



America's Best Endgame in the Middle East: Jobs, Jobs, and More Jobs

By Judith Barnett
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With the constant turmoil in the Middle East, be it the horrific beheading of journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff by the terrorist organization the Islamic State or news reports showing the ruins of Gaza, it is crucial for the U.S. Government to give a lot more thought to the end game. That is, what types of governments will realistically form in the Middle East, and how does the U.S. shape its policies based on those expectations?

One thing is for sure. If Americans are expecting any of the nations of the Middle East to develop Western-style democracies, that is never going to happen. The best we can expect, and support, are stable, made-in-the-Middle-East governments.

And the best way to do that, as Egyptian President Abdel Fatah El-Sisi told a visiting U.S. Congressional delegation last week, is to help these states increase their capacity to provide food, housing and better futures for its people.

Since the so-called Arab Spring, nations of the region — including Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Jordan, Bahrain, and now again, Iraq — have been upended. As these governments have begun to develop, each is clearly unique to its own geography, peoples and culture. Our government can actually have little impact on the types of political structures that develop in those nations.

However, having traveled to and worked in the Middle East for 30 years, both in the Clinton administration and as a trade lawyer, I believe that the impact that we can have is to assist in recreating respect and dignity. For that, there is one basic solution — jobs, jobs, and more jobs.

True, our government must continue to act and react to ongoing military insurgencies. But the real fix is in getting our best and brightest to innovatively create economic, commercial, and social programs. The programs that will get people trained and to work, that will allow better lives for their families, and will bring back a hugely missing element — hope.

There are a host of concrete steps that the U.S. government can take to help rebuild hope and the promise of a future.

For starters, only 1 percent of the US budget goes to foreign assistance. This is an appallingly small number. Per capita, we give far less than Finland, Norway or Iceland. But whatever the assistance budget, we need to develop programs that not only we want to do, but most importantly, that these countries need and want. After 230 years, we have huge assets, if wanted, to offer. Structuring



government institutions and court systems, implementing useful technology and alternative energy, teaching about entrepreneurship, establishing health systems, to name a few.

Although shaping economies may begin with governments, the strength of any country will depend on the determination of the private sector. The greatest assistance that Western companies can provide is to continue, despite the uncertainty, their investments in the region. As a gentleman in the region told me, "If I can find a job and feed my family, no one can pay me enough to plant bombs or blow myself up."

Some could argue that the U.S. government should support only the type of political and economic systems that are close to our own. That our treasury is wasted on aiding systems that are not built on our values. However, this philosophy will ensure that the nations of that region will reject any alliance with America. Our trump card is found in finding the moderating influences in these governments, supporting their economies and better practices, and accepting that some history cannot be changed.

What develops from these revolutions may not be the democracies or the institutions that we, as Americans, would like. They will be molded by thousands of years of strife, history, culture, and achievement, much like our own government. But for sure, these governments and economies will be made in the Middle East.