

Behind The Lines!

Late Winter 2011

TO THE BARRICADES!

Whether it be Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Yemen, or Jordan, the common thread in the current Middle East turmoil is a more vocal populace that is tired of false promises from their authoritarian rulers, high unemployment, and the onerous cost and scarcity of food with no relief in sight. Hungry stomachs bring people to the barricades.

That being said, the unfolding events in Bahrain stem from causes other than strictly socioeconomic ones as in the cases cited above. Bahrain is the country to watch carefully for many reasons, not the least of which is mounting dissension among competing sects in the Islamist world. The ruling elite in Bahrain is similar to the regime in the days of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, i.e., a Sunni minority that rules over a Shiite majority. This Sunni vs. Shiite friction leaves Bahrain open to meddling by Iran which itself is a Shiite entity. Two major implications here: (1) Saudi Arabia is a Sunni monarchy that is the majority ruling element in the country, but one with a Shiite minority that could be influenced by events in Bahrain if the Shiite majority there becomes more restive, not to mention the long reach of the meddlesome Iranian Shiite arm, and (2) Bahrain is the headquarters of the U.S. Fifth Fleet with its primary mission to protect the key shipping lanes for the world's oil, as well as a/the major focal point for U.S. activities in the entire region. U.S. strategy in the Middle East would be gravely crippled, if things suddenly were to go south in Bahrain.

Moreover, this doesn't even take into account the dire geopolitical implications of such events for Israel and Saudi Arabia, and for the rest of the world for that matter, especially for those authoritarian/dictatorial regimes in China, North Korea, Russia, Belarus, and Venezuela just to cite a few of the more prominent ones.

The political vacuums being created by the dislodgement and eventual overthrow of these old dictatorial systems in the Middle East, which the U.S. has tolerated, supported and benefited from as well for many years, eventually will be filled by elements that assuredly will not be in the best long-term interests of the United States.

The physical world is especially restless at this time (earthquakes, floods, blizzards, volcanoes, tsunamis) and the landscape of the political world is exhibiting fissures that are no less disturbing. We are witnessing tectonic changes unfold before our very eyes across the world we've become accustomed to influencing for so many generations. There is evidence of a similar phenomenon even in U.S. society, e.g., the demonstrative activities of the Tea Party and the current events in Wisconsin to reform collective bargaining. Fresh winds are blowing, but old sailors know that they are often harbingers of ill winds that may lie just across the horizon.

Amidst this growing turmoil and a world in a state of flux, the ability of the U.S. to control/influence events around the globe is diminishing and being challenged as never before. Nowhere is this more evident than in the supreme irony of a scenario which occurred just this week when a band of youthful Somali thugs murdered four innocent Americans on the high seas in the proximity of a fleet of U.S. warships bristling with firepower, but helpless to act in a decisive way.

Note: For this issue I digress from my area of specialization with commentary and analysis of events in the Russian Federation.

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