things, including the imposition of Islamism, and because it enjoys widespread international support from Western democracies who for one reason or another believe that such authoritarian regimes are either useful or even more necessary for peoples like themselves. But the events in the Arab Spring have made such arguments less compelling than they were. After all, the governments that have been toppled in the Arab world made exactly the same arguments with perhaps even greater effect—until it became obvious that the peoples of that region no longer accepted them and that the West had begun to recognize that these claims were unjustified and wrong.

The reason that authoritarian leaders use such arguments and come down so hard on any display of collective demands for freedom is that such demands are contagious. When people in [any] country dare to be free, to live not by lies, and to not be afraid, others elsewhere are inspired to do the same. That is why there have been waves of democratization across large parts of the world at various points in the last generation, and it is why there is a new wave which has started in the Middle East but which will not end there.

In defense of their positions, authoritarian regimes rely not only on propaganda and police methods. They also rely on direct control of what people can find out about what is going on elsewhere. But the ability of these regimes to do that is small and declining. The Internet and other forms of social media mean that it is almost impossible to cut key groups off from learning what others are doing in other countries. That does not mean that regimes won't try—almost all of the regimes in Central Asia are doing so—but rather it means that they will not succeed. And the splash effect of such knowledge is larger than many understand.

Statistics on Internet penetration are less important than the fact of such penetration. If a few people can learn the truth, they can tell others. And that process means that even if the number of Web surfers in Central Asia is still small, the number of those who benefit from such knowledge is far larger. Indeed, one can argue that in many of these countries, it has reached critical mass. And to the extent that the Internet is supplemented by international broadcasting, both radio—and for obvious reasons, it has to be shortwave—and direct-to-home television



broadcasting, the expansion in the spread of information will lead over time to the expansion of human freedom.

On this as on all other measures, there are enormous differences among the countries of this region, just as there are enormous differences among the countries of the Arab world. Consequently, just as the outcomes at any one point in the Arab world have ranged from quiescence to peaceful demonstrations to mass violence, so too the range of patterns in the Central Asian countries is likely to be large. At the same time, however, because within the Arab world and within the Central Asian world, people in one country often take their cue from what is happening in another in their region, so too a breakthrough in one Central Asian country, such as Kyrgyzstan, in response to developments in the Arab world, is likely to play out across the other Central Asian states more or less quickly.

#### ELECTIONS RATHER THAN BULLETS DEFEAT ISLAMISM

As an increasing number of American commentators are now pointing out, the execution of Osama bin Laden is likely to have a smaller [effect] on the future of terrorism than are the actions of Egyptians, Tunisians, and Libyans who are pressing for democratic rights. Indeed, the least reflection will lead to the conclusion that the actions on the streets of Cairo are a more definitive defeat of Al Qaeda than even the liquidation of bin Laden. This message is increasingly being absorbed among U.S. government leaders, who are ever more inclined to recognize that the purchase of short-term stability through reliance on authoritarian rulers gives a false sense of security.

That eliminates one of the key arguments that authoritarian rulers in Central Asia have advanced, many Central Asian populations have accepted, and that many Western governments including our own have made the basis of policy. Supporting a dictator who claims he can hold off Islamist extremism is a fool's errand: Such regimes are more likely to produce Islamist responses than are democratic ones. That does not mean that managing the transition from dictatorship to democracy is easy: It is obvious that those who support democracy must ensure that no free election will be the last one in any country.

But as Washington's approach in Egypt has shown, that is not an impossible task. There are ways to develop safeguards against backsliding, and there are ways to marginalize the extremists. That is one of the things that democracy truly understood does best. Another thing democracy does extremely well is allow for succession, an issue that arose in the first instance in Egypt and that will arise soon in many Central Asian countries whose presidents are aging Soviet-era officials. If such individuals can be led to see that they will be remembered as fathers of their countries if they allow the emergence of a genuine opposition via elections, they will be more likely to take that step than if they are encouraged to "keep the lid on" Islamic assertiveness.

## EVERYONE NEEDS FRIENDS

As the events of the Arab Spring show, people who aspire to democracy need friends abroad, but they need friends who understand that support from abroad must be carefully calibrated lest it allow authoritarian regimes to claim that the democratic movement is a cat's paw for foreigners or it provoke the regimes into even more violent action in "defense of the nation." The United States showed that kind of understanding in the case of Egypt, carefully calibrating its statements and actions to the situation on the ground. But it has been less successful elsewhere in the Arab world not only because the leaders are less willing to see reason and yield to the people but also because the United States has either immediate interests it wants to protect or has less knowledge of the situation.

Unfortunately for the peoples of Central Asia, both of those factors are even more on view there. The US relies on several of the Central Asian countries for the passage of logistical support to the US-led effort in Afghanistan and not surprisingly does not want to see anything happen that might disrupt the flow of needed military supplies. And the US knows far less about Central Asia than it does about the Arab world. Few American representatives there speak the national languages, instead continuing to rely on the former imperial one; few US officials appear to view the Central Asian countries as independent actors in their own right, instead viewing them as part of Moscow's *droit de regard*. (The infamous case in which an American president thanked the Russian president in public for allowing a US base in Uzbekistan but did not thank the president of Uzbekistan is a symbol of this.)

There is little appreciation of the nature of Central Asian societies and the opportunities they have for development in a positive way. Instead, the focus in Washington is almost exclusively on the problems they represent: drug flows, human trafficking, corruption, violence, and unemployment among the urban young. All of these things are true, but they are neither the whole story nor can they be adequately addressed by authoritarian measures. Indeed, addressed in the ways that the regimes of this region have, these problems collectively can be the breeding ground for further violence and the replacement of the current authoritarian regimes by perhaps even more authoritarian Islamist ones.

That is something that the US does not yet appear to grasp, but if we are to be a friend to these peoples, we must understand that the only approach which gives hope of a truly better future for them is a commitment by us to the careful and continuing promotion of human rights and demography. Our doing that will add to the courage of those who are already inspired by the Arab Spring and will thus promote a change of seasons in Central Asia as well.

The authoritarian governments of Central Asia have maintained themselves not only by pointing to the threat that any change would bring Islamist regimes to power—something they make more likely the longer they are in office—but also by arguing that they have provided security and increasing prosperity for their peoples. In fact, they have provided neither. The peoples of Central Asia are less