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## The Arabs, the US and Trump

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Here is the 44th president of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama, getting ready to pack and leave the White House, making room for Donald Trump, a newcomer chosen by the American people to become the 45th president of the United States. And since the personal traits, the political and intellectual orientation, the roots and social status of the next president are virtually the exact opposite of everything embodied by the outgoing president, it is difficult for one to believe the same people actually elected the two of them to occupy the most important and dangerous job in the world.

This is particularly true since the timeframe that separates the election of the two extremes is just eight years, a very short period of time that is hardly sufficient to produce and justify such an abrupt shift in public mood. This leads me to believe that political scientists, sociologists, and historians will henceforth pause long to explain what happened and analyse the internal and external causes and factors that contributed to this major shift, which might cost not only the American people but the whole world a high price in the future.

With the departure of Obama from the White House, after eight years at the head of the most powerful nation in history, a page in the history of the United States and the world will turn, one that political scientists, sociologists, and historians will spend much time assessing, shedding light on all its pros and cons. A new and unwritten chapter is about to begin with Trump's arrival to the White House, and no one can predict in advance whether it will be long or short, bright or dark. The only thing that one can be certain of is that what will be written down in it will not be limited to what Trump and his team decide, but rather will be the collective outcome of internal

and external interactions with what will be determined in Washington, or in cooperation with other capitals, regardless of whether these reactions are negative, positive, supportive, resisting, or neutral.

This significant historical moment prompted me to go back to what had been written in the Arab press about Obama and his administration since they arrived at the White House, in an attempt to trace back these articles. I found that usually they had the tendency to exaggerate and overreact in everything. We have gone from being overly welcoming and enthusiastic about him, especially after his famous speech at Cairo University, to excessively attacking and denouncing his policies to the point of ridiculing and slandering him, especially towards the end of his rule. These writings show superficiality in understanding the working mechanisms of the American system and in appreciating the margin of manoeuvrability available to any president to steer things in this or that direction. More seriously, I found that these writings rarely include an objective assessment of the performance of official Arab policies towards the United States led by a president cheered by all Arabs at the beginning, nor do they include an in-depth analysis of Arab decisions or initiatives designed to help the Obama administration adopt policies that serve the interests of the Arabs or deter the United States against adopting policies detrimental to those interests. It was also clear to me from these articles that Arab leaders seldom adopt a common policy towards any American or non-American administration. Instead, they often act as a motley of tribes, with each tribal chief pursuing his own needs that usually revolve around his own personal protection, the protection of his regime, or at best, the protection of his homeland's interests as he sees them. Rarely do these tribal chiefs have needs that relate to supreme Arab or national interests. This is why every American president finds himself, even if he has an initial willingness to help Arabs to help themselves, incapable of responding to the contrasting demands of the Arabs and is often able to turn Arabs against Arabs to protect the interests of the United States and close allies. Arab policies toward Syria constitute a clear example of the contradictory Arab policies that helped turn a domestic crisis into a civil war managed from afar by regional and international forces.

I was one of those filled with enthusiasm for Obama, hoping to see the arrival in the White House of an African-American university professor, born to a Muslim father, as an indicator of the beginning of real change, not only in the American system way but also the world order led by the United States.

However, my enthusiasm for him started to fade away slowly with each step he backtracked in the face of Netanyahu, who decided to challenge him from the first moment. And when the extremist Israeli prime minister succeeded in forcing the US Congress to send him an official invitation, against the US president's wishes, to criticise from inside Congress on US foreign policy towards Iran, particularly after the conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal, I realised that Obama doesn't have the leadership credentials to lead the world order toward real change. However, I still believe that history will show that Obama was one of the best presidents in US history, not by virtue of what he did in terms of change, but by virtue of resisting the temptations to commit follies of the type enacted by his predecessor, which cost the United States and the world a lot.

I believe that Obama's decision to refrain from using a veto and allow to pass a resolution condemning Israel's settlement policy, as well as the US secretary of state's comprehensive speech on the Arab-Israeli conflict that reaffirmed US support for a two-state solution, which is

opposed by both Netanyahu and Trump, reflect a cry of conscience by an American intellectual at the helm of the most powerful country in the world. Perhaps the world will remember this defining moment when it follows Trump's foolish actions in the months or years to come. If the Arabs have failed to take advantage of the presence of a president like Obama at the head of the US administration for eight years, letting their global and regional status slip from bad to worse during that long period, how will they fare under an American administration led by a man like Trump, who hates Arabs, Muslims and everything that isn't American? I think that the Arabs, as always, are not united in their perception of Trump's administration and in this regard they are divided into at least three groups:

- One group thinks that Trump will be better than Obama because he promises to adopt tougher policies towards terrorist organisations. This group believes that the Trump administration will consider the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group, like all other organisations that promote an extremist religious ideology and hatred of others.
- Another group thinks that Trump will prove the better president because he promises to adopt tougher policies towards Iran and its nuclear programme, and against its expansionist plans in the region.
- A third group thinks that, in the worst-case scenario, it can neutralise Trump or win him over using the "security in exchange for money and major trade deals" equation, which Trump appreciates and for which he is a master negotiator.

If we look at the reasoning behind these perceptions we discover that the Arabs didn't and won't change. Each group continues to bet that the American president will solve the problem that troubles them on their behalf: the Muslim Brotherhood for the first group, Iran for the second group, and military protection from any potential internal and external threats for the third group. However, I believe that they are all delusional. Trump will be concerned with America's interests first, followed by Israel's interests. Unless all the Arabs develop a common policy to deal with the new extremist US administration of President Trump, they will find themselves stripped of their money and assets, and left alone not only to face the terrorist groups that emerged from under their cloaks, but also to confront each other. And when they wake up, if they do, they will discover that the US embassy has already moved to Jerusalem and that the stage is set for the liquidation of the Palestinian cause.

When Trump begins to draft his Middle East policy he will discover that Israel, Iran and Turkey possess real cards in the region that they can use as leverage to block any US policies that do not suit their interests. As a result, Trump will be compelled to negotiate for a compromise. He will also discover that the Arab states, which always act as individual units with conflicting objectives and policies, have no real power and are not active players.

Accordingly, the Arabs will pay the price with their land and assets, and possibly blood.

Are the Arabs really in a position to deal with a Trump administration as equals?

Arabs, get united for God's sake, or at least stop acting against one another so that others may respect you.