



NAVIGATING THE REGIONAL TURMOIL: MILEPOSTS AND GUIDELINES

By John Duke Anthony

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The events in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Oman and elsewhere have been beyond riveting. In determining how best to navigate the turbulence, the United States government is placed in a bind. Among its core dilemmas are longstanding, built-in contradictions. On one hand, the contradictions are rooted in our vital strategic, national security, and economic interests as well as key foreign policy objectives. On the other, they are also rooted in interests that are often at cross-purposes.

This second set of interests includes values, moral principles, and ethical postulates that pertain to transactional transparency in government, accountability, adherence to constitutional obligations, the rule of law, political pluralism, governmental, economic, and social reforms, and expanded popular participation in countries' national development processes. As we and other countries consider responses to the uprisings, it is essential not to lump any two countries and/or governments together. Like fingerprints, snowflakes, and human beings, no two are the same.



To avoid eliciting any further misgivings or antipathy towards the U.S. from emerging new governments, American leaders would do well to keep the following suggestions in mind.

(a) In keeping with the adage "haste makes waste," **we need** to avoid demanding unduly accelerated and/or radical changes with regard to institutions and processes that are not ours to begin with and

whose interests, needs, and objectives are not necessarily similar to ours. (Note the waste that haste on our side produced in Iraq.)

(b) **We need** to avoid specifying any terms related to re-engineering or fine-tuning developing executive, legislative, and judicial structures and systems of governance-- something we would abhor if the shoe were on the other foot.

(c) **We need** to demonstrate a willingness to accept fully and accommodate effectively the likely fact that societal components many Westerners find unpalatable are likely to increase their representation in the region's national, regional, and/or local governments, inclusive, in particular, of the ministries of education, justice, and/or foreign affairs.

(d) **We need** to exhibit reluctance if not refusal to push our own self-centric agendas. Instead, we need to project the same empathy we would have every foreigner critic, friend, and adviser project toward Americans.

(e) **We need** to provide serious and favorable consideration to any prudent and reasonable agenda presented to us with a request for input, comment, and meaningful assistance. Doing so would provide the requesters ownership of what is desired and could transpire as a result.

(f) **We need** to utilize social media and official as well as other communications outlets as appropriate to inform relevant elites, interest groups, and advocacy constituencies of American capacity-building institutions that would likely be eager to assist but only if and when requested, e.g., the National Endowment for Democracy, the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

If requested, the kind of American help that could be enlisted includes assistance in capacity-building for elections; the drafting and amending of constitutions; improving structures and systems of governance; utilization of social media, aiding private sector support networks; strengthening and expanding the nature and extent of human, gender, and civil rights; enhancement of youth leadership opportunities and overall human resource development; enabling political/professional association/electoral bloc building; and addressing environmental challenges.



If we can lead in this manner whilst manifesting the requisite humility becoming of any well meaning friend and adviser, we will strengthen the example of being other-oriented as well as legitimately self-interested.

If we can do this, we will demonstrate that we can appreciate that the region and its people are not mere objects but, equally and increasingly if not more so, also actors, like ourselves, with their own legitimate need, concerns, interests, and objectives.

On the anvils of reciprocity of respect, similarity as well complementary of interests, and mutuality of benefit, America,

if it will take into consideration and proceed to implement some of these guidelines, and the peoples it wishes to help will be well served. Doing so offers the promise of doing much to restore some of the goodwill that, to no good purpose, has been lost when we have failed to practice what we so often preach.

Not least among useful and abiding frames of reference as to what to do and what not to do, one can hardly go wrong in observing and implementing the golden rule of not doing unto others that which we would not have others do unto us.

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