PERSPECTIVES

Political analysis and commentary from the Middle East

PEOPLE'S POWER
THE ARAB WORLD IN REVOLT

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Heinrich Böll Foundation – Middle East

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- Statehood & Participation
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- Environmental Justice
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The self-immolation of young and jobless Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi in the provincial town of Sidi Bouzid, upon being deprived of his vegetable stand and humiliated by the authorities, triggered popular movements and historic events in the Arab World completely unexpected in their magnitude…

But were they really that unexpected? Have not generations of activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens for decades tirelessly pointed out the repressive practices of their governments? Was it not common knowledge that thousands were executed, imprisoned, exiled, and that dissent was silenced in many other ways; Was not testimony after testimony collected, and report after report submitted? Did not countless experts, Arab and foreign, repeatedly stress the need for comprehensive political reforms, for economic opportunities for the growing youth population, for a redistribution of wealth, and for the establishment of accountable and transparent governance?

Two questions therefore are to be asked:

First, what has happened? What burst the dam and finally pushed millions of citizens to the streets in the Arab cities and countryside? Which element tore down the wall of fear that had prevented Arab societies for decades from holding their leaders accountable? How is it that neither political parties nor religious movements took to the streets, but rather people – people, peacefully shaking the foundations of deeply entrenched authoritarian rule and emerging as new and proud political actors?

And second, what invested these regimes - as most of them had already lost legitimacy a long time ago - with such long-lasting resilience (some of them remaining resilient at this point of time)?

History is still very much in the making. What seems clear, however, is that the current popular revolutions have cracked two central myths. Both the international actors, skeptical towards prospects for democracy in the Arab world, as well as authoritarian leaders themselves had dearly held on to these narratives: First, that Arab societies constituted an "exception" and were not "mature" for democracy; and second, that political Islam and/or chaos would constitute the only alternative to dictatorship.

The initial euphoria about people's power to enforce change has been clouded by the staggering numbers of victims, mainly in Libya, but also by the brutality employed against protesters in Bahrain, Yemen and Syria. It is clear, however, that there is no going back. Euphoria has transformed into broad political awareness, and while the remarkable process of people's self-empowerment demands respect, it also demands the international community to thoroughly review its existing policies towards the region. The opening of the political space provides a unique opportunity to finally listen to what the populations on the Southern shores of the Mediterranean, and especially the young generation, have to say.

Apart from the already enormous tasks of democratizing state institutions, organizing elections, and reforming the notorious security apparatuses, huge efforts will be necessary in order to match political participation with the demands for equality and socio-economic development. While the magnitude of transformations and challenges are immense, the future remains volatile.

Since the events started to unfold in December 2010, much has been speculated about the Arab "Spring," "Awakening" or "Renaissance."

Will these popular revolts translate into sustainable change? Will counter-movements emerge, should citizens not feel that their lives have improved? In what way will foreign

interests determine the course of events?

The authors in this special edition of "Perspectives Middle East" address the above questions and many more. The edition seeks to offer a forum for a diversity of voices and viewpoints – ranging from in-depth analytical insights to opinion pieces and testimonies.

"Perspectives Middle East" is a publication series of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung's offices in Beirut and Ramallah that seeks to provide a platform for presenting the analysis and viewpoints of experts primarily from the region.

This special issue was put together in a very short time, and during a period in which many of the authors were personally engaged in the events that we are witnessing. We thank them for their effort to put their thoughts into writing, some under very difficult conditions - a further testimony to their dedication.

Layla Al-Zubaidi, Director, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Middle East Office Beirut

Joachim Paul, Director, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Middle East Office Ramallah

A Revolution of Ideas

The Arab Revolts:
Ten Tentative Observations

Mouin Rabbani

Mouin Rabbani is an independent Middle East analyst and specialist in Palestinian affairs and the Arab-Israeli conflict, currently based in Amman, Jordan. From 2002-2008 he was Senior Middle East Analyst and Special Advisor on Palestine with the International Crisis Group. He was previously Palestine Director of the Palestinian American Research Institute. He is a Contributing Editor of the Middle East Report and Senior Fellow with the Institute for Palestine Studies.

The extraordinary developments in Tunisia and Egypt during the first six weeks of this year, and more recently in Bahrain, Libya, Yemen and elsewhere, have inaugurated a revolutionary moment in the Arab world not experienced since 1958. If sustained uprisings continue and spread, it

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has the potential to develop into an Arab 1848. Based on what we have witnessed thus far, the following observations appear relevant:

1. The Arab world is a fundamentally different beast than Eastern Europe during the late 1980s. The latter was ruled by virtually identical regimes, organized within a single collective framework whose individual members were tightly controlled by an outside, crisis-riven power increasingly unable and unwilling to sustain its domination. By contrast, Arab regimes differ markedly in structure and character, the Arab League has played no role in either political integration or socio-economic harmonization, and the United States – still the dominant power in the Middle East – attaches strategic significance to maintaining and strengthening its regional position, as well as that of Israel.

Whereas in Eastern Europe the demolition of the Berlin Wall symbolized the disintegration of not only the German Democratic Republic but of all regimes between the Danube and the USSR, the ouster of Ben Ali in Tunisia did not cause Mubarak's downfall any more than change in Cairo is producing regime collapse in Libya or leading to the dissolution of the League of Arab States. More to the point, neither the Tunisian nor Egyptian regimes have yet been fundamentally transformed, and may even survive the current upheavals relatively intact. (The nature of the Libyan case is somewhat of an anomaly, with regime survival or comprehensive disintegration the only apparent options.)

2. Many, if not most, Arab regimes are facing similar crises, which can be summarized as increasing popular alienation and resentment fueled by neo-liberal reforms. These reforms have translated into: growing socio-economic hardship and disparities as the economy, and indeed the state itself, is appropriated by corrupt crony capitalist cliques; brutalization by arbitrary states whose security forces have become fundamentally lawless in pursuit of their primary function of regime maintenance; leaders that gratuitously trample institutions underfoot to sustain power and bequeath it to successors of their choice – more often than not blood relatives; and craven subservience to Washington despite its regional wars and occupations, as well as an increasingly visible collusion with Israel proportional to the Jewish state's growing extremism.

Even the pretense of a minimal Arab consensus on core issues such as Palestine has collapsed, and collectively the Arab states not only no longer exercise influence on the world stage, but have seen their regional role

diminish as well, while Israel, Turkey and Iran have become the only local players of note. In a nutshell, Arab regimes no longer experience crises of legitimacy, because they have lost it irrevocably. In perception as well as reality, with respect to the political system and socio-economic policy, reform – in the sense

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of gradual, controlled change initiated and supervised by those in power – is not an option. Meaningful change is possible only through regime transformation.

Furthermore, the contemporary Arab state, in its various manifestations, is incapable of self-generated transformation. This also applies to Lebanon, whose elites have proven unwilling and unable to implement de-confessionalization as agreed upon in the 1989 Taif Agreement. With Iraq having demonstrated the catastrophic consequences of foreign intervention, sustained pressure by indigenous forces – perhaps only mass popular pressure – has emerged as the only viable formula.

3. Arguably, the Tunisian uprising succeeded because no one anticipated that it could. An increasingly rapacious, repressive and narrowly based ruling clique that seems to have lost its capacity for threat recognition proved incapable of pro-actively deploying sufficient carrots and sticks to defuse the uprising. The violence it did unleash and the extravagant promises it made – as well as their timing – only added fuel to the fire of revolt. Faced with a choice between removing their leader and imminent regime collapse, Tunisia's elites and their Western sponsors hastily and unceremoniously forced Ben Ali out of the country.

4. Although Egypt's Mubarak was also initially slow to respond, he had the benefit of a

significantly broader, better organized and more deeply entrenched regime, whose preservation additionally remains an American strategic priority. Given the severity of the threat to his continued rule, Mubarak played his cards reasonably enough to at least avoid a fate identical to that of Ben Ali.

After the initial gambit of unleashing the police and then the battalions of thugs failed, Mubarak's appointment of intelligence chief Omar Suleiman to the vice presidency – vacant since Mubarak left it in 1981 – was never meant to appease the growing number of demonstrators demanding his immediate departure. Rather, Mubarak acted in order to retain the military (and Suleiman's) loyalty. By sacrificing the succession prospects of his wolverine son Gamal to the security establishment, (and by extension restraining the boy's insatiable cohorts), Mubarak *père* calculated that his generals would crush the uprising in order to consummate the deal. (He presumably intended to use the aftermath to re-insert Gamal into the equation, perhaps by scapegoating those that saved him.)

With Washington positively giddy over Suleiman's appointment, the scenario was foiled only by the Egyptian people. Indeed, their escalatory response to Mubarak's successive maneuvers – a resounding rejection of both reform and regime legitimacy – appears to have led the generals to conclude that the scale of the bloodbath required to crush the rebellion would at the very least shatter the military's institutional coherence. No less alarmingly for them and for Washington, in particular, Mubarak seemed determined to drag Suleiman down with him if he was not given a satisfactory exit.

If, in Tunisia, the revolt's arrival in the capital set alarm bells ringing, it appears that in Egypt, the spread of mass protests beyond Cairo and Alexandria played an equally significant role. As towns and cities in the Suez Canal zone, Nile Delta, Sinai, and then Upper Egypt and even the Western Desert joined the uprising, and growing numbers of workers in state

industries and institutions went on strike, it became clear that Mubarak had to go, and go immediately. Since, in contrast to Ben Ali, he retained sufficient authority to prevent his own deportation, and therefore the ability to threaten his generals with genuine regime change, he was able to negotiate a less ignominious end in time to escape the massive crowds gathering

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around his palace, but apparently too late to fulfill Suleiman's leadership ambitions. Given that Suleiman and Gamal had between them effectively governed Egypt in recent years, their ouster is of perhaps greater significance than Mubarak's.

5. The success of the Tunisian uprising inspired and helped spark the Egyptian revolt, rather than produce the conditions for it. Indeed, there had been a steady growth of activism and unrest in Egypt for a number of years, which began to spike in the wake of the police murder of Khaled Said in Alexandria in June 2010 and then in response to the December 31 government-organized bombing of a church in that same city. The Tunisian revolution, in other words, sprouted so easily on the banks of the Nile because it landed on fertile soil. The same can be said about protests and incipient rebellions in other Arab states in recent weeks and months. It is noteworthy that neither Tunisia nor even Egypt have – in contrast to Arab revolutionaries in the 1950s and 1960s – sought to export their experience. Rather, other Arabs have taken the initiative to import what they perceive as a successful model for transformation.

6. If Tunisia has largely existed on the Arab periphery, Egypt forms its very heart and soul, and the success of the Egyptian uprising is therefore of regional and strategic significance – a political earthquake. Indeed, where the ouster of Ben Ali was celebrated in the region on the grounds that an Arab tyrant had been deposed, many non-Egyptian Arabs responded to the fall of Mubarak as if they had themselves been his subjects – which in a sense they were.

The impact of Egypt could already be observed the day Mubarak's rule ended. Where as Arab governments largely acted to suppress the celebrations of Ben Ali's removal, there were scant attempts to interfere with the popular euphoria that greeted the success of the Egyptian uprising. On the contrary, governments from Algiers to Ramallah to Sana'a rushed to demonstrate that – like Ben Ali – they "understood" the message emanating from their populations. And the message, of course, is that if Mubarak can fall, then no autocrat is safe.

In the coming months and years, it can reasonably be expected that Egypt will seek to re-assert a leading role among Arab states and, whether alone or in concert with others, seek to balance Israeli, Turkish and Iranian influence in the region.

7. Absent genuine regime change in Cairo, it appears unlikely that Egypt will formally renounce its peace treaty with Israel. It may, however, seek to restore unfettered sovereignty to the Sinai by renegotiating key aspects of this agreement. More importantly, it seems inconceivable that Egypt will or can continue to play the role of the regional strategic partner of Israel that was the hallmark of the Mubarak era. Rather, Egypt is likely to begin treating its relations with Israel as a bilateral matter. This, in turn, will place significant pressure on Israel's relations with other Arab states, as well as the framework for domination through negotiation established with the Palestinians.

8. The Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, and the incipient rebellions in a number of other Arab states, suggest that a new generation has come of political age and is seizing the initiative. Organized, even disciplined, but not constituted through traditional party or movement structures, the region's protesting populations appear to be led by coalitions of networks, more often than not informal ones. This suggests that

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Arab regimes were so successful in eradicating and marginalizing traditional opposition that their opponents today lack the kind of leaders who exercise meaningful control over a critical mass of followers, and whose removal or co-optation can therefore have a meaningful impact at ground level. Ironically, in his desperate last days the only party leaders Mubarak found to negotiate with represented little more than themselves.

9. The current rebellions in the Arab world have been overwhelmingly secular in character, and participation has spanned the entire demographic and social spectrum. This is likely to have a lasting political and cultural impact, particularly if this trend continues, and may form a turning point in the fortunes of Islamist movements who, for almost three decades, have dominated the opposition to the established Arab order and foreign domination.

10. The key issue in the coming months and years is not whether the Arab states can organize free and fair parliamentary elections and obtain certificates of good democratic conduct. Many probably will. Rather, the core question is whether the security establishment will continue to dominate the state, or become an instrument that is subordinate to it. Most Arab states have become police regimes in the literal sense of the word. Their militaries, while remaining enormously influential, have been politically neutralized, often by leaders who emerged from its ranks and – recognizing better than others the threat that officer corps can pose – have relied on the forces of the Interior Ministry rather than soldiers to sustain their rule.

That Ben Ali, himself a former Interior Minister, was the first to fly, and that intelligence chief Suleiman shared his fate, gives cause for optimism.[1] By the same token, those who have seen Ben Ali and Mubarak fall can be expected to cling to power more tenaciously if effectively challenged. Gaddafi, whose head appears well on its way to a rusty pitchfork parading through the streets of Tripoli, is but a horrific case in point.

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[1] At the time of writing, Omar Suleiman was still in his position. The sentence was put in past tense by editor [Editor's note].

Revolutions Bring Down Ideas As Well!

Slavoj Žižek describes the popular intifadas the Arab region is witnessing today as miracles. This description is accurate as long as it corresponds to the definition of a miracle being an extraordinary event that no one could predict would take place.

The fact that no one predicted these miracles makes the matter all the more worthy of question and contemplation, at the very least. While Israeli and American intelligence agencies try to figure out the enigma behind their failure to foresee and anticipate these explosions – which the Israeli Prime Minister likened to an earthquake – one can approach the matter from yet another angle: What obstacles impeded the ability to anticipate this earthquake?

Here, I would argue that one of the most important reasons for this failure is the dominant rhetoric that developed after the end of the Cold War – and particularly in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks – which combined the precepts of neo-liberal imposition under the shadow of American imperialism, and attempted to explain the "Islamic exception" by reducing it to a cultural-religious phenomenon. This dominant discourse not only did not allow for a forecasting of this earthquake, it also presented a vision for the region, its events and developments, its problems and solutions, the tenets and theories of which were rebuked and brought down by the current intifadas in practice.

Scholarly and intellectual efforts on the region were not devoid of sensing the impending danger, and warned of the consequences of a number of social and political manifestations.

Early on, demographic experts warned of the dangers of the "demographic time-bomb" in the Arab World, where the population is expected to reach 395 million by the year 2015, of which 60% will be less than 25 years of age, and where no less than 250 million of these populations will be living in urban centers. Furthermore, the "Arab Human Development Reports" issued by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

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indicated that the number of unemployed youth in the Arab region will reach 100 million by the year 2015. At the same time, neither the Human Development Reports nor the UNDP had much to say about the alternatives to increasing employment opportunities in light of economies that are increasingly and rapidly being dominated by rentier capitalism, financial and services sectors, and consumer markets. Moreover, social and political scientists did not miss an opportunity to provide judicious advice on what kind of imbalances would result at all levels from this population growth and rural-urban migration, from the birth of "slums" to the disintegration of the patriarchal structure amongst young people. Yet, this research and

Fawaz Traboulsi

Fawwaz Traboulsi is Associate Professor of History and Politics at the Lebanese American University, Beirut. He has written on Arab history, politics, social movements and popular culture. He has published extensively and translated several books into Arabic, including works by Edward Said, Karl Marx, John Reed, Antonio Gramsci, Isaac Deutscher, John Berger, Etel Adnan and Saidi Yusuf. His latest publication is "A History of Modern Lebanon" (2007).

these scholarly efforts were governed by the prevailing dialectic, with their conclusions and recommendations taking on the direction of its dictates and needs. Indeed, the social and

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political scientists predicted that these new migrants will become a fertile breeding ground for the advocates of Jihadist violence, or will become transformed into a mass market for the social, educational and health services of Islamic movements, which are provided in return for political gains, and will represent increased viewership of "radical" television like Qatar's "Al-Jazeera."

The truth of the matter is that this surplus of educated, unemployed youth is the explosive mix that ignited and played the most prominent role in the current intifadas.

Therefore, instead of producing knowledge about the region, intellectual and scholarly efforts have been dominated by an Orientalist dialectic, which ponders over the "lacks," "gaps" and "deficiencies" that the region suffers from in comparison to the Western model, which is also proffered as the culturally civilized model. Of the most prominent deficiencies portended is the "lack of democracy," of course. However, the great majority of these analyses have been similar to efforts to explain water, after much ado… as water.

Indeed, instead of undertaking scholarly efforts that seek to understand the attributes and nature of despotism or, in other words, the mechanisms, institutions and tenets of despotism and the factors that allow despotism to persist, continue and reproduce

itself, the logic of inquiry into the region's "deficiencies" ordained the following brilliant formula: Despotism exists because there is no democracy. Thus, all concerns have concentrated and converged on preaching the need for… democracy. Here, interpretations have also focused on the disparities of the cultural civilizations between the Arab world, which was reduced to Islam, and the Western world, which was determined to be defined as "Christian." It was determined that the latter had attained the status of a "knowledge society" and, as such, the Arabs must strive to attain this, as well. Thus, the United Nations Development Programme and the Arab Human Development Reports decided to donate to the Arab cause a fast, luxury, four-wheel drive vehicle that moves forward, on all four wheels simultaneously, towards a knowledge and "rights-based" society, complete with entrepreneurship, freedoms and women's empowerment.

The Fall of Concepts, Recommendations and Solutions

The revolutionary slogan, "The people want the downfall of the regime," has also become the slogan of the rebellion of young men and women against prevailing concepts, recommendations and solutions. "The people want" is, before anything else, a fundamental objection to the theory of the "state/civil society." Let us set aside the discussion of all the confusion that comes with trying to understand and apply this theory, and the fact that this theory has actually been renounced by its Western proprietors. For, besides the fact that this theory flattens society in all its consequential and conflicting components into one harmonious mass (or one mass divided into two domains: "civic" and "civil"), the concept or notion of "the people" has gained reconsideration as being a mass of variant and differentiated powers, interests and groups that form and crystallize around one identity, one will and one goal. It is a vision far removed from the in-vogue globalized terms that are colored by doubts and suspicions about

any proposition that offers notions of patriotism and nationalism, or that refers to the state of the "nation." Whatever the case is, the return of the terms "the people" and "the will of the people" has come together with not only the return of national belonging in every Arab country at the

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expense of religious, sectarian, tribal and ethnic loyalties and intolerance, but also a return to the fore of the identity of the Arab region, in the face of the string of loyalties imposed upon it from the outside by way of the endless versions of the geo-political identity proffered for the so-called "Middle East."

The slogan, "the downfall of the regime," is yet another critique of the civil society/state theory, and a critique of the prevailing conduct of non-governmental organizations that have worked to separate society's sectors and issues from one another – typical of "post-modern" micro-narratives, par excellence! First, these separations are made and then juxtapositions are established between these sectors and key issues by creating theoretical links or sympathies (i.e., women and the environment, sustainable development and human rights, corruption and "business" ethics, and so on), or by "networking" between these non-governmental organizations.

It is possible to view the slogan, "to overthrow the regime," hailed by the young Arab revolutionaries as a will to establish and create a new kind of "networking:" Either a fundamental re-assessment and review of the system in which relations between the

institutions that comprise the authority and the security, military, economic, financial, social and cultural components of this system all fall under one structure; Or, a system whose internal power relations and equations must be dismantled, overturned and replaced by a democratic system; Or, in other words, by a system that represents the "will of the people." However, "this will" would not have been able to act had it not been for the fact that the revolutionary youth were actually able to discover the central link of the system, which needed to be pressured and acted upon – that of political authority.

This is not a historical assessment and review of the more than a quarter century of non-governmental organizational activity in our region. But, it is indicative of the political deficiency in their thinking, their concepts and their practices. These NGOs preached and offered ready-made prescriptions that replaced tangible analysis and corporeal knowledge without offering a road map for moving from a dependent, exploitative and despotic reality towards an independent, just and democratic reality. Instead, today, this "popular will" has drawn a road map of its own: The power is in the street, it falls and rises in the street and, democracy is a revolution that is attained by replacing one system with another through struggle and sacrifice.

The greater "obstacle" in the prevailing dominant vision is the agenda it put forth for the youth. Official and private bodies and institutions have constantly sought to study and plan for the development of educational systems, with these efforts overcome by the concern to propagate a "moderate Islam." In the meantime, the central issue was forgotten: Linking educational systems with economic needs. This is how our Arab high schools and universities became incubators for hatching unemployed graduates. Projects, seminars, workshops and trainings have proliferated with the intention of preparing the youth to excel and pioneer in a globalized, capitalist economy and in citizenship. But, all these efforts were lacking in envisioning and

projecting the kind of economics that provide and generate employment, put bread on the table, allow for competencies and a future, and finally, the means of production for a society of free citizens. Simply, Arab youth have taken the decision to undertake these tasks and attain this mission by themselves.

The same issues are linked to examining the role of the middle classes in the democratic process. The diagnosis of their role has

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teetered between the middle class taking a leading political role while, at the same time and in reality, this class has been in the throes of an economic death. Whatever the case may be, the current experience has proven that the middle classes, which represent the class most active in civil society and non-governmental organizations, have decided, en masse, to take a more proactive role; that is, to join all the other segments of society in creating and forming the "people" who want to construct new democratic systems.

As for the private, capitalist sector – which is usually relied upon to breed liberal politics from the womb of its liberal economics – it has been a colossal disappointment. Instead of joining all the other segments of the population in their intifadas or uprisings, the greater majority have sung to the tune of the mafia and security-systems of the governing regimes, to which this sector has created strong links of kinship, intermarriage and interests. Perhaps it is just incapable of breaking its dependencies on these regimes, or has fallen prey to exclusive arrangements, monopolies and easy money. This sector has made the choice to make extortion payments to the sultan rather than

pay the taxes that could improve the conditions of the poor amongst their people – with the result being an increased incapacity among businessmen to become political agents with weight in determining the course of peoples' lives, or in demanding reform.

Last, but not least, one should stress upon an examination of the way the current uprisings have transcended traditional opposition parties, the majority of which have played and still play the role of "the majesty's opposition:" biding their time and awaiting the opportunity to present their case to the ruler, or to take their share, in one form or another, of authority without demanding any serious structural changes to the power structure. The traditional opposition has been literally dragged to the street and to the protests, and it has followed the movement and initiatives taken and led by the youth, instead of exercising its alleged role of initiative and leadership.

External Legitimacies at the Expense of Popular Legitimacy

The Arab intifadas were launched without any external support; rather, it can even be said that they came into being despite external powers – and against them. By virtue of this reality, the veil has been lifted from the contract that exists between authoritarian, despotic Arab regimes – whether they are dynastic, populist or military regimes – and Western interests. This contractual agreement, which was solidified after September 2001, stipulated an adherence to the Western agenda in the region, and protected Western interests in return for supporting the continuity of these regimes. In its wake, the West would turn a blind eye to the thieving and the oppression. And, the more these regimes became isolated from their people – or showed more contempt for their people or became more arrogant – the more they came to depend on these Western powers.

This agenda can be summarized in three points:

First: Preserving the neo-colonialist order under the pretext of prioritizing and maintaining "security and stability." Securing American military bases, facilities, airports and ports; securing oil and gas pipelines; ensuring the continuous turnover of high returns on deposits; securing employment in Western economies and bonds in Western treasuries; and, ensuring markets for Western exports that

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have the highest rate of return in sectors such as the arms industry, infrastructure projects, universities and museums, not to mention luxury consumer goods.

Indeed, "preserving the security of Israel" occupies the highest rank in the geopolitical priorities of these systems and regimes. Here, adhering to the Western agenda entails signing and preserving bilateral peace agreements, (in terms of the axis of "moderate" Arab countries), and enforcing the self-restraint and neutralization of what were once radical countries from playing any role in the Arab-Israeli struggle, (Iraq, Libya and Yemen), or committing to the formula of bilateral solutions, which today mean nothing more than peace with Israel for Arab countries, in return for the latter's commitment to safeguard the security of the state of Israel and its borders (which are constantly expanding and which have never been defined, in any case).

Finally, these "security" stipulations also include the role that Arab Maghreb countries play in preserving "European security" by restraining the wave of African migration to Europe from their shores.

Second: The vast majority of despotic Arab regimes have used the "dread" of Islamists coming to power as a scapegoat to justify their firm hold on their seats of power, and as a means to elicit legitimacy and financial support from Western powers. They have also used this fear as another instrument to maintain their continuity, or to justify extensions of their terms "in office" or in bequeathing power to their sons. However, when the masses mobilized, the true size of the Islamist movements was exposed. Indeed, these movements joined these uprisings in accordance to their real scope among the ranks of the millions mobilized from all the segments, groups and tendencies in society. This reality has been proven to such an extent that certain experts and academics see in these current intifadas the true beginning of limiting and curbing the spread of "moderate" Islam, that includes fundamental and Jihadist Islam.

The experiences in Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen and Algeria have all shown that Islamist movements have not deviated from the conduct and systemic course that traditional opposition parties have taken. Rather, Islamist movements have proven that they are not even among the most militant or extreme of "the opposition," nor have they been the most adamant about demanding the dismantling of dictatorial regimes. It would not even be surprising if these movements actually came to play the role of a centrist and protective ally for the forces working to abort these revolutions, or working to transform them into yet another means for merely replacing one ruler by another. Indeed, it is extremely telling that the Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt deviated from all the other parties and revolutionary youth that boycotted the referendum on the constitution because it lacked the most basic requirements for amending the vast authorities held by the president of the republic.

