

THIS WORLD OF OURS

By Bob Harwood

People Power Goes Global



With Information Age, instant communication People Power has been unleashed at a pace and on a scale never before experienced. Some of the factors at play are lack of freedom, corruption, obscene economic contrasts, soaring food costs and rising unemployment. Entrenched Arab despots scramble to implement appeasing concessions or respond with suppression and brute force. In Libya, this became a deadly civil war causing the UN Security Council, without a veto, to bring in air power to protect civilians.

In see-saw battles back and forth it remains to be seen if reinvigorated rebel forces will ultimately oust Gaddafi. As casualties mount from deadly responses to protests and senior officials defect might the rulers of Syria or Yemen be next to go? Justified or not, Saudi Arabia's military coming to Bahrain's aid raised Sunni / Shiite tensions in a region vital to both American and Iranian strategic interests. Iran recalls the protests after its disputed 2009 election.

As West Bank and Gaza citizens seek to end Israel's harassment and impoverishment of their people, might serious two-state negotiations finally get underway to address the issue above all others that fuels Arab angst against the West? Egyptians now call for Mubarak to stand trial. In Italy 100,000 women protested Berlusconi's denigration of women in his public policies and decadent private life. He is now to be tried before three women justices for purchasing sex with a minor and faces other charges. Global International Women's Day protests remind that much remains to be done on gender discrimination. China ramped up its suppression of dissidence fearing echoes from the Middle East. But at some point China's huge economic gains must be followed by political reforms.

America must ponder its role in the Middle East unrest. It has been a prime supporter of despots now under siege by their own people for oil, strategic military bases or as bulwarks against Iran and Al-Queda. Most shameful has been gross abuse of its Security Council veto. In the past 35 years it has cast 60% of all vetoes, commonly as the sole voice blocking any critique of Israel's continuing oppression of Palestinians.

And on the home front America is poorly positioned to deal with People Power outrage as it struggles with unsustainable debt at every level. Difficult choices must be made in a country too often at odds with the rest of the world. Military expenditures are 43% of the world's total. Prison populations far exceed all others with draconian sentences for minor offences while citizens arm to the teeth as a constitutional right. It lacks universal health care yet its more costly private system leaves tens of millions unprotected. An aging demographic has lost its dream of universal home ownership. Ideological extremes clashed as a dysfunctional government played brinkmanship with complete shutdown as much for ideological as budgetary reasons. Cutting public sector perks in unions' last public sector bastion will invoke mass protests far beyond Wisconsin. As Americans bemoan the price of gasoline Europeans have long paid two to three times as much to help avert the looming climate change Americans still deny.

Millions continue to pay the price of reckless, often fraudulent conduct of an under regulated financial sector still issuing obscene bonuses. Astronomical lobbying and campaign outlays mock the very meaning of democracy. To cling to his modest start on health care reform, Obama had to accept extending Bush's tax cuts for the wealthiest. Turbulent times lie ahead for

America.

Caution: As I file this weeks before you read it in print daily changes on the ground continue.