



PROJECT on Middle East Democracy

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**"Senator John Kerry on U.S. Policy Toward the Middle East"
The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
1779 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC
Wednesday, March 16, 1:00pm-2:15pm**

Senator John Kerry (D-MA) delivered a speech at The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on Wednesday, March 16, 2011, on U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East in light of the recent uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt and continued unrest and protests across the entire region. Marwan Muasher, vice president of studies at The Carnegie Endowment introduced Senator Kerry and made brief remarks about the current unrest in the region.

Senator John Kerry (D-MA) began his remarks by calling the uprisings sweeping across the Middle East as, **"one of the most momentous developments of our time."** He also stated that the events that have transpired present enormous challenges to the peoples of the region and the U.S.'s relationship with those peoples. **How we respond, now, will shape the image of the U.S. in the eyes of the Muslim world for decades to come,** he said.

Kerry also pointed to the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union after the fall of Berlin Wall as a model for how to proceed in the Middle East. He pointed out that then, just as now, the U.S. had no assurances to future outcomes favorable to U.S. interests. However, the U.S. recognized that there was a historic opportunity to make a difference; and through a comprehensive and enormous aid and support package, was able to cement the end of communism in the eastern bloc countries. Many of those countries today are close U.S. allies in the international arena. Kerry stated the same policy must be pursued in the Middle East.

The Senator further went on to say that the fall of **Hosni Mubarak** was not only a victory for the Egyptian people, but democrats worldwide. **Securing the liberation of the people into a lasting democracy will deal a dramatic blow to extremism that the U.S. would never have been able to achieve itself.** Islamists, he said, tried to upend the Egyptian government for decades, while the ordinary citizens were able to, through the aid of social media, in 18 days, without suicide bombings or IEDs. Countries like Iran, who repress their population and advance their interests through terrorism will be weakened.

Senator Kerry said he was currently working with Senators **John McCain** (R-AZ) and **Joe Lieberman** (I-CT) on legislation that will support democratic transitions in Egypt and Tunisia along with sustainable economic development that would help provide jobs and educational opportunities to increased amounts of young people. Kerry also stated that despite the uncertainty, **"just as the Berlin Wall could not be rebuilt, so we know that the old order in the Middle East cannot be restored."**

The roots of rage, he said, run deep and are the result of local grievances that resonate across borders. The people of the Middle East escaped the yoke of colonialism only to fall victim to autocracy, where oil wealth coalesced at the top but did not trickle down to the steadily growing population. **Kerry**

stated that 60% of Arabs are under the age of thirty and the job market needed to accommodate them simply does not exist. People are worried about how they can continue to provide for their families in such an environment.

The Senator spoke to the lack of political rights in the region, a fact that has remained static for decades. Coupled with rampant corruption at every level of government and the "gross theft of national resources that allows some leaders to stash away fortunes," the trust that is the "heart of governance" is nonexistent. The cry for change across the region emanates from the frustration of people with no recourse or outlet for their grievances and little hope of a better life for themselves and their families. These people are now, "tearing down the walls of state sponsored fear and bureaucratic indifference." Quoting Lech Walsea Kerry stated: **"He who puts out his hand to stop the wheel of history will have his fingers crushed."**

The prominence of instant communication that can spread dissent at rapid pace requires leaders to embark on a path of reform in order to maintain the mandate of their people. Consent of the governed, Kerry remarked, has always been an essential force, something that the events of the past few weeks have reinforced. Governments must be more accountable to their people and offer real opportunities. **The choices are evolution or revolution**, he said.

Regarding Libya, Senator Kerry called Muammar Gadhafi a dictator guided by a "megalomaniacal self-preservation instinct." He further called the crackdown on protesters grotesque and declared that the international community could not "watch from the sidelines." **Calling the Arab League request for a U.N. mandated no-fly zone over Libya unprecedented, Kerry warned that the Libyan people are running out of time.** An immediate response was needed in order to avert a humanitarian crisis. He implored the U.N. Security Council to heed the Arab League's call stating the Gadhafi has no legitimacy and that the Libyan will ultimately prevail.

In Bahrain, where the U.S. 5th Fleet is stationed, Kerry urged all sides against violence and called for a real, accountable, and transparent national dialogue to chart a path of reform. He said that the U.S. must ensure that the recent deployment of Saudi troops in Bahrain does not turn into a broader regional conflict.

Kerry praised King **Abdullah II** of Jordan for being having sensitivity to issues of reform and his faster pace approach than others in the region. He also praised King **Mohammed VI** of Morocco for his announced referendum on constitutional and political reforms as well as Omani Sultan **Qaboos bin Said's** announced legislative reforms. He commended Algeria's lifting of its longstanding state of emergency law that banned protests. All of these are, **"tentative first steps, not final measures, but they suggest that no country in the region will the escape the populist wave that began [...] Tunisia."** The impact will also affect Israel, and making progress toward lasting peace is the only way to ensure Israel's security, the Senator said. He then announced he would be traveling to the Middle East in the coming days.