Third: The unbelievable wealth amassed by the mafia-rentier-autocratic-repressive families linked to these regimes has exposed the depth of the relationship between these despotic

authorities and the globalized, capitalist international (and transnational) institutions and multinational companies. This astounding wealth has indeed been amassed by exploiting the seats of power to steal from public funds, to acquire land belonging to the state, to money launder, to reap immense profits from the privatization and take-over of public sector institutions, to regulate monopolies and protect

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them, and to take commissions and bribes – in the billions – from arms deals, contracts and the contracting of foreign companies. These possibilities would not have existed except in a global economy, whose main function is to impose the dictatorship of free market economies, where wealth and returns are suctioned from the bottom – and from the poorer and middle classes to the wealthy – in exact reverse to the claims made by the advocates of the trickle-down theory. This is real corruption. This is not the "corruption" of the small-time employee who can be bribed, or the kind of corruption that is penalized. The truly corrupt, with access to the kind of money required to sow corruption, are acquitted or given lessons in the culture of business ethics.

Western leaders recognize and are aware of all this. The American administration knows that the real purpose behind the recent deal to provide the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with U.S. fighter jets and helicopters to the tune of US$60

billion was to strengthen the American balance of payments and support the operations of its military industrial complex – much more than any strategic necessity. It also knows that expenditures of this kind come at the expense of fighting poverty and reducing unemployment rates, particularly unemployment among young educated Saudis, as well as improving social services and education for the general population. The American administration also knows all too well that six Saudi princes receive proceeds from one million barrels of oil produced per day out of a total daily production of eight million barrels; just as the French administration is well aware that Saif al-Islam Gaddafi takes a direct share from the proceeds of the oil production in Libyan oil fields operated by Total.

With that, the advocates of neo-liberalism do not see "waste" except when it comes in the form of expanding state institutions or increased budget expenditures. Here, they show reservations about the money spent by Arab governments to preserve their heads of states and their seats by maintaining the subsidies on major staples, raising the salaries of employees and increasing spending on infrastructure and social services. In an article, with the telling title of "Throwing money at the streets," the Economist (March 12, 2011) warns of such measures that belong "to the bygone era of state intervention in the economy." Meanwhile, the fact that Muammar Gaddafi's sons spent one million dollars of the Libyan people's money on one show with English and American rock stars is not perceived as worrisome. Moreover, this staid and sober economic weekly does not seem all too concerned about the kind of money thrown around palaces where, for example, the monthly allowance for members of the al-Saud tribe – which number over 6,000 – can reach amounts to the tune of US$275,000 for each prince.

Will the Iraqi Experience of 1999 Be Repeated?

The issues discussed above are not separate from Euro-American policy towards the region. A policy of maintaining silence towards the flagrant abuses of human rights, of imposing of emergency and military laws, assassinating dissidents, arbitrary arrests, torture in prisons and detention centers and the silencing of the voices of the press and social media.

As for the nonsensical jargon spewed about democracy, in the cases of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and even Syria, this has been simply translated into sufficing with a system of pluralistic parties and press under tight

> The second axis in Western policy towards these authoritarian, despotic regimes is related to programs of political reform and combating corruption.

controls, that are no more than mere facades for a one-man, one-party rule that has persisted over decades. A system of rule that has evaded every obligation in ensuring popular representation, divisions of power through a system of checks and balances, and the peaceful transfer of power.

It would be difficult to expect the citizens of Arab countries to now believe claims made by Western circles that they tried to give advice to Arab rulers, in secret. Indeed, the exposure of this "advice" only adds fuel to the lies: Advice from President Barack Obama's administration to deposed President Hosni Mubarak that he should appoint his vice president as president of the republic; or the wishes relayed by George Bush's administration that the Saudi king carry out municipal elections – elections were held, but only from man to man, and for municipal councils that were never granted any actual authority, and where the operations of the entire municipal system were suspended four years later when the time came to replicate the electoral experience.

The second axis in Western policy towards these authoritarian, despotic regimes is related to programs of political reform and combating corruption. European and American "donor" governments placed such conditions on Yemen during the sixth round of its war against the Houthi movement in the northwest of the country. However, the Yemeni leader did not live up to or adhere to any of these conditions. Nonetheless, 300 million dollars are still pumped annually into Yemen to support its efforts in the war on "terror."

But, after the rise of the intifadas, the conduct of Western powers has revealed their surprise and confusion. They have all scrambled to try to rectify past mistakes and cover them up. Official statements have been issued defending the freedom of social networking media, protesting the use of violence against civilians, and calling for dialogue between the authorities and the opposition. Indeed, calls for taking the demands of the people into consideration escalated to the point of calling for leaders to actually step down, as is the case with Colonel Gaddafi. But, American offers of mediation have always been tainted by the "security and stability" premise and thus have always been biased in favor of Arab leaders. Consequently,

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while the (traditional) opposition has called for clearing the streets and arenas of protest, on the basis that the leader has pledged not to extend his term in office and has pledged not to bequeath his power, the revolutionary youth have maintained their calls for the overthrow of their leader and their regimes.

In Libya, the belated U.S.-led military intervention to impose a no-fly zone came after the troops of Gaddafi had drowned in blood the popular insurrection in most of the rebel-held areas and was threatening the last rebel bastion of Benghazi. Moreover, the Libyan intervention coincided with a marked Western connivance with the Saudi-Emirati military intervention against a popular uprising bloodily repressed by a sectarian monarchy in Bahrain, home of the American 5th Fleet.

Whatever the outcome of these two interventions, which have highly complicated the regional situation, it is very doubtful that one will save the bloody Bahraini monarchy from the anger and determination of its people, and that the other will manage to help the Libyan rebels get rid of their bloody dictator.

Translation from Arabic by Mona Abu Rayyan

The Revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt:
The People Without Populism

Ahmad Beydoun

Ahmad Beydoun is a Lebanese writer and researcher. He served as Professor of Sociology at the Lebanese University until his retirement in 2007. He is the author of 15 books in the areas of culture, linguistics and politics, has numerous contributions to academic journals, and several novels. He also translates scholarly works into Arabic and writes film-scripts. He is a co-founder of the new Arab magazine "Kalamon." His latest book is "La dégénérescence du Liban ou la réforme orpheline" (2009).

The Egyptian revolution has reinstated the concept of the people. A little earlier, the Tunisian revolution had done the same. Now, signs of similar developments are spreading from Algeria and Yemen, to Jordan and Iraq, while in Damascus[1], a pregnant silence hangs over the city. In the Arabian Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent, there has been an explosion of humor at the wave of generous "gestures" made by kings, princes and presidents – a direct outcome of the fear engendered in rulers' hearts by the eventful days in Cairo's Tahrir Square and other squares across Egypt – while in Iran, the Egyptian revolution aptly brought back spirit to the suppressed Green Revolution.

It was not by choice that these peoples had abandoned the idea of people power – indeed, for a long time the people appeared to have forgotten their own existence. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the winds of freedom that blew across the rubble seemed to die away before reaching the borders of the Arab countries; the world preferred to regard us as the exception to democracy. It appeared that the only innovation in the Arab world was that of radical fundamentalism and the terrorism associated with it. Indeed, terrorism had dealt a deadly blow to our societies long before any enemy – real or imagined – realized any such effect. This terrorism was the manifestation of despair and fatalism, as experienced by these societies in its most extreme form; a despair of their history which they chose to believe that they could bring to a stop and seal off from end to end. In reality, this despair of history was not exclusive to the supporters of fundamentalist terrorism, but was, rather, all encompassing. For no answers to the basic questions were found: What are these societies doing to themselves, and where are they heading? Is there still any willpower left in these societies, other than the resolve of their enemies – both at home and abroad – and that of the resolve of the enemies of their enemies, who may, in fact, be these societies' worst enemy?

Today, those of us who had been thrown into despair by our history are beginning to feel that we can return to being ourselves once again, both individually and collectively, swimming with freedom in a swelling sea of great hopes. In spite of the horrors of misery and humiliation, this widespread social movement represents nothing less than freedom in motion, a movement of opposition and rejection. It was inevitable that something all-embracing would demolish our submissive attitude toward these horrors, and end our tolerance of them. These

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events can in no way be ascribed to fate or any similar interpretation. Despite the strength and unrelenting power shown by these movements, one cannot but hope and fear for them and for everyone active with them – from day to day, from one stage to the next.

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[1] This article has been written before the demonstrations began in Syria in April 2011. [Editor's note]

The outcome of the Egyptian revolution, in particular, was dependent, day-by-day, on wise conduct and sound decision-making about which path to take and which to avoid at every juncture. For those involved, it was clear that these junctures shifted daily: there was no predetermined outcome or certain victory. There were only people who excelled in peaceful demonstrations, motivated by their just and strong will to win their victories at

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each stage. Moreover, these people imposed their will and their standards upon themselves, before imposing them upon the regime that they wanted to sweep away. And still the regime played for time by scheming, engaging in dirty tricks and obstinately refusing to concede. Every day, people held their breath for fear that divisions could break their ranks or that violence would suddenly spread among them, paralyzing the initiative and opening the door to unacceptable behavior from the regime or the revolutionaries. There was also uncertainty about the identities of these new organizers, about how the movement was led and the multiplicity of aims underlying the youth initiative. At the same time, it was also very clear that the traditional opposition to the regime was feeble and exhausted. And in any case, what became obvious was that free people led these movements, not destiny. This is what we will experience as the Egyptian revolution continues into the future, and this is what we will continue to witness in other restive areas where events are still unfolding.

So the people have regained their power, setting free the will of its sons and daughters without the oppression that characterized the previous regime. Today, people in Egypt no longer fear to speak their opinions, whatever they may be; today, expressing their views no longer results in imprisonment or death. It is now up to Egyptians to ensure that the benefits of this great moment endure. The people, so far, are avoiding populism.

Recent and current events indicate that the idea that Arabs are an exception to democracy has begun to fade away, and that a revolutionary apex was reached in one of the most significant countries of all: Egypt. Prior to these events – perhaps out of desperation, perhaps out of self-interest – some people had accepted the Bush administration's claim that an allied military occupation would liberate Iraq from the tyranny of an individual and his party's rule, paving the way to warmhearted democracy. Today, Tunisia and Egypt represent two models, which – aside from their socio-historical differences – we may usefully compare with the Iraqi model. The Egyptians took to the streets and strengthened their own sense of unity by cleaning up Tahrir Square in order to demonstrate their determination to rebuild and improve their nation. During the revolution, the previously growing Muslim-Coptic tensions regressed, as did the civil violence that found its expression in the sexual harassment of women. In the meantime, the violence in Iraq continues as a direct consequence from the devastation caused by the war; indeed, it is feared that with the departure of the occupation forces from Iraq, the violence will simply worsen. The Iraqis are so divided that the latest elections ended in a stalemate that lasted for nearly a year. Once a government was finally formed, the Iraqis – like everyone else in the Arab world – still needed to demonstrate and demand the most basic of rights from which they were deprived during the years of occupation and internal fighting, destruction and looting.

In Tunis and Egypt, the Islamists neither started nor led the revolutions. Islamists like the Salafis and such did not make an appearance, and followers of the "moderate" schools of Islam, such as the revivalists or Muslim Brotherhood, did not attempt to seize the reins of revolution. This came as a surprise to all of

those apprehensive of a change that, after its effect, would not allow anymore changes: a change that would lead to a situation in which no one would hold enough power to demand further change, a democracy for one-time use only. The regimes of Hosni Mubarak and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali capitalized on this very calculation to ensure the survival of their regimes, using this fear to justify their "right" to loot their countries and to humiliate their subjects.

The Islamists in Egypt and Tunisia now have the chance to create their own opportunities, just like any other group. As long as the rules of what might be termed the "game" of democracy are observed, the Islamists' gains will be acknowledged as rightfully theirs, provided that they in turn acknowledge the rights of the other players. It is not in the interest of the revolution to diminish its foundations through exclusion, as was done in Iraq. The Islamists will not have the right – it would even be difficult for them – to confront others with the threat of exclusion. Equally, no other groups will have the right to exclude others, (thereby turning them into victims lacking an accusation of perpetrating a crime) – like, for example, the Islamists or supporters of the previous regime who did not actually commit a delineated crime or violate a right.

Today, Egypt is attempting to restore its status as an influential, indeed pivotal, nation in the region. However, and in the first place, Egypt is returning for its own sake, and not to be in the service of causes outside its own borders, no matter what those causes may be. Egypt will decide which causes to serve and how, and make its own decisions regarding any conflict it may enter and to what extent. Even in smaller countries, democracy acts in and of itself as a preliminary obstacle to subservience, so it is hardly reasonable to ask what will happen in a country the size of Egypt, where its citizens have just regained a measure of dignity – or are in the process of regaining it. Initial hints that the political movement in Egypt was being masterminded from outside its borders were

– and are – laughable. It is clear that only the people themselves could drive an uprising of such magnitude and dynamism. And it will not be different for any authority which eventually comes into being through this movement: such an authority cannot be hijacked or subverted, so long as those behind the original movement keep a close eye on it.

And still, or perhaps because of this, Egypt's recovery will give the Arab world a focus through which it can define itself. For anyone of us can conclude – without bias or narrow-mindedness – that the way in which Egypt has staggered for the past few decades has created a need in the Arab region which no other Arab country was

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able to adequately meet: The need for a political nucleus and for leadership. This unfulfilled need is what made it possible for Iran, since the time of the Iranian revolution, and more recently for Turkey, to directly influence and interfere in the affairs of the Arab region. While the consequences of the older Iranian interference on many Arab societies – including the Gulf and the Levant – are eminent, the consequences of Turkey's newer involvement are still unclear. Perhaps one of the first hoped-for effects from the Egyptian revolution will be the extinguishing of sectarianism, which has threatened to wreak havoc in the region for years. By the nature of its culture and the practice of its leadership, Egypt – which is primarily a Sunni Islamic country – tends to prioritize leadership comportment above sectarian divisions; This is what binds the country to all of the "three circles" articulated by Gamal Abdel Nasser in his book The Philosophy of the Revolution.

Egypt's absence from leadership also opened the door for Israel to continue its abuses, and Israel has continued to implement its policies with impunity to pursue the elimination of the Palestinian homeland. On the ground, this most likely translates into driving the Palestinian people out of their land for a second and final time, through forced migration or a migration resembling forced migration, as more than five million Palestinian Arabs will have no place in the "Jewish State" – a state that stretches over the entirety of the Palestinian territories. No other country in the Arab world was able to compensate for Egypt's absence: not the leadership of Saudi Arabia, which adopted a "moderate" stance; not the well thought-out Syrian positions that shifted from a long period of acquiescence to the Iranians to an awkward period of alignment with Saudi Arabia; and not, last but not least, Qatar's growing ambitions.

In recent years, nobody living in, visiting or analyzing Egypt has had a positive or reassuring word to say about the country's circumstances or those of its citizens. There was a more or less general consensus that the situation in Egypt had become intolerable – indeed, beyond intolerable. The media did not cover this situation the way it deserved. It seems that this resigned despair was translated into a language of silence and neglect. Consequently, nobody anticipated the events that took place before our very eyes and that tested our nerves over such a brief – but highly significant – span of days.

This revolution responded to the spilling of blood peacefully, rejecting violence. These were the days that rekindled our vision of the way our modern societies should work today: a vision that brought forth our recognition of the determination of the young people, of their new-found methods of communication and organization, of their mobility, and of the new relationships they forged between different classes and social groups. In Egypt especially, there was a broad, strong foundation where people from different backgrounds worked together within one movement for one project.

These were uplifting days for the Egyptians, as they restored their pride and, in turn, many others in the region found pride in them. The revolutionaries absorbed the waves of violence thrown at them by the government's hired thugs, and they overcame them; The revolutionaries protected their families, their country's prosperity and its heritage. They

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created a new language for their revolution that expressed remarkable tolerance, avoided indecencies, developed its own sense of humor, and circumvented repulsive revolutionary talk (that which sounds like the boots of soldiers and embeds the potential for oppression). Language that promotes baseless revenge, which neither waits for the law nor concerns itself with establishing true facts, remained absent. Most supporters of the ousted regime stayed safely in their large houses or met in the elegant cafés of the popular urban neighborhoods. They voiced their views daily on television, showing their faces without fear. When an artist, who was one of the revolutionaries, was asked about a fellow artist who opposed the revolution, the former responded that if Umm Kulthum had been brought to trial after 1952 for praising King Farouk, then Egypt would have lost one of the country's greatest artists![2]

We were listening and learning from these responsible young people who showed such extraordinary strength, but also such an extraordinary sense of social responsibility. They did not use overstated slogans; they neither demanded nor enacted anything that reflected a reckless disregard of potentially negative consequences or that risked reducing

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[2] Egypt's revolution of 1952 overthrew the monarchy of King Farouk. [Editor's note]

the country to chaos. In Egypt in particular, there is a profound historical fear of power vacuums and, hence, a lack of willingness to reject authority. It seems that, a priori, respect for the future government-to-be can already be felt. Undoubtedly, then, there is much we can

> If what happened in Cairo and Tunis is reminiscent of what Tehran witnessed in 2009, then we can conclude that lessons are being relayed and that different peoples can indeed learn from another.

still learn from the revolutionaries in Tunisia and Egypt, as they relate events and shape history, create new formations, come up with slogans and produce novels and films. If what happened in Cairo and Tunis is reminiscent of what Tehran witnessed in 2009, then we can conclude that lessons are being relayed and that different peoples can indeed learn from another, even though each people must follow their own path according to their own circumstances and capabilities.

What we witnessed in Tunisia and Egypt were democratic revolutions par excellence, driven by the quest for freedom. This demand for freedom was linked to the demand for a dignified existence, and these two demands together formed the backbone of both revolutions. To protect this two-part demand – the demand for freedom and the demand for dignity – revolutions should be followed, presumably, by a state of alertness; the extent and mode of alert protection should become the criteria by which the values of regimes and the nature of achievements are measured. Such a two-part demand is strained by nature; it is the origin of the tensions of the modern world for the past century. Is it right to forsake freedom in the pursuit of social justice? Is it possible to have justice without freedom? And can justice exist without placing limits on freedom?

These questions become even more pointed in societies which have been stripped to the bone by prolonged tyranny, overwhelming corruption and deprivation, and which are now setting about the task of ridding themselves of such regimes and their vast burdens.

Over a sixty-year period, Egypt first experienced a "Socialist" model, characterized by repression, lack of development, self-indulgence and the creation of parasitic social strata. This was followed by a period of rapacious liberalism, which was to the liking and benefit of the ruling elite: a liberalism that spread looting and corruption from the top to the bottom of the social ladder, that subjected the majority of the population to humiliating poverty, and that brought about a type of "freedom" that did not preserve the people's dignity, that did not make right what was wrong, and that did not allow for accountability. These historical experiences are presumably what nourished the impetus for the revolution in modern Egypt – the leadership of this new phase in the country's existence should draw on the experiences and sacrifices of the Egyptians, who have walked the long road of sacrifice and struggle. Many difficult decisions will have to be taken, and inevitably mistakes will be made at various critical stages.

For Lebanon and other countries, the political movements in Tunisia and Egypt (and the uprisings in other parts of the Arab world resulting from those movements), represent an opportunity to take a critical account of themselves, and do not represent an opportunity to intrude, or to boast about having prior experience or of belonging to this revolution or the other. No one can claim to belong to a revolution that united the people's willpower in city squares who had previously indulged in the abyss of sectarianism, and who accepts – for the sake of preserving the interests of his sect – that his country be the playground for foreign powers which are divided between two political camps! Furthermore, no one can claim to belong to a democratic revolution who derives his or her core political existence and identity by aligning with neighboring regimes which

epitomize the characteristics of those regimes against which the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions arose. While it is important to be aware of the unique features of every political system, there appears to be no significant difference, in this respect, between the regimes of "moderation" or the "rejectionist" regimes – if, indeed, such descriptions are appropriate in the first place. In either of these regimes, rights are violated, freedoms are constrained, resources are looted, inequality and humiliation abounds, and the authorities speak in lies. From all sides, the Lebanese, in particular, are in a position by which they are cheaply exploited. While the Lebanese are being pushed to the brink of destruction, they nevertheless maintain that they are rightfully being driven to this brink, or being rightfully kept away from it, or rightfully

being thrown into the throes of an internal or external war – as best suits the times. This surrender of self-control – whether to one power or another – expresses nothing less than immeasurable animosity toward the values that the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions held up high. How can the claim of truly relating to the values of freedom and dignity hold true for those Lebanese who are being led in chains – even should they be led to Paradise? And how then, how can this claim hold true, if they are rather being led to destruction?

What the People Want…

Mohammed Ali Atassi

Mohammad Ali Atassi is a Syrian journalist and filmmaker. He has lived in Beirut since 2000 and writes for several Lebanese and Arab newspapers and magazines. He directed two documentary films on prominent Arab personalities: "Ibn Al Am" (2001) on Syrian dissident Riad al-Turk and "Waiting for Abu Zayd" (2010) on the critical Egyptian intellectual Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. "Waiting for Abu Zayd" has won several Arab and international awards.

When Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor who sold fruit and vegetables, burned himself to death in the public square of Sidi Bouzid, a remote village in central Tunisia, he could not have imagined that his protest against the humiliation inflicted upon him by

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the police would be the first blow to shake the Arab version of the Berlin wall. Built from bricks made out of collective fear, this "wall" stretched all the way from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf. How could he have known – who could for one moment have imagined? – that the fire which consumed his body would be the spark to ignite popular revolutions that swept from one end of the Arab world to the other over a space of just three months? So far, these revolutions have toppled dictators in Tunisia and Egypt, shaken the thrones of Arab rulers and kings, and induced many of them to grant significant concessions to their people. Bouazizi's act was the spark that fired the Tunisian revolution. Perhaps another spark, at another time, in another place, might have unleashed this dynamic political

awakening which has since developed such self-perpetuating momentum across the world's Arab communities. Nevertheless, history will regard Bouazizi's action as the single event which laid the foundation for uprisings destined to shake the entire Arab world in a matter of weeks.

From the outset we can venture to say that, despite their diversity and complexity, all these revolutions can be encapsulated in one very expressive and politically charged concept, which has been absent from the political arena for far too long: "The people." Indeed, it is the people's will that the people should be transformed – by and for themselves – into an active nation capable of influencing the destiny of their own countries. Encouraged by the current uprisings, the Arab peoples have once again formed themselves into political entities destined to play a discerning, influential role in the political equation, despite many decades of inertia. Everything started in Tunisia, under the slogan adopted by the Tunisian demonstrators in the earliest beginnings of their popular movement: "If the people one day decide to live, destiny will inevitably respond." Since then the spirit of the slogan – an excerpt from a famous poem by Tunisian poet Abul-Qasim al-Shabi, written in the 1930s in the midst of the Tunisian struggle against colonialism – has been adopted by all the Arab revolutions, each in its own way.

In Egypt, the main slogans chanted by the young people in Cairo's Tahrir Square and in other Egyptian cities were: "The people want to change the regime," "The people want to overthrow the President," and "The people want to purify the country." With minor variations, the

same sentiments have been repeated across other Arab countries from Morocco to Iraq, by

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way of Algeria, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain. In the Kingdom of Morocco, demonstrators raised a banner reading: "The people want to reform the system," emphasizing their demands that the absolute monarchy should be reformed and turned into a constitutional monarchy. In the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinian demonstrators waved banners with the slogan: "The people want to end the division," referring to the power struggle between the government of the Hamas movement in Gaza and the government of Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah. Lebanon enjoys a climate of relative freedom compared to the rest of the Arab world, but in Beirut demonstrators hoisted banners proclaiming that: "The people want to overthrow the sectarian system," referring to the sectarianism which has formed the basis for the existence – and increasing corruption – of the ruling political class since the country's independence. And in Damascus, as the first spontaneous demonstration erupted in the city's commercial centre in protest at police aggression after a young protester was beaten, the slogan chanted by the demonstrators was: "The Syrian people will not be humiliated," in reference to the daily humiliations suffered by citizens at the hands of those in authority who

– at least at the time of writing! – still hold the reins of power in Syria in an iron grasp.

"The people" is a key term, and we can use it to analyze the revolutions which have shaken the whole of the Arab world over the past three months. If this particular political term – adopted by the demonstrators and repeated over and over again in the many different versions of the slogans and demands now spreading across the Arab world – really means anything, it means that individuals who have for many decades been deprived not only of the right to participate in the political process, but also of their most basic rights, long to be transformed into an effective political entity – a "nation" in the truest sense. It means they long to restore due political process to their communities, while at the same time bringing their communities back onto the political scene. What we see are nations of people demonstrating in the streets, defying heavily armed authorities and paying the highest price – and all with the same goals in mind: First, to create a political and collective presence as a nation; Second, to play a decisive part in managing their countries' affairs and shaping their countries' domestic and foreign policies; And third, to win the right to choose their own representatives to manage the decision-making process.

The "Arab Exception"

For many decades, the Arab world existed in a state of false political stability, apparently immune to the waves of democratization that swept across the world from the Eastern European states through Latin America and East Asia and finally through a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This made it easy for racist authors to write – without shame or hesitation – about the "Arab exception," about the "incompatibility of Islam with the Charter of Human Rights," and about our lack of a "culture of democracy." At best, they resorted to elegantly written diplomatic analyses which ultimately drew the same conclusion: That Arabs and democracy are incompatible.

These authors appeared to be referring to the "absence of a middle class" and the ability of oil revenues to "bribe the people and buy their silence," concluding that thanks to these revenues, those in power have been able to strengthen and perpetuate police states that are wholly unaffected by the will of the people.

However, in analyzing these clichés and stereotypes the authors forgot – or rather, pretended to forget – the timeless aphorism: "Man shall not live by bread alone." According to this tenet it is the right of Arab individuals

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– whether or not they belong to the middle class, whether or not they are saturated in the white man's culture, whether or not they adopt or repudiate their Islamic heritage – to live in dignity and freedom without humiliation or having their rights trampled upon by tyrannical authorities. Indeed, like the rest of the world's population, Arabs are entitled to enjoy the most basic of human rights – and even to strive, as they are at the moment – to wrest these rights from the control of their oppressive rulers.

The Islamist Scarecrow

It is true that for a long time the ruling Arab authorities – irrespective of political regime or specific national circumstances – succeeded in neutralizing the political will of their peoples by depriving them of any effective participation in the political process. The people were trapped between artificially polarized extremes, such as "tyranny vs. the Islamists," or "stability vs. chaos." Such success is, in part, attributable to skilful use of the "Islamist scarecrow" by those in

power. They have successfully used the threat of Islamic extremism not only as a deterrent to the democratic aspirations of their own populations, but also – first and foremost – as a counter to Western countries, whenever the latter dared to exert embarrassing pressure on Arab governments concerning claims of human rights violations or repression of democratic liberties. However, it is fair to point out that the Western countries rarely exerted much pressure in the first place, and then only in order to preserve an appearance of decency. In most cases, the West backed away from applying pressure on the pretext of preserving the internal stability of Arab countries – a pretext that conceals substantial business contracts and arms deals worth enormous amounts of money.

