

Nov 04, 2016 by [APDS Bloggers](#)

Egypt, Libya, Revolutions, Oh My! ^[1]

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History always has a way of repeating itself. Flashback to 1979 Iran when the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was in power--prior to his expulsion, Pahlavi had thrown lavish festivities where he would drink alcohol with foreigners. While, at the same time would exclude Iranians from the celebrations, many of whom were homeless and starving. The Shah was protected by a heavily financed army and security forces and built an intelligence force--that was trained by a U.S. Army Colonel working for the CIA--and was absolutely brutal in its oppression. Subsequently, it was unprecedented when the Shah's monarchy, which had both international support and a modernized army of 400,000, crumbled at the hands of unarmed demonstrators all within a matter of months. The core reason for this revolution in Iran was to Pahlavi and all he represented, which was Westernization.



Fast forward to just a few months ago when the uprisings in Egypt began; for decades, President Hosni Mubarak had ruled his nation with Emergency Law and had persistent issues with the economy and unemployment. Under his watch, political figures and activists were held in prison without trials, and even rejected the construction of some mosques. Egypt under Mubarak was also the second largest recipient of U.S. aid, receiving \$2 billion dollars, most of which was spent on the military. Mubarak too, enjoyed quite a lavish lifestyle with many houses all around Egypt and a net worth of up to \$70 billion dollars. In January 2011, mass protests began and within two months, President Mubarak was President no more. The core reason for this revolution was to depose Hosni Mubarak and everything he represented, among which included Westernization.



The similarities cannot go unnoticed. After the revolution in Iran, the Islamic Republic of Iran was established as a means to prevent Iran from once again coming under the control of leadership deemed a Western puppet. This is the main reason that 30 years later, the U.S.-Iranian relationship has been rocky at best. If there is no U.S. intervention in Egypt, there will similarly be poor relations with the U.S. in the future because of how negatively Egyptians view the U.S. In fact, a recent poll conducted in the Middle East concludes that the U.S. already has an incredibly low approval rating particularly in Egypt. Additionally, the “Cold Peace” that exists between Egypt and Israel is gradually getting warmer by the day. In recent weeks, there have been scares of Egyptian radicals infiltrating Israel ready to carry out terror attacks, while the Israeli Ambassador to Egypt had to be evacuated from the country just days ago.

These rapid relationship changes resemble the changes which occurred 30 years ago. While we live in a more interconnected and globalized world than in 1979 and some may argue that this would mean a decreased likelihood of radicalization, it could also mean that the backlash towards globalization would be exponentially more powerful because there are more things that it could be blamed for. All of this is bad news for the U.S.

In order to prevent further deterioration of the United States' relationships in the Middle East, it should conduct more public diplomacy in Egypt in order to maintain a civil relationship in the long term. To ensure the U.S.-Egyptian relationship, Egyptian public opinion of the U.S. must change before the revolution ends, and the likelihood of a radical coming to power increases. More public diplomacy of the following can be used in Egypt to prevent this possibility of a radical coming to power:

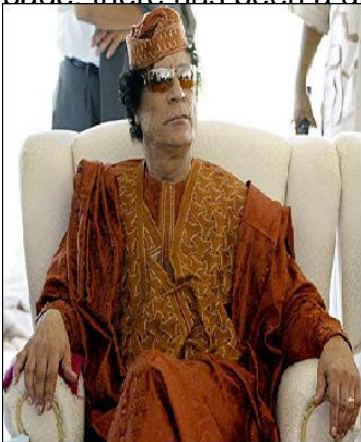
Invest more in the media sector of Egypt which has become increasingly free. Implement more programs that would teach and give tools to Egyptians who would like to be journalists in a free society. The U.S. could also offer a similar, but more advanced program to current Egyptian journalists. Also, providing different media networks more aid to purchase additional equipment would only be beneficial. It should be noted that the U.S. would have to be careful in giving Egyptians only a voice and not the actual speech. Doing so would have the exact opposite effect of the end goal of this public diplomacy campaign.

Since rap and hip hop music is very popular in the Middle East and has been crucial to many in Libya and Egypt as a morale booster, the U.S. can arrange for more Muslim American rappers to travel to these locations and perform their music. The U.S. Department of State has already implemented this program in other nations, such as Indonesia and it has worked wonderfully. Alternatively, a program for gifting instruments such as old turntables and

microphones would allow for many who have endured hardships to express how they feel.

Setting up more exchange programs of high school students would also be quite effective in combating anti-Americanism in Egypt. Egyptian students can come to the United States, have a rewarding experience, and then go home and tell their friends about it. While there are already Fulbright programs in place, having more of these programs for younger Egyptians would only be more effective.

These are just a few strategies that can be implemented with relative quickness and effectiveness. As we have learned through our relationship with Pakistan, and their inability to successfully combat terrorism, throwing money at a country and hoping for the best is not an effective solution to build relationships. A somewhat active hand must be played by the U.S. for its own interests in the long term. Coca-Cola has already got the ball rolling with their recent commercial on Egyptian television "making tomorrow better," with its own original Arabic song. In looking through the comments and even looking at the Coca Cola Facebook page, there has been a great amount of positive feedback which is a win for globalization and states.



However, the worries for the United States don't stop with Egypt. The U.S. is also going to need more public diplomacy in Libya. As recent reports have said, the CIA had helped Qaddafi identify terror suspects, including the Libyan rebel commander who has links to al-Qaeda. One could only imagine if he were to come to power in place of Muammar Gaddafi. What the U.S. shouldn't tolerate are college students with Laker jerseys who are in for a thrill to travel to Libya, and agitate the rebels, giving them all the more reason to hate Westerners. There is no doubt that Hosni Mubarak and Mummer Gaddafi were oppressive leaders. However, as an American living in the post-9/11 world, I would rather the U.S. have stable relationships with un-liked leadership, than to deal with the unknown, or worse--potentially more radical leadership gaining power in the Middle East and North Africa.
