

## Americas

# The West "must accept 'Islamist' rise to power"

FROM FRONT PAGE

against decades of repression took to the streets in a stunning awakening. Since the collapse of the regimes in Egypt and Tunisia a year ago, "Islamist" groups once largely confined to the political sidelines, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, have formed parties and contested parliamentary polls, winning the greatest share of seats.

Even the once apolitical Salafis, who abstained from politics under Egypt's ousted president Hosni Mubarak, have fared well, winning more than 20 per cent of the vote in the country's first post-uprising ballot. Roth was cautious when asked about concerns about potential human rights violations under "Islamist" rule.

He said that although the "Islamists" have so far said "a lot of right things", the true test will be in how they deal with the full sweep of human rights once in power.

"These are the big questions."

The Muslim Brotherhood, for example, has been most interested in political freedoms, but Roth noted that "it is very difficult to secure political freedom if you are not respecting religious and women rights".

In some ways, the unexpected Arab uprisings have amounted to a slap to the United States and other Western governments, which had supported autocratic regimes that served as bulwarks against "Islamists" hostile to the West and appeared to offer stability in a volatile region. "The West backed an array of autocrats as long as they, in turn, supported Western interests," Roth said. "The West is still adjusting to this historic transformation."

He added that the wave of uprisings "show that the forced silence of people living under autocrats should never have been mistaken for popular complacency."

Roth acknowledged western governments were re-evaluating their policies as new governments emerge in the region. Western nations have been accused of being selective in supporting the protesters, with NATO air strikes proving key to the ouster of slain Libyan strongman Moammar Gadhafi. Meanwhile, the West has stood largely on the sidelines amid continued crackdowns in Bahrain, Yemen and Syria.

# Community helps Palestinian children

Students gathered University professors, concerned citizens and the Arab community to raise money for the Palestine Children's Relief Fund, a non-political charity that provides life-saving surgeries to youth.

By sending doctors to refugee camps in Lebanon, transporting children to the Americas, Europe or other places in the Middle East and providing supplies such as wheelchairs, PCRF is prolonging childhood for hundreds of children each year.

Three University organizations joined forces to make A Wish for Palestine possible - Arab Cultural Association, Muslim Student Association and Athens for Justice in Palestine. The event marks the first collaboration among the groups.

Dalal Hillou, a junior international affairs and Arabic major from Lawrenceville and founder of ACA, said the event was about childhood, not politics, a sentiment widely echoed at the charity luncheon.

"This isn't about old politicians who are vying for power," Hillou



said. "This is about innocent children who got caught up in someone else's mess."

Event planners, Hillou included, considered the luncheon relevant to college students, who are transitioning from childhood to adulthood, remembering favorite toys and places with nostalgia. The presidents of the three organizations want the same for children in Palestine, said Umarah Ali, a junior Arabic and journalism major from Augusta and president of the Muslim Student Association.

"We're college students planning it together and it hasn't been that long since we were

youths just like these kids," she said. "We all remember our childhoods and how it made us who we are. I think it's really important to focus on these children, who can go on to be leaders in the respective communities."

From electing President Barack Obama to sparking the Arab Spring through Facebook and Twitter, college students have a tremendous voice, which can be used to help Palestinian children, Ali said. "We've seen that college students can really make a lot of changes," she said.

The presidents said students as a whole aren't aware of the trouble

in Palestine and Israel. They hoped the event would educate students and encourage them to do their own research on the subject.