This apparent stability, based on oppression and intimidation, gave the false impression that everything was calm and peaceful in the various Arab societies; Unfortunately, this was nothing more or less than the silence of the grave. Except that these societies – like all human civilizations – are not and never will be mere cemeteries in which history comes to a standstill, hope dies forever, and the people's aspirations to freedom and dignity are buried.

Ageing Governments, Youthful Society

Those who talk about the "Arab exception" forgot that life does not stop – not even for a single day – in any society. Indeed, life goes on, at varying speeds, depending on each country's specific circumstances, but always tending toward the same direction, i.e., toward the modernisation of traditional lifestyles. Thus, the demographic composition of these societies has changed entirely, becoming more youthful, and in most of them the rate of population growth has slowed. The average lifespan of individuals has increased, as has the number of educated people of both sexes, and illiteracy levels have declined. Urban populations have increased at the expense of rural populations. The average age of marriage has risen, while the age difference between husband and wife has fallen. Female fertility has decreased and the

patriarchal family structure has been eroded, either because women are more involved in business affairs, or because they are more highly educated, or because of the changing relationships between different generations and between men and women. But these

> Most members of ruling authorities, when confronted by this huge gulf separating a dynamic society and a rigid political structure, were unable to respond other than by heaping oppression upon oppression.

significant developments collided head-on with the corruption and inflexibility of those in political power, who are incapable of permitting participation in the political process, of providing job opportunities, of fighting corruption or of reducing high levels of unemployment and poverty. We are facing an unprecedented situation in which ageing, mummified leaders dominate youthful populations with an average age of 25 or less.

While some oil-rich countries have sought to buy their peoples' silence with money, aid and gifts, most members of ruling authorities, when confronted by this huge gulf separating a dynamic society and a rigid political structure, were unable to respond other than by heaping oppression upon oppression. In this sense, countries were turned into huge prisons, police states were strengthened, and fear spread throughout populations. Rulers took extreme measures in attempts to create antagonism between different communities and social classes, while in the background they kept the threat of Islamic extremism alive. People were denied the right to organize themselves into groups, even for legitimate purposes – in fact, the only time they can make use of this right is when showing support and reverence

for the country's ruler. The rule of law was abolished, and the security apparatuses regard all members of society as fair game. People were treated as if they were subjects beholden to a ruler's mercy, rather than citizens with internationally recognized rights and responsibilities.

Individual and Collective Dignity

But this lengthy series of mass degradations must inevitably come to an end – as must the lie about the "Arab exception." When municipal police officers wrecked the cart of street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi, destroying his produce and his livelihood, and when he went to the town hall to protest the injustice, the outcome was a slap in the face by a policewoman. December 17, 2010 was the day on which Bouazizi was humiliated and stripped of his human dignity – and yet, every hour of every day, millions of Arab citizens are humiliated by members of the security forces and the police. Except that in this case, with the world "darkened in his eyes," this young Tunisian chose to carry out the last act of freedom available to him, namely that of ending his own life entirely of his own volition. Moreover, he decided to turn his suicide into an explicitly political act by choosing his own local village square as the place of self-immolation. This profoundly courageous decision was also highly symbolic: it became the first spark to extinguish the collective fear and kindle flames in the pile of straw which, in the Arab world, is how we describe tyranny. When we equate tyranny to a pile of straw waiting for a burning match, we do not exaggerate, because the edifice of tyranny is based primarily on collective fear which the authorities have succeeded – over a period of decades – in forcibly instilling in the hearts and minds of the people. This edifice swiftly collapsed once the people were freed of their fear and became aware that they are part of a free nation, capable of determining their own destiny. We saw the same process happen in the countries of Eastern Europe and Latin America; today we are witnessing it in the Arab world.

Mohamed Bouazizi chose to burn himself in the public square of his home village so that his individual act could become an expression of political protest par excellence, reflecting his rights as a citizen and his dignity as a human being. And now we find the Arab peoples choosing the public squares in their cities not as places of self-immolation, but rather as places for making collective acts of protest. Places where they can transform themselves into a political bloc capable of expressing: First, their clear demands; Second, their desire to regain the rights to which they are entitled; and Third, their desire to defend their collective dignity by confronting oppressive authorities. Thus, from Casbah Square in Tunisia to Tahrir Square in Cairo, from Taghyeer Square in Sana'a (capital of Yemen) to Lulu Square in Manama (capital of Bahrain), public squares in Arab towns and cities have become the definitive political arena. Places in which the people can win back their ability to exert influence and act collectively – in a political sense – against state oppression and suppression of the people's

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will; Against those, in short, who would deprive them of proper parliamentary representation. In all these squares, in country after country, people have proclaimed a single slogan, with slightly different wording in each case: "Lift up your head, O Tunisian," "Lift up your head, O Egyptian," and "Lift up your head, O Yemeni." This slogan has a single aim, to tell Arabs to wake up, to lift up their eyes, because they are, each and every one, citizens who need to reclaim their dignity and preserve their rights.

The Internet

Modern means of communication, such as the Internet, social networks and mobile telephones, helped to hamstring the ability of political authorities to monitor the flow of information and ideas. At the same time, they allowed young activists to sidestep old-fashioned methods of organization and mobilisation such as political parties and trade unions, newspapers, leaflets or posters. Equally important, these modern methods of communication enabled young people to create wide-ranging networks that extend into the virtual world, where they are immune from seizure or prosecution by the security forces. Every time a new online initiative successfully gathered together a large group of demonstrators, young people were able to defy the iron fist of police power wielded by the regime – they were able to shatter the awe in which the police were held and in doing so created a snowball effect whereby even more people rallied to the group. In these police-dominated regimes, ordinary people do not have the right to take ballot papers freely in hand – yet thanks to modern communication technologies, they are able to keep mobile telephones in hand, equipped with cameras and linked to the Internet. Using their mobile phones, ordinary people are not just acting as reporters in the field, able to broadcast everything they see and experience to the outside world, but also as citizens with rights and duties. They have become capable of adding significant weight to their side of the political equation by using the cameras in their phones – indeed, they can even paralyze military tanks and prevent them from attacking their fellow citizens out of fear of the impact such pictures would have on the people.

Modern means of communications made it possible for these revolutions to take place in genuine freedom, rather than relying on individual leaders or charismatic personalities. They enabled young people to think collectively and devise the most effective solutions and best tactics for circumventing or confronting the potency of the police apparatuses and

the unprecedented ruthlessness of the ruling powers. These new methods of communication have also liberated these revolutions from the burden and inertia of political convictions inherited from Islamist and nationalist ideologies, and have enabled activists to formulate clear, definite and comprehensive political demands which state as their key objectives, the restoration of freedom, dignity and trust to the people by returning power to the people and allowing the people to make their own decisions.

What About "The Islamic Threat"?

While many of the decision-makers and media in Western nations were obsessing over the same, timeworn, obsolete question – "What if fair, impartial elections were held and Islamists came to power?" – the silent language of the demonstrators in the streets of Arab cities, Islamists and secularists, men and women, old and young, emphasized the most fundamental principle of democracy more eloquently than any outspoken rhetoric. And the principle is this: It is vital to conduct free and fair elections, so that those who represent the popular majority – whoever they may be – can come to power. The ballot boxes which bring them to power are the sole means of removing them from power again, should they act counter to democratic principles or neglect their election promises.

The majority of the political and cultural elite in the Arab world – including the Islamists themselves – have now recognized that the only way to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of future political development is to break down the awful polarity represented by the implicit choice between "tyranny or religious extremism." But this can only happen if the Islamists are fully involved in political life, as they represent a significant proportion of the population. It is consequently impossible – especially now – to exclude a major section of the community from the political arena simply on the pretext that their political agenda does not comply with democratic values. Using this flimsy argument, tyranny and suppression of the

will of the people was perpetuated for decades. Moreover, it cannot be ignored that the main currents of contemporary Islamic political thought have learned from the experiences of the past; over the last few years considerable progress was made in incorporating democratic principles into these groups' programmes.

As such, it is sufficient to note the radical changes that have taken place over the past 30 years in the messages published and the tendencies displayed by the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the Arab world. For example, notions like taking turns in holding power, allowing the ballot box to decide matters, and accepting other people's opinions are all generally accepted. Of course, this does not mean there is no possibility that they might renege on or reject the progressive steps that have been taken to date. But the only way to guarantee that these progressive tendencies become permanent and to prevent any backsliding is to firmly establish the democratic

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experiment and then protect it through appropriate state institutions and through the free will of the people – the same people who should be allowed not only to put the Islamists in power, but also to remove them from power if they so decide.

Politics: Between the Sacred and the Profane

If we analyze in detail the demonstrations held in the public squares of Arab cities – especially in Tahrir Square in Cairo – and if we characterise these demonstrations as being the acts of protest which laid the foundations for and became the source of the aspirations and the aims of the Arab Spring revolutions,

we find that secular and civilian elements were more strongly represented than the religious or extremist elements with which some people have attempted to associate them. In Tahrir Square, veiled women kept vigil alongside unveiled women, women demonstrated side by side with men, and Coptic Christians stood alongside Muslims. Indeed, after Muslims performed their Friday prayers in Tahrir Square, Christians celebrated Sunday mass in the same place. And if religious slogans were

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almost entirely absent from the demands of the demonstrators and from the banners on which they displayed them, by contrast, slogans calling for religious brotherhood, emphasizing citizenship, and stressing the people's political demands have been very much in evidence in all these uprisings.

The sacred robes in which tyrannical regimes – as well as certain Islamists – have long succeeded in shrouding politics have been stripped away. The political sphere is once more clad in everyday clothing and has been given a new lease on life, joining together the sacred and profane, the merits and shortcomings of which characterise human life as a whole.

Just as an example: the millions who joined in victorious Friday prayer in Cairo's Tahrir Square had scarcely finished praying when they began to dance and sing, celebrating the same victory in the same square, but in a different way. Did not Mohamed Bouazizi commit what – according to traditional Islamic law – is considered the most reprehensible of all sins when he set himself alight to inject life back into the veins of the Arab peoples after the tyrants had bled them almost dry? And yet the violation by Bouazizi of such a fundamental principle of traditional Islam was not enough to prevent millions of people from sympathizing with him and turning him into an icon and symbol of the current Arab revolution.

There are some who will assert that the aspirations of these Arab societies will, sooner or later, founder against the rocks of reality – that poverty, corruption, feudalism, traditional conservatism and tyrannical authority will prove to have pervaded the deepest structures of Arab communities. But those same commentators are missing the fact that a new and different historical impetus has started in the Arab world – an impetus that will be difficult to stop, because a new element has entered the equation: the "people." The people represent not only the most important aspect of reality, but also a force capable, at certain times in history, of changing reality itself.

Yes, the people want change, and are capable of change. Today, the offspring of the people are making history in the Arab world. Like the other peoples of the world, the Arab nations desire freedom and dignity – and ultimately, they will attain them.

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Revolutions for Democracy

t is difficult to monitor, analyze and read events that are still in progress, that are still interacting, that are constantly changing on the ground. Monitoring, analyzing, reading and understanding a phenomenon and all its surrounding factors is a process that needs the phenomenon to draw to a close. It requires acquiring an understanding of all the phenomenon's dynamics, and an ability to read the script of events that unfolded from the moment it started to its conclusion.

With that said, and from the outset, we must all first recognize that the youth movements

> Arab political thought failed to develop and nurture a true democratic renaissance, one that is far more than being superficially attached to revolutionary coups.

in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Algeria are indeed revolutions for democracy in all senses of the term. Moreover, these revolutions have surprised everyone: old and new opposition groups, ruling parties, and governments on a local, regional and international scale. Indeed, these revolutions have even taken the revolutionaries by surprise, even though they were the ones who mobilized these movements by calling for peaceful protests and demanding political, economic and social reform. Moreover, as the numbers of protesters grew and the interaction among diverse segments of the Arab population increased, the ceiling of demands was raised

to the point that two leaders were ousted from power thus far, with the demands for these leaders to leave power being immediate – now, and not tomorrow.

In Tunisia, the popular protests went on for 23 days and ended with not only the President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's fall from power, but with his fleeing the country and seeking refuge in Jeddah. In Egypt, the capital Cairo and particularly the capital's Liberation Square, as well as all of Egypt's other major cities, witnessed similar protests that lasted 18 days and also forced President Hosni Mubarak from power. Mubarak's subsequent disappearance to a place unknown represented the symbolic declaration that his regime had finally fallen.

Indeed, the fall of the Egyptian and Tunisian regimes was not just the outcome of the protest by a young Tunisian man, who burnt himself alive after his humiliating treatment at a municipal center; and, it was not just the outcome of young men and women communicating with each other via the Internet and through Facebook and Twitter. They are, rather, the outcomes of the fact that the peoples of these two countries – each within the context of their own circumstances and conditions – have harbored a profound sense of injustice and oppression caused by their dictators over very long periods of rule, and have suffered abject poverty resulting from poor governance and from the rampant corruption of these countries' ruling classes.

Certainly, these popular revolutions are democratic. They are revolutions for democracy never before known to the Arab world – not in the revolutions that swept through the region in the 1950s and 1960s, and not in Arab political

Hussein Yaakoub

Hussein Yaakoub is a Lebanese author and researcher. He regularly writes for local and Arab newspapers and magazines, including *Al-Nahar*, *Al-Hayat* and *Al-Awan* website, and he researches for human rights orgaizations. Among his publications are "On Modernity, Urbanity & Urban Dwellers" in an edited volume (2009). He is currently working on a book documenting Lebanese memories of the civil war (2011).

thought, which deferred the issue of democracy from its political "revolutionary" dictionary for various reasons. These revolutions have once again posed the question of democracy, which was removed from Arab political thought and from the different Arab ruling systems for more than six decades.

Indeed, over these past six decades, Arab political thought failed to develop and nurture a

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true democratic renaissance, one that is more than superficially attached to revolutionary coups and to oppressive, totalitarian and regressive regimes. Thus, according to this line of thinking, it is necessary to delve into the causes for the absence of democracy in Arab political thought during this period that witnessed the fall of monarchies and the establishment of states in the Arab region.

Provenance and Contemporaneity[1]

Despite the profundity of the Arab and Islamic civilizations when compared to other civilizations, Arabs, today, are living in a state of intellectual displacement and dispersal, and cultural disequilibrium and dependency. What is even more dangerous are the closed horizons that stand before the immediate development of an intellectual and cultural paradigm that is "Arab" and that will transport the Arab peoples and nations from a totalitarian state to a democratic one.

The Arab condition, today, is the problematic outcome of an interlock between the past and the present; an outcome summarized by the antilogy of "provenance and contemporaneity."

This antilogy results, among other factors, from the fact that the Arab past is better than its present; and, that this "Arab" past rose forth from religious foundations and from within conditions and determinants that are difficult to reproduce in today's world. Indeed, one could say that the Arab countries are the only states in the world which have not had the opportunity to think freely, and in a manner that would allow them to set up suitable and appropriate political and economic regimes. For the Arab countries and their peoples are torn between multiple polarities: The past and the present – where the voices of the dead are louder than the voices of the living; The religious and the worldly; The sacred and the secular; And the ideals of regional nationalism and pan-Arab nationalism[2]. What is more, today, these polarities are reflected in tensions between tribalism, sectarianism and nationalism.

If one were to open the book of (our intellectual) politics, one would find that this book is composed of three parts, with each part broken down into other smaller parts. One part of this "book" is Islamic, or attributed to Islam: the Caliphate, the Imamate, the principle of Divine Governance[3], and the tradition of the Salaf al-Saleh[4]. All of this, without any consensus even among and within Islamic groups, movements and regimes, debates the foundations, systems or provisions for Islamic rule and governance exactly. The second part is drawn from the West, and is a distorted mixture of liberal, capitalist, nationalist, feudal and democratic thought. Certainly, all the thought that has been known to the West has a distorted image in our "Arab" thinking. Finally, the other third of this "book" draws from the socialist paradigm: socialism, communism, revolution, anarchism, nihilism and atheism. Meanwhile, nothing in our prevailing Arab political thought expresses our "Arab" essence or our identity as Arab peoples. It is a political thought that only reflects the state of our inability to innovate and create something particular and unique to us. Moreover, it has reached the point that we have become societies without identity.

Of course, a crisis of legitimacy was born with the Arab states of the post-independence era. These states came from outside the natural evolution of their societies and communities; they were not nation-states, nor were they

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the heirs of a Caliphate, nor were they states emanating from a social contract, nor were they states governed by the dominant class of Marxist thought. Instead, they were forced into existence as states out of colonialist considerations and interests.

Consequently, the entire Arab region became a breeding ground for ideas and theories that tried to frame societies and communities which had no prior experience in self-governance or self-rule. Indeed, many of these Arab states experienced liberation movements against colonialism and against domestic elements loyal to the colonialists, movements dominated by revolutionary fervor. Hence, the political thought of that period of liberation was characterized by a revolutionary paradigm that was the outcome of a mixture of nationalist, socialist and religious ideas and thinking that did not clearly discern between any of these schools of thought.

For example, the rise of the Nasserite[5] period was linked with the Muslim Brotherhood. However, ties to the Muslim Brotherhood were then cut for the benefit of nationalist thinking and, later, nationalist thinking was transformed into or merged with socialist thinking. The regimes and movements that emerged in the likes of Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Sudan would also be the outcome of a mix between nationalist and socialist ideologies, which employed religion in one manner or another. Even the

monarchies of Morocco and Jordan witnessed the rise of political movements motivated by nationalism, socialism and Islam. However, these monarchical regimes were quick to take a hostile stand against all these ideologically motivated movements – movements that, in turn, set their targets on deposing these regimes, as they were perceived to be the antithesis of a liberated and free people.

Revolutions for National Liberation and Democracy Postponed

Liberation ideologies and notions of freedom and unity dominated modern Arab political movements in the 1950s, all of which were characterized by some form of revolutionary or nationalist ideals. The idea of revolution and the rise of the republic captivated the minds of the masses. The goal of bringing down monarchies in the region gained prominence over all other objectives, as monarchical regimes were perceived to be the main obstacle before the path of liberation and progress. Arab revolutionary thinkers did not explore the possibility that these monarchies could actually experience any success in the fields of progress, development and human rights – despite the fact that these regimes were already familiar with and experienced pronounced constitutional and parliamentary conditions.

The revolutionaries came to prioritize and focus all their attention on the revolution and on the republican system, placing their wager on the idea that the "Nahda" (renaissance) of Arab nationalism, progress and liberation could never be achieved except at the hands of revolutionary regimes and by revolutionary, socialist and nationalist leaders. The obsession with overthrowing regimes overtook and outweighed any focus on establishing democracy. This condition prevailed for many, long years while the Arab peoples waited for their hopes and aspirations to be realized by republican and revolutionary regimes. They refused to consider alternatives which differed from their regimes, even when aware that these regimes were neither revolutionary nor

republics. And, they never paid any heed to other paths towards progress and liberation that were not paths of revolution or paths commanded by revolutionary or socialist thought.

The problem of, or the sin committed by, Arab political thought which was so eager

> The problem of Arab political thought was that it placed freedom, progress and development in conflict and at odds with democracy.

for progress and freedom, was that it placed freedom, progress and development in conflict and at odds with democracy – in other words, it was either revolution or democracy. In the Arab political thought that prevailed, the path of revolution contradicted the demands and requisites of democracy; at best, the democratic process was something to be deferred until regimes were overthrown, and political and social emancipation and economic development were achieved.

Indeed, after the "revolutions," the majority of revolutionary Arab regimes worked to immediately disband existing political parties and obstructed any course leading to democracy, transforming their revolutionary leaders into new sovereigns with new ideologies. Meanwhile, the people were transformed into new subjects at the mercy of these new sovereigns, and revolution and democracy became two hostile poles, instead of one paving the path before the other.

This revolutionary thinking, with its nationalist and socialist attributes, dismissed the possibility that the demands of the masses and the interests of the states could be achieved by any means other than "revolution" and military coups. In turn, this thinking further alleged that, what could not be achieved by revolution would not be achieved through democracy and reform. What these thinkers also did not

recognize was that if Arab monarchies were bad, they were not bad just because of the monarchical system, but rather because the monarch, his entourage and his policies were bad – just as the republican system was not, in and of itself, necessarily good. Indeed, the monarchical system did not represent an obstacle before progress and modernization in Great Britain, other European states and Japan.

Undoubtedly, some Arab thinkers and intellects were aware of the dangers of revolutions that possessed nothing but the name "revolution." They warned of new totalitarian ideologies wrapped in the guise of glittering, attractive ideologies. However, this alternative thinking was unable to crystallize into a unified intellectual project, as these thinkers came from different schools of thought and walks of life. At the same time, the glamour of revolutionary and socialist slogans captivated the minds of the masses, inducing them into a state of obstinate apathy, ignoring any proposition that cast doubt upon the claims of those who conducted the coups and of those who called for revolutions.

On another front, the alternative regimes – or the Arab monarchies and traditional regimes – did not encourage their defense. These regimes were truly regressive. They aligned themselves with colonialism, drove the masses into ignorance and consistently violated the human rights of their peoples.

Most importantly, democracy and the culture of democracy remained totally absented from, or at best maintained a very weak presence in, Arab political thought and culture.

A Continuous State of Revolution

The previous discussion is not an attempt to profane the revolution and the revolutionaries. It is also not an attempt to place the entire burden of a whole period on revolutionary and nationalist Arab thought. Undoubtedly, there were positive steps taken by regimes that defined themselves as revolutionary and progressive. The problem remained that those who advocated revolution, dealt with "revolution" as if it were an ongoing,

continuous state. They did not differentiate between revolution as an instrument and an approach to overthrow corrupt regimes, and with the transformative stage that must follow a revolution, which requires a certain system of thought, practices and processes that are not necessarily the same as those required to prepare for a revolution or to carry out a revolution.

Revolution is a stage a stage that is marked by a high level of violence, the exhausting of populations and grassroots efforts. It is an exceptional condition that achieves a specific purpose, which is fundamentally to overthrow and change the status quo with which the people are no longer satisfied. The objective of a revolution is to employ the state of popular discontent and hatred, and the poverty and oppression suffered by the people, to effect change and put an end to the sources of hardship – or, in other words, overthrow those whom the revolutionary leaders consider to be the source of this suffering. Revolution works with the emotions of the masses more than it does their minds. But, the masses cannot continue in a state of continuous revolution.

Accordingly, revolution must pass through two stages: destruction and construction. The destruction period of a revolution is the easy part. Our previous Arab revolutions have succeeded in this aspect, because it is an easy process, the scope of which is limited to a military coup, the assassination of a king or a leader – after which the revolution is declared a success. Indeed, what we in our Arab societies called revolutions were, in reality and for the majority of the time, coups or military conspiracies and not revolutions, because the people were not even aware that a revolution had taken place until after the coup and the old regime was brought down, and immediately replaced by another. Where the people are hungry, poor, humiliated and deprived, not much effort is required to convince them to throw themselves into the throes of revolution. They are already in a state of continuous revolution, despite themselves and even against themselves.

How delusional and pretentious are those who attribute to themselves the mark of intelligence, genius and sage leadership merely because they were able to lead their people in a "revolution" – such as the Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, who continues to slaughter and murder his people because they dared to take to the streets in protest, demanding regime change and his fall from power. This "leader" refuses to step down because, according to his understanding, he is not formally the President of a state but the leader of an eternal revolution. Those who have claimed the virtues of leading "revolutions" have proven to be the most demagogical of leaders, and the most capable of manipulating the emotions of the poverty-stricken, oppressed masses.

But, what happens after the chaos and after the coup alleged to be a revolution? What happens after the destruction? Who will build a new society?

The revolutions in the Arab world succeeded in their first stage, in the process of destruction. The cost of this process may have been no more than that of taking over the state television and radio station, or a bullet in the head of the corrupt leader – the right-wing, reactionary agent of colonialism and the source of the nation's doom… etc. Then, a fervent speech, or what the leader of the revolution likes to call the "first declaration," is given to the masses in which the revolution is claimed a success. But, what happens then?

Many of the Arab revolutionary regimes

> It is the building process that is fundamental, because it requires different men and women, a different mentality and different methodologies.

and movements have only finished off the old regimes. They then sit upon its ruins, chanting the slogans of the revolution – believing that these slogans will satiate the people's hunger and relieve them of their poverty. They believe

the problems of the people will be resolved by merely deposing the previous regimes, and replacing these regimes by the new revolutionary leaders. What of the economy, the debt, education and technology? Will

> The revolutionary and pan-nationalist regimes were actually reinforcing local regionalisms.

society be developed and modernized by revolutionary slogans? Will poverty, ignorance and debt be eradicated by the blessings of the revolutionaries and their invocations? Will Israel and the United States be defeated by mass demonstrations mobilized in condemnation of Zionism and imperialism?

Destruction is a simple process. It can be carried out by an obscure officer in the army. However, it is the building process that is fundamental, because it requires different men and women, a different mentality and different methodologies.

The Question of Identity

During the period of previous revolutions, the question or problem of identity emerged from within the struggles that took place between pan-nationalist, universalist, nationalist and religious identities. Clearly, movements such as the Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizb ut-Tahrir[6] offered different visions for identity; however, their political presence was limited. The universalist identity was also unclear; and, in many cases, was marked by the illusions or dreams of those active in communist parties. Indeed, many Arab communists tried to find a solution to reconcile communism with religion; some even used religious verses in their speeches, which often began with the religious introduction of, "In the name of God…"

In all cases, the direct and indirect confrontation with colonialism and with the ruling regimes prevailed and overshadowed

efforts that should have been made on the important question and matter of identity. More often than not, any thought given to the matter of identity, or any thinker who openly deliberated the question of national identity, was determined an enemy of unity and emancipation and sometimes even as an agent of colonialism.

In another comparison, during the time when these slogans of Arab unity and pan-national identity were chanted and raised, the revolutionary and pan-nationalist regimes were actually reinforcing local regionalisms – intentionally or unintentionally – by centralizing the nation-state, strengthening the one-party system, expanding the state's security apparatus, tightening border controls and security, and preventing any freedom of thought. What was even more dangerous was that these regimes and movements revived, reinforced and manipulated sectarian, ethnic and tribal identities – identities that existed before the nation-state and before nationalities were established – so that fears and preoccupations about national unity become more important and took precedence over pan-nationalist unity or identity.

