

Arab Spring, and then what? Ved Nanda The Denver Post 4 May 2011 Ved Nanda (vednanda@law.du.edu)

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(...) Popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa led to the euphoria of the Arab Spring, which has now given way to anxiety: What comes next? What shape will these difficult transitions in Egypt and Tunisia take? How will the bloody struggles in Syria and Libya end? What role will the Islamists, the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates play in this unfolding drama? The second quandary is primarily for the United States. Concerned primarily with stability and furtherance of its interests, albeit short-term interests, it has supported repressive dictators, most of whom supported the U.S. in countering terrorism and Islamist extremism.

Among other unanswered concerns is the charge that, while the United Nations valiantly invoked the "Responsibility to Protect" principle and NATO enthusiastically came on board in repelling Moammar Khadafy's attacks on civilians in Libya, why has no action been taken in Syria? (...)

(...) Khadafy in Libya and Bashar al Assad in Syria have no intention of going peacefully. But the protesters are persistent, continuing to pursue their goal of changing the regime. Democratic transition there will have to wait, for they must first simply survive the process. In Libya, scenarios under which the current impasse will give way include NATO's intensifying its use of coercive force to degrade Khadafy's military to a point where it is can be defeated. Or, those supporting him may realize that they can't win, and ultimately change sides. There is little hope that the Gulf Cooperation Council or other Arab/African mediators can succeed in persuading Khadafy to leave. (...)

(...) In Syria, the situation is different. Its strategic location and the prospects of sectarian strife and extremism if the regime collapses are the primary reasons that demands for a firmer response to the bloodshed there are met by little else than unilateral sanctions imposed by the U.S. and contemplated by the European Union. (...)

(...) Given the current international system, where the U.N. Security Council has five veto-wielding powers and 192 countries (most of them vigorously defending their sovereignty), it is foolhardy to expect that decisions on the use of coercive force will always be rational and equitable. While no action was taken to stop the slaughter in Rwanda, and the U.N. has not acted in Syria, we should still applaud its belated action in Libya. (...)

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