**How should the United States address authoritarian states in the post-Arab Spring world?**

*In October 2017, Steven A. Cook from Council on Foreign Relations gave a* [*talk*](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20171025-false-dawn-protest-democracy-violence-new-middle-east-steven-a-cook) *at Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs about his book* False Dawn: Protest, Democracy, and Violence in the New Middle East. *In the following excerpt, Cook reflects on what the relationship between the United States and Middle Eastern/North African nations should look like after the Arab Spring.* ***The excerpt has been modified for the classroom.***

…I am going to say something very controversial. I think what President [Trump said in Riyadh](https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/05/trump-saudi-speech-islam/527535/) in May [2017] about the era of the United States telling people how to live, how to arrange their societies, and that they should live with some approximation of the way we live, is over. I do not think that was necessarily a bad thing; not because I am opposed to democracy, not because I support authoritarians, but because after this episode [the outcomes of the Arab Spring], after it has become clear that we have very little ability to alter the politics in these countries, it would be harmful to American interests to continue to do those kinds of things.

Where I differ from the president—of course, it is not the only way that I differ from the president—is his gutting of the foreign affairs budget…My view is that we should get back to the basics, broadly thinking about the Middle East, and when we think about the missions of organizations like USAID [United States Agency for International Development].

So, to me, [Abdel Fattah el-Sisi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdel_Fattah_el-Sisi), [Recep Tayyip Erdoğan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recep_Tayyip_Erdo%C4%9Fan%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), even [Beji Caid Essebsi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beji_Caid_Essebsi%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), the alleged democratic leader of Tunisia, are not much interested in democracy and good governance programs. The Moroccans, the Jordanians, they are very good at writing these grant applications and extracting this reform-minded money, but it has not really changed things. Maybe it is a 50-year project, and I am being unfair, but it seems to me that if we go back to what USAID used to do, which is actual development work—rural electrification, potable water, developing sewerage, protecting historical sites, those kinds of things, public health and education.

**…**I think over a longer period of time [they] are more helpful to your average person in the Middle East than good governance conferences with Egyptian governors at the Four Seasons Nile Plaza. Because if you know anything about Egyptian governors, they are retired military officers or police officers who have a very different view of what good governance is than what we believe to be good governance. So it is sort of like we are wasting money when we could be contributing to the health, wealth, and education of populations that may over a long period of time produce fundamental kinds of change.

1. Why does the author argue that democracy programs in the Middle East and North Africa have not been working?
2. What does the author suggest as an alternative to good governance programs? Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?
3. Would you qualify the programs that the author suggests as methods of promoting democracy? Explain.