Obstacles to Democracy in Arab Political Thought

The causes for the floundering of Arab political thought in the matter of resolving the problems of the Arab nation are manifold, whether these problems are represented in questions of identity and affiliation, development issues or in facing challenges from abroad. However, of the most important of these causes is the absence of democracy in the agendas and discourse of both pan-nationalist and revolutionary movements and parties, as well as among regimes and mass culture. The causes for the absence of democracy in Arab political thought can be traced back to the following:

First is the absence of an Arab model for democratic governance that can be referred to and used as a source of inspiration. This absence affects the present as it affected the

past, despite attempts by some to create a commonality between the notion of the Islamic shura[7] and democracy. Moreover, the image of ideal governance inherited from Arab Islamic heritage has been that of the "benign dictator" (literally, "the just tyrant or autocrat"), despite the fact that certain Arab countries experienced constitutional and parliamentary conditions prior to independence.

Second is the absence of enlightened democratic thinkers specifically in positions of influence in political decision-making processes, or in positions where they can influence decision-makers that are able to develop an evolved vision or project that can create linkages between the world of democratic ideas and the unique socio-cultural character and needs of Arab Islamic societies and communities. Even the contributions of Arab Renaissance (Nahda) thinkers, at the turn of the 20th century, such as Mohammad Abdo, Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, Boulos Salameh, Taha Hussein and others like them, were not referenced or employed in a serious manner, nor were their ideas built upon or developed. These ideas were fertile and rich in a manner that could have, at that time, formed the nucleus of a culturally Arab democratic project; instead, they encountered opposition from a spectrum of political currents such as the nationalists, secularists, religious movements and the revolutionaries.

Third is, in more general terms, the absence of a democratic, intellectual elite that can act as a catalyst and lead the way towards democratic transformations in society. Some Arab intellectual elite orbit within the circles of authority and among the sultans of authority, while others orbit within the circles of those who have fallen out of favor with the authorities or who have distanced themselves from authority – whether or not these intellects come from a democratic school of thought, a militant revolutionary school, or a religiously Jihadist school (where in either of the latter two cases, change is advocated by other than democratic means anyway).

Fourth is the absence of a democratic culture. Democracy is not just a matter of institutions, but it is also a culture. In the Arab world, democratic institutions were established before democratic thinking – unlike the Western experience where modern thinking paved the way for the renaissance and the enlightenment which led to the establishment of democratic systems. It is here that we find the contrast between the prevailing mass culture – which can be religiously fundamental, or militantly

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revolutionary, or autocratic and dictatorial – on the one hand, and a democratic culture, on the other.

Fifth, international polarities have politically and ideologically emerged in a manner that democracy has come to be perceived as the property of Western imperialism. Thus, it has been viewed as a part of Western imperial culture; and, as such, its notions and provisions and the demands for the application of these notions and provisions are perceived as being part of the invasion of Western culture.

Sixth is the linkages made with the precedent set and prevailing belief that democracy was – and still is – the top-down brainchild of a bourgeois elite coming from a rich minority and from the minority of intellectuals with a Western education. Thus, in light of the unpleasant relationship between the Arab popular masses and the Arab elite, the masses have been cautious and, from the beginning, have reacted guardedly to the notion of democracy and the advocates of democracy.

Seventh is the fact that everything has been linked to the Palestinian cause and the Zionist threat so that regimes, as well as political parties,

have been able to present the immediate and direct threats as not being poverty, human rights violations, illiteracy and the absence of democracy, but rather Zionism and the Zionist threat. Accordingly, this pretext has required all efforts to be united and focused on "unity" and on the liberation of Palestine. Indeed, in the name of Palestine, rights and freedoms have been seized, prisons have proliferated, free men and women have been persecuted, the masses have been made more ignorant, and the poor have become poorer and the rich richer – with the outcome that neither has Palestine been liberated nor democracy achieved.

Eighth is the fact that the question of identity has been subjected to conflicting polarities, and especially so when it comes to pan-nationalist, Islamic, universalist and nationalist identities. Moreover, there have been no serious efforts made to reconcile these identities by way of identifying priorities so that a transition can be made from one circle of identity to another without creating friction and conflict.

Ninth is related to the fact that revolutionary and pan-nationalist Arab regimes actually produced that which was the exact opposite of its ideology and rhetoric. Where these regimes spoke of Arab unity and the Arab nation, the logic and realities of those who governed these regimes was not only to reinforce a grim regionalism (*iqlimiya*) but also tribalism and even sectarian lines. The concepts of the nation and of nationalism were transformed into a barrier that limited any unionist or pan-nationalist orientations.

Tenth, in a reaction to the imagined threat posed by the revolutionary regimes, traditional regimes have withdrawn into themselves and produced an identity unique to them, which employs and exploits religion, tradition and historical legacies. Thus, the Arab regimes have become divided between regimes that portend religious legitimacy (such as Saudi Arabia), and those that herald a revolutionary legitimacy (for example, Syria). Meanwhile, in reality, they all lack these alleged legitimacies as long as their people are absented from the centers of decision-making and are not free to choose those who govern them.

Conclusion

Concluding on the above, despite all the long years that unfolded after independence and until the end of the 20th century, the Arab political mind did not succeed in developing

> Numerous questions have emerged regarding the future of Arab political thought, and whether or not it will be able to successfully develop a democratic project.

an ideology or a school of thought that can be rightly called "Arab political thought;" one which has specific, unique and defined attributes and characteristics. Thus, it did not succeed in bringing into line and harmonizing between that which it claimed and that which was taking place in reality and on the ground. Later, globalization and the ideology of globalization entered the scene to pose yet another serious threat to the challenge of democratization and development, which the Arabs have also failed to confront.

In the context of the current revolutions, where the Arab masses have articulated their demands for democracy and freedom, numerous questions have emerged regarding the future of Arab political thought, and whether or not it will be able to successfully develop a democratic project which avoids the hegemony, tyranny and empty pretensions and claims that accompanied these Arab regimes over previous decades. This is particularly relevant because these revolutions did not come via coups or by the military, but rather by oppressed, frightened Arab masses and populations that were able to break the barrier of silence and say: "We only want democracy!"

But, will this experience succeed? We stand before a transitional period where, if the revolting masses succeed in improving the systems of

governance, the possibility then exists that we will witness a renaissance (*nahda*), a rebirth and renewal in Arab political thought founded on democratic pillars and peaceful, systemic transfers of power.

Translation from Arabic by Mona Abu Rayyan

Endnotes

[1] The word "provenance" is used here to represent the Arabic word and concept of "*asalah.*" Originally, the term emerged in relation to Islamic thought to describe the concept of preserving and maintaining the essence of the "original" Islamic *da'wa* (call) of the patristic period of early Islam. In contrast, the word "contemporaneity" is used here to represent the Arabic word "*mu'asarah,*" which stands for the notion of bringing Islamic da'wa in line with the conditions of contemporary life. In more general terms, the antilogy of "*asalah*" and "*mu'asarah*" expresses the conflict between reconciling the past with the present, and the conflict between remaining true to the "origin" and adapting to the "contemporary." [Editor's note]

[2] "Regional nationalism" or "individual nationalism" ("*qutriyeh*") represents that line of political thinking which emerged as part of pan-Arab nationalism, but which bases its vision for Arab unity on the concept of "*qutur*" or "*qutriyeh.*" According to Lisan Al-Arab, one of the most respected references for the Arabic language, "*qutur*" is a "side" or "area." The advocates of this political line of thinking acknowledged that the regions of the Arab world differed in their characteristics and, hence, propagated a form of governance that would divide the Arab world into different "*aqtar*" (plural of "*qutur*") while maintaining overall political Arab unity amongst these "*aqtar.*" More precisely, this stream of pan-Arab nationalism promoted ambitions for a Greater Syria, and was predominantly advocated by the Syrian and Iraqi Baathist regimes. In contrast, traditional pan-Arab nationalism (*qawmiyeh*) calls for one united Arab nation whose territory stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arab/Persian Gulf. [Editor's note]

[3] "Divine Governance and Sovereignty" is the principle called "al-Hakimiya" in Islam, or the rule of law by that which God brought forth to men, i.e., Islamic Sharia or law. It is a principle used by certain fundamental Islamic political schools of thought to disavow contemporary regimes, constitutions and (civil) statutory laws and legislation as blasphemous. [Translator's note]

[4] Al-Salaf al-Saleh: The Righteous (or Pious) Predecessors (or briefly: the Salaf) refers to the first and "best" three generations of Muslims. These three generations begin with the Companions (Sahaba) of the Prophet Mohammad, their immediate followers (Tabi'in) and then the followers of the Tabi'in. These were praised by the Prophet Mohammad as follows, "The best of people is my generation, then those who come after them, then those who come after them" [Bukhari and al-Muslim]. According to Salafists today, the term Salaf can also apply "to the scholars of Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jamaa'ah, who came after the first three "blessed" generations, and who followed the way of the "Righteous Predecessors" in their belief and practices". [Reference: http://www.qss.org/articles/salafi/text.html] [Translator's note]

[5] Gamal Abdel Nasser was the second President of Egypt from 1956 until his death in 1970. Along with Muhammad Naguib, the first President, he led the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 which overthrew the monarchy of Egypt and Sudan, and heralded a new period of modernization and socialism in Egypt together with an advancement of pan-Arab nationalism, including a short-lived union with Syria. For more on the Nasserite Era see: A. Sadi, "'Arab Socialism' and the Nasserite National Movement", from the International Socialist Review, Vol.24 No.2; Spring,1963; pp.48-51 [Translator's note]

[6] Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation) is a radical Islamic movement that seeks "implementation of pure Islamic doctrine" and the creation of an Islamic caliphate in Central Asia. The group's aim is to resume the Islamic way of life and to convey the Islamic *da'wa* to the world. The ultimate goal of this secretive sectarian group is to unite the entire *umma*, or Islamic world community, into a single caliphate. The aim is to bring the Muslims back to living an Islamic way of life in '*Dar al-Islam*' [the land where the rules of Islam are being implemented, as opposed to the non-Islamic world] and in an Islamic society such that all of life's affairs in society are administered according to the rules of the Sharia (Islamic law). [Reference: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hizb-ut-tahrir.htm] [Translator's note]

[7] The word *shura* provides the title of the 42nd chapter of the Qur'an, in which believers are exhorted to conduct their affairs "by mutual consultation" [Reference: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/542358/shura] [Translator's note]; with a Shura Council (Arabic for "Consultative Council") representing, in early Islamic history, the board of electors that was constituted by the second caliph (head of the Muslim community), Omar I (634–644), to elect his successor. Thereafter, in Muslim states, *shura* variously designated a council of state, or advisers to the sovereign, a parliament (in modern times), and – in certain Arab states – a court of law with jurisdiction over claims made by citizens and public officials against the government. [Translator's note]

Arab Streets and Arab Publics: A New Political Culture?

The "Arab Spring:"
Rebirth or Final Throes of Pan-Arabism?

Yassine Temlali

Yassine Temlali is an Algerian writer and translator. He studied French literature and linguistics. He has published extensively and regularly contributes to several newspapers and magazines, including the electronic journal Maghreb Emergent, the Lebanese daily Al-Akhbar, and the review Afkar-Idées. He lives between Algiers and Cairo.

The winds of social and democratic revolution currently blowing through the Arab world have spared neither resource-poor countries such as Tunisia and Jordan, nor wealthy, oil-rich states such as Bahrain, Oman and Algeria. It has shaken regimes which have hitherto concealed their authoritarianism beneath a cloak of sham democracy, such as Egypt and Yemen, as well as overtly dictatorial regimes, such as Libya. The geopolitical unity of a region reaching "from the

> It comes as no surprise that this simultaneous eruption of feeling has revived pan-Arabist sentiments.

Gulf to the Ocean" – to use a ritual pan-Arab catchphrase – has become apparent in the unexpected shape of synchronous struggles for justice and freedom.

The targets of these uprisings are the autocratic rulers who have, in some cases, held power for decades, and whose only plans for renewal are based on the reassuring strictures of family succession: ageing despots eventually ceding their thrones to their own offspring. So it comes as no surprise that this simultaneous eruption of feeling has revived pan-Arabist sentiments. Several national branches of the Ba'ath Party have hailed the ongoing process as a great "Arab revolution."[1] And while the credibility of that particular pan-Arabist organization was damaged by the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the discrediting of his arch-rival Syria, their enthusiastic proclamations have been echoed

by many substantially more influential Arabist intellectuals.

Egyptian Yahia al-Qazzaz, for example, asserts that, "what we are now witnessing as revolutionary growth cannot be described as a series of national revolutions. It effectively represents an unprecedented revolution of the Arab nation, which burst into life in Tunisia and then found firm footing in Egypt, reflecting the latter's position as largest Arab state."[2] This Arab awakening[3] is presented as a probable precursor to a transnational movement of unification: "The question remains: Can [it] provide the basis for a system of government that functions as a union, federation or confederation […]. This is what I hope; this is the old dream we all share!"

Other intellectuals share the Arabist convictions expressed by Yahia al-Qazzaz, although they do not ponder, as he does, on the possible "unionist" implications of the Arab intifadas. Jordanian Abdallah al-Naqrash writes: "The fact is that in one form or another […], Arab revolutions are happening in Tunisia, in Egypt, in Yemen, in Libya […]."[4] Similarly, Sudanese writer Taha al-Noaman does not hesitate to group these uprisings together under the heading of "second Arab Revolt,"[5] the first being the Arab Revolt of 1916 when the Arabian peninsula and several countries in the Levant – with the active support of the British – declared war on the Ottoman Empire. "Despite apparent differences in orientation and certain issues on their agendas, these two revolts share key common elements, central to which is liberation of the will of the [Arab] nation." Another Sudanese author, Ayman Suleiman, draws a finer distinction when he states that,

"the true great Arab Revolt, working to achieve genuine independence and unity," is the one which started in Tunisia at the end of 2010, and not "the English revolt of the Sharif of Mecca." [6]

Arabist Regimes also Under Fire

On closer examination, such arguments look more like wishful extrapolations, based on little more than the close proximity of these intifadas in space and time – intifadas which the international press, for the sake of convenience, has bundled under the generic heading of "Arab Spring." It is relatively easy to counter them with facts that establish the primacy of national feeling behind each of the uprisings. Rulers with

> Linguistic minorities who have developed a distinctly anti-Arabist stance over the past twenty years have been involved in the protests.

Arab nationalist pretensions such as Muammar Gaddafi – and, to a lesser extent, Bashar al-Assad – have not managed to evade the wrath of the people. And linguistic minorities who have developed a distinctly anti-Arabist stance over the past twenty years have nevertheless been involved in the protests. For example, Berber-speaking groups played an active role in Algeria and Libya, while in Morocco, recognition of Berber (Tamazight) as an official language was one of the key demands made during the demonstrations on February 20, 2011, placed on an equal footing with the adoption of a democratic constitution.

As for inter-Arab solidarity, this was expressed less vehemently than on previous occasions. Marches certainly took place in Egypt in support of the Tunisians and Libyans, and in Tunisia in support of the Egyptians. Even so, they did not mobilise the tens of millions of Arabs who, in 1990-1991, joined in condemning the Allied military intervention in Iraq for days at a time. While it is true that in Cairo and Tunis

people chanted slogans denouncing the Jewish state, and that on the walls of Benghazi you will find graffiti describing Muammar Gaddafi as an "agent of Israel and America," it is difficult to assert that, in the midst of all this turmoil, the Palestinian cause has maintained its status as the "central cause of Arabs everywhere" (to use a cliché popular in Arabist rhetoric).

Resurgence of Injured National Pride

Thus, only low-key pan-Arabist references are included in the slogans of the Arab Spring and the rhetoric of the political parties involved (with the obvious exception of Ba'athists, Nasserites and others who are not, in reality, playing a key role in these events). On the other hand, former symbols of national patriotism have been revived. In Tunisia, once the civil disobedience movement spread beyond its starting point in the west-central region, the Tunisian national anthem became a major rallying cry. In Egypt, one of the slogans chanted by the millions of protesters in Tahrir Square and elsewhere was the single word "Masr," which is the country's Arabic name. In the Egyptian media, comparisons were frequently made between the "Revolution of 25 January" and the Egyptian Revolution of 1919 calling for national independence.[7] In Libya, the rebels adopted the old Libyan flag dating from before the Nasser-inspired coup led by Muammar Gaddafi on September 1, 1969. They also revived the memory of Omar Mukhtar, heroic leader of the native resistance to the Italian occupation, fiercely claiming his support against the regime.[8] And in the demonstrations that took place in the Palestinian Territories during February 2011, protesters asserted the need for reunification and denounced the Israeli occupation. Furthermore, it is significant that the Palestinian demonstrations organized at the end of January 2011 in support of the Egyptian uprisings were banned in Gaza (by Hamas) and on the West Bank (by the Palestinian Authority), lest they touch upon the thorny issues of domestic policies.

The Arab Spring has played a significant role in liberating national pride that was previously

stifled or else had expressed itself in distorted and even chauvinistic ways (at sporting events, for example[9]). In Egypt, hopes are growing that the state may be able to act independently of the USA and – above all – of Israel on the region's geopolitical stage. And if opposition speeches (by the Muslim Brotherhood and the

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Nasserites, for example) tend to remind us of the need for the Egyptian authorities to "serve the interests of Arabs rather than those of their adversaries,"[10] it is difficult not to discern traces of an over-sensitive patriotism still suffering from the humiliation of Hosni Mubarak's pro-American reign.

Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya: A New Medium for Arab Politics

Demonstrating the primarily national motivation behind each of the Arab uprisings is not the same as asserting that they exerted no influence on each other at all. The Arab dictators are perceived as a league of tyrants, unified by the similarities in their methods of government and their subservience to the major powers – the USA and the European Union.[11] From this perspective, it makes absolute sense that the fall of Ben Ali should pave the way for the fall of Mubarak, and that scenes of jubilation in Morocco, Yemen and Lebanon should greet the victories of Tunisians and Egyptians over their oppressors.

The Arab Spring appears to be redefining relations between Arabs. Never before has the Arab League appeared so clearly, under such a harsh light, as a coordinating authority for repressive regimes. Certainly the League attempted to prevent the spread of

revolutionary fervor after Ben Ali's flight from power by dedicating the summit meeting on January 19 to "the fight against unemployment and poverty," but the succession of revolts which followed the summit confirmed that the League has reached the end of its historical validity. Unless it is rebuilt on new foundations, the League is doomed to be nothing more than a dusty exhibit in the museum of antediluvian autocracy.

This new Spring is only possible because unifying factors have long been at work in the Arab world at the geopolitical level. One of these factors is undoubtedly the massive popular rejection of the foreign military presence in the Middle East, as well as the close collaboration of North African security forces with NATO and the EU. Another factor is the enormous popularity of the pan-Arab media network, which competes so vigorously with the various national media, with the most influential being the satellite television broadcasters such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya.[12]

These channels played a key role in the success of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolts. Without them – given the stringent state control of social networks and even of basic Internet access – the revolutionary slogans could not have spread so far, nor resonated on such a scale. But long before these two uprisings, the TV channels had already helped to create a transnational milieu for Arab media and politics in which the same debates were raging. Their coverage of events in Iraq and Palestine, and of Israel's wars with Lebanon and Gaza, helped to shape a new, anti-imperialist unity of opinion among Arabs. And by giving a voice to bullied opposition movements and courageous, militant NGOs, they helped to shape a similar, anti-despotic unanimity. By enabling populations to share their political experiences "from Gulf to Ocean," they encouraged the emergence of a shared democratic dream – a dream that excluded neither the secular nor the religious, and which embraced the specific concerns of minorities such as Berbers, Kurds and others.

By playing this transnational role, the media

have also helped to strengthen the unity of the Arabic language. One could even assert that thanks to them, Modern Standard Arabic is now entering its golden age. Never before has the language been so unified. In particular, never before has it so successfully facilitated communication between the elites in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain and other Arab countries – communication that would have otherwise been severely hampered by national dialectal disparities.

A New Arab Unity of Sentiment?

The Arab Spring is delineating the outlines of a new, pan-Arab unity of sentiment, based less on ethnic or racial considerations than on a broadly political stance: Rejection of foreign domination, aspiration to freedom, belief in the possibility of change. This new sentiment – forged in the crucible of bloody battles against despotism and in pursuit of social justice – has little in common with the attitudes that flourished during the heyday of Arab nationalism

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which, while anti-imperialist in nature, were also inimical to human and democratic rights. It would be more accurate, perhaps, to compare it to the "Latin American sentiment," cemented by resounding victories against unpopular and often pro-American regimes.

Traditional Arabism, which sacrifices the imperatives of equality and freedom at the altar of an illusory unity, has had its day. It no longer acts as a barrier between the Arab peoples and their dignity. It is likely that another kind of Arabism is about to emerge into the light. If it is strongly anti-imperialist, this will not be solely because of the military powers occupying

Iraq, but also because of these powers' ongoing support for the autocratic regimes in the Middle East and North Africa. And if it is secular, this is because the uprisings of the Arab Spring are the work neither of Islamists nor of Arabists who, no matter how secular they may be, still believe that religion has an important place in any definition of a common Arab identity.[13]

Translation from French by Word Gym Ltd.

Endnotes

[1] In a statement by the executive body of the Ba'ath-party in Tunisia, dated February 11, 2011 (on the organization's Facebook page), we find: "The revolution of proud Egypt, carrying on the Tunisian Arab revolution, is a bright milestone on the road to global Arab revolution, with the aim of defeating the corrupt and despotic regimes which have sanctioned the fragmentation [Arab] nation." In another statement by the Arab Socialist Avantgarde Party in Lebanon, dated February 1, 2011 – also a Ba'athist organization with a Facebook page entitled "Al-aruba al-jadida" (New Arabism) – we find: "Although the revolutions of the Tunisian and Egyptian peoples have, in their demands for bread and work, expressed themselves as an aspect of class, they also wear another, Arab nationalist face."

[2] This article was published on February 22, 2011 on many Arab nationalist websites such as "al-Ba's al-arabi" (Arab strength) and "Zaman al-arab" (The time of the Arabs).

[3] As evidence of the reality of this Arab awakening, the author highlights a statement made by former Chief of General Staff of the Israel Defence Forces Gabi Ashkenazi who, while commenting on the Egyptian uprising on January 25, 2011, advocated "greater humility in our judgements on the Arab world." This statement was reported in the February 15,.2011 edition of the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Badil* (http://www.elbadil. net).

[4] Article entitled "Lessons of the current Arab revolution," published on March 2, 2011 on the website of the Jordanian press agency AmmonNews (http://ammonnews.net).

[5] Article entitled "The second great Arab Revolt," published in the March 1, 2011 edition of the Sudanese newspaper *Akher Lahza* (http://www.akhirlahza.sd).

[6] Article entitled "The true and the false great Arab Revolt," published on February 23, 2011 in the Sudanese online newspaper *Sudanile* (http://www.sudanile.com).

[7] Many press articles established this analogy between the Egyptian intifada of January 25, 2011 and the Egyptian revolution of 1919. We will confine ourselves to citing the article by Imad al-Din Shahin entitled "The Revolution of 25 January and the new Egyptian renaissance," published on March 7, 2011 on the Egyptian website *Onislam* (http://www.onislam.net), and the article by Talaat al-Maghribi entitled "The Revolution of 1919 and the Revolution of 2011," published on March 4, 2011 on the website of *Al-Wafd*, the main publication of Egypt's New Wafd Party (http://www.alwafd.org).

[8] Appeals by organizers of the uprising were addressed to the "grandsons of Omar Mukhtar."

[9] This was certainly the case in Egypt and Algeria in November-December 2009, during the qualifying rounds for the 2010 Football World Cup, and again in Egypt and Tunisia in October 2010 during the Africa Cup of Nations football championship.

[10] Article by Yahia al-Qazzaz cited above (cf. Endnote 2).

[11] This solidarity is symbolized by, among other things, the coordination apparent between Interior Ministers of the various states in the Arab League.

[12] Encouraged by the popularity of Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, European broadcasters have recently launched Arabic-language TV channels (France 24 Arabe in 2007, BBC Arabic in 2008).

[13] Let us quote, for example, Michel Aflaq, one of the founders of the Ba'ath Party: "So long as there remains a close correlation between Arabism and Islam, so long as we regard Arabism as a body the soul of which is Islam, there is no reason to fear that the Arabs will overstep the limits of their nationalism, which will never be affected by the spirit of injustice and imperialism." Speech entitled "To the memory of the Arab Prophet" delivered in the amphitheater of the former Syrian University – now the University of Damascus – on April 5, 1943 (cited on http://albaath.online.fr).

A New Arab Street in Post-Islamist Times

Asef Bayat

Asef Bayat is professor of Sociology and Middle East Studies at the University of Illinois. Prior to that, he served as director of the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM), and held the Chair of Society and Culture of the Modern Middle East at Leiden University. His recent books include "Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn" (2007), (with Linda Herrera), "Being Young and Muslim: Cultural Politics in the Global South and North" (2010), and "Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East" (2010).

The popular uprising in Tunisia has surprised many - Western observers, the Arab elites and even those who generated this remarkable episode. The surprise seems justified. How could one imagine that a campaign of ordinary Tunisians in just over one month would topple a dictator who presided over a police state for 23 years? This is a region where the life expectancy of "presidencies" is matched only by "eternal" rule of its sheikhs, kings, and ayatollahs who bank on oil and political rent (Western protection) to hang onto their power and subjugate their people. But the wonder about the Jasmine revolution - and the subsequent mass protests in Algeria, Yemen, Jordan, and more spectacularly in Egypt's numerous cities on January 25, 2011 – also comes from a common mistrust among the Arab elites and their outside allies about the so called "Arab street" – a place that is simultaneously feared and pitied for its "dangerous irrationality" and "deplorable apathy."

But history gives us a more complex picture. Neither "irrational" and prone to riots, nor "apathetic" and "dead," the Arab street conveys collective sentiments and dissent expressed by diverse constituencies who possess few or no effective institutional channels to express discontent. The result is a street politic where Arabs nonetheless find ways to express their views and interests. Today the Arab street is shifting. With new players and means of communication, it may usher some far reaching changes in the region's politics.

There is a long history of such "street" politics in the Arab world. Popular movements arose to oppose colonial domination in Syria,

Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon during the late 1950s, after Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal. The unsuccessful tripartite aggression by Britain, France and Israel in October 1956 to reclaim control of the canal caused an outpouring of popular protests in Arab countries in support of Egypt. The turbulent years following 1956 probably represented the last major pan-Arab solidarity movement until the pro-Palestinian

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wave of 2002. But social protests by workers, artisans, women and students for domestic social development, citizens' rights and political participation continued, even as the Arab state grew more repressive. The 1980s saw waves of wild cat strikes and street protests in Morocco, Sudan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan and Egypt, protesting cut backs in consumer commodity subsidies, price rises, pay cuts and layoffs – policies largely associated with the IMF-recommended structural adjustment programs. In the meantime, the bulging student population continued to play a key role in the popular movements, either along the secular-

nationalist and leftist forces or more recently under the banner of Islamism.

