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## What the new US president must do in the Arab world

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January 23, 2017

It is easy to feel deeply distressed if you are an Arab these days. The Arab Spring has turned into stormy winter. Countries have been destabilised by uprisings that have accomplished very little good. Lives have been lost, yet dignity has not been restored. Economies have been destroyed and prosperity seems like an ever more elusive objective.

This is taking place in our region while the world is also witnessing unprecedented events marked by the rise of populism and xenophobia. From the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump to the rise of the extreme right in Europe, a new culture of separation and isolation is gaining ground. In fact, it seems that the world order that emerged after 1945 is unravelling.

With all these changes happening, the picture in the Arab world remains ambiguous and uncertain, making it very difficult to construct a proper sense of what lies ahead. The most that we could do at present is to draw some observations and quick conclusions and to try to come up with some recommendations and guidelines.

In terms of the new president of the United States, the priorities that I believe should be adopted for the Arab region are as follows.

Firstly, it must seek permanent rather than transitory solutions to the festering problems of the region, such as the conflicts and disputes in Israel-Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen.

These open wounds provide fertile ground for all kinds of evil – starting with dictatorships, then violent extremism and ultimately leading to further instability and more violence.

Secondly, the administration must recognise that extremism on one side cannot be permanently defeated by extremism by the other side. Therefore, the war on ISIL cannot be won by the militias that are ravaging cities and entire regions in Iraq and in Syria and introducing religious, sectarian and ethnic cleansing in large chunks of these two countries. Moreover, ISIL cannot be defeated by allowing more intervention from Iran and its client militias.

On the contrary, this continued intervention would fuel further extremism and more violence in the region.

Hence, since it is essential to stop the destabilising role of the Iranian intervention in the region, it is very important to concentrate on the real underlying issues and problems in the Arab region that are causing discontent, exclusion, anger, increasing unemployment and poverty and distressed economic and social conditions.

The new US president may have to realise that it is in his country's national interest to support and help the Arab region by properly addressing these challenging issues to further stability in the region and beyond.

Next, the new US president must strengthen and empower Arab moderates.

This region should not be ruled by extremism, and it should not move backwards when the entire world is trying to move forward.

It is also important to empower and encourage Arab states – those such as Lebanon that respect human rights, democracy and good governance – to stay the course, particularly those states that are currently fighting terrorism. In this context, it is important that the US (as well as Saudi Arabia) continues to support the Lebanese armed forces, which have made a significant difference in the fight against terror.

He must also recognise that it would be in America's national interest as well as the interest of the region for the US to invest in the social and economic development in the Arab region.

The Arab world, with its huge pent-up demand and untapped resources, could provide a much-needed growth engine for the region and beyond if stability and security were re-established.

Finally, he must pursue an even-handed policy regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, which would mean abandoning the idea of moving the US embassy to Jerusalem and exerting US influence over Israel to ditch its expansionist settlement practices, thus allowing for the two-state solution to proceed.

But this does not mean we do not have a responsibility as Arabs. So how can we navigate these rising global tensions?

I say it is very simple: building civil states in which representative institutions that underline equal rights and obligations are the real protectors of all components of our diverse societies, instead of exacerbating tension by bringing up the devils of sectarian and religious divisions.

Engaging in regional or global wars that tend to support one or another sect or ethnicity is a wild adventure that would only lead to further chaos and destruction.

Only building the civil state and giving back to our youth the idea of belonging to an Arab nation, rather than to a religious sect or to an ethnic group, would create a real and common sense of belonging. It would also bring recognition of common interests among the various components of the societies of Islamic countries as well. Thus, a real contribution could be made to help the Arabs in building a better future for the Arab youth.