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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: The Arab Spring isn't dead.

Supporting Protesters Worldwide

If you noticed that people are taking to the streets all over the world, you're not wrong. Worldwide protests in [Chile](#), [Ecuador](#), [Haiti](#), and [Hong Kong](#) are just a few examples of how 2019 has been characterized by popular uprisings against corrupt, ineffective governments and by the demand for increased democracy and structural change.

In particular, ongoing protests in Lebanon, Iraq, and Algeria, and in Sudan and Tunisia earlier this year, show that the Arab Spring lives on with demonstrators across the region. Among the things the protesters want: an end to corruption, failed governance, and foreign interference.

While these protests have largely been met with silence by the Trump administration, the U.S. [can and should support](#) them.

DEMOCRACY PERSISTS

Those who have said the Arab Spring ended in failure may want to check their notes. Yes, authoritarians have swept back into power across the Middle East and North Africa, but this year we've also seen important democratic developments in the region. Tunisia held another round of [free and fair elections](#), passed laws to [ensure minority rights](#), and worked to consolidate its new democratic institutions established during the Arab Spring. Today in Algeria was the 38th consecutive day of protests, which began when protesters pushed longtime ruler Abdelaziz Bouteflika out of power, indicating Algerians will not rest until [real democratic institutions](#) are implemented. Similarly in Sudan, protesters pushed out Omar al-Bashir earlier this year after 30 years of authoritarian rule. [Civilians are continuing to push](#) the military to transition to a completely civilian-ruled government with elections expected next month.

Meanwhile, Lebanese and Iraqi protesters are continuing this trend of demanding more accountable governance and an end to corruption oftentimes in the face of state violence. Since the beginning of October, over [250 Iraqi protesters have been killed](#) by government forces using excessive force, even though the protests have remained largely peaceful, with protesters even [cleaning up subways and buildings](#) that the government had let deteriorate. Protesters in Lebanon have also faced [violence from government forces](#) as well as [Hezbollah and Amal forces](#), but they continue to take to the streets and demand democratic changes peacefully. The protests have featured [students walking out of classes](#) and individuals from all ethnic and religious groups coming together to form a [human chain](#) 105 miles long.

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Contrary to the Trump [administration's narrative](#), these protests aren't primarily about Iran. While there is some anti-Iran sentiment in both Lebanon and Iraq protests, these protests are fueled by ongoing anti-corruption fervor. The anti-Iran sentiment in these protests is driven by popular desire to end foreign interference, including by Iran, in their respective governments that helps fuel patronage and corruption. In reality, it is Iran who stands to [lose](#) if these protests achieve their aims.

WHAT SHOULD THE U.S. DO?

The U.S. cannot arm or bomb its way out of instability in the Middle East. The ongoing protests throughout the region show that popular aspirations for democratic representation, economic opportunity, and accountable governance will not end due to repression.

Importantly, there is not a binary choice between supporting the protesters by forcibly overthrowing their governments or doing nothing. When protests turn violent like they did in Syria, the choice was not U.S.-led regime change or doing nothing. The U.S. government failed to invest in sustained diplomacy to achieve accountability, decrease violence, and build a multilateral coalition to back the protesters in the international arena. Further, by arming rebels we fueled the idea that violence was the only way to see change.

So what can we do? The protests in Iraq and Lebanon are an opportunity to reassess U.S. interests in the region and finally align them with the aspirations of the people in each country, rather than aligning them with the governments oppressing them. By continuing to prop up corrupt regimes and continuing an unprecedented flood of weapons into the region, all in the alleged name of “increasing stability,” we have achieved the exact opposite and increased human suffering. Going forward, we must align U.S. foreign policy with these principles: **safety, solidarity, equality, self-determination, and justice.**

Safety. The U.S. must reconceptualize its foreign assistance by ending the practice of building foreign militaries in the image of the U.S. military – an unattainable goal that often subordinates the will of these countries' citizens to their military leaders and can embroil the U.S. in human rights violations. Instead, security assistance and cooperation should have clear metrics and be limited in scope, such as focusing on building the rule-of-law capacities of police forces and militaries with robust pre-vetting and end-use restrictions to prevent misuse of military equipment.

Solidarity. The U.S. must realign its policies with the rights and needs of people in countries around the world. To act in solidarity, the U.S. must expand its diplomatic engagement with nongovernmental actors and the international community to facilitate negotiations between the people and their governments. The U.S. should use its influence, including diplomatic statements and accountability for the bilateral relationship, to push governments to meaningfully engage with their citizens' demands.

Equality. Ending economic, racial, and gender inequality is a security and moral imperative for the U.S. and the world. The U.S. should prioritize peacebuilding, development financing, and other

WIN WITHOUT WAR



policies that will help lift up the most marginalized in society and are grounded in fairness, nondiscrimination, and equal opportunity. Ensuring social and economic inclusion in U.S. international development, trade, and financial policy is essential to undermining mass inequality.

Self-Determination. U.S. policymakers must engage with broad cross-sections of local populations and analyze whether partner governments' actions uphold the desires of their people and the people's right to determine their future. Policymakers also need to determine how to uphold self-determination when issues arise outside of people's relationship with their national government, at the local, interstate, or multinational level. Doing so will prevent the United States from doing harm while also uplifting the policy solutions developed by the local people.

Justice. Instilling justice as a principle of U.S. foreign policy means prioritizing the protection of human rights worldwide. Policies that prevent human suffering, hold perpetrators – including parts of the United States government and private military contractors – accountable for abuses, and ensure U.S. actions uphold international law and norms to create a more inclusive and accountable world system are essential to promote justice and peace in the Middle East and beyond.

We are under no illusion that such a shift in U.S. policy will be easy or simple. For decades, the United States has systematically defunded and dismantled the very tools we need to address not just the security challenges we face today, but those just across the horizon in the future. But from the streets of Beirut to Baghdad, we see every day the failure of our current strategies and policies. Progressives should take this moment to not just make clear what's not working, but start the process of building what we need for a better tomorrow.

And if our own government won't listen, a whole lot of folks all around the world are showing exactly what it looks like to demand the change we need.

BURIED LEDES

The Chinese government [continues](#) to **systematically destroy Islamic structures** in an attempt at cultural genocide.

CAN YOU HEAR US? 11,000 scientists [agree](#) that **climate change will result in “untold suffering”**.

Trump [showed](#) a complete disregard for science and humanity's future when he announced the **beginning of pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement**.

[Apparent mail and wire fraud](#) by the Trump campaign has supporters going hungry as **there is little evidence that winners of meet-and-greet prizes have actually met Trump**.

Twitter employees were [spying](#) on critics of the government of Saudi Arabia, including a friend of Jamal Khashoggi.

WIN WITHOUT WAR



MAXIMUM FAIL: the only thing Trump's maximum pressure policy against Iran has [achieved](#) is Iran turning on its centrifuges.

Some **State Department officials** [pushed back against, but were overruled,](#) on **Trump's racist immigration policies** after warning against taking away protections for immigrants from El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti.

Members of the South Korean National Assembly [fed up](#) with Trump's failed foreign policies with North Korea are **calling for a formal end to the Korean War and signed peace treaty.**

Is this what "leaving" means? Trump [approves](#) troops to stay in Syria to secure oil (btw making that decision isn't his job).

And finally, a **stray cat** [wandered](#) onto the field of a football game this week and caused adorable havoc.