The United States' relationship with the region would need to be adjusted to reflect the new realities on the ground that for too long our policies in the region were driven by addiction to oil which overshadowed human rights and democracy, he said. The U.S. was willing to overlook the abuses of autocratic regimes in favor of their cooperation on fighting terrorism and thus U.S. policy was, **"focused on leaders rather than people."** What is needed, said Kerry, was an emphasis on relationships with the peoples of the region. In practice, this would vary from country to country.

Kerry said the U.S. view of Middle East was defined by the lens of 9/11: "**Now we, must view it through the lens of 2011.**"

Kerry called for a push back against the consolidation of power that has bred corruption, stagnation, and dissatisfaction. The U.S. must encourage the establishment of institutions that promote accountability and transparency. These institutions must safeguard the freedom and justice for all people. The citizenry, he said, must have a greater voice in the affairs of the government, including women. Independent media must also play a vital role he said, as well as access to and the freedom of information. Internal security structures must be balanced by independent judiciaries that are dedicated to the rule of law and preserve human rights.

America cares about respect for the rule of law and economic reform throughout the world because Americans believe, "**that democracy enables the fullest expression of the human spirit and that economic freedom is the engine of human innovation. We believe that when people can trust their government and rely on its justice, the society that flourishes is a stable one. And we believe that stability and prosperity are powerful antidotes to the violent urges of nihilism and extremism.**" Religious parties will seek a voice in the new political order, in Egypt and elsewhere; which while a point of concern, should not be a reason to panic. The U.S. should engage the region's political actors while standing by its convictions; a rejection of radicalism and anti-Semitism, and an embrace of modernism: "**For a modern democracy to function, violence can have no place in the political process.**"

Kerry called for development aid for the Middle East in the same fashion of the SEED (Support for East European Democracy) Act of 1989, in which he said billions of dollars for economic and political transition helped solidify Poland and Hungary into functioning and prospering democracies. The act eventually expanded to cover other former Warsaw Pact nations that are now also thriving, stable economies, democracies, and NATO members. Kerry said that the SEED Act has provided \$9 billion in overall assistance since it was passed.

Kerry called Egypt an "incubator of ideas in the Middle East," and the, "vanguard of the new Arab awakening." He outlined the Enterprise Funds he has proposed for Egypt; funds that would invest in small and medium sized businesses and provide assistance to local Egyptian entrepreneurs and businesspeople in the form of strategic and technical advice. Similar in structure to SEED, the funds would raise \$5 billion extra in private capital while the original U.S. investment would be repaid with interest. He stated that the U.S. has been laying the groundwork for aid for years through programs with NED, MEPI, and USAID. Kerry recognized the current budget crisis but stated that **democracy assistance, "was not a gift,"** referring to the fact that investments would be repaid. The U.S. could pay now to help people or pay later with instability and threats to American national security. Kerry concluded by saying that the U.S. cannot "miss this moment" and called for a new relationship with the people of the Middle East based on common humanity now bound by common freedoms.

In response to audience questions, Kerry questioned the reasoning of critics of a no-fly zone over Libya. **He said that the U.S. had no certainty of outcome in Eastern Europe either and that the U.S. did in fact know the "principal players" sufficiently.** He mentioned that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with Libyan opposition leaders in Paris and that Libyan opposition has also met with NATO officials. The alternative was to allow Gadhafi to stay in power, the prospect of which although not an existential threat to the U.S., would do significant damage to America's image abroad.

Kerry also said that his proposed legislation for assistance would be ready by the end of next month and said he hoped that Congress could cast aside current ideological excesses when considering such important issues.

Kerry also held up Turkey as an example of progress. Turkey and Egypt were comparable politically and economically in the 1950s. However since then, Turkey's transition into democratization along with economic reforms and a strong relationship with the West have helped propel Turkey far beyond Egypt in economic and political development. In regards to Libya, Kerry stated that all options were on the table, but that they needed to be thought through carefully. Continued lost time equals diminished options he said.

On Bahrain, Kerry said that the Shi'ite population must be listened to by the ruling Sunni minority. He reiterated calls for a legitimate national dialogue and urged all sides to refrain from violence. He also said that he believed that Syrian President **Bashar al-Assad** would embrace changes in order to benefit from and embrace a legitimate relationship with the U.S for economic reasons. Kerry even stated that the U.S. and Iran had some common interests against the Taliban in Afghanistan and Iran's anti-drug trafficking stance.

On Libya, Kerry reiterated that even should Gadhafi succeed in defeating the rebels at present, international efforts against him would not stop. Ultimately the Libyan people would prevail he said.

On Egypt, a reporter from *AlMasry AlYoum* asked the Senator what the U.S. could do to help Egypt, in particular in terms of debt restructuring, free trade agreements, investment and recalibrating aid to Egypt in favor of economic assistance over military aid. Kerry confirmed his belief that economic aid to Egypt was the most important factor at the present moment: **"I think there's a strong feeling that we should shift the balance of the assistance. Certainly until there's been a presidential race and a parliament is chosen and the country as a whole, sort of defines where it's heading. I think the most important aid is the economic and the development piece that I talked about here today."**