With the ebb and flow of major clashes in Cairo's Tahrir Square since the Arab Spring began nearly two years ago, it's easy to get bogged down in the details of who's doing what to whom on any given day. Americans must take a step above the fray and look at Egypt and beyond from a broader, strategic level. What we're seeing unfold in Egypt — similar to what took place in Libya, Tunisia and Yemen with leaders toppled by the "Arab Street" — represents the most significant geopolitical shake-up since the Russian Revolution of 1917 ushered in the Soviet Union and Iran's Revolution of 1979 gave us the Islamic Republic of Iran. In all three scenarios, popular uprisings overthrew dictators — a czar, a shah and plenty of Arab autocrats. Although those revolutions were launched by a variety of groups wanting change, the best organized movements always have pushed aside rivals. President Mohamed Morsi's power grab, placing himself above Egypt's courts, brings to mind George Orwell's "Animal Farm," seeing one dictatorship replaced by another. In the wake of this week's mass unrest, Mr. Morsi is backpedaling in his newly decreed authority, though it still appears he's moving toward remaking Egypt into an Islamic-oriented, repressive, totalitarian state. Secular and socially liberal Egyptians are challenging Mr. Morsi's moves, along with Coptic Christians, leftists and others, though those opposition groups are not well-organized and have about as much influence there as minor political parties do in the U.S. We should be supporting them, much as we bolstered anti-communist groups in Eastern Europe during the Cold War. Because of Egypt's symbolic importance as a cradle of civilization, its cultural significance and weight of numbers in a population of 80 million, what happens there sets the tone for the Middle East. As the Arab expression goes, "Always pick the strong horse." Thus, it's no surprise that popular opinion is backing Islamists, as they grow stronger daily. This helps explain the recent unrest in Gaza. The ruling party, Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood and still internationally considered a terrorist organization, was emboldened to provoke Israel by launching about 1,400 Iranian-supplied missiles north and east as far away as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Though Israel's tactical response in killing more than 100 Hamas leaders and militants while destroying some infrastructure won the battle, the civilian casualty count made it difficult, if not impossible, to win the larger strategic war of ideas. Palestinians, indeed, have it rough in both Gaza and the West Bank. Drawing attention to their plight helps garner support on the world stage. Still, hard-liners like those in Hamas who seek to wipe Israel off the map en route to Palestinian statehood make those aspirations unlikely. This brings in Iran, which is supplying Hamas with missiles smuggled in through Gaza's tunnels from Egypt while working hard to develop its own nuclear weapons program, now largely buried in mountainsides and spread around the country. Seeking top power status within both Islam and the Middle East, Iran is leading the charge in pushing for Israel's demise. As Shia Muslims, though, Iranians must compete for "hearts and minds" with the majority Sunni branch anchored by Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Moreover, they are ethnically

Persians, not Arabs. To compensate for those major disadvantages in influence, Iran wants to "rally the base" by being the toughest on the Jewish state and its American backers. Palestinians make up just 2 percent of Arabs. Nonetheless, because societies throughout the Middle East are so dysfunctional in their own ways, focusing popular angst against Israel — and, by extension, the United States — is a convenient way to distract attention from fixing their own problems. Thus, Israel and the United States essentially are scapegoats of the highest order. Syria is another element of the struggle between Iran's Shia-led sphere and the Saudi-Egyptian-Sunni sphere. Should Bashar Assad's Iranian-backed Alawite regime fall, a Muslim Brotherhood takeover of Damascus is likely, as Sunnis make up 75 percent of Syria, and the Muslim Brotherhood is the strongest horse. This leads us back to Egypt. It's time for the Obama administration to oppose what's happening in Cairo. We need to leverage all our power to ensure that Mr. Morsi does not turn Egypt into another totalitarian Islamic state like Iran. Congress should withhold U.S. aid dollars until Mr. Morsi reverses course and ensures Egyptians have the type of freedom and democracy our government enabled by helping push Hosni Mubarak's government aside. Even if we withhold our money, it's going to be a tough road ahead. We have less influence on Mr. Morsi than we had on Mr. Mubarak, as he relied not only on billions in U.S. aid but on our backing despite his unpopular peace with Israel over three decades. Mr. Morsi has a mandate from winning elections, so he is less likely to listen to anything the United States says and can turn to Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar to make up the shortfall in revenue. America must show resolve in Egypt — and fast — or we'll likely see the rise of more anti-U.S. and highly anti-Semitic dictatorships in the region. Failure to do so is at our own peril. Read the original article here in the Washington Times