The first Palestinian Intifada (1987 to 1993), one of the most grassroots-based mobilizations in the Middle East during the past century, combined the demand for self-rule with democratic governance and the reclaiming of individual and national dignity. Triggered by a fatal accident caused by an Israeli truck driver, and against the backdrop of years of occupation, the uprising included almost all of the Palestinian population, in particular women and children. These protesters resorted to non-violent methods of resistance to the occupation, such as civil disobedience, strikes, demonstrations, withholding taxes, and product boycotts. Led mainly by local leaders, the movement built on popular committees (e.g., committees of women, voluntary work and medical relief) to sustain itself, while serving as the embryonic institutions of a future independent Palestinian state. That Intifada remains a role model and inspiration to today's protesters.

The late 1990s and 2000s produced the next great wave of Arab street politics, a wave of which continues today. Arab street politics assumed a distinctively pan-Arab expanse in response to Israel's incursions into the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza, and the Anglo-U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.

> There are now signs of a new Arab street, with post-nationalist, post-Islamist visions and novel forms of mobilization.

For a short while, the Arab states seemed to lose their tight control, and publicly vocal opposition groups proliferated, even among the "Westernized" and "apolitical" segments of the population. Millions marched in dozens of Arab cities to protest what they considered the U.S.-Israeli domination of the region. These campaigns, directed against *outside* forces, sometimes enjoyed the tacit approval of the Arab states, as way of redirecting popular dissent against their own repressive governments. For a long time, Arab states managed to neutralize the political class by promulgating a common discourse based on nativism, religiosity and anti-Zionism, while severely restricting effective opposition against their own regimes.

Things, however, appear to be changing. There are now signs of a new Arab street, with post-nationalist, post-Islamist visions and novel forms of mobilization. The 2004 democracy movement in Egypt – with the Kifaya movement at the core - mobilized thousands of middle class professionals, students, teachers, judges and journalists, who called for an end to the Emergency Law, the release of political prisoners, an end to torture, and an end to Hosni Mubarak's presidency. Building directly on the activities of the Popular Committee for Solidarity with the Palestinians, this movement chose to work with "popular forces" rather than traditional opposition parties, bringing the campaign into the streets instead of broadcasting it from the party headquarters, and focused on domestic issues rather than simply international demands.

More recently, the "Cedar Revolution," a sizeable grassroots movement of Lebanese from all walks of life demanding a meaningful sovereignty, democracy and an end to foreign interference, resulted in the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon in 2005. The Iranian Green wave, a pervasive democracy movement that emerged following the 2009 fraudulent presidential elections, served as a prelude to what is now the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia, and the Egyptian Revolution. These are all breaks from traditional Arab politics, in that they project a new post-Islamist and post-ideological struggle that combines concerns for national dignity with social justice and democracy. These movements are pluralistic in constituency, pursue new ways of mobilizing (such as boycott campaigns, cyber-activities and protest art), and are weary of the traditional party politics.

Why this change? Certainly there is the long-building youth bulge and the spread of new information technology (Internet, e-mail, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and especially satellite TV like Al-Jazeera). Frustrated youth are now rapidly moving to exploit these new resources to assert themselves and to mobilize. For example, Egyptian youth used Facebook to mobilize some 70,000 mostly educated youth, who made calls for free speech, economic welfare and the elimination of corruption. Activists succeeded in organizing street protests and rallies, as well as more spectacularly initiating a general strike on April 6, 2008 to support the striking textile workers. The January 25 mass demonstration in Egypt was primarily organized through Facebook and Twitter. These

> The current neo-liberal turn has failed to offer most graduates an economic status that can match their heightened claims and global dreams.

modes and technologies of mobilization seem to play a crucial role in the Tunisian uprising.

But there is more happening here than merely information technology. The social structure throughout the region is changing rapidly. There is an explosion of mass educational institutions, which produce higher levels of literacy and education, thus enhancing the class of educated populace. At the same time, these societies are rapidly becoming urban. Far more people live in the cities than in rural areas (just below Central and Eastern Europe). A creeping urbanity is permeating into the traditional rural societies – there are modern divisions of labor, modern schools, expanding service works, electrification and especially a modern communications system (phone lines, cars, roads and minibuses), which generate time-space compression between the "urban" and "urban" worlds. The boundary between '"urban" and "rural" is becoming increasingly

blurred and "rural" populations are no longer rural in the traditional sense.

But a key change is the emergence of a "middle class poor" (with significant political implications), at the expense of the more traditional classes and their movements - notably, peasant organizations, cooperative movements and trade unions. As peasants moved to the city from the countryside, or lost their land to become rural day laborers, the social basis of peasant and cooperative movements has eroded. The weakening of economic populism, closely linked to structural adjustment, led to the decline of public sector employment, which constituted the core of trade unionism. Through reform, downsizing, privatization and relocation, structural adjustment undermined the unionized public sector, while new private enterprises linked to international capital remain largely union-free. Although the state bureaucracy remains weighty, its underpaid employees are unorganized, and a large proportion of them survive by taking second or third jobs in the informal sector. Currently, much of the Arab work force is self-employed. Many wage-earners work in small enterprises, where paternalistic relations prevail. On average, between one-third and one-half of the urban work force is involved in the unregulated, unorganized informal sector. Lacking institutional channels to make their claims, streets become the arena for the expression of discontent.

And all this is happening against the background of expanding educational institutions, especially the universities, which produce hundreds of thousands of graduates each year. They graduate with new status, information and expectations. Many of them are the children of comfortable parents or the traditional rural or urban poor. But this new generation is different from their parents in outlook, exposure, social standing and expectations. Unlike the post-colonial socialist and statist modernization era that elevated the college graduates as the builders of the new nation, the current neo-liberal turn has failed to

offer most graduates an economic status that can match their heightened claims and global dreams. They constitute the paradoxical class of "middle class poor," with high education, self-constructed status, wider world views and global dreams, who nonetheless are compelled – by unemployment and poverty – to subsist on the margins of neo-liberal economy as casual, low paid, low status and low-skilled workers (like street vendors, sales persons, boss boys or taxi drivers), and to reside in the overcrowded slums and squatter settlements of the Arab cities. Economically poor, they still fantasize about an economic status that their expectations demand – working in IT companies, with secure jobs, middle class consumption patterns and perhaps migration to the West.

The "middle class poor" are the new proletariat of the Middle East, who are very different from their earlier counterpart – in their college education, knowledge of the world, expectations that others have of them, and with a strong awareness of their own deprivation. Mohamed Bouazizi, the street vendor who set himself alight, and ignited a

> Islamism itself has faced a crisis in recent years, not least because it is seriously short of democracy.

revolution in Tunisia represented this "middle class poor." The politics that this class pursued in the 1980s and 1990s was expressed in Islamism, as the most formidable opposition to the secular undemocratic regimes in the region. But Islamism itself has faced a crisis in recent years, not least because it is seriously short of democracy. With the advent of post-Islamist conditions in the Muslim Middle East, the "middle class poor" seems to pursue a different, post-Islamist, trajectory.

Will the Tunisian uprising unleash a democratic revolution in the Arab world? The events in Tunisia have already caused mass jubilation among the people, and a profound anxiety among the power elites in the region. Mass protests have broken out in Egypt, Algeria, Jordan and, Yemen, while leaders are in quandary as to how to react. The possibility of similar trajectories in the region depends primarily on how the incumbent regimes will behave. The grim reality is that precisely because a democratic revolution occurred in Tunisia, it may not happen elsewhere, at least in the short run. This paradox reminds one of the Bolshevik revolution's loneliness in Europe, and the Islamic revolution in the Middle East. Those revolutions did inspire similar movements around the world, but they also made the incumbent states more vigilant not to allow (by reform or repression, or both) similar outcomes in their backyards.

Yet in the longer term, their efforts may not be enough. The structural changes (educational development, public role of women, urban expansion, new media and information venues, next to deep inequalities and corruption) are likely to make these developmentalist authoritarian regimes – whether Libya, Saudi Arabia, Iran or Egypt – more vulnerable. If dissent is controlled by rent-subsidized welfare handouts, any economic downturn and weakening of provisions is likely to spark popular outrage.

At stake is not just jobs and descent material welfare; at stake is also people's dignity and the pursuit of human and democratic rights. As we have seen so powerfully in Tunisia, the translation of collective dissent into collective action and a sustained campaign for change has its own intriguing and often unpredictable dynamic. This explains why we keep getting surprised in this part of the world – revolutions happen where we do not expect, and they do not happen where we do. After all, who sensed the scent of Jasmine in the backstreets of Tunisia just a few weeks ago?

What Next for the "Arab Street?"

How could the supposedly quiescent and cowed people who live in Arab dictatorships, like Egypt and Tunisia, rise up spontaneously and topple their regimes? The West has been blindsided by the current uprisings in the Arab world – in large part, we suggest, because the West has underestimated the power of Arab public opinion.

What is the "Arab Street?"

An important element of this underestimation is the Western concept of the "Arab street," an expression used to refer to Arab public opinion. We recently studied the use of this expression in both English-language and Arabic-language media.[1] They differ. The image of the "Arab street" in Western media is often that of a volatile mob, a rabble that reacts violently and irrationally. In this image, while the "Arab street" may wish to topple Arab governments, it is seen as lacking the focus, intelligence, organization and discipline to actually accomplish this. It is not conceived as the voice of engaged people with a legitimate stake in the future of the Arab world. Instead, it is seen as an unruly and irresponsible force that must be carefully restrained.

In recent years, the term "Arab street" has become by far the most common way to refer to Arab public opinion in English-language media, accounting for some 86% of references to Arab public opinion in the LexisNexis database between 2002 and 2007. By contrast, the neutral expression "Arab public opinion" is rarely used by foreign correspondents and other commentators on events in the Middle East.

What is the "Arab street," then? Above all, it is a monolith. It does not denote a diverse group of people with a varied collection of opinions, but a single organism that acts as one. For example: "The crowds are large, their chants fiery, but the Arab street remains a force controlled and choreographed by the region's autocratic governments" (Associated Press, April 2002). Or: "Hizbollah is riding a wave of popularity on the Arab street" (BBC News, July 2006).

The phrase "Arab street" also has decidedly negative connotations. It is far more likely to be associated with volatility and irrationality than is the neutral expression "Arab public opinion." For instance, the "Arab street" is often paired

> The image of the "Arab street" in Western media is often that of a volatile mob.

with adjectives like "angry" and "furious:" "Of course, the Arab street has always been angry at America for backing Israel, and now for events in Iraq, too" (BBC, April 2004). It "seethes," "erupts," and "explodes," as opposed to objecting in a calm and deliberative manner to the policies of its leaders or to the actions of foreign powers. We found that the term "Arab street" was almost four times less likely than "Arab public opinion" to be associated with rationality and deliberation.

Muhammad Ali Khalidi

Muhammad Ali Khalidi is associate professor of Philosophy and Cognitive Science at York University in Toronto. He has taught at Columbia University, the University of Chicago, the University of Virginia, and was chair of the Department of Philosophy at the American University of Beirut from 1998-2005. His main research interests are in the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of science. He serves on the Research Committee of the Institute for Palestine Studies and has written on ethical dimensions of the question of Palestine and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

[1] Terry Regier and Muhammad Ali Khalidi (2009), The Arab street: Tracking a political metaphor. Middle East Journal, 63, 11-29. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/the_middle_east_journal/v063/63.1.regier.html

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of this prevalent and pejorative metaphor is that it is reserved almost exclusively for Arab societies. There is no similar mention of the "European street," "Indian street," or "Latin American street" in the English-speaking media. If the street metaphor were more widely applied to other societies in other parts of the world, and indeed to Western societies themselves, its application to the Arab world might not

> The concept of democracy is hardly a novelty in the Arab context, stereotypes to the contrary notwithstanding.

be quite so problematic. As it is, the phrase tends to segregate the Arab public from other publics, suggesting that it is one of a kind, fundamentally different from its counterparts elsewhere. One does find such expressions as "the man on the street," "Main Street," and "street credibility" used with reference to Western societies. However the "Arab street" is the only English-language metaphor we know of that casts the opinion of an entire ethnic group as a monolithic entity with a distinctly irrational and volatile demeanor.

The "Arab Street" in Arabic

The Arab media share this unflattering image to some extent: in Arabic, the term "Arab street" often betrays a patronizing attitude by pundits and politicians towards their own societies. However, unlike in English, in Arabic the term also carries clearly positive associations of legitimacy, centrality, and normalcy – comparable to "Main Street USA" in English. Moreover, whereas in English it is almost exclusively Arabs who are cast as "the street," in Arabic the term is used more broadly, with common reference to the "American street," the "British street," and so on. An interesting example comes from the leader of Hizbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, who has used the expression "the Israeli street" in 2007 with positive overtones, claiming that "it

is worthy of respect" that "political power and the Israeli street move quickly" to defend former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

The Arab press refers admiringly not just to the "Arab street" but more specifically also to the "Egyptian street," the "Palestinian street," and others. In the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ayyam* in 1997, we read about "the great Egyptian street, which has always been the heart and conscience of the Arabs." Similarly, a Hamas leader is quoted in 2006 as saying that "[Hamas] won [the Palestinian elections] because it is a movement with a broad popular base in the Palestinian street." Such statements bring out another side to the "street" metaphor as it is sometimes used in Arabic, which contrasts with many Western uses of the expression "Arab street." Some Arabic uses of the expression carry a connotation of people power; they suggest a democratic process whereby leaders are held accountable by ordinary citizens.

The concept of democracy is hardly a novelty in the Arab context, stereotypes to the contrary notwithstanding. Some three hundred years prior to the Magna Carta and a full millennium before universal suffrage in the United States, the Islamic philosopher Al-Farabi, writing in Baghdad in the early tenth century, discussed the pros and cons of a democratic polity. In a democratic society, according to Farabi: "Those who rule do so by the will of the ruled, and the rulers follow the wishes of the ruled." The people in a democracy, he went on to say, "praise and honor those who lead the citizens of the city to freedom… and who safeguard the citizens' freedom." In a significant break with Plato, Farabi reasoned that the democratic system was the second best of all forms of government, surpassed only by the "virtuous society," a utopian system ruled by perfectly moral rulers. In his view, democracy, with its emphasis on freedom of expression and egalitarianism, would be most suited to the emergence of a group of virtuous individuals who would then go on to establish a perfectly ideal state.

Terry Regier

Terry Regier is associate professor of Linguistics and Cognitive Science at the University of California, Berkeley. His research interests are in the relation of language and thought. He received his PhD in Computer Science from UC Berkeley, and has taught at the University of Chicago and at Berkeley. He was born and raised in Beirut, Lebanon.

The "Arab Street" and the Current Uprisings

Though street demonstrations have been the dominant form of political expression in the Arab world over the past few weeks, they are not the only way in which Arab publics express their opinions, and they do not tell the whole story about political expression in Arab societies. Moreover, the recent wave of such street protests belies the prevalent stereotype about Arab public opinion.

The mob characterization of the "Arab street," especially evident in Western usage, simply does not fit the current uprisings in the Arab world. Demonstrations have been

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largely peaceful, disciplined, organized – and in Tunisia and Egypt, ultimately successful. Those violent confrontations that have occurred appear to have been instigated by the regimes rather than by protesters – witness recent events in Bahrain and Libya.

The mismatch between mob image and more complex reality is also highlighted by the composition of the crowds in recent protests. They represent a broad cross-section of society, male and female, secular and religious, and include young, web-savvy professionals, along with many others.

Rather than continue to misconstrue the nature of Arab public opinion, political elites in the West would do well to acknowledge that the public in the Arab world is motivated by the same concerns as any other public the world over. In 2009, in the same Cairo that has just witnessed a popular struggle for decent government, U.S. President Barack Obama stated: "All people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice;

government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose." These words clash with the history of lavish U.S. support for the Egyptian regime that denied its people exactly those things, but his words are nonetheless correct. Freedom and democracy are just what the Egyptian public has struggled for, and now has a hope of attaining.

The U.S. government is likely scrambling to ensure that Mubarak's resignation in Egypt does not harm its interests in the region. Egypt is second only to Israel as a recipient of U.S. military aid, and its peace treaty with Israel is central to U.S. strategy in the region, but is viewed askance by many Egyptians. The U.S. will no doubt try to protect its investment in Egypt, but the administration should think twice about attempting to ensure that whatever regime replaces Mubarak's privileges U.S. foreign policy goals over the wishes of its own people. The "Arab street" is more rational and less likely to be hoodwinked than many would have us think.

Meanwhile, the spectacle of a whole host of Arab leaders, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf, attempting to bribe citizens into acquiescence with government handouts or trying to bludgeon them into submission with brute force is frankly obscene. Unfortunately, there is nothing to guarantee that such measures won't work, at least in some places and for a limited period of time. But bribes and violence are not likely to postpone the inevitable forever.

The Way Forward

It remains to be seen whether the uprisings in Egypt and elsewhere will be hijacked by internal or external forces. It's one thing to initiate a movement like those that are sweeping the Arab states and it's quite another to go on to establish a just and free society with a government that is answerable to its people. To quote the words of Larbi Ben M'Hidi, one of the heroes of Gilles Pontecorvo's film, the *Battle of Algiers*, about the Algerian anti-colonial struggle: "It's hard

enough to start a revolution, even harder to sustain it, and hardest of all to win it. But it's only afterwards, once we've won, that the real difficulties begin."

At the moment, there are plenty of forces that would like to "win" this revolution, or to take it in a direction that serves their interests. They are up against a remarkably energized and liberated "Arab street." As one pro-democracy campaigner delightedly told Al-Jazeera after Mubarak's resignation, "I have worked all my adult life to see the power of the people come to the fore and show itself. I am speechless." It is unlikely they will let that sense of empowerment pass.

The Other Face of the January Revolution:
The People's Desire to Liberate Their Language!

On the evening of Thursday, February 10, I hurriedly left my home to join what I thought would be the celebrations of Mubarak's resignation. I had spent the whole day in Tahrir Square and then went home at about five in the evening. But after watching a series of news reports and predictions suggesting that Mubarak would shortly make

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a speech in which he would announce that he was relinquishing power, I decided to return to the Square so I could celebrate with the revellers there, because even though the revolution had spread across the whole of Egypt, the Square had become its most potent symbol and icon.

On my way there, I felt I was in a different Egypt from the one I knew. Even the air I was breathing seemed different, without the usual reek of exhaust fumes. Out in the streets, I no longer felt the spirit of dejection and hopelessness that had become so all-pervasive over the past few years. It seemed as if the old world had moved aside, making way for a new, different world. Everybody was in a state of joyful euphoria as they waited for Mubarak's speech to be broadcast; they believed this speech would be the one that confirmed the revolution's success. In the taxi, the country's former national anthem "Be peaceful, O Egypt" flowed from the cassette recorder, reminding me of the liberal Egypt which existed before the military regime. From distant Tahrir Square, the rhythm of enthusiastic singing and chanting reached my ears. In the square itself, everyday

life had been replaced by a mood of celebration; the atmosphere was relaxed, filled with the near-certainty that the efforts of the past few weeks would be crowned with success in a few minutes' time. At this moment, it seemed that the revolution was turning into a holiday: the glow of spotlights gave the Square a special lustre, the singing was festive and passionate, as were the many lively discussions in which people enthusiastically attempted to predict how matters would eventually end.

After nearly two hours we started to become restless; we mocked the poor sense of timing of Mubarak and his apathetic regime. Afraid we would be unable to hear the speech clearly amid the noise and bustle in the Square, we decided to look for the nearest cafe, so we could return to the celebrations as soon as the speech was over. We gathered around a taxi: the driver had opened all four doors, so we could listen to the speech on the taxi's radio – the speech which dashed our hopes. As the former President started to tell us about all the things he had done for the nation since his youth, one of the people standing in our group started to attack the speech, mocking it as "prattling about reminiscences." About twenty people were gathered in our circle that evening – most of them strangers, but all nervously waiting to hear the one concrete sentence that would clearly acknowledge our demands. Instead, they heard nothing but foolish chatter and deceitful prattle which attempted to avoid all genuine meaning and subvert self-evident facts.

Next to me stood a young man in his early twenties, wearing American jeans and a leather jacket in the latest fashion. His head was

Mansoura Ez-Eldin

Mansoura Ez-Eldin is an Egyptian novelist and journalist. She is literary editor of the Akhbar al-Adab literary magazine. She is the author of two novels, "Beyond Paradise" (Arabic, 2009), which was short-listed for the Arabic Booker prize, and "Maryam's Maze" (English edition 2007). She has also published short stories in various magazines and the short stories anthology "Shaken Light" (2001). In 2009, she was selected for the Beirut39 festival as one of the 39 best Arab authors below the age of 40.

covered by a Palestinian keffiyeh, which gave him a suggestively revolutionary appearance without necessarily implying that he belonged to an old-style nationalist revolutionary cadre. He was excited and impatient as he followed Mubarak's foolish twittering, which seemed to all of us to be meaningless. "Get to the point," he kept repeating, in growing agitation – and then he started to rephrase each sentence as it was uttered, changing it to its true meaning. It was as if he was translating the corrupt language of complicity into another language: a clear, confident language which called things by their true names – a new language, the language of the generation to which he belonged. Before the speech came to an end he shouted out, with a world's worth of determination in his eyes: "We may die in the Square, but now we advance on to Oruba Palace." He uttered his cry as if the decision to continue the revolution was his alone, but the end of his shout coincided with the end of the speech, and behind us the whole of Tahrir Square burst into excited shouting, ringing out in response to the ousted President's contempt and evident failure to take the revolutionaries' demands seriously enough. Although spontaneous, the reaction showed almost total harmony – with astonishing speed, the crowd divided into groups, one to take up position in the Square, a second to advance on to Oruba Palace, and a third to encircle the radio and television building. As I observed this young man's determination – his confidence and the way his reaction harmonized with the reaction of the rest of the crowd in the Square – I realized, in some mysterious way, that the end of Mubarak's regime was closer than we had ever imagined, and that a new language was being born out of the revolution itself.

A Revolution Against Language

I described how the young man, who defied Mubarak with a determination I had never seen before, was translating – or rather, decoding – Mubarak's language, distilling it into its true meaning, devoid of masks and untruths. And now it seems to me that this is what the whole

revolution was doing. Alongside the demands for a civilian democracy based on social justice, the revolutionaries achieved another aim, an aim they articulated clearly and rationally – the

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liberation of the Egyptian language from the decades of corruption and decadence with which it had become associated.

The revolution of 25 January – the "Day of Rage," as it is often called – was not just directed against a repressive and corrupt regime that had attempted to silence, marginalize and impoverish the people. It was also a revolution against a corrupt, artificial and equivocal language (where the true meaning is the opposite of the apparent meaning) that has prevailed for decades. The era of Abdul Nasser was dominated by a language consisting of slogans which not only bore no relation to reality, but were also charged with an overpowering certainty. This was followed by the era of Sadat, characterized by an exceptionally heavy use of religious discourse in politics. The supposedly devout President played skillfully on the language of religion: as a young man he had been an amateur actor, and he made maximum use of intonation and body language. But even before this, he had already succeeded in firmly establishing rural community values across society as a whole, replacing state institutions with the family as the institution and transforming himself into the patriarchal "head of the Egyptian family" – the one who determines issues of honour and dishonor. In essence, he raised the ethics of the village above the rule of law.

As for Mubarak's regime, which lasted for thirty years, it showed neither enough

originality nor sufficient creativity to come up with anything new. Mubarak simply took advantage of his predecessors' legacy, taking it

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to new extremes in the process. This became especially apparent during the early days of the revolution prior to 25 January, when the pro-Mubarak media attempted to portray him as the patriarchal father of a great family, shocked by the disobedience of his children (the people in revolt) and wishing only to re-establish the "security and stability" of the family home (the Egyptian nation).

Just like Sadat, Mubarak sought inspiration in pseudo-democratic play-acting and sham political parties, and used his publicity machine to promote the notion that Egypt was living in a "Golden Age of Democracy." The process of perverting language continued unabated, transforming the dominant discourse in Egypt into a language of corrupt collusion – but then, corruption had become the backbone of the state and its institutions. This culture of corruption dominated every aspect of daily life, so very few people were surprised when they learned of the many cases of corruption that leaked out once Mubarak was ousted.

The Mubarak era has proved beyond any reasonable doubt that language can become a partner in corruption, conniving with complicity and becoming persistently evasive, leaving the truth to flounder in darkness. Typically, language is not particularly vulnerable to rapid social change, but in the political and media-related discourse which prevailed in Egypt,

there is ample evidence to demonstrate the impact of widespread corruption – especially in terms of linguistic fragmentation, where words are deliberately scrambled and acquire contradictory meanings. Sometimes the evidence is very clear, sometimes it is more elusive. For example, if we consider certain terms with opaque meanings, such as "debt rescheduling" or "investors delaying payments," we find that they are terms which attempt to embellish or minimize corrupt activities. They are used most frequently to describe the thieving businessmen who stole millions – sometimes billions – from Egyptian banks and were subsequently described as "investors in arrears" rather than as thieves absconding with bank funds. Thus the prevailing culture of corruption invented its own language, which feigned objectivity whilst actually indulging in fraud and deceit.

The corruption of our language has taken place steadily and systematically by various means, including: Giving new meanings to everyday expressions; Blocking all discussion of language as a moral medium (with an implicit conscience); Using words incorrectly; Using deceptive wordplay; And using words in non-neutral contexts. These mechanisms were also used extensively during the days of the revolution, and when combined with all the disruptions, tensions and predicaments of the regime that was so forcibly exposed to the world, ultimately resulted in a babble of confused, broken-down pronouncements which appeared to mean one thing but actually meant precisely the opposite.

Two Discourses

The revolution of 25 January witnessed a conflict between two discourses. The first discourse was vigorous, modern and open to the world; the second was fabricated, self-contradictory and confused. The revolution exposed the huge gap yawning between the young people who started the revolution and the regime which, under Mubarak, quite simply failed to understand the language or mentality of these young people,

submerging itself instead in accusations dug up from the distant past, such as unrest in the labour force, treason and foreign conspiracies aiming to undermine the nation. In the process, ridicule emerged as a primary weapon, used skillfully and mercilessly by the revolutionaries to refute all these accusations and make the accusers themselves look stupid – like primitive cavemen, far removed from the spirit of the times.

