



# Executive Summary

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## POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE: REVOLUTIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S. MILITARY

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Editor

Dramatic political, economic, and social changes across both the Greater Middle East and Latin America over the last several years—in some instances revolutionary, in others evolutionary—have had profound implications for global security generally, and U.S. security specifically.

In the Middle East, although initial causal factors may have been the same or similar in many affected states, the Arab Spring has unfolded—and continues to unfold—in a unique way in each of the countries affected. In the same way, Washington must develop a tailored response to each as it seeks to promote key U.S. interests and objectives across the region.

U.S. interests have also been challenged by the social and political changes that have unfolded across Latin America over the last decade. Although certainly not as revolutionary as the changes witnessed across the Middle East and North Africa in the last several years, the growth and spread of modern Bolivarianism has confronted American policymakers with a new set of challenges in Latin America.

Washington is therefore confronted with the issue of how to respond to the various changes in these disparate regions in order to safeguard U.S. interests, promote Western values, and shape the security environment into the future. Whether and to what degree U.S. policymakers can influence the unfolding changes and shape outcomes remains to be seen. But if Washington is to achieve success in this regard, it will likely only be possible through the skillful employment of a variety of policymaking tools, including development, diplomacy, and defense.

These were among the central issues confronting a panel entitled, “Political and Socio-Economic

Change: Revolutions and Their Implications,” during the U.S. Army War College’s annual Strategy Conference in April 2013. Three expert panelists—Professor Gregory Aftandilian of the Center for National Policy, Dr. I. William Zartman of the Johns Hopkins University, and Dr. Philip Brenner of the American University—were each asked to consider the aforementioned issues. The chapters of this volume were the basis for their presentations at the April 2013 Strategy Conference.

Professor Aftandilian calls for the United States to exhibit greater consistency in responding to undemocratic behavior of regimes in the Greater Middle East. Nevertheless, he argues for the United States to maintain ties with most of the military bureaucracies throughout the region as a means of maintaining influence. Additionally, Aftandilian calls on U.S. officials to engage with a broad swath of opposition and civil society figures, particularly given the diffusion of power evident in many countries of the region.

Dr. I. William Zartman believes that Washington can “at best” react wisely to events in the Middle East—controlling such events will likely prove impossible. In contemplating the policy tools necessary to achieve U.S. objectives, Zartman argues that military-to-military ties can function as a useful bridge. Additionally, he recommends stubborn tenacity in the search for new or different means of engagement, collaboration, and negotiation. Perhaps most interestingly, Zartman concludes with a call for policymakers to seek to maintain U.S. primacy. Ultimately, he argues, weakness becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, making efforts to shape the international security environment more difficult.

Like Zartman, Dr. Philip Brenner argues that the United States would benefit from a greater degree of humility in how it reacts to and in terms of what it aspires to achieve when confronted by changes in the international security environment, particularly across Latin America. In particular, Brenner argues that the United States must end its “hegemonic presumption” and instead practice a “realistic empathy.” Instead of assuming Latin American populists—who have, in most cases, been the vanguard for dramatic political, economic, and social change in the region—are fundamentally anti-American, Brenner argues that U.S. officials should begin from the premise that those populists object to specific U.S. policies.

As Brenner, Zartman, and Aftandilian all make clear, managing change in the international security environment—whether revolutionary or evolutionary in nature—is never an uncomplicated task. American leaders will need to carefully consider how best to wield defense tools, among others, at their disposal—particularly Landpower—given the continuing defense austerity in the United States, the aftermath of over a decade of war, and the ongoing recovery from the Great Recession.

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