

disguising their true intentions in talks at Chatham House or the Council on Foreign Relations, they could not possibly provide the partner America needed. As the Obama team prepared to end the wars of the Bush administration, it felt a need for friends in the Arab world. So the administration bought into the fallacy of " moderate " political Islam. Had they not fallen for the Islamists' lip service to democracy, they might have paid more attention to the new political force that sparked the Arab Spring: democratic secularism. Regrettably, the United States failed to recognize the need to strengthen the Muslim world's secular democratic parties and empower their supporters, who want to build a society based on tolerance, moderation, the rule of law, women's rights and constitutional freedoms. Just as America worked to stop the spread of Communism after World War II, the Obama administration could have invested in civil society groups and secular democratic parties in the Muslim world. Few will dispute that Islamism in its " moderate " form is now in retreat. It took just a year for the incompetence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to reveal itself (the fall of Ennahda in Tunisia took longer). Washington must acknowledge the new reality, and engage with the Sisi government in Egypt and with Tunisia's secular political parties ahead of national elections later this year. How to channel the aspirations of that segment of the Egyptian and Tunisian societies that is rural, pious, illiterate and conservative remains a real challenge. Typically, such people are poor and lack economic opportunity. From the period of the dictatorships to the elections made possible by the Arab Spring, these populations were courted by the Islamists and developed into a strong