



ATLANTIC MEMO #30

Arab Spring: The West's Chance for a Fresh Start

Focusing on societal engagement, economic reform, and military confidence building, we should break with our questionable past and respond to the Arab uprisings by taking bold action to improve our reputation. The uprisings in the Arab world have attracted support and sympathy from citizens in the West (Varin), and these revolutions are an opportunity to embrace our values by supporting the uprisings (Alves). The West should "take Egypt's Revolution as the starting point of a new era of democratization across the Middle East and a chance to create a new foreign policy strategy" (Kennedy). All authors participated in the competition "*Women on Transatlantic Security*" sponsored by the United States Mission to NATO and the NATO Public Diplomacy Division.

1. Promote democracy by engaging all civil society groups.

Engagement with and support of civil society movements should be a priority because transformations in the former USSR and Eastern Europe have shown that the strength of such movements is critical to democratization processes. Western-led democracy initiatives in the Arab world will face a credibility issue, so the West will need to take a "careful and culturally sensitive approach to civil society engagement." This approach should include a wide range of pro-democracy groups and religious organizations. Ignoring groups who do not mirror Western values in favour of those we agree with is not compatible with democracy promotion. Success can only be guaranteed if these initiatives are shaped by local realities (Makanju).

The West should engage in dialogue with Islamist groups. Encounters with Islamism are unavoidable when promoting democracy in the Arab world and we have failed to distinguish between different Islamist currents. Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood is a pragmatic movement experienced in working with a broad coalition of groups. A younger generation of Brother's are open to dialogue with Israel (Kennedy). By refusing to talk to Hamas, which was elected by the Palestinian people, we are ignoring our democratic principles and promoting double standards (Paraipan).

2. Support reforms with better trade.

Europe should provide better market access to Arab countries, using trade as a means to encourage longer term political reform. These reforms should include profound institutional transformation towards fairer, more transparent elections, constitutional reform and robust judicial systems (Jacobs).

The West must make a sustained commitment to a legally binding treaty to regulate the international arms trade. While publicly calling on Arab leaders to respect human rights, Western countries have sold them tools for domestic oppression. Our policies on arms exports leave us bound to regimes whose domestic legitimacy is questionable. This sends the message that "international norms such as democracy and human rights do not count as much as economic interests do" (Kruse).

3. Build confidence through NATO's regional cooperation initiatives.

NATO is a political entity whose goal is to "promote democratic values to build trust and prevent conflict in the long-run" (Redohl). The Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia, as well as the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) with Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, can be used as frameworks to promote confidence building and increase transparency between military establishments (Scatamacchia).

These measures would also reassure Israel and thus promote stability in the region (Landman). The success of such military diplomacy was evident during the Egyptian Revolution, when the United States military's ties with its Egyptian counterparts were credited with fostering the Egyptian military's decision to protect the protesters from government forces.

Atlantic Memos showcase the best ideas and arguments from debates in the Open Think Tank on atlantic-community.org. All policy recommendations in this document were made by registered members of the Atlantic Community.

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