The regime and its media played on such concepts as fear for Egyptian stability and threats to national security – ideas that were heeded by a generation of middle-class parents. But the young people and those who joined them as time went on were not listening. The regime and its official media never woke up to the fact that the new generation had a fundamentally different image of Egypt and the nation as a whole. According to their image, the nation was not simply an idol upon whose altar dictatorial regimes could command us to sacrifice our freedom. This concept of Egypt – or more specifically, of Egypt's security and stability – was used to oppress the people for decades, but in the end, those who resorted to these methods forgot that Egypt the nation is not just

> Despite the differences between the various groups from which they were formed, the revolutionaries regarded the Egypt which they desired – of which they dreamed – as a modern, democratic state which respects its citizens.

a plot of land in a fairy tale location, consisting entirely of history and ancient monuments. No, Egypt is a nation of people – Egypt is comprised of Egyptians who, as individuals, conceive and co-create the nation, both as an idea and as an actual physical place where people can live, for which it is worth making genuine sacrifices. The nation as a whole is an entity capable of

providing its citizens with security, a decent life and freedom – this, at least, is the view of Egypt held by the majority of the younger generation. As far as the revolutionaries were concerned, Egypt meant something different from what it meant to the regime and the regime's spokesmen. Despite the differences between the various groups from which they were formed, the revolutionaries regarded the Egypt which they desired – of which they dreamed – as a modern, democratic state which respects its citizens, and not as some kind of absolutist ideology which insists on keeping its citizens in chains. By contrast, all that the regime saw in Egypt was Mubarak, the much-needed Pharaoh, sincere and inspiring – or at least, this was the view they attempted to impose, by giving the nation the impression that the only choice was between Mubarak and his regime, or absolute chaos.

Throughout the days of the revolution, the regime succeeded neither in deciphering the language of young people, nor in understanding the key issues that might influence them, especially in light of the disastrously negative impression made by all the violence and brutality which, despite all, failed to intimidate them. Meanwhile, the revolutionaries were busily decoding the regime's signals and the special terminology used in the regime's "messages," swiftly dismantling them and then making a mockery of them in a game which sometimes closely resembled the rituals whereby Egypt's people had been humiliated by the regime in the past. Part of Tahrir Square was effectively converted into an alternative street theatre, a broad carnival ground for people who had, for so long, been denied ownership of the streets and squares of the city by the ever-present threat of the security forces.

Three Speeches, Increasing Rage

In his first speech, Mubarak seemed unable to appreciate the significance of what was happening. Unable to grasp its true scope, he wallowed in artificially constructed phrases lifted from previous speeches. Wearing a

sullen, threatening expression, he described the revolution as riots jeopardizing the rule of law – nor did he neglect to play variations on the already clichéd theme of the "Golden Age of Democracy," claiming that these demonstrations could not have taken place if not for the freedom of opinion and expression that characterized his reign. In contrast to Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who told his people "I have understood you" – a statement containing the implicit admission that he had previously failed to understand them – Mubarak displayed a much more pronounced degree of fecklessness and prevarication. indeed, he claimed that every hour of every day, he was aware of the people's legitimate aspirations; that he had understood the people's aspirations and concerns since first he came into office. In truth, this meant he deliberately ignored the significance of the revolution and the justification for it, stating instead that the revolutionaries would not achieve their demands by resorting to violence, as if it were the people who had perpetrated the violence and killed the dozens who fell on that day (the "Friday of Anger") and not his own regime that had attacked the people with unprecedented savagery.

The arrogance displayed in Mubarak's speeches; his stubborn refusal to recognize his own mistakes; his adherence to clichés such as "the subversive minority" and "his regime's support for the poor;" his failure to apologize for the martyrs who had fallen in the fighting – this arrogance was the fuel which fed and fanned the flame of revolution. Every time Mubarak or those symbolizing his regime made such an error, the revolutionaries extended and radicalized their demands still further. In his very first speech, Mubarak appeared like some tragic "hero," a figure who had fallen behind the times and lost the ability to understand or listen to the demands of the present era. It was as if he was searching for friends among the faces of the angry revolutionaries challenging "his people" (by which he meant the people he knew). When Western leaders subsequently urged him to introduce more democratic

measures, he told them, "You do not know the Egyptian people as I do."

In his second speech, perhaps because he had now realized that he did not speak the language of the revolutionaries – and they did not speak his – he concentrated instead on neutral groups and elements who, while they might sympathise with the revolution, were not yet demonstrating in the streets and squares. He played on their feelings using techniques of emotional blackmail – up to and including pleading, as he spoke of his wish to die and be buried in the soil of Egypt. He also played on what is, for Egyptians, a sensitive issue – respect for the elderly – by presenting himself once again (expressing even greater anguish than before) as the father of the Egyptian family, the

> It was the third speech which most grated on people's nerves and provoked their rage, because the deposed President wallowed in folk-tale-inspired fantasies as he attempted to "remind" his audience of all that he had given Egypt and its people.

guarantor of safety and stability, the one who had been charged with this duty without having sought out this burden of his own accord. This speech succeeded in exerting a significant influence on a large section of the Egyptian population, who in that moment saw Mubarak as a defeated old man who had responded to his children's demands – who had decided not to put himself up as a candidate at the end of his presidential term and who was now striving for a peaceful transfer of power.

"What more could you want?" was the question echoed by many people the morning after Mubarak's second speech. But then they were obliged to observe the paradoxical truth – on the following day after each of Mubarak's two speeches, the regime committed crimes that

were even more heinous than before. After his first speech, following the abrupt withdrawal of the police and security services, prisoners were released and the regime's hired thugs carried out widespread robbery and looting, causing the people to lose their trust in Mubarak and his regime as never before. After his second speech, camels, horses and Molotov cocktails were used to carry out a barbaric attack on the demonstrators in Tahrir Square in an event subsequently referred to as Bloody Wednesday. It was as if we were being attacked by a gang in the literal sense of the word – a gang with more than one leader, all of them with different – even contradictory – agendas. Naturally enough, chaos was the inevitable result.

The events of Bloody Wednesday had the positive effect of neutralizing the emotional blackmail that Mubarak had successfully used on so many people in his second speech. But it was Wael Ghonim who most fully undermined the Mubarak's influence. He was one of those who had been calling for a revolution from the very start, on his Facebook page entitled "We are all Khaled Said." During an interview on popular TV programme Ten PM, Ghonim's tears and evident fragility were the talisman which broke the spell cast by Mubarak's emotional blackmail, by means of which he had succeeded in turning some of the ordinary people against the revolutionaries. In his first appearance on television, Wael Ghonim presented us with a new model for heroism that is the very antithesis of the concept of heroism in the Arab tradition. And in doing so, he gained our overwhelming sympathy.

But going back to Mubarak's speeches: it was the third speech – the one described as "reminiscences" by the young man near Tahrir Square – which most grated on people's nerves and provoked their rage, because the deposed President wallowed in folk-tale-inspired fantasies as he attempted to "remind" his audience of all that he had given Egypt and its people, while his listeners anxiously waited for the single sentence confirming that he would step down. In this speech, Mubarak appeared to lay aside his arrogance and pride and – as he himself put it – made the speech in "which a father addresses to his sons and daughters!" Once again he reverted to his strategy of acting as head of the Egyptian family, in a way which Sadat himself might have envied. Indeed, the promises made by Mubarak in this speech might have served to calm people down in the early days of the revolution. But as usual, his assessment of the situation and his timing were both wrong, so each speech he made reflecting such errors and misjudgments simply increased the protesters' determination and fanned the flames of their anger. In light of his many mistakes, and the way they all seemed to work to the benefit of the revolutionaries, it was only natural that after Mubarak's fall, a popular joke suggested that, "The revolution succeeded thanks to the President's guidance!", referring of course to his misjudgments…

The Language of Revolution

Mubarak's speeches also shaped the way the official media treated the revolutionaries. After the first speech the regime's media puppets echoed the ousted President, accusing the

> As the revolution became a reality, so the revolutionary language took shape and demands matured in a way that surprised everybody, not least the revolutionaries themselves.

protesters of rioting, jeopardizing the country's stability and spreading violence. After the second speech all the pro-regime media people – as well as Omar Suleiman – swung behind the theory of the "subversive minority," claiming that although the revolution was started by honest people, they were subsequently exploited by saboteurs with foreign agendas, who had stolen the revolution out from under them.

This period saw the highest level of confusion

and contradiction, in the sense that meaning was sacrificed and much of what was said was transformed into sheer nonsense. Thus the President's speech vilifying the revolution was incoherent, self-contradictory and alarmingly misleading. Typically, we would hear officials, media representatives and so-called "strategic experts" utter two consecutive but contradictory sentences, the first praising the young people who had started the revolution, extolling their enthusiasm and their concern for the nation's welfare, the second accusing the revolution of following a foreign agenda and of being hijacked by "terrorists" who were conspiring against Egypt. Sometimes these speakers would express respect for the young revolutionaries and condemn the revolution in one and the same sentence, until their language gave listeners the strong impression that they were more or less blatantly pleading for respect. This in turn caused us to seek for true meanings and forced us to use our minds.

In official "communications," the talk was all about the revolutionaries' foreign agendas, about how they were agents of Iran, Hamas, Hizbollah, Israel and America – often at the same time! – and accusing them of betraying the "homeland" in exchange for a Kentucky Fried Chicken meal and a couple of hundred Euros. Over and over again, the mouthpieces of the regime repeated these ingenuous accusations, as if they could turn lies and nonsense into facts by sheer repetition. Similarly, sheer absence of imagination called forth an arsenal of accusations based on worn-out fears from the past, while those who made them failed to recognize that they were confronting a genuine, nationwide revolution which expressed the will of every part of the people; failed, in fact, to understand that they should deal with the revolution on this basis rather than ignoring it and treating Egyptians as if they were a nation of mercenaries and traitors. Finally, sheer absence of moral conscience prompted them to fabricate lies or at best resort to half-truths in their efforts to deceive and turn ordinary people against the revolutionaries, even thought the

latter were seeking a better tomorrow for all, regardless of what the cost.

The language of the revolutionaries and protesters, on the other hand, was a young, confident language, simultaneously satirical and transparent, calling a spade a spade. As the revolution became a reality, so the revolutionary language took shape and demands matured in a way that surprised everybody, not least the revolutionaries themselves. I do remember that the preliminary list of demands, which made the rounds on Facebook a number of days before 25 January, never predicted all the things which subsequently took place. Although the planned event had been christened "The revolution of 25 January," the written demands

> But were the revolutionaries really unarmed? As a matter of fact, they were armed with the power of imagination, of language, and above all with the weapon of biting satire, which was both very sharp and very intelligent.

were modest compared to what the real-life revolution demanded and subsequently accomplished. One of the most prominent of them, for example, was that the minimum wage should be raised, provoking a friend of mine into republishing the statement on his own web page, this time preceded by the words, "O you charitable people, revolutions do not ask for the minimum wage to be raised; rather they demand the return of power!"

But what we saw on 25 January in Tahrir Square – and Suez and other parts of Egypt – was truly remarkable. It epitomized the elegant but simple slogan, "The people want to overthrow the regime," as well as the accompanying slogan, "Peaceful… peaceful," which together summed up the aim of the revolution and its moral message. There was a determination to act in a non-violent way and to uphold civilised

behavior no matter how brutal the regime might become: this is what happened, and it earned the Egyptian revolution the world's support and respect. On the day now known as Martyrs' Friday, nearly five million demonstrators filled Tahrir Square and the surrounding streets. Their morale was very high, and the hearts and minds of all were with those who were advancing toward Oruba Palace. Yes, there was a tacit fear that the Republican Guard would retaliate violently against the demonstrators, resulting in a new massacre, but the scene turned into one of the most wonderful sights in the entire revolution as the revolutionaries threw roses to the Republican Guards surrounding the palace. No sooner had they done this, than the Guards returned the salute in an even more impressive manner – by turning their tanks' gun muzzles away from the revolutionaries and towards the Palace!

But were the revolutionaries really unarmed? As a matter of fact, they were armed with the power of imagination, of language, and above all with the weapon of biting satire, which was both very sharp and very intelligent. Through clever, humorous songs, through sketches transferred from Tahrir Square directly to cyberspace, through witty banners and scathing jokes, the revolutionaries succeeded in caricaturing the figures who represented the regime, chief among them Mubarak. They played on the gaps and inconsistencies in the speeches made by those in power, swiftly composing and spreading songs and jokes about foreign agendas, subversive minorities and KFC meals – and the disconcerted regime had neither the ability nor the imagination to respond to them or deal with the situation. By playing the card of creativity and an imagination freed from nationalist prejudices and worn-out clichés, the children of globalization and cyberspace succeeded in formulating a message in their own likeness. The extreme quick-wittedness and originality of the message exposed the absurdity and inadequacy of official government communications as never before. Of course, I know that the Egyptian revolution extended far

beyond the original imaginings of those who planned it, stretching across the nation as a whole, reaching people of all religions, classes and inclinations. But the young people bore the greatest burden in terms of promoting the revolution and preserving its fresh, original language and voice.

The language of the regime revealed the contradictions and bewilderment of the regime, while the language of the revolutionaries was new and unprecedented, showing that they had moved beyond a number of basic concepts firmly rooted in Egyptian culture, such as family values and hierarchical structures – values associated with what might be termed a village morality. The language of the Egyptian army was initially vague and neutral, but day after day, the signals it sent out to the people steadily became more reassuring. The language of the army was entirely consistent with the gradual escalation of the army's own position. In the early days of the revolution, Egyptians became used to receiving short, ambiguous text messages on their mobile phones from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, such as: "We appeal to all honest citizens to combine their efforts to bring our homeland to a safe haven," and "We call upon the citizens to establish an appropriate climate for managing the country's affairs." These messages neither explained where the safe haven was, nor how it was to be reached amidst the gratuitous daily violence perpetrated by the authorities; neither did they explain what the appropriate climate was, nor why the citizens alone should be obliged to establish it.

As time passed, however, the language of the army abandoned its caution and became both clearer and more sympathetic to the people, although it maintained the same calm tone: "The Supreme Council has understood your demands and the authorities concerned have been instructed to satisfy them at the appropriate time." This was the last message I received on my mobile, while I was writing these lines. Our "demands" are clear and well-known, because the revolution took place in order to establish a modern civilian state. The

army was the first to recognize this because – to its credit – it was more in tune with the new language created by the revolutionaries and, unlike Mubarak and his regime, made an effort to swiftly learn and understand this language. Otherwise how can we explain the fact that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces opened its own official Facebook page once the revolution had succeeded, with the aim of disseminating information and communicating with young people through Facebook?

… Finally, far removed from the connivances, tricks and treacheries of language, the coming days continue to be the most significant, the most momentous, in the 25 January revolution, because they will make clear to us whether the army really has understood the language and demands of the revolutionaries, or whether it is simply procrastinating in order to preserve the last, discredited remnants of the regime.

Revolutions in Real Time:
The Mediatization of Political Struggle

The Role of Al-Jazeera (Arabic) in the Arab Revolts of 2011

Between faithfully reporting an event and attempting to actively shape it lies a hornets' nest, and the media organization oscillating between the two extremes is sure to feel its sting. Adhering to the camp of factual reporting or to the camp of event shaping may not be the safest option

> The rules of journalism were clearer before the age of Arab revolts.

in the current revolutionary environment that is the Arab world. The worst option remains to actively ignore, obscure and misinform – a pattern that can be observed in most Arab state media.

A television station is assumed to have an impact on current events, indeed, it is its raison d'être. But the effect could come as a matter of fact, or it could be intentional. There is little doubt that it was Al-Jazeera's clear intention to affect – a decision it is currently paying dearly for.

Neutrality vs. Objectivity

Let us consider words such as "neutrality" and "objectivity" before we delve into Al-Jazeera's role in the freedom revolts of the Arab world, which erupted shortly before the beginning of 2011. It is a role important enough to lead Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to acknowledge – with grudging admiration – on March 5, 2011: "Like it or hate it, it is really effective. In fact, viewership of Al-Jazeera is going up in the United States because it is real news."

A person's heart is only really neutral at death. If a person did not favor one of two sides: Hosni Mubarak, or the crowds in Tahrir Square for example, he would be confused at best, at worst psychologically ill. In journalism, however, relative neutrality is essential. The reporter endeavors to expose different points of view, in an effort to remain faithful to the information, and to better describe the bigger picture. This increases his credibility, which in turn helps him retain a large audience, whose hearts and minds he can affect, thus contributing in the making of the event. Objectivity is yet another tool to increase impact. In the coverage of clashes between Gaddafi's forces and their opponents by Al-Jazeera and other stations, a clear attempt was made to lessen the impact of news of opposition losses by also drawing attention to Gaddafi's corruption. This amounts to direct participation in the psychological warfare of the Libyan revolution/civil war.

The Age of Arab Revolts

The rules of journalism were clearer before the age of Arab revolts (in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, Jordan, Oman…). We used to advocate that the media should not campaign, except against smoking, or in favor of human rights. But we soon discovered that the media is quick (and happy) to slip into campaigning mode. After all, corruption is no less damaging than smoking, and freedom does not lie outside human rights.

In the time between the Tunisian and Egyptian revolts, Al-Jazeera embarked on a strange campaign. On the evening of January 23, 2011, it devoted the entirety of its main newscast to the Palestine Papers, leaked confidential documents detailing a number of

Aref Hijjawi

Aref Hijjawi is Programme Director at Al-Jazeera Arabic Channel in Qatar since 2006. Prior to that, he directed the Media Centre at Birzeit University in Palestine for six years. He served as a radio journalist and manager at the BBC in London, and worked as a newspaper journalist and teacher in Palestine. He is the author of ten books on media, Arabic grammar and literature.

concessions that the Palestinian Authority had allegedly agreed to make to Israel. For four consecutive days, Al-Jazeera allotted many hours to a multitude of programs and interviews surrounding the issue. The campaign adopted a strident tone, and an oddly theatrical staging, which lessened its impact. Many noted that the presenters' body language was far from their customary coolness, and that the tone of their voices was frighteningly similar to the tone of 1960s Arab state broadcasters when declaiming rousing political statements. The Palestine Papers revealed little of note and resulted in an opposite effect to the one expected: The Palestinian Authority ended up receiving support from people who would not have defended it otherwise.

Two things quickly came to Al-Jazeera's rescue: First, the implementation of its great slogan: Al-Ra'i wa-l-Ra'i al-Akhar (the opinion and the other opinion). Since the start of the coverage, Saeb Erakat, chief negotiator for the Palestinian Authority, had made several appearances on Al-Jazeera, and had successfully disproved many points, using a strong offensive style when necessary. Al-Jazeera also hosted a number of Palestinian Authority officials, who served to balance the picture a little more. Second, the Egyptian revolution: On January 25, the third of four days that Al-Jazeera dedicated to the revelations of the Palestine Papers, Egypt rose against its rulers. Al-Jazeera quickly relegated the Palestine Papers to a special online website, and got ready to cover the Egyptian uprising.

The story of the Arab revolutions began in Tunisia. Mohamed Bouazizi set himself alight on December 17, 2010, sparking a wave of protests, which intensified following his death on January 24, 2011. Ten days later, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia's autocratic president, stepped down and fled the country.

Al-Jazeera had not been allowed inside Tunisia for years. Citizen journalists helped alleviate the vacuum of information. While Al-Jazeera obtained no scoop, it was, however, the first to feel the real pulse on the street. It is important to understand what went on in the minds of reporters in Al-Jazeera's headquarters in Qatar. These reporters, many of who were Tunisian, all considered Tunisia a police state. Ben Ali's regime, which subsisted mainly on tourism, was deemed oppressive, and opposed to real development. Many production companies had often proposed television features about life in Tunisia, within the context of Hadith As-Sabah, the morning talk show which regularly featured segments about daily life in different Arab countries. Al-Jazeera refused to air the Tunisia features, feeling the bright picture they depicted was inappropriate for a country that forbade any political coverage.

> Al-Jazeera creates neither deep awareness, nor a solid political culture. Instead it allows its viewers to have faith in their own thoughts.

Al-Jazeera was quick to take a stand supporting Tunisian protesters and their demands. As demonstrations intensified, the station dropped its regular scheduling and opted for an open news cycle, which broadcast news and images from Tunisia as they came in online. The Tunisian audience followed their revolution on Al-Jazeera – the station was already popular in Tunisia before the revolution, due to the absence of trustworthy local media. During the revolution, the Tunisians lifted banners praising Al-Jazeera.

The Tunisian revolution succeeded with astonishing speed. We will avoid attributing to Al-Jazeera a share in the revolution's success. On the contrary, we are critical of researchers' exaggeration of its role within the revolts. More than its size, it is important to study the quality Al-Jazeera's impact: it was superficial. The Arabic speaking Al-Jazeera station was simply closer to the hearts of many Arabs because the latter related to its employees as one of them. This was the case, for in Al-Jazeera's newsroom

one can find reporters and producers from every Arab country - with a fair distribution and representation – who are all impassioned about Arab and Islamic issues. They use the term *umma* (nation) a lot. Some apply it to signify the Islamic *umma*, others to mean the Arab *umma*,

> For Tunisians, Al-Jazeera was a mirror in which they saw themselves reflected. It helped them believe in the revolution their country had embarked on.

but most of them use it interchangeably. The majority come from a middle class background, even though their good salaries in an affluent oil-producing country now allow them to send their children to foreign schools and to join the ranks of the upper middle class.

Cautious Conclusions

Al-Jazeera creates neither deep awareness, nor a solid political culture. Instead it allows its viewers to have faith in their own thoughts. It shares their ideas more than it advances new ones.

For Tunisians, Al-Jazeera was a mirror in which they saw themselves reflected. It helped them believe in the revolution their country had embarked on. It was also the closest media to their hearts and minds.

With the Egyptian revolution, things were more difficult for Al-Jazeera, as it was far from being the news channel of choice of the Egyptian household. In 2009 a poll, conducted on 27,000 viewers by an American company at Al-Jazeera's behest, revealed that the channel was practically absent from Lebanese and Egyptian screens. The cause was clear: Both countries had many channels and TV stations which covered local news with a great degree of freedom and professionalism. However, freedom of information in Egypt had received a painful blow from the state security apparatus soon before the Parliamentary elections, two

months before the revolt of January 25. Strict restrictions had been placed on privately owned television stations, although the written press had been relatively less affected. Al-Jazeera undoubtedly gained some ground in Egypt during that period, although I do not have exact numbers. But the Egyptian public did not need Al-Jazeera to comprehend the farcical nature of the Parliamentary elections that took place only two months before the downfall of Mubarak: the ruling national party had secured more than 95% of the seats. To the historian, we say, if only one cause is to be considered as the spark that set the Egyptian revolution aflame, let it be the farce of the elections.

The previous elections in 2005 were equally fraudulent, laden with threats and violence. The falsification, however, was not complete: the Muslim Brotherhood won 20% of the seats, with members who ran as independents, since the party was legally forbidden to participate in the political arena. The Egyptian people grudgingly accepted the elections, whose results greatly pleased the Muslim Brotherhood. However, the most recent elections were a blatant insult to the Egyptian people's dignity and intelligence. As a consequence, Mubarak's regime lost the support of the Muslim Brotherhood, which it had enjoyed for five years.

During the past five years, Al-Jazeera had allocated a lot of its airtime to Egyptian topics, despite the channel's absence from Egyptian screens. The station's coverage had been strongly criticized on many occasions, especially after the broadcast of a two-hour long documentary about torture practices in Egyptian police departments. The documentary led to a number of Egyptian talk shows attacking Al-Jazeera and attempting to discredit it. Shortly after the end of filming, the documentary's producer Huweida Taha was arrested, and her tapes and laptop confiscated. She later managed to smuggle out a copy of the material. To make a long story short, Al-Jazeera broadcast tens of hours of documentation on Egypt, more than was produced about all other Arab countries combined. I do not recall a

single hour that was not in some way critical of the regime. Even the documentary entitled As-Saqf al-'Ali (the High Ceiling), which praised

> The role of Al-Jazeera in mobilizing the Egyptian street was minimal.

the relative freedom of privately owned media in Egypt, still alluded to the police's contempt and disrespect for the Egyptian people.

The role of Al-Jazeera in mobilizing the Egyptian street was minimal. Al-Jazeera imprinted one idea in people's minds: That everybody believed Egypt still lived in the shadow of a regime that defied time. What really galvanized the Egyptian street was the youth of Egypt's middle class. On Facebook and YouTube, 70,000 young men and women set January 25 as a date. And the rest, as they say, is history.

As protests across Egypt grew more heated, the government ordered events to be obscured by all local television stations. It also interrupted Al-Jazeera's broadcast on the NileSat satellite, the only way to view the channel in Egypt. This represented a big setback for the Al-Jazeera. Nevertheless, it managed to resume its broadcast through other friendly stations. One could say that the impact of official Egyptian television was still important as the protests intensified, notably when it managed to touch the hearts of many after Mubarak's second speech on February 1, with the image of the old president telling his people that he wanted to die on Egyptian soil. But what kept the street ablaze was the stubbornness of Egyptian youth, aided by the strong presence of an organized force on the street, namely the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Jazeera received as much praise from Egyptians as it had from Tunisians, if not more. But it had only really reassured the revolutionaries that the channel of the Arab rebelling masses believed in them and in their struggle. Al-Jazeera was very clear and immutable in its pro-rebellion stance, as opposed to other stations that visibly wavered.

When all the station's reporters were arrested and its network offices closed for a couple of weeks, Al-Jazeera sent people from Doha to work secretly as reporters. It was constantly present in Tahrir Square. Many of the images broadcast at the time were the work of amateur reporters. For a few days Al-Jazeera's broadcast resembled radio more than television. With a live 24-hour broadcast, punctuated by scarce videos, phone conversations filled the void left by the dearth of images (and that, despite the regime's intervention on mobile communications). Al-Jazeera had sent its reporters to different cities and towns across Egypt, and they made sure to relay information in any way they could.

Studio guests also inflamed the Egyptian street. Azmi Bechara's contributions were especially noteworthy, with his deep political and theoretical analysis of events based on his historical knowledge, leftist background and firm belief in Arabism. His impact was great in raising the morale and spreading faith in the hearts of the youth of the revolution. Another voice that rose to the forefront during that period was that of Nawara Negm, an Egyptian activist who was interviewed many times by Al-Jazeera. She was close to the core of the youth movement, assertive and harsh as she made her demands and exposed her point of view.

