



PROJECT on Middle East Democracy

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“Revolution in the Middle East: A Trip Report by Senator John McCain and Senator Joseph Lieberman”
The Brookings Institute
1775 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington DC
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On Thursday the Brookings Institute hosted an event focused on the recent trip of Sen. **John McCain** (R-AZ) and Sen. **Joseph Lieberman** (I-CT) to the Middle East entitled: “Revolution in the Middle East: A Trip Report by Senator John McCain and Senator Joseph Lieberman.” The event was opened by **Strobe Talbott**, President of the Brookings Institute and moderated by **Robert Kagan**, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institute.

Robert Kagan began the discussion commending the Senators for undertaking their trip to the Middle East during a historic period of change in the region amidst a time “when people talk about maybe the United States is losing interest in the world or we’re preoccupied with our own problems.” Kagan asked the speakers to weigh in on how Americans should feel about what is going on in the Middle East. Sen. McCain stated that he believed Americans should feel **“exhilarated, I think they should be exuberant, I think they should realize the universality of everything we stand for and believe in.”** He also cautioned that there remains a possibility for these revolutions to be “hijacked” by extremist factions. When dealing with the region he warned that there are vast differences between the countries in the Maghreb and the Arab World and thus the United States and policy makers cannot simply lump them all into a singular mold.

Sen. Lieberman reiterated that the revolutions across the Middle East exemplify the universality of political freedom and economic opportunity. He went on to state the events unfolding in the Middle East **“represents the strongest repudiation possible of al-Qaeda and Iran.”** Lieberman believes the peaceful revolutions have achieved the end that violent extremists sought to achieve in Egypt, the overthrow of the Mubarak regime. Instead of achieving these ends through terrorism they did it through popular, non-violent protest, which Lieberman argues strikes a blow at the legitimacy of terrorist organizations across the region.

After meeting with civil society leaders in Egypt, Sen. McCain stated that the two most important goals for the U.S. are **to promote the growth of democracy through free and fair elections as well as helping to spur job growth.** He also cautioned that Egyptian civil society is very wary of U.S. interference and thus the U.S. must act carefully to make sure that Egyptians do not perceive the U.S. as interfering, but instead supporting. Sen. McCain called **for more support of U.S. organizations supporting democratic promotion in the region including the National Endowment for Democracy, the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute.**

Sen. Lieberman argued that the military council currently in charge in Egypt does not seem interested in holding on to power, but because of this there are fears and disagreements on what kind of time table should be used in order to carry out elections. Sen. McCain commended the Muslim Brotherhood for the

work they have done so far, but cautioned that he still maintains a “cynical” view of them and that there is a great deal of uncertainty surrounding the group in the run up to elections.

Sen. Lieberman called **for increased aid to Tunisia to promote the growth of democracy** which he fears will get brushed aside when policymakers decide on aid allotments for democratic promotion in the region. Following the uprisings, Sen. McCain asserted that the U.S. must do more to seek a peace process between Israel and Palestine at this critical moment. In accordance with the tremendous events in the region, Sen. Lieberman called for the United States to do **“more than we ever did before to support the opposition in Iran.”** He contended that the regime in Iran is **“afraid right now”** and that in response the U.S. must do all it can **“overtly and covertly”** to support the growth of democracy there.

Both men called for urgent action against the Gadhafi regime to thwart the violence that continues to be perpetrated against the Libyan people along with the humanitarian crisis that is unfolding with Libya and its borders. They also believe that one of the first steps that must be taken **is the establishment of a no-fly zone**, which they argue must be achieved with multi-lateral assistance.

When asked if the Senators believed that economic aid should be increased to Egypt, Sen. McCain argued that Egypt is a national security priority and the U.S. must do all that they can to promote the stability of Egypt’s future. He believes a first step is debt relief assistance. Sen. Lieberman argued that there is room for money to be spent in Egypt in the interest of national security which would pale in comparison to the hundreds of billions of dollars spent in Iraq and Afghanistan for the same goal.