“Be identified with the emerging future rather than the decaying past:”
The US and Middle East in the wake of the Arab Uprisings 2010-11”

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What are the implications of the “Arab Spring” for US foreign policy in the Middle East? This paper offers a postcolonial reading of the debate about this question in the American public sphere by highlighting how fails to recognize the experience and agency of Middle East states and societies. In doing so, the debate tends to privilege certain forms of global order and ignore the hierarchical power relations and means of violence deployed to sustain such orders while rejecting the legitimacy of the subjectivity, history, and memory of political actors subject to this order. With a survey of the major US policy speeches and the debate conducted in major policy-oriented journals and media outlets, I show how many argued that the Arab world is entering its own “post-cold war” moment in which the US and other major powers will have to take more seriously the role of these states as agents in international politics. I argue that the non-Islamist, tech-savvy, democracy/freedom oriented protester allowed American commentators to identify with the uprisings and downplay the threats they might post to US interests. This reading is reflected in the common refrain: “they want what we want.” The paper concludes, however, by asking of the US today the same question posed by former US Ambassador to Egypt in the 1960s: How can the US “Be identified with the emerging future rather than the decaying past?” While the future shape of the regional order remains unclear, I suggest that US actions and the broader American debate about US policy towards the region still privilege US-dominated forms of global order, ignore its hierarchical power relations, and fail to fully recognize the agency of Middle East states and societies as actors in the international system. The paper concludes by outlining the ongoing debates and emerging visions within the Arab public sphere about the possibly for a the development of a new, multipolar regional order may evolve in the wake of the Arab Spring.