Gains and Losses

Despite the Islamic tint that usually colors Al-Jazeera broadcasts, during the Egyptian revolution and until the fall of Mubarak, the station strove to commit to the demands of the young protesters by not promoting any particular party or ideology. It kept broadcasting as if it represented the revolutionaries. Only after Mubarak's resignation did the role of parties become clearer – mostly, it emerged that there were few real parties other than the Muslim Brotherhood – and viewers noted the increasing appearance of the face of political Islam on Al-Jazeera screens as the station kept intensifying its broadcasting.

The fall of Mubarak on February 12, 2011 was a moment of joy at Al-Jazeera. Three days later, Libya rose against its leader. On February 21, Colonel Gaddafi sent his son Saif al-Islam to threaten his people with a civil war. Today, in the middle of March, it appears he has kept his promise.

The Libyans also called for Al-Jazeera, and Al-Jazeera responded by taking a stance for the people against Gaddafi. The station focused its broadcast on the news and developing events. This time, interference took place on the Arab Sat satellite. Al-Jazeera is still reporting Libyan developments with the same intensity, with Yemen getting its share of coverage every now and then, with Bahrain close behind. But this

> Gulf sensitivities might soon become more evident on Al-Jazeera.

style of impassioned reporting of events, which aims at impacting and shaping them, tends to limit the focus to one story at a time. Gulf sensitivities might soon become more evident on Al-Jazeera. But until now, the tally shows that it has been the station that was closest to the street pulse and the emotions of Arab citizens.

It would benefit Al-Jazeera (Arabic) to assess its losses. It has sacrificed much of its diversity, not only by eliminating all its documentary programs and talk shows, but also by devoting most of its broadcasts and the bigger slice of its newscasts to the headline of the day. It has lost a large portion of its viewers – who have migrated towards BBC Arabic, France24, Al-Jazeera English, and BBC English – by failing to satisfy their hunger for more diverse and elaborate information. Al-Jazeera's success in the age of revolutions fell short of its triumph during the Iraq War, despite its impact on the revolts.

When the age of revolution is passed, Al-Jazeera will still benefit from strong foundations. It is likely to lose more viewers to local stations, which now enjoy more freedom in the countries that have been released from the control autocratic regimes. Even in countries where regimes remain unchanged, a new wind of media freedom is sure to blow – whether strong or soft. Stations there will have the advantage of being local, which will make them more attractive and relevant. However, Al-Jazeera will still profit from a very high ceiling of freedom, long experience, superior funding and from being the "Channel of all Arabs." Add to that – and deservedly so – the characteristic of being the one station that supported the revolutions without reservations.

A television station does not create a revolution, nor does it participate in it, despite what some researchers may think. At most, it is a panel on the highway telling the revolutionaries: You are on the right path.

Translation from Arabic by Joumana Seikaly

Media Lives Up to Its Name as Game Changers in Spreading Arab Revolutions

On résiste à l'invasion des armées; on ne résiste pas à l'invasion des idées.

(One may be able to resist the invasion of armies, but not the invasion of ideas.)

Victor Hugo

French author Victor Hugo must have been gazing through a crystal ball when he wrote these words some three centuries ago, because they resonate true in 2011 with the outbreak of popular revolutions across the Arab world, egged on, in great measure, by traditional and social media.

Unlike the era when news traveled for days or weeks before reaching its destination, events in the 21st century are literally exploding before

> There are ample examples of Arab regimes trying to bar or completely stifle the media covering the wave of revolts gripping the Middle East and North Africa region.

our eyes 24 hours a day on satellite channels, on the Internet's various outlets, and in every conceivable converged media combination. Any invasion of armies today is being met with an equally hard-hitting invasion of media to cover unfolding events – often to the consternation of those who seek to suppress people, invade countries, change borders, or just defend their own territories. There are ample examples of Arab regimes trying to bar or completely stifle the media covering the wave of revolts gripping the Middle East and North Africa region, notably in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Algeria, Syria and Iran, to name a few.

As this publication goes to print, more unrest will be reported in the media, but what is certain is that print, broadcast and especially online outlets will have an increasingly greater impact on the course of history. As Donald Graham, the late publisher of *The Washington Post*, once said: "Journalism is the first rough draft of history."

The Role of the Media in Recent Revolutions

Media have become so ubiquitous, intrusive and demanding that they are hard to avoid, as a result of which, countries with oppressive regimes are devising countless ways to curtail them, or shut them up entirely.

The Egyptian authorities' decision to literally cut off the Internet and limit mobile telephone and message service in early 2011, when what became known as the "Youth Revolution," the "Facebook Revolution," the "Twitter Revolt," and the "January 25 Revolution" broke out, is a case in point.

Egypt under Hosni Mubarak may have allowed a certain amount of latitude with Internet use, but it cracked down hard on anti-regime journalists, bloggers and dissidents who expressed themselves through social media. It was slightly more tolerant than the regime of ousted Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who literally stifled opposition and made press freedom impossible. In Tunisia, regime opponents either spoke out openly, thereby

Magda Abu-Fadil

Magda Abu-Fadil is director of the Journalism Training Program at the American University of Beirut. Previously, she served as director of the Institute for Professional Journalists at the Lebanese American University and as Washington Bureau Chief of *Events* magazine. She worked for 40 years as foreign correspondent and editor with Agence France-Presse and United Press International, and wrote for several dailies. She taught journalism at the American University in Washington, D.C. and trains journalists across the Arab world. She regularly contributes to the Huffington Post.

Pan-Arab daily *Al-Hayat* touts Egypt without Mubarak
Source: Al-Hayat, Magda Abu-Fadil

subjecting themselves to untold harm, or went underground to spread their message of defiance, with online access being one of the greatest obstacles they faced.

Cutting off Internet access in the new

> A common thread running through the revolutionary wave sweeping the region has been the fast dissemination of information.

age of Arab revolutions has become catchy. The Libyan authorities picked up where their Egyptian counterparts had left off when demonstrators took to the streets of their cities, demanding a change in regime, freedom to express themselves and better living conditions. While their leader of 42 years claimed Libya enjoyed prosperity and the rule of the masses (*al-jamaheer*) where none existed, protesters demanded jobs, an end to government

corruption and media freedoms. Despite the chokehold on Internet service, Libyan dissidents managed to get their message out any way they could. When it was difficult to disseminate from inside Libya, they crossed the border into Egypt or Tunisia and sent their reports from there.

The tiny Gulf state of Bahrain, which caught the uprising fever, responded by restricting Internet use amid the growing unrest. Troubled Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula's southern tip, and the North African country of Algeria also had their share of anti-government violence, with resultant backlash against the media. Syrian authorities were equally hard on journalists and bloggers who reported unrest in that country.

Only Media, or Part of the Political Event?

A common thread running through the revolutionary wave sweeping the region has been the fast dissemination of information, notably via Arab satellite channels like the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera and Dubai-based Al-Arabiya that are viewed in the remotest areas of most Arab countries. The two channels-cum-networks reflect their paymasters' political bents.

Al-Jazeera is financed by the Qatari government, and its Arabic news channel has drawn criticism from any number of Arab and Western governments about its coverage of unrest in various countries.

It first came to fame when it received and broadcast footage from Al-Qaeda, following the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, and later was considered a serious competitor to the American CNN news operation. Since its debut, Al-Jazeera has also been charged with tilting heavily towards the Palestinian cause – it is no coincidence that the director general and many reporters and correspondents are Palestinian – and with being anti-Israeli, anti-American, etc. While the channel's funders host Al-Udeid, the largest U.S. military base in the region, they also have close ties to Iran, Syria and Hamas, to the dismay of policy-makers in Washington.

Sheikh and priest in Cairo's Tahrir Square
Source: Al-Jazeera, Magda Abu-Fadil

According to a Wikileaks cable dated June 24, 2009, Qatari claims of supporting a free press are undermined by manipulation of Al-Jazeera.[1] Al-Arabiya, on the other hand, is part of the Saudi-owned MBC group of channels that is thought to be more accommodating to the U.S. and Arab regimes in general, and was established as a counterpoint to Al-Jazeera. It is also more financially independent and has more advertisers.

Other local, regional and international channels broadcasting in Arabic have jumped on the bandwagon in a bid to capture Arab audiences, but Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya hold sizeable pan-Arab viewership, with the former

> Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera have both been accused by various governments or feuding groups of serving one side's interests against the other's.

claiming to reach the largest number of viewers. As such, their news coverage of unfolding revolutions has been instrumental in providing Arab audiences with information frequently hidden by their respective regimes on state-run media. Which is the reason that regimes like Libya's have attempted – and succeeded up to a point – to jam the channels' signals. Fame comes with a price. Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera have both been accused by various governments or feuding groups of serving one side's interests against the other's.

Egyptian detractors, for example, have charged Al-Jazeera with seeking to topple the then sclerotic Mubarak regime by focusing on police brutality, the crackdown on dissidents, government corruption, cronyism, misuse of power by the Mubarak family and more. The regime paid the channel back by closing its Cairo bureau during the Egyptian revolution, harassing and jailing its correspondents, revoking their press credentials, and unplugging its transmissions from the Egyptian-controlled satellite channel carrier NileSat. Analysts attributed the causes of Egypt's response to lingering political differences between Doha and Cairo, and to Al-Jazeera's record of critical coverage of Egypt over the years.

The use of dramatic footage, repetitive provocative graphics and titles for special segments on the unrest in whichever country was being covered, as well as charged background music befitting the revolt, have invariably contributed to the unsettled mood in Arab countries. Cameras zooming in on demonstrators' catchy signs, or constant replays of citizen journalists' video footage from mobile devices of bloody scenes, panicked citizens, street violence and general chaos added to the dynamic of television with a combination of moving and still pictures. Sometimes they even surpassed analysts' or reporters' comments in coverage of unrest in North Africa and Yemen, as opposed to the reporting of revolts in Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province.

The signs carried by demonstrators in different countries were straight political declarations demanding regime change, while others were rhyming couplets or jokes about the state of affairs, and their appearance on television, on websites and in news agency pictures confirmed the saying, "a picture is worth a thousand words."

Media as Extensions of Political Interests?

To answer this question, it is worth considering journalist Fadia Fahed's take entitled, "Arab Media and the Lesson of the Street" in the

pan-Arab daily *Al-Hayat*: "Arab media, long noted for their coverage of wars, news of death in Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Iraq, and their specialization in disseminating official pronouncements from their sources, are unaccustomed to covering popular movements and transmitting the voice of the street and their sons' daily tribulations."[2]

She was on target. Reading government-run newspapers in most Arab countries or watching official television channels' newscasts is not only tedious, it is misleading and extremely banal. Official Arab media's raison d'être is focused on personality cults of the respective Arab leaders and their cronies. Running afoul of these leaders usually means trouble, or worse.

Watching state-run Nile TV, a viewer could easily be misled into thinking that the upheaval was one-sided, simply a plot to undermine the Egyptian regime, and totally lacking in

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context. At first it reported the outbreak of anti-government demonstrations as limited action by a few dozen protesters demanding social and economic changes. It also referred to widespread popular rejection of the actions of, "the few who claim to represent the Egyptian people." As a result, Nile TV reporter Shahira Amin walked out when she refused to continue broadcasting the official lies and was hailed for her courage. Likewise, Libyan TV sidestepped the popular uprising by airing totally inane entertainment programming or videos glorifying Muammar Gaddafi.

Egypt's leading newspaper *Al-Ahram* – like all government-run media - was in complete denial of the raging revolt in the country that finally ousted 30-year dictator Hosni Mubarak

Al-Ahram **front page proclaiming the people's revolution**
Source: Magda Abu-Fadil

as president. But it did an about-face when the revolution proved stronger than Mubarak, and headlined with, "The People Toppled the Regime."

So it has caused major confusion in Arab media, leading to hesitant, fearful and late coverage of events, Fahed wrote. Adding to the confusion is the people's simple and painful demands: "Arab media may have to change the meaning of journalism, give up fashionable ties and shiny shoes, go down to the street and convey the people's simple and painful concerns, with absolute loyalty to simple facts, and to return to their basic role as a mirror of the people, not the rulers," Fahed argued. She added that the lesson came from the street.

While Internet access has made incredible inroads in recent years, its availability and use has depended on literacy levels – still rather low in the region – and the ability to afford the needed technology. Echoes of people yearning to live free, in dignity, and with a better future for themselves and their families have reverberated across the blogosphere in recent years, and picked up steam since the latest series of

Arab revolts broke out. As revolutionary fever grips the Middle East and North Africa region, more regimes are turning to knee-jerk extreme measures of clamping down on social media and access to the Internet, as well as controlling traditional news outlets.

But there are ways of circumventing governments' efforts to silence bloggers, tweeters, journalists and civil society activists. The more regimes tighten the noose, the more creative the dissidents become in trying to loosen it. According to the Menassat's Arab Media Community blog, "Avaaz (an online service to circumvent censorship) is working urgently to 'blackout-proof' the protests – with secure satellite modems and phones, tiny video cameras, and portable radio transmitters, plus expert support teams on the ground – to enable activists to broadcast live video feeds even during Internet and phone blackouts and ensure the oxygen of international attention fuels their courageous movements for change."[3]

And that is just one avenue. Countless others exist. Peter Beaumont of Britain's *Guardian* newspaper wrote that social media have unavoidably played a role in recent Arab world revolts, with the defining image being a young man or woman with a smartphone recording events on the street, not just news about the toppling of dictators. "Precisely how we communicate in these moments of historic crisis and transformation is important," he argued. "The medium that carries the message shapes and defines as well as the message itself."[4]

The flexibility and instantaneous nature of how social media communicate self-broadcasted ideas, unfettered by print or broadcast deadlines, partly explains the speed at which these revolutions have unraveled, and their almost viral spread across the region, he said. "It explains, too, the often loose and non-hierarchical organization of the protest movements unconsciously modeled on the networks of the web," he added.

But lawyer, journalist and media consultant Jeff Ghannam countered that in the Middle

BBC Arabic coverage of Cairo street demonstrations
Source: Magda Abu-Fadil

East, this was not a Facebook revolution, and said one should not confuse tools with motivations. Social media, he explained, helped make people's grievances all the more urgent and difficult to ignore.[5] It is that viral spread and non-hierarchical organization that inspired a Chinese activist who tweets under the handle "leciel95" to translate everything he could about events in Egypt to English and Chinese after Chinese authorities barred their media from reporting on the Egyptian revolution, according to Mona Kareem, writing in the Kuwaiti daily *Al-Rai*, who encountered him on Twitter.[6]

What is the Difference Between Arab and Western Media Coverage?

Western media tend to have a shorter attention span when covering foreign events, notably in an age of severe budget cuts and more reliance on stringers, independent operators and the competition they face from Arab and other media. Unless Western media have Arabic-speaking correspondents, like CNN's Ben Wedeman, Rima Maktabi and Mohamed Jamjoum, *The New York Times*' Leila Fadel, or the BBC's Jim Muir, for example, they have to incur extra expenses by hiring fixers, translators and others to get the story out.

While Western media may have bureaus and local staff, they have been cutting back on their operations in recent years. Depending on where these journalists are based, there is also the question of distance, logistics and insurance, all of which add to the cost of covering conflicts.

It is safe to say that Western media tend to

be more dispassionate, more to the point and generally more aware of media ethics standards. But it should be noted that Western media have also demonstrated occasional carelessness, bias and lack of balance in their coverage – a charge often leveled at Arab outlets that lack freedom. The American network Fox News is a good example of right-wing views completely shadowing hard news. Their reporters' and anchors' comments are laced with opinions, which override facts.

In early March U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton testified in Congress that American channels did not provide news, whereas Al-Jazeera, whatever one thought of it, was a reference on solid reporting. She said:

"Al-Jazeera has been the leader in that are literally changing people's minds and attitudes. And like it or hate it, it is really effective. In fact viewership of Al-Jazeera is going up in the United States because it's real news. You may not agree with it, but you feel like you're getting real news around the clock instead of a million commercials and, you know, arguments between talking heads and the kind of stuff that we do on our news which, you know, is not particularly informative to us, let alone foreigners."[7]

Other than content, accuracy, fairness, balance and objectivity (whatever that means), there is also the issue of finances. Without adequate resources, Arab and Western media are constrained in their coverage. Satellite uplinks are very expensive, TV crews cost a lot of money to transport, multimedia reporters still need a certain amount of digital equipment and facilities to operate, and travel is becoming prohibitive with rising oil prices.

In all fairness, some Arab media excel at particular stories, or under certain circumstances, but may inevitably flop at others. The same is also true of Western media.

Conclusion

Media coverage in times of conflict should not be judged in the heat of battle. Far too many elements come into play when journalists are under the tremendous pressure of deadlines, competition, financial considerations and, very importantly, their own safety or existence.

During the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, countless journalists were faulted for accepting to be embedded with Western troops, which

> It is unavoidable for reporters to feel pulled in one direction or another. They're only human.

resulted in skewed reporting of events. Arab journalists working for their own countries' state-run media, independent news organizations or foreign outlets have also received their fair share of criticism during the latest upheavals across the Middle East and North Africa.

It is unavoidable for reporters to feel pulled in one direction or another. They're only human. It brings to mind the ethical question: Do you continue covering, shooting footage or taking pictures when bombs drop and people are being cut to shreds, or do you stop and help out? Can you do both? And, can you maintain your balance and sanity after that?

Therefore, journalists should be provided regular professional training to learn how to make sound and ethical decisions for whatever story they cover.

Endnotes

[1] http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/213692
[2] http://international.daralhayat.com/internationalarticle/237836
[3] http://community-en.menassat.com/profiles/blogs/blackoutproof-the-protests-in
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[5] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/18/AR2011021806964.html
[6] http://alraimedia.com/Alrai/ArticlePrint.aspx?id=258362
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Social Media and the Revolutions:
How the Internet Revived the Arab Public Sphere and Digitalized Activism

"Our revolution is like Wikipedia, okay? Everyone is contributing content, [but] you don't know the names of the people contributing the content. This is exactly what happened. Revolution 2.0 in Egypt was exactly the same. Everyone contributing small pieces, bits and pieces. We drew this whole picture of a revolution. And no one is the hero in that picture.

Wael Ghonim
13 February 2011
60 Minutes – CBS

Doreen Khoury

Doreen Khoury is Program Manager at the Heinrich Böll Stiftung's office in Beirut. Prior to that, she worked as researcher and elections specialist at the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies (LCPS) and served as executive director of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections. She specializes in elections, governance, anti-corruption and social media issues. Since 2009 she is coordinating Arab Bloggers Meetings for HBS, in cooperation with Global Voices.

"Social media is the postal service of the age. It is an efficient method of communication. It still fits within a general modern theory of mass communication."

Ahmad Gharbeia

10 March 2011[1]

A big wind of change and revolution is blowing through the Arab world, potentially ushering in a new era in the region's history. Political maturity and courage have finally come to the Arab people as they revolt against authoritarianism, political inheritance and state corruption. The Arab citizen is being shaped as we speak, free from the chains of subjectivity.

Since the Tunisian revolution began, much has been written about the role of social media

as, depending on what term you use, facilitator, catalyst or instigator of the popular uprisings. The Arab world has certainly witnessed a mushrooming of the blogosphere and digital activism over the past few years, and political blogging has been hailed by many as a major force and vehicle for change and reform in the region.

The Arab blogosphere arose because young people were frustrated with the restrictions imposed by the state-regulated boundaries of the Arab public sphere, which is closed off to most modes of free expression and joint citizen action. The public sphere, as defined by

> The Arab blogosphere arose because young people were frustrated with the restrictions imposed by the state-regulated boundaries of the Arab public sphere.

German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, is the domain in which public opinion can be formed and which can be accessed in principle by all citizens and where they can address all matters without being subject to coercion. Ideally, the public sphere is an inclusive space, which is characterized by diversity of opinion and critical debate.

Stifled Expression

In Arab countries, arbitrary state regulation of action and expression in the public sphere has strangulated any form of criticism towards regimes and most of the critical perspectives

toward socio-economic and cultural issues. Although opposition parties have been present in most Arab countries, either their leadership has languished in prison or exile, or parties modified their rhetoric to an extent that they no longer constituted a threat to the regime, or sometimes they even colluded with it.

The work of civil society organizations has also mostly been curtailed and limited to "soft" non-political topics, thus depriving them of a grassroots presence. Most Arab regimes have acted with suspicion toward the most innocent non-political activities; the ban on gatherings under state of emergency laws is the unofficial motto of repressive Arab regimes. Any collective action (e.g., a group of young people clearing their neighborhoods of rubbish – as happened in Syria) is opposed and put down because: a) it is an independent action by people not organized or regulated by the state, and b) citizens forming groups, committees, etc., however informal or non-political, are viewed as a possible prelude to organized action against the regime.

The media in the Arab world, directly and indirectly controlled by the state, has mostly been unable to carve an independent space for itself in the public sphere, hampered by rigid editorial lines and forced to portray events through the lens of stagnant state ideologies.

Advances in new mass communication technologies that have revolutionized expression and collapsed boundaries between

> The political significance of blogging and social media as a whole is evidenced by the fact that in recent years, Arab regimes have cracked down on bloggers with increasing rigor and ferocity.

people (both within and across countries), have allowed young Arabs to relocate civic action and expression from the suffocated (physical) public sphere to the Internet, and in so doing, they have created a new virtual public sphere.

A New Power

The political significance of blogging and social media as a whole is evidenced by the fact that in recent years, Arab regimes have cracked down on bloggers with increasing rigor and ferocity. Although this crackdown was most visible in Egypt, which has the biggest blogosphere, other countries such as Morocco and Syria have also detained and jailed bloggers for online activism. Most Arab states do not have laws specifically regulating the Internet (although some like Syria have blocked Facebook and Twitter in the past). However, this has stopped neither Internet censorship nor the persecution of bloggers, with security considerations being commonly invoked as justification for restricting free online speech (and press freedom in general). Whether online or offline, Arab regimes seek to control the free flow of information, thus controlling individuals. Bloggers not only have been targeted for directly attacking the regime; more often than not, they have been arrested for exposing corruption or public mismanagement. Arab regimes undeniably possess seemingly limitless power and means of repression which they regularly use with brutal efficiency against dissent.

However, bloggers and online activists have amassed a different and more subtle kind of power. Advances in video and photography technology, which have not only made digital cameras and video recorders accessible to lay people, but have allowed online activists to document, photograph and record human rights violations, government negligence, police violence and other incidents of daily life, and share them with the vast online community. Once this information is online, it is impossible to eliminate or stop it from spreading. Written testimonies and witness accounts are now powerfully augmented with audiovisual documentation and quickly disseminated online. As the Egyptian revolution

in particular showed, there is a clash between traditional public mass communication via state newspapers and television, which require massive physical infrastructure, and new channels of virtual political mobilization that require minimal physical tools.

The Sceptics

There have been and there still are skeptics who, perhaps justifiably, play down the role and impact of the blogosphere and social media because these domains are perceived as limited to the elite, given that the number of illiterate and computer illiterate individuals in

> The revolution is being tweeted as we speak.

the region is still alarmingly high. A common skeptical perspective of social media's role is that expressed by American-Jordanian journalist Rami Khouri who, writing in *The New York Times* in July 2010,[2] was sweepingly dismissive of social media's role in fomenting change in Arab societies. Khouri – following the revolutions he has adopted a more positive take – maintained that not only have thousands of bloggers not triggered change in the MENA region, but that young people use digital media mainly for entertainment and "narrow escapist self-expression."

A more nuanced criticism of the over-hyping of the role of social media in effecting radical change came from Canadian writer and journalist Malcolm Gladwell's much commented-upon *New Yorker* article in October 2010,[3] "Small Change: The Revolution will not be Tweeted."

Gladwell was dismissive of the power of social networking in effecting change, and posited that the role played by Facebook and Twitter in protests and revolutions has been greatly exaggerated. Social networks, he claimed, have encouraged a lazy activism whereby people consider themselves active if they "like" a cause on Facebook but not actually

do anything about it. This is because real activism, according to Gladwell, requires strong personal ties which are forged in person, where as social networks are built around weak ties and therefore do not form the basis for effective activism. Citing examples from U.S. history, he stated that, "events in the early 1960s became a civil-rights war that engulfed the South for the rest of the decade – and it happened without email, texting, Facebook, or Twitter."

"We seem to have forgotten what activism is," wrote Gladwell. The problem here is that Gladwell's argument is constrained by his narrow definition of activism, which is limited to street protests and direct action. Activism, especially in the Arab World, has also been about changing people's perspectives of their governments, fostering previously forbidden debate (which in itself is an act of defiance under authoritarian regimes) on citizenship issues; in this respect, the revolution is being tweeted as we speak.

Are the Sceptics Asking the Wrong Questions?

Egyptian blogger Hani Morsi offers a thoughtful critique of Gladwell's article in a 2-part blogpost entitled "The Virtualization of Dissent: Social Media as a Catalyst for Change,"[4] and outlines social media's role in providing change.

Morsi's response to Gladwell is that instead of asking, "Is social media necessary for popular uprsing?", the question should be, "Is digital activism a true catalyst for social change?"

Morsi starts with the April 6 Youth Movement in Egypt and the Iranian Green Revolution, activist movements which relied substantially on social media, namely Facebook and Twitter, to publicize their views, mobilize citizens and also crucially to organize their activities.

In Egypt, according to Morsi, social media played a role in reviving a dormant public consciousness and involving it in a dynamic social discourse. Social media has had a long-term influence since the controversial presidential elections of 2005; the use of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube did not

suddenly come into use during the 18 days of the revolution. Rather, 25 January 2011 was just the "boiling point" reached after several years of increasingly vocalized dissent, both virtual and

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real. The process of the virtualization of dissent means that vocalized dissent shifted from real space, where it had gone into hibernation, to a space that, "the Patriarchs do not understand: virtual space," and then back to, "real space in the form of strong confrontational popular action." Because the regime could not understand or grasp this space, it first tried to detain and intimidate digital activists, and then ultimately, during the revolution, completely shut down the medium, "a move which only betrayed how weak they [had] become and added fuel to the fire."

Morsi adds that digital activists who shifted confrontation against the regime from real space to virtual space are mostly not representative of the vast majority of Egyptians; the profile is usually of a "young, educated, tech-savvy middle/upper-middle class." However, "this minority… spoke for all of Egypt."

"By taking the war for reform to their virtual turf, away from the regime's clamp down on political action in real space, then funnelling it all back out to real space in the form of a mighty wave of revolt, they have reclaimed Egypt."