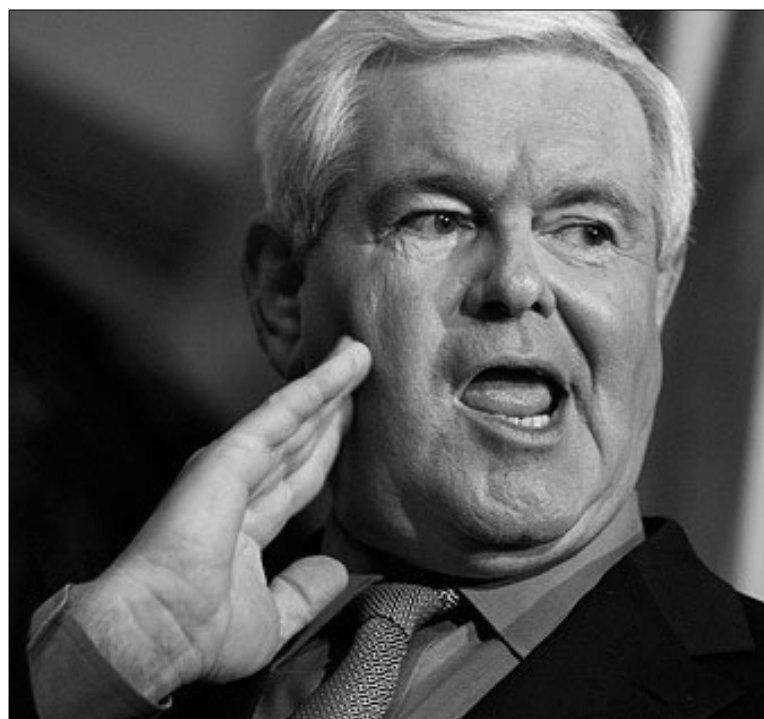
"I think everyone's kind of oblivious to what's going on in Israel and Palestine," said Amena Abbas, a senior environmental health science major from Sudan. "Kids as young as seven or eight are being thrown in jail, hauled off in the middle of the night."

To learn more about tragedies befalling children in Palestine and Israel, conducting individual research is necessary because American news media often doesn't report on the region - or report accurately - she said.

"We need to educate people and for them to go and do their own research about what's going on in the Middle East," she said. "Even I have to educate myself about what's going on over there."

Ali also cited education and awareness as an aim of the event, however, said the main motivation was aiding children in the Middle East by donating to PCRF. Through donations at the event, PCRF is working to build a cancer center.

# Gingrich reminded that all faiths are equal in America



A prominent national Muslim civil rights and advocacy organisation called on Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich and other GOP representatives to reaffirm their support of an American republic that treats citizens of all faiths as equals.

Gingrich told a South Carolina

town hall that he would only support a Muslim for the presidency if that person would "commit in public to give up Sharia."

"Newt Gingrich's vision of America segregates our citizens by faith. His outdated political ideas look backward to a time when

Catholics and Jews were vilified and their faiths called a threat," said CAIR National Legislative Director Corey Saylor.

"The time for bias in American politics has passed and Newt Gingrich looks like a relic of an ugly era."

Saylor added that Sharia teaches marital fidelity, generous charity and a thirst for knowledge. It includes religious guidelines for praying, fasting, giving charity, helping the needy, feeding the hungry, and caring for the environment.

"The last time I checked, that was called freedom of religion and it is all protected by the Constitution," said Saylor.

According to Saylor, Sharia literally means "path," and it is a set of interpretations that are dynamic and intended to accommodate the time, place and laws - like the U.S. Constitution - of a particular community.

Sharia mandates Muslims to respect the law of the land in which they live.

Many familiar with Islam note that Sharia is similar to Catholic Canon law and Jewish Halacha law.

The US Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit recently upheld a lower court's decision to block implementation of an Oklahoma state constitutional amendment that would prohibit courts from applying "Sharia law" and "international law".

# Mosque aims to spread understanding

A Central Texas mosque opened its doors to the public for the first time. The Islamic Center in Killeen held its first open house for its neighbours to educate them about who they are and what they believe. Robin Berry's son Patrick converted to the religion a few years ago. She attended Saturday's event to learn a little more about her son's new faith.

"I kind of understand a little bit more of what my son does every week when he comes," she said. "I understand him a little bit more."

Mustafa Salaam serves as president of the Islamic Community of Greater Killeen. He turned to Islam about 20 years ago after being raised in a Christian home. He says the foundations of both faiths are similar. Muslims follow the teachings of Abraham, Noah, Moses, and Jesus. However, the Qur'an is the key book of their faith, written through the Prophet Mohammed about 600 years after Jesus Christ.

Salaam knows some in the Killeen community hold a negative view of Islam due to the 2009 attack at Fort Hood and the failed bombing attempt of 2011, but he says every person should be held accountable for his or her actions.