

## Russia, Egypt, Libya: A kind-of-silver lining

Written by Eric Walberg

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Russia has always looked on at events in the Middle East from afar, shut out of the action, and remains an onlooker today, absorbed by its own problems. **Eric Walberg** looks at the implications for Russia of the revolutions and no-so-revolutions sweeping the Middle East

Russian politics is in turmoil as a result of the uprisings in the Arab world, in particular the Egyptian revolution. Those fed up with an increasingly autocratic political system hope that Russian citizens will be energised, while those who came out on top following the collapse of the Soviet Union are quick to dismiss any implications for the Russian political scene.

The official Russian reluctance to embrace the winds of change in the Middle East contrasts with the reaction of the rest of the world and speaks volumes about the real state of Russian politics. While the invasion of Libya revived the spectre of British/ French/ Italian/ US imperialism on Africa's north coast – hardly a welcome development for Russia – the implications of the Egyptian tidal wave now sweeping away corrupt, authoritarian politicians and their business cronies, without any need for French Exocet missiles and US-Israeli drones, is even more disturbing for the Kremlin, and it has nothing to do with Chechnya or Dagestan, where violence could hardly get worse as a result of a peaceful mass revolution like Egypt's.

The lack of enthusiasm was a gut reaction by the leadership and has a very good cause, for despite the very different cultures and histories, ordinary Russians face much the same situation as did

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