

Presentation of Dr. David H. Gray at Utah Valley University

Dr. Gray spoke a lot about Al Qaeda. I learned a lot from his discussion. Starting with how the nexus between Al Qaeda and Arab Revolution has received the most attention since 2001. Al Qaeda in the last 40 years has had big changes and development. The irony is that what Jihadi type have tried to do in the last 40 years is what has happened in the last year – revolution.

They tried to spark and overthrow the state. Revolution now is for democracy and other factors. Al Qaeda is not the driving force for the revolution. In Algeria, they drove the overthrow in the 1950s. They have other spin off groups. They had an unsuccessful attempt at an Islamic state. Between the 1990s and 2000s it was a bloodbath. In Turkey in the early 1900s had big changes in how islam was treated. They were economically strong compared to 30 years ago. They are looking for examples to follow. Major actions regarding the revolution included politicians, parliamentarians, not the radicals, following the Iraqis. Moderate governments are being formed.

Terrorism in the case of Osama bin Laden's death. Major changes happened to Al Qaeda. The order of operations was messed up because bin Laden was in charge of that. Someone needs to take his place, but the replacement will never be bin Laden. It shows the weakness in Al Qaeda. This degrades the organization. The intelligence puts senior members in vulnerability and decentralizes the terrorist group. When it comes to terrorist franchises the commander is the brain and there is no overall support or fire power. Al Qaeda's response is to battle for the soul of Islam. It is now up to the countries where to go. Al Qaeda has lost strategic support and action. They are now being forced to compete in the parliamentary process and trying on democracy.

Al Qaeda is out of the fray with the exception of Syria. They can't participate so they are non players. They are unable to establish an Islamic state which is a death sentence to their organization. When it comes to the direction of the Islamic countries, the question is "Will Islam adapt?" The Arab Spring when it comes to Tunisia is progressing well. This is one of the most homogenous societies and is looking good. They have a long way to go, but they are doing well. In the Cairo revolution, one of the big causes was the cost of bread on the street. The demand was up, the supply was down which drove the cost up as well.

Al Qaeda has been discredited. Countries are starting to question whether they create a more stable environment because the area is destabilized or not. With Syria, Assad was a war criminal who caused pressure on the regime. Al Qaeda types are fighting the Assad regimes. This makes us wonder what to do? Do we arm and supply the rebels which happen to have members of Al Qaeda? Al Qaeda is active in Yemen as well. It is not the same Al Qaeda as before. They are not as popular.

Egypt's parliament has about 40% of its members identifying as being part of the Muslim Brotherhood. They have recently warmed to Iran. The conflict between Iran and Israel is experiencing a cooling. Al Qaeda is not simply the same as the past and is losing its traction. This brings the question to the U.S. of "Which side should we support?" Do we support Syria and the rebels now? Or do we stay out of it? If the rebels win and we didn't support them, will this result in more problems?

Democracy and Islam are at odds. It's all due to the way the countries view themselves. Is U.S. Democracy exportable? Dr. David H. Gray says No. The social interaction has to be worked through before economy. This is the heart of the issue. The last 200 years in the middle east has shown large dynamic change. In Saudi Arabia, Islam is about God, while Democracy is about the King.

There are approaching problems with Hamas and Syria besides the long term consequences and changes in their breaking connections. Who are the players or stake holders? How do they play together? What is their dynamic? There is a mirror imaging going on. It's a model of rational actors. What should we do strategically? When it comes to defense spending the administration needs to stay engaged especially with Afghanistan. Economics will cause revolution because it causes people to be angry and hungry

Cindy Blackburn, President, Foreign Affairs Club