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The Middle East and the Midwest

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The Middle East has erupted like a chain of volcanoes with dissent pouring forth in nearly every Muslim country in the region. Mubarak's regime in Egypt fell faster than seemed possible, encouraged by the regime change that protestors were able to accomplish in Tunisia. Other regimes will likely fall in coming weeks, if not days.

The Middle East has been the source of unending trouble for the world with its many religious, political, and economic challenges. Even though there is presently so much confusion and turmoil, we know what the conclusion of this matter will be, and it will be good. The unfolding scenario that we are witnessing now is found in Isaiah 19. However, the path that the events will take before the ultimate conclusion will likely present increasing challenges which will bring increasing stress on the nations. To be prepared for the times, we need to understand them.

First, let's briefly look at what we obviously know is not true. How was it that Hosni Mubarak went from being one of our best allies in the Middle East to being a cruel dictator so fast? He's a dictator, and there does not seem to have been a single dictator in history who has not been ruthless, so why did our government turn on him so fast? For us to have done this was remarkable, but to do it without even knowing who would take his place is even more so. Something is awry when someone we call our friend becomes evil in our eyes so quickly. Mubarak has been essentially the same person for the 30 years he's been in power. Why the sudden change?

The way that this change in our perception came was when it appeared like our government was just waiting to see who would win the standoff and then fell over themselves trying to appear to be for the winners. Our other "allies" in the region took note of how quickly we abandoned Mubarak, and their faith in us dipped accordingly.

Of course, we should be encouraged when any people start to demand democracy. This is the foundation of our own nation, and we should be the greatest of all

champions of democracy. However, there has not been a single revolution in the Middle East that has ended up being a true democracy. Every popular uprising has ultimately ended up in an even worse form of tyranny being imposed. What makes us think Egypt will be any different?

Why have we all of a sudden become skittish about relations with dictators or oppressive regimes? With the exception of Israel, and to a smaller degree Iraq and Afghanistan, every country in the region is ruled by a dictator, or an oppressive regime. If we do not relate to dictators or oppressive regimes, we cannot relate to anyone else in the region, not to mention many of the rest of the countries on earth. Maybe this should be our foreign policy, but if it is not uniform and consistent, then we will continue to be viewed as the hypocrites and fair weather friends we are now seen as.

Many experts on the Middle East are quite sure that ultimately the Muslim Brotherhood will be in control of Egypt. There may be a couple of more steps before they get total control, but this is the open door they have been seeking since they killed Anwar Sadat. The information we received from the people in Egypt during the recent demonstrations was that these were not spontaneous, but had been planned for weeks if not months and by people who did not appear to be Egyptians.

When I was at the World Public Forum on Civilizations and Religions that is held each year in Rhodes, Greece, I heard from several Muslim leaders that America is one of the most naïve and easily manipulated countries in the world. They told me how many of our intelligence sources in Iraq and Afghanistan would give us “intelligence” on their own personal enemies, so we would bomb them, and we fell for it almost every time. Our military knows this now, but America is considered a nation very easy to manipulate and fool, and they are correct.

A main reason for this is that our human intelligence resources have been decimated since the Reagan Administration. The resources we have now are spread very thin, and the intelligence we get is likewise very shallow. Our intelligence services were blindsided by what happened in Egypt because they have been reduced to trying to evaluate what has happened instead of foreseeing what is going to happen. In world affairs, we are now flying almost totally blind.

We should be proud that our country supports and promotes democracy, but it is still wrong, and usually counterproductive to be naïve or hypocritical in our promotion of it. The Gaza Strip is a good example. We insisted on a democratic vote and the people voted for a terrorist organization, Hamas, enemy of Israel and enemy of the U.S., to be their leader.

Jihadists and other enemies of America learned quickly how to use naïve, U.S. idealism about democracy to gain power. Their saying is, “One man, one vote, one time,” meaning they will use our insistence on elections to get their people in power, and then you can forget ever having another real election. They may continue to have elections for the sake of world opinion, but they will control the outcome.



As we read this scenario in Isaiah Chapter 19, through the first part of this chapter there is great conflict in the region before the final conclusion of the alliance between Assyria, Egypt, and Israel. Biblical Assyria includes all of the territory from modern-day Iraq to Egypt. This is the sure word of prophecy that it has not yet happened in history, so we know that it must happen before the end of this age.

The Midwest

The connection between the Middle East and the Midwest of the United States is that both regions are entering times of great challenge over ultimate issues. In the Middle East, many forces are at work, but most seem to be sincerely crying out for freedom from the oppression, which has ruled that region for too long. There is a rising cry for democracy, and we should be encouraged by this. However, in the Midwest we are facing challenges that threaten our democracy.

