

Middle East, North Africa Learn from Egypt

The revolution of Egypt no longer dominates the headlines.

However, Carl Moeller of Open Doors USA says discounting the changes in Egypt could be a costly mistake: "Egypt still is in the midst of sorting out what this revolution is going to look like. The reality is that there's still an incredible amount of uncertainty as to which direction Egypt is going to go. As a result, there's an incredible amount of uncertainty and continuing instability for the entire region."

More to the point, Moeller says, Egypt is a driving force in the policies of North Africa: "Egyptians have had the tradition of setting the course for a large part of the intellectual direction of Islam."

With a leadership vacuum in place of a presidency, Islamists are looking for huge gains in the time of "freer politics." "We've talked before about the role that the Muslim Brotherhood has had in being the seedbed of extremist movements for the last half a century," Moeller says. "Even though we may not see a Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt, there's no doubt that there's going to be a far greater role for them in a future government in Egypt."

Moeller goes on to say that at the same time, other regimes are looking to how Egypt settles her affairs. "They're going to move very quickly to new elections, which sounds good to us in the West," he says. "But the reality is: the only organized parties there are Mubarak's party, the National Party, and the Muslim Brotherhood. There's sort of an 'unholy alliance' between those two to pull this off quickly so they can retain whatever power they can grab."

Meanwhile, blame is flying as the U.S. tries to support other

threatened states in the Middle East and North Africa. Foreign policy efforts are trickier because a misstep could prove costly. There's a line of black and white thinking emerging that lumps former president Hosni Mubarak, his supporters, and allies into a type of "anti-democracy" camp.

Moeller says, "Beware when they begin to associate the United States with the old regimes. I saw another account where the United States was particularly being blamed for not acting forcefully enough to support the revolution there."

Before the revolution, the idea that Egypt might one day become an Islamic state wasn't up for debate. Now, it's not out of the realm of possibility as disillusionment grows over events in Libya.

"In the immediate aftermath of revolutions, there are opportunities," Moeller says. "We saw that in Eastern Europe in the 1990s: there was a window of time where it was incredibly open, and then the doors and the windows began to shut as new power structures became entrenched against the church."

Christians were front and center during the initial movement for change. That earned them credibility. Moeller says the combination of openness and credibility means believers have to "make hay while the sun is shining." "This is an opportunity for us, in the midst of some of these things, to do some unprecedented Scripture deliveries, literature work, as well as doing some training to equip church leaders for the inevitable instability that's going to be around for some time," he says.

Until the door closes, there's an urgency to which Open Doors is responding: "We know that God is sovereign, and that God's timing here is impeccable. Some of our storage facilities that have been used as distribution points for literatures are basically empty."

Even as the possibility of a caliphate looms, Moeller says, "Christians continue to ask us to pray for them that they would continue to be a light of hope and liberty in Jesus Christ to their culture."