

## *Middle East Dialogue 2015...Glorious Past, Uncertain Future*

### **AN OPTIMISTIC POSSIBILITY FOR THE FUTURE MIDDLE EAST**

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The experience of the Arab Spring suggested two potential futures for the Middle East: 1) a novel era wherein the popular will plays a meaningful role in political life or 2) an era of continuing oppressive dictatorship. It also suggested that left to its own devices, Middle East politics is more likely to tend toward the latter, more dismal scenario.

Is there a way of changing these discouraging odds and increasing the probability of a brighter future that answers to the democratic will of citizens? In other words, how do we help ensure that, the next time around (and I am assuming there will be a next time), the Arab Spring will succeed?

This paper will argue that there is such a scenario based on the potential of the now worldwide civil society movement in support international human rights - a movement that uses human rights as a criterion to judge the legitimacy of states and their governments. Here I am speaking of the same movement that helped force the demise of apartheid South Africa and is now challenging the legitimacy of Zionist Israel.

The present effort to fight Israel's violation of Palestinian human and civil rights with the proven tool of boycott, divestment and sanctions is slowly becoming measurably effective. It is possible that within a decade using this tool, serious damage will be done to the Israeli economy as well the isolation of that state from the greater part of the international community. Could this force fundamental change in Israel as it helped to do in South Africa?

As this process goes forward, and hopefully proves itself effective, it could become a model for permanent on-going action directed against Middle Eastern (and other) regimes with records of ongoing human rights violations.

It might be argued that amount of energy and dedication necessary to bring about a successful BDS movement requires that it be directed at one target state at a time. It might also be that success against Israel will spark another round of Arab Spring revolts and, if this occurs, we can see how BDS might be reworked to assist a broader movement of liberation.

There are many “ifs” and “maybes” in this scenario, but the potential is real enough. And, it promotes hope and sanity to look for optimistic future possibilities in an otherwise dark and dismal present.