To understand unfolding world issues, we need to comprehend what is now spreading in the Middle East. To comprehend unfolding national issues, we need to understand what is happening in Wisconsin, and how it is likely to spread to other states just as the uprisings have spread across the Middle East.

A primary issue in the Midwest conflict at present is the right of public employees to collective bargaining. To consider the rejection of this right to be a union busting tactic is simply not true. This one thing is a major source busting the entire country financially, as well as bringing unprecedented political corruption, and it has to be faced if we are going to escape from some of the most crushing financial problems we're now facing. Even Franklin D. Roosevelt, one of the most liberal of all U.S. Presidents, rejected giving the right of collective bargaining to public employees because of its potential for corruption and the destruction of sound fiscal policy.

Why is the potential for corruption so much greater for public employees than those in the private sector in regard to collective bargaining? What has evolved since this right was given to public employees proves that FDR was right. Public Employee Unions are some of the biggest of all political campaign contributors—the campaigns of the very ones who will be setting their salaries and benefits. Who can take their money and then vote against them? Not many, which is why public employee salaries and pension benefits have soared to the point where they will soon drive the majority of states into bankruptcy even before this year is out if not reversed.

Public service employees now make on average considerably more than those with comparable jobs in the private sector. With the benefit packages now enjoyed by public service employees, including being fully vested for 100% retirement benefits by age 55, all paid for by taxpayers, is it a wonder that the best and the brightest have left the private sector to work for government? Since government does not produce anything marketable, this sucking of all the oxygen out of the room has further crippled our ability to compete in the world markets, shrinking our national income, and therefore our tax



income for paying government employees. Many states have not been able to pay into their pension funds for a long time. Others have borrowed anything they had put into them, and now these exorbitant benefits are being called for by retirees. Something has to give.

All but possibly four states are facing insolvency this year if radical changes are not made. Illinois decided to raise state taxes by 30% rather than face down their unions. The result of this should have been expected—the beginning of a mass exodus of companies and people fleeing to neighboring states. This move will likely shrink the Illinois tax revenue instead of increasing it.

This looming and sure to grow crisis now leaves hard choices to be faced. Lines are now being drawn between the public, and the public service unions. There are many nuances to this issue, and every state is at least to some degree unique in what it must now face, but the overall issue could change the American political landscape every bit as much as the Middle Eastern political landscape is now changing. Both regions are facing issues that can no longer be put off.

Summary

The immediate impact of the Middle Eastern turmoil will likely be fuel prices soaring. The U.S. could be facing permanent prices above \$5 a gallon at the pump. The economic impact of this will not be good, especially with our economy still crippled.

In the Middle East, opportunities for the liberties to expand have been tasted to a degree in Iraq and Afghanistan. Though no transcendent statesmen like Washington or Jefferson have yet appeared in the region, or even another Anwar Sadat, the cries for change are great and growing. This is no doubt an opportunity for good or evil. It is tragic that the credibility of the U.S. is being eroded so fast by our handling of the situation, which hinders our ability to influence the situation. This presents a greater opportunity for China, Russia, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Because the situation is unfolding so fast, it gives even greater opportunity for those who are better organized, and those who are the best organized are not the ones we would like to see in power. Because the situation is so fluid, there is still potential that it will turn out well, but the trend is definitely against it.

In the Midwest crisis, there is a much greater potential for good to be the result. There are strong leaders who know what must be done and are making the hard, but essential choices. Either the union grip on government will be broken, or the country will be broke. Many states could start defaulting this year, creating a devastating cascade. States cannot just print money like the Federal government can when it cannot sell more of its debt.

The public service unions are not the only crises facing state governments. The burden placed on the states by Obamacare will not be just the straw that breaks the camel's back, rather the Sherman tank that breaks the camel's back.



The good is that the madness of the public service union agreements with governments and Obamacare will both be illuminated this year, and therefore can be corrected. It will take strong, resolute leadership, but there does seem to be just such a leadership now in many key positions. If they can persevere to resolve these issues, we will have a much more healthy future. If they start to cave, we will be in an even more desperate crisis very quickly. Pray for your leaders.

On one final note, it is debatable whether public service unions should exist at all, but unions in general have been a vehicle for many positive changes in America, and it is not in our best interest for them to be totally destroyed. Without question, some of these unions have greatly hurt America's ability to be competitive in the world over recent decades, but with reform and reformation-minded leaders, labor unions can be an important partner for our future progress.

If it is decided that public service unions are to continue to have collective bargaining rights, then they should be restricted from making any kind of campaign contributions or endorsing candidates, just like tax-exempt organizations. At least that way those who must vote on their wages and benefits won't be obligated to them. Without something like this, collective bargaining for public employees simply cannot be tolerated without basic continuing corruption of the system.

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