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**From:** Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, February 23, 2011 3:44 PM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** FW: Les Gelb's Daily Beast Blog 2/23/11

I agree with all of this and it is consistent with -- indeed ripping off  
 -- things you have said.

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Leslie H. Gelb [mailto:   
**Sent:** Wednesday, February 23, 2011 10:27 AM  
**To:** Sullivan, Jacob J  
**Subject:** Les Gelb's Daily Beast Blog 2/23/11

Dear Mr. Sullivan:

Forget forging a new grand strategy for the Mideast, writes Les Gelb at the Daily Beast. With little known about today's revolutionaries, President Obama should forego soaring rhetoric for modest principles.

The full text of the piece is included below.

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2011-02-22/how-president-obama-should-navigate-the-new-arab-landscape/>

Sincerely,

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Watch Out, Mr. President  
 by Leslie H. Gelb  
 February 23, 2011

**\*\*With Libya's regime crumbling and protests spreading across the Middle East, neither Obama nor the experts really know whether America should now cheer or cringe.\*\***

Remember that great old democrat, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin? Once upon a time, many trumpeted him as the peoples' man du jour. He had delicious democratic slogans: "Peace, Bread, and Land" and "All Power to the Soviets" (meaning the peoples' councils). This pithy platform thrilled throngs longing to stop Russia's involvement in World War I and retire the czar's oppressive regime. Good people the world over applauded these populist sentiments, though not the communist progeny. Unfortunately, by democracy, Lenin meant dictatorship by him and the Communist Party.

Now, don't go crazy. I'm not obsessing about Islamic Lenins lying in wait to exploit the current turmoil. I'm simply noting that experts and the talkocracy seem overeager to leap "on the right side of history" and march arm-in-arm with the revolutionaries, whom they don't know from a hole in the wall. To be blunt, I don't know anyone who has the foggiest

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idea where these revolutions from Algeria to the borders of Saudi Arabia are going or whether future leaders there will be true democrats or new dictators. Sure, we all hope that present autocratic friends will help with a peaceful and orderly transition toward real democracy. Sure, we all hope that their successors will be both real democrats and sympathetic to American interests.

I'm hoping for, but I'm certainly not betting on, a bright and more democratic future. Too many things can come a cropper on the rocky road to democracy, especially in the troubled and religiously quixotic world of Arabs and Islam. Will the Egyptian military help to gradually establish democratic institutions and free and fair elections, or will they hold on to their vast political and economic power? I'm betting the military takes over Hosni Mubarak's old political party and "wins" the election. What of the 70 percent Shiite majority in Bahrain? I'm betting they just want to throw out their longtime Sunni rulers, take over, and embrace Iran. As for Libya and Yemen, I'm not counting on their turning into Switzerlands. And so forth. If only the women of Egypt, so sensible and bright, could take over their country, I'd be sublimely happy.

Whatever this region will look like a year or two from now, it will be different from the last bunch of decades. Leaders, old and new, will have to be somewhat more responsive to their people by sharing additional wealth and power with some groups. This, in turn, will mean a more anti-American foreign policy. Truth be told, most Arab peoples and elites blame America for most of their ills: backing their oppressive leaders, invading Muslim Iraq and Afghanistan, and sustaining the Zionist entity, their hate-filled name for Israel.

The effects of even modest adjustments in Arab foreign policies could be quite serious: less secure oil supplies at higher costs, degradation of anti-terrorist operations based in the region, an Israel on hair-trigger military alert, and a stronger Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Iran generally.

So, President Obama, what should you do in these vastly uncertain and threatening times?

First, don't make your trademark grandiose speeches. Tread carefully and modestly and stick to sound general principles that can survive inevitable surprises and don't have to be revised daily. Here are some:

The U.S. firmly supports peaceful and orderly transition to real, not fake, democracies. The U.S. opposes using force against peoples who demonstrate peacefully. The U.S. stands ready to help as requested by governments and peoples of the region.

Second, avoid soaring rhetoric that undermines America's remaining friends or sparks another uprising in Iran, which might only lead to another round of slaughter. Instead, urge friendly regimes-publicly and privately-to open up their political systems. Leave decisions on revolution in Iran to the Iranian people, and aid them only when and as asked.

Third, avoid all pledges for a new Marshall Plan for the region.

Otherwise, American money will be squandered in a sea of corruption.

Rather, urge the rich, Arab oil states to kick in the billions they've been hoarding for decades and bask in the gratitude of their neighbors.

They have the money; and we are limited at the moment from providing new and great sums of aid.

Fourth, make policy on a country-by-country basis, paying close attention to each country's special history and culture. A grand and brand new strategy will only blur critical distinctions and confuse friend and foe alike.

Fifth, don't just throw out old autocratic babies and suppose you can keep the democratic bathwater. Instead, help, cajole, and push friendly regimes to transition peacefully toward democracy. Specifically, encourage development of political parties, the rule of law, a free press, and genuine elections. That's much safer both for friendly rulers and far, far better for the people. It reduces risks of their democracy being hijacked by new Lenins. And it will better protect American interests.

Many will argue this modest and careful course will place you on the wrong side of history. But, Mr. President, they don't know where this Arab whirlwind is tossing us any better than you or I. My fear is that an activist and grand strategy will grossly exaggerate America's power to shape events and will do more harm than good.

Leslie H. Gelb, a former New York Times columnist and senior government official, is author of *Power Rules: How Common Sense Can Rescue American Foreign Policy* (HarperCollins 2009), a book that shows how to think about and use power in the 21st century. He is president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations.