

Tyler Morning Telegraph

West cannot force Arab democracy

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As the “Arab Spring” continues to devolve into merely a newer despotism, in some cases, or into anarchy, in others, the Bloomberg news service is calling for a new “Marshall Plan” to shore up freedom and democracy in the volatile lands.

Bloomberg misses the point, however, that from what we’ve seen so far, democracy has resulted in less freedom, as new voters go to the polls and choose a new set of tyrants and extremists.

Assistance and aid, like we provided to a war-torn Europe, will not have the same result, because too many in the Arab world want Shari’a law and theocratic rule.

“Two years to the day since protesters toppled Tunisian dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, triggering revolts across the Arab world, euphoria has clearly turned to disappointment,” Bloomberg editors write. “Building Arab democracies with open economies is proving much harder than was, perhaps naively, anticipated. Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have become trapped in a vicious circle in which instability hampers economic recovery, while lack of growth and jobs in turn fuels instability. In all three countries, failure to break the circle this year could mean ceding the field to radical Islamists who reject modernity, or lapsing back into the corrupt crony-state systems that so many people risked their lives to escape.”

Yet that doesn’t mean democracy has failed, they contend.

“What’s needed is a bigger and more focused effort, along with a healthy serving of patience,” Bloomberg editors write. “History offers a telling comparison. It was also two years after the end of World War II when George C. Marshall said in a speech at Harvard University that ‘the rehabilitation of the economic structure of Europe quite evidently will require a much longer time and greater effort than had been foreseen.’ He proposed what became known as the Marshall Plan, arguing that the alternative would be ‘hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos.’”

But there’s a big difference. Western Europeans shared what, for lack of a better term, we can call Western values. They were democracies before the war; both Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini were elected, though both took dictatorial control once in power.

Our assumption then — and it was borne out — was that with rebuilt infrastructure and institutions, those countries would continue to pursue democratic goals. Given the choice, they would choose freedom.

We should not — must not — make the same assumption about the Middle East in the post-Arab Spring era.

Notes the Cato Institute's Doug Bandow, "Ugly reality has dashed the high hopes of the 'Arab Spring.' Although the dream of democratic reform lives on, only Tunisia appears on course. In Egypt, the fall of Hosni Mubarak has encouraged religious intolerance and persecution, especially against the Coptic Christian community."

It's not something massive amounts of foreign aid will fix, though the Bloomberg editorial board calls for just that.

In fact, there's precious little the United States or the European Union can do to influence the region, at this point. As Michael Trotten warned in *World Affairs Journal*, "the current upheaval and its aftermath is a gate through which the Arabs must pass."