Egyptian blogger and activist Ahmad Gharbeia complements this view of how the January 25 Revolution and the activism of the past few years in Egypt are directly linked:

"Everything activists did during the

past ten years was a step towards where we are today, 5-person protests in the street that were crushed seconds later by hundreds of police soldiers; human rights campaigns, etc. The great conversation on the Internet, that started on forums and mailing lists and later became all-encompassing on the blogosphere, was crucial. Even our open-source events: they helped revolutionize the youth against an archaic, unjust and inefficient system, or way of doing things."[5]

And on the link between offline and online activists, Gharbeia says:

"In most cases they were the same. Many activists were introduced to activism and incorporated in the groups of activists by first making contact on the web. The Internet was a medium of theorizing, campaigning and organizing. All in all, it was a method of 'activating' the community."

He adds:

"Some of us have been proposing for long that 'blogging' was just the name of the phase, and that we should not limit ourselves to a certain, temporal technology. This is like asking a hundred years ago about, "the role the telephone will play in revolutionizing the word."

Most bloggers agree though that there is a danger in overplaying the role of social media in Arab revolutions. As Saudi blogger Ahmed Al-Omran says:

"Many analysts would like to overplay the role of social media in the recent uprising for two reasons: a) providing a simple narrative of events instead of digging deeper into the complexities

of the revolutions; b) it's sexy. It's far sexier to call this 'The Twitter Revolution' instead of trying to explain what actually happened. I believe that social media played an important role in helping people to organize and communicate in these uprisings, but in the end it was the people's will and determination that has overthrown the dictators."[6]

As Palestinian-American social media expert and founder of www.7iber.com Ramsey Tesdell says:

"While social media usage has recently exploded, it must be noted that social media is just a tool used to organize and distribute information. It may be faster and more fun than other tools, but they remain just tools."[7]

The continuous oppression of the Arab people, the lack of government transparency and unemployment are the real motivating factors

> What the Arab revolutions, uprising and protests have injected into the social media debate is that activism should be taken as a whole.

behind demands for political reform. People are using new social tools to create new public spaces of expression to call for change. Tesdell reminds us that ultimately,

"Tools are just tools and without us human beings, sharing, listening and creating new information, then they are just tools. The motivation for the revolutions was political, social and economic, not because we have Facebook and Twitter... These tools did help bring mainstream media attention to the issues and this helped

dramatically as more and more people became involved and pushed the revolutions to the tipping point."

Convergence of Medias and Activisms

What the Arab revolutions, uprising and protests have injected into the social media debate is that activism should be taken as a whole, and that there should not be a differentiation between traditional and digital activism, as if there were no continuity between them and each occured

> Ownership of the Arab revolutions will always belong to the Arab people, and not to Facebook or Twitter.

in isolation. Every age brings with it newer, faster and more powerful tools of communication. Thus, a better way of understanding how the Arab revolutions came about is to consider that traditional activism was enhanced, amplified and empowered by digital tools.

Moreover, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc., cannot be separated from Al-Jazeera, not just in terms of affecting the course of uprisings and revolutions (Al-Jazeera's live capture of iconic scenes and its broadcast of citizen-shot videos initially uploaded onto YouTube played a major role in the "branding" of the revolutions) but also the rapid spread of information, videos, testimonies, etc. We should also mention the live blogs of major international TV stations and newspapers, such as the BBC and the *Guardian* newspaper, which also played an important role in gathering information and facts on the ground, as well providing considerable space for citizen voices in the uprisings. This is the new age of mass communication: multiple sources of information which are also conduits for change and expression.

Both the fanciful branding of revolutions as "Facebook revolutions," and the outright dismissal of the role of social media and blogs in revolutions, miss the point. The former

over-praises the tool while ignoring the people wielding it, and the latter places too much emphasis on individuals and disregards the tools they used to disseminate information and organize action. Conceptually, it has to be understood that social media is an intrinsic part of the lives of many Arab people, especially younger generations, and thus can no longer be separated from other forms of communication, expression or action. Ownership of the Arab revolutions will always belong to the Arab people, and not to Facebook or Twitter or any of the other online tools. But we can also praise the often ingenious way in which digital activists and even ordinary citizens used these

tools to analyze, expose and mock authoritarian regimes, which helped keep alive a spirit of resistance among young people.

Endonotes

[1] Comments during interview by author.

[2] Rami Khouri, "When Arabs Tweet." *The New York Times*, 22 July 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/23/opinion/23iht-edkhouri.html?_r=1

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[4] Hani Morsi, "The Virtualization of Dissent: Social Media as a Catalyst for Change," 15 February 2011. http://www.hanimorsi.com/blog/index.php/archives/2011/02/15/the-virtualization-of-dissent-social-media-as-a-catalyst-for-social-change-part-one-why-gladwell-is-wrong/

[5] Interview conducted on 10 March 2011.

[6] Interview conducted on 2 March 2011.

[7] Ibid.

Digital Activism:
Arabs Can Do It Themselves

Interview with Sami Ben Gharbia

Sami Ben Gharbia

Sami Ben Gharbia is a Tunisian blogger and human rights campaigner. His is advocacy director at Global Voices, and co-founder of nawaat. org, a Tunisian collective blog about news and politics. He wrote the first Tunisian e-book "Borj Erroumi XL. – Voyage dans un Monde Hostile" about his forced exile from Tunisia. His platforms and projects are, among others: samibengharbia. com, nawaat.org, twitter. com/ifikra, cybversion.org and babtounes.com.

PERSPECTIVES: You have returned to Tunisia after 13 years of exile. What made you leave the country and return?

BEN GHARBIA: In 1998, the Tunisian police arrested and interrogated me on the grounds that I had studied in Iran. I visited Iran because

> Nawaat.org is an independent collective blog on Tunisia.
> It was launched in order to provide a public platform for oppressed voices and debates. Today, it provides information on the Tunisian revolution.

I was interested in political Islam and how the revolution had developed there. I also wanted to understand how this process transformed into a dictatorship. When I was summoned again to the Interior Ministry, I fled first to Libya. Then a long odyssey through several countries followed, until I finally ended up in Holland where I was granted asylum. It was the revolution that brought me back to Tunisia. Ten days after Ben Ali left Tunisia, it was officially announced that political refugees could enter the country. I immediately applied for a passport which I received within a day, packed my bags and came back here.

PERSPECTIVES: What are you doing right now?

BEN GHARBIA: I'm catching up with family and friends who I haven't seen in 13 years. There are many people I left behind here, others who have gone into exile as well and are now coming back. It is a very emotional time for me. For many years, writing has been the only means of expressing myself and dealing with exile. I'm still in a state of utter surprise that the revolution that is now spreading throughout the Arab world, started in Tunisia. I didn't expect it, and now suddenly my life has changed. For the moment I cannot plan, I still have to get adjusted to the new reality. But, of course, I'm very busy working on the media and providing information and analysis about developments in Tunisia. There is actually no time to do anything else. So many things are happening every day that it consumes all of my time to stay on top of events.

PERSPECTIVES: When and why did you become an Internet activist?

BEN GHARBIA: I first got connected to the Internet when I was applying for asylum in Holland. I had to research information about human rights violations in Tunisia in order to make my case. This is also how I came into contact with Tunisian organizations and activists. I began to write on the Internet and engage in digital activism. Later I set up my own blog and joined the organization Global Voices, which is a platform for non-Western blogs. In 2004 I co-founded Nawaat.org.

PERSPECTIVES: What is Nawaat.org about?

BEN GHARBIA: Nawaat.org is an independent collective blog on Tunisia. It was launched in order to provide a public platform for oppressed voices and debates. Today, it provides information on the Tunisian revolution, culture, socio-economic and political developments, corruption, governance and issues of

censorship. Most of the coverage of Al-Jazeera that you see on Tunisia is provided by us through our Posterous[1] alerts blog hosted at 24sur24.posterous.com. We made available for them the footage, and translated and contextualized much of the Facebook communication about the Tunisian revolution.

PERSPECTIVES: Why does an Arab-language news channel like Al-Jazeera need translation of Tunisian Facebook communication?

BEN GHARBIA: The Tunisian Facebook world is actually quite difficult to access for non-locals, even for other Arabs. Facebook users here communicate in Tunisian dialect, which in addition is written in Latin.

PERSPECTIVES: A long-standing idea of yours is to encourage the linkage between digital activism and what you call "offline activism." Is this not precisely what happened during the current revolutions?

BEN GHARBIA: Yes. We still have to assess how far the connection between Internet-based activism and other forms of activisms was shaped, which aspects are successful and where it should be improved. But the group that we, Global Voices and Heinrich Böll Foundation, brought together during the two Arab Bloggers Meetings that took place 2009 and 2010 is now at the heart of the struggle in the different Arab countries. There are of course many other bloggers, but the many activists that we gathered in this group are the ones that currently facilitate Internet connectivity, get the information out and network both among each other and with the mainstream media. We have all been virtually connected, but the face-to-face experience at the Arab Bloggers Meetings was very important. Now, Ali Abdulemam, for example, who had been imprisoned in Bahrain and was just freed,[2] is not only a fellow blogger

who I defend as an activist, but he has become a friend. We spent time together in Beirut, we had a drink and chatted. There was great diversity in dialects and backgrounds, and yet a common cause. These personal encounters create a very strong sense of solidarity.

PERSPECTIVES: There is now a great deal of international attention on Arab bloggers and Internet activists. Do you feel the pressure increasing?

BEN GHARBIA: Yes, absolutely. Social media is very fashionable at the moment. Every day I receive dozens of mails, asking me for

> Let's not forget that the social media are a big business. Many international agencies sustain themselves through training and consultation.

the contacts of bloggers to invite them to international conferences. I could open an agency and live very well from only facilitating such contacts. I receive numerous requests for interviews and appearances on TV. I'm not very keen on that, therefore I've started to refuse most of them. There was a time when I opted for publicity because it was only us bloggers and activists in exile who were able to speak out freely and influence public opinion. But now people within Tunisia can express themselves, as well. Therefore, I try to step back and give others the chance to speak. There are also representatives of all kinds of international organizations and donors, who are now flowing into the country to explore possibilities for funding and training.

PERSPECTIVES: Aren't there are enough media-savvy Tunisians and Arabs, so that this expertise could be provided within the country or at least within the region? Or are international trainers needed?

BEN GHARBIA: Of course we have this expertise in the region. But let's not forget that the social

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[1] Posterous (www.posterous.com) is a basic blogging platform which integrates posting to other social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. [Editor's note]

[2] The latest news is that Ali Abdulemam has gone missing in Bahrain. See Sami Ben Gharbia's alert, posted on 18 March 2011: http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2011/03/18/alert-ali-abdulemam-goes-missing-in-bahrain/ [Editor's note]

media are a big business. Many international agencies sustain themselves through training and consultation. And some international experts cultivate themselves as social media "gurus." There are also some Western donors that can be very insistant, especially American organizations, such as USAID, who seek to promote their agenda. I don't seek this kind of funding. There are activities that anyhow don't need financial support, like blogging

> If it is possible to put constraints on the export of weapons into conflict zones, why can't there be prohibitions on exporting censorship software to authoritarian regimes?

itself. As for activities that need support, such as training and meetings, I prefer to stay with more independent institutions that don't impose their political views. The current revolutions have shown that Arabs can do it themselves. It was also a different experience from, for example, the Green Revolution in Iran, which took place in an international political climate that strongly rejects the Iranian regime. Our revolutions, rather, took place despite Western support for our dictators. We want to continue this independence from external intervention, be it political tutelage or aggressive "assistance" for democratic transformation.

PERSPECTIVES: Some analysts interpret the social media as being a part of U.S. "soft power." Do you agree with this view?
BEN GHARBIA: No. The Tunisian revolution and, as far as I know, the Egyptian one, are homegrown, grassroots and independent movements that don't even have any kind of centralized leadership. The media are tools, and this is how they should be understood. The Western media tend to mystify the use of new information technologies and exaggerate their role.

Sami Ben Gharbia
source: shareconference.net

PERSPECTIVES: There are several Western companies producing software that are used for online censorship. How, in your view, should they be dealt with?
BEN GHARBIA: It is natural that companies aim mainly to make profit. As long as they are not restricted or criticized, they will not stop producing and exporting such software to repressive regimes. The problem with these programs is that there is hardly any awareness. The Palestinians, for example, are very aware of the international companies that support the Israeli occupation or settlements, and they initiate campaigns and boycotts. There is nothing similar in the region with regards to software that is used for the suppression of freedom of expression. The information needs to be spread. There should also be criteria for prohibiting the export of such software when it is obvious that they will be used to silence dissent. If it is possible to put constraints on the export of weapons into conflict zones, why can't there be prohibitions on exporting censorship software to authoritarian regimes?

PERSPECTIVES: Can you give examples of such software?
BEN GHARBIA: There is, for example, the program SmartFilter, produced by the American company Secure Computing and now acquired by McAfee. SmartFilter is being used to censor online content in many repressive countries such as the UAE, Sudan, Iran and Tunisia. Websens is also used to censor the Internet in Yemen.

PERSPECTIVES: Programs such as Facebook themselves can be also used to track down activists, correct?

BEN GHARBIA: Yes, of course. This is why it is very important for Internet users and activists to know how to use these technologies. There are many features in place to protect a user's privacy and security. The problem is that, for example, Facebook's list of regulations and instructions is so long that nobody reads it. This is why we offer security training for Internet

> Facebook's list of regulations and instructions is so long that nobody reads it. This is why we offer security training for Internet activists.

activists. But at the end of the day, users have to develop awareness on what can happen if they use these technologies. This also applies to legal regulations that force social media companies to forward personal data to the authorities.

PERSPECTIVES: Tunisian Internet activist Slim Amamou, who had been imprisoned prior to the revolution, has been appointed State Secretary for Youth and Sports. In your view, was the step from blogger to member of the government the right one?

BEN GHARBIA: Well, let me tell you what I also told him. I find it problematic that an activist accepts a post in a controversial interim government, where he sits around a table with figures which were part of the former regime. Many ministers resigned from the first and second interim governments because of this reason, but Slim has chosen to stay. The recent clashes and the consequent resignation of Prime Minister Ghanoushi, who had served under dictator Ben Ali, indicate that people do not want to see these faces anymore. Amamou has faced severe criticism by Tunisian bloggers for his decision to join and stay in the government. I do not want to paint an entirely negative picture. Of course the appointment of an Internet activist to the political leadership is generally a good sign, if this person is not merely used as a fig-leave to create legitimacy. But we haven't seen any positive results from his presence in government. We don't even know what his tasks are and what he is doing, and until now no roadmap on media and freedom of expression issues has been publicized. If he uses his position to exert pressure on the government to deal with these issues, it would be a good sign. But this doesn't seem to be the case yet.

Interview by Layla Al-Zubaidi, 28 February 2011

Slim Amamou – From Digital Activist to State Secretary

For hours he has been sitting on a plastic chair with his hands cuffed, secret service officers yelling at him. They want him to give up the damn password to his e-mail account. They took away his white smartphone, searching for contacts and compromising text messages. It is not the first time that the 33-year-old software developer Slim Amamou has been arrested and held at the infamous Ministry of the Interior on Avenue Bourguiba in the center of Tunisia's capital Tunis.

Somewhere down the corridor, Amamou can hear a woman screaming. They have told him they took his sister, too. A doctor scurries

> The police who, early in January, had interrogated Amamou at the Ministry of the Interior had underestimated what a few clicks on his smartphone could do.

across the corridor. Amamou tries to fight his rising panic, tries to keep a clear head. He knows, they may stick him in a dungeon, make him disappear for years. For months, the henchmen of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali have had their sights on the Internet activist. Now they are accusing him of being behind the hacking of government websites. It is the beginning of 2011 and the regime is very edgy. Tunisia is in rebellion. All over the country, angry young men and women have taken to the streets, protesting against poverty and unemployment. The security forces are trying to quell the protests using batons, tear

gas and live rounds, too, yet the protesters will not budge. "We are no longer afraid," they shout at the police. Slim Amamou is considered a saboteur, an enemy of the state, someone who has caused all this uproar.

A few weeks later Slim Amamou is walking down Avenue Bourguiba. The sun is shining and it seems as if, in the middle of winter, spring has arrived in the Arab world; it is the spring of freedom. For some weeks now, the feared dictator Ben Ali has been in exile in Saudi Arabia, and his Egyptian colleague Hosni Mubarak, faced with the strength of popular dissent, had had to give up, too. In Jordan, Yemen, Algeria, Bahrain, Syria and Libya, people are fed up with their regimes, which oppressed them for so long.

Colorful graffiti on the walls of Tunis' white colonial era houses declare: "Long live freedom" and "Thank you Facebook." Amamou who, only a few weeks ago, had been persecuted as an enemy of the state is now one of the hopefuls, one of the people to lead his country to freedom. "Somehow I've still not come to grips with what has happened," says Amamou. Until recently, he had only been an anonymous online activist and now, all of a sudden, he has to pose for press photographers and shake hands with European politicians. On January 14, 2011, four days after the overthrow of Ben Ali and only five days after having been released from prison, he was appointed minister. Now he is part of the country's new transitional government, charged with preparing the first free elections in 60 years. In a country where 70% of people are younger than 30, the 33-year-old is Deputy Minister for Youth and Sports – a gargantuan task.

Eva Lehnen

German journalist Eva Lehnen writes for several journals and magazines and has reported from the Middle East since 2009. She is based in Beirut, Lebanon.

Amamou's white smartphone is ringing continuously, his finger constantly tapping on the keyboard. Cheap plastic shells with Internet access are the new symbols of power. The police, who, early in January, had interrogated Amamou at the Ministry of the Interior had underestimated what a few clicks on his smartphone could do. When they confiscated and turned on the phone and went online they had, within minutes, made the internet activist's covert arrest public knowledge. The mobile location app Google Latitude raised the alarm, as, on their screens, Amamou's friends could see his picture together with a map of Tunis and a pointer showing that his current location was at the Ministry of the Interior.

"We are with you, Slim. We'll not give up." The voice of young radio DJ Olfa Riahi was determined as she announced this on Tunisian radio station Express FM. Then she played Bob Dylan's *Blowing in the Wind*. Thousands of Tunisians heard her at cafés, inside taxis, at their businesses and online. Amamou may have been in jail, but he was still a step ahead of the regime.

For years the computer engineer has believed that modern technology is not just good for building shopping portals or music download websites, but that it is a means to organize political resistance and that people like himself will be able to beat their oppressors by intelligently using the Internet. In the long run, they will be more effective than all the power at the state's command and the pressure they are able to exert peacefully will be able to overcome all repression.

This is just what happened in the days before the dictator's downfall. It was the third week of the uprising in Tunisia. For days, in the cities, the police had attacked demonstrators using tear gas and live rounds; thousands had been arrested. And now the dictator's henchmen had begun to reach out for the Internet, too. With phishing attacks, they grabbed activists' passwords to their e-mail and Facebook accounts and deleted them. Helpless, many Tunisians could only watch as critical remarks

Slim Amamou

they had posted disappeared as if erased by an invisible hand.

Just then, out of the obscure depths of the Internet, a friendly force came to their aid. Within only a few hours it had knocked out the websites of the prime minister, the president, the foreign minister, the stock exchange, and of four other government agencies. Wherever it appeared it left a black pirate ship as its signature, always followed by the same message: "An open letter to the government of Tunisia. Greetings from Anonymous. (…) Like a fistful of sand in the palm of your grip, the

> Anonymous isn't a club – you can't apply for membership. Anonymous is an idea. It doesn't matter whether someone's Tunisian, Egyptian, Japanese or German. The Internet is the new nationality.

more you squeeze your citizens the more they will flow right out of your hand. The more you censor your own citizens the more they shall know about you and what you are doing. (…) Continue your oppression and this will just be the beginning." Where did these online pirates come from and who are they? Is Amamou part of Anonymous?

Instead of answering, the minister in his corduroy jacket and hoodie says conspiratorially: "Anonymous isn't a club – you can't apply for membership. Anonymous is an idea. It doesn't

matter whether someone's Tunisian, Egyptian, Japanese or German. The Internet is the new nationality." For years, online activists like him have been networking and working for a

> Up until now, in the Arab world, it seemed there were only two ways for getting rid of dictators. Either the U.S. would set its military machine, the largest in world, in motion, as happened in 2003 in Iraq, or one had to wait.

revolution in the Arab world. "We knew it would happen – just not exactly where and when."

In a region containing some hundreds of million of people harrowed by dictators and at the end of their tether, a region where rage is rife and governments try everything to control the Internet, for some time the question has been: When will a critical mass be reached? Amamou explains: "Once you have a certain number of users, state surveillance will fall apart. There will be ever new web pages, new groups, news eyewitnesses, film clips – protests spreading every second." This sounds as if he were rephrasing Anonymous' motto: "We are legion. We never forget, we never forgive. Expect us."

That dictator Ben Ali would fall so fast surprised even someone as optimistic as Amamou. Last year, he speculated on his blog (just before it was blocked in Tunisia):

"In 2024, at the latest, we will have a new president."

Up until now, in the Arab world, it had seemed there were only two ways for getting rid of dictators. Either the U.S. would set its military machine, the largest in world, in motion, as happened in 2003 in Iraq, or one had to wait, as was the case with Ben Ali's predecessor Bourguiba, until nature had run

its course. Now, all of a sudden, the hope of democracy seems to be just a few clicks away. Tweets, Facebook posts, videos and web raids such as the distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks on government websites are the new weapons of choice to overthrow a hated regime: Programmers beat pistols, Twitter users vanquish terror squads. Traditional power structures are being turned upside down, and all of a sudden, people such as Amamou are in charge.

Every morning, somewhat outside the center of Tunis, he threads his way through a crowd of people congregating in front of his office on the second floor of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. A mother blocks Amamou's way, demanding jobs for her sons. Graduates wrapped in the red and white flag of Tunisia demand to be hired as teachers. "Right now, I'm mainly a psychologist, I listen to what people have to say," says Amamou. Right now, everywhere in Tunisia's capital, one can observe what it means when people, all of a sudden, feel free and dare to say what is on their minds. Day after day, in front of the Casbah, the seat of government, and in front of the administrative buildings people congregate to demand their rights: more jobs, fair food prices, higher wages. They chant lines from Tunisia's national anthem. They come to present their grievances, to tell their stories. And they do not want mercy for those who they associate with the old regime. The last one to feel their rage was Amamou's boss, transitional Prime Minister Mohammed Ghanouchi. Tens of thousands took to the streets until the former confidant of Ben Ali was cleared from his post. And Amamou? Also under Ghanouchi's successor, he repeats what sounds like a mantra: "Folks, the transitional government is working hard – please have patience. A whole country has to be rebuilt – this can't be done overnight."

So far, the young minister has not had time to arrange his own office. His brown desktop is empty, a conference table is placed lengthwise, and the old computer the ministry has given him is turned off. Amamou's smartphone vibrates

almost non-stop. He checks the display, puts it back into the pocket of his brown corduroy jacket. Right now, he only reads his e-mails once every 48 hours. "My head's all in one big whirl. Since my arrest, I've been going without a break. I'm completely drained, really."

Yet, he cannot rest. First, he has to find out how to navigate this new country, his new life. What is most difficult? "To face criticism." The fact that some of the old ministers look at him askance, as he does not wear a tie for government meetings, is less of an issue. Much more difficult to stomach are accusations

> Many Tunisians doubt that the transitional government will be able to achieve what millions desire. They are afraid that the new faces will follow old patterns and will not be working for the best of the country.

coming from other online activists, friends of his, who can not comprehend why one of their leading lights has changed sides: "Don't take this job – they're just using you," they say. "You're selling your soul!", "Slim, you're an idiot." Many Tunisians doubt that the transitional government will be able to achieve what millions desire. They are afraid that the new faces will follow old patterns and will not be working for the best of the country. Amamou, a beginner, too, is faced with criticism. Is he capable of managing his job in the first place? "I'm trying to take such accusations not too much to heart," says Amamou. "I tell myself, again and again, that it is a good thing that finally people dare to make their discontent public. What is the alternative? We've overthrown the old government and now we're supposed to look on as bystanders to see what the new one will do? This doesn't make sense. Plus, I think we're doing good work."

Still, Amamou has decided to withdraw from politics soon. "To know this loosens me up. I can say and call for the things I think are right without having to worry about my career." As soon as the first free and fair elections, the basis of democracy, have been organized, Amamou wants to resign and continue to work for his own computer company.

If this succeeds, will it mean that Tunisia's freedom has come thanks to the Internet? Amamou disagrees: "This is a label that has been applied somewhat thoughtlessly to the events in Tunisia and Egypt. Without the people who actually took to the streets, our revolution wouldn't have happened. And satellite TV's played an important role, too." However, so has the online community, a confederation without borders – all for one, and one for all.

When, on January 28, 2011, Egyptian Google executive and online activist Wael Ghonim was arrested at Cairo's Tahrir Square, Amamou feared for a friend he mostly knows through his online activities. Only a few months ago, the Egyptian, now known around the world, had helped Amamou to regain access to his blocked Google account. It's a small world.

On February 7, Amamou tweeted from his account Slim_404: "Wael Ghonim is free. Our love goes out to him and his family." "404" is the error message for web pages that cannot be found – for example because they have been censored to prevent people from accessing information. The idea most dear to Amamou is that free access to knowledge will be enshrined in Tunisia's new Constitution. In addition, he is working on new government websites, a network connecting ministries, and a platform for citizens to voice their grievances. Transparency is key. Those are seemingly strange activities for a Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports. Amamou is unconcerned: "Why not? In the new Tunisia the turf hasn't really been divvied up yet."

Just recently, Amamou has shown the Minister for Internet and Technology how to tweet. Many times a day, he will send news about his ministry to his Twitter followers,

admitting that he dented his new official car, reporting that Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi has asked him in person to stop tweeting live from meetings. What is Amamou's reaction? Four minutes later arrives his next tweet.

Hardly anybody in the transitional government has political experience. The new government, as well as the people, will first have to learn how to organize a democracy – and how to live in one. "On the one hand, I understand that the people out there hope things will move faster, that life will get better. On the other hand, I can become quite worked up when I hear some of the demonstrators' demands. What is somebody thinking who comes by to demand a pay rise? Do they seriously believe that that's the number one priority right now?" Especially in a country where new laws have to be drafted, old structures broken up, cronyism gotten rid off. Democracy is a gift but it is also a commitment – not just for the transitional government but for the people as a whole.

Amamou checks his watch, lunch break, he has to run. He has a doctor's appointment. Ever since the interrogation at the beginning of January, he has suffered from bad back pain. And how is his sister? The young state minister has a calm expression on his face. Ben Ali's people had lied to him. They never held his sister.

The Social Costs of Authoritarianism

Whither the Political and Social Movement in Arab Countries:
Can We Expect a New Arab Renaissance?

Adib Nehme

Adib Nehme is the Regional Advisor on the Millennium Development Goals at the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), based in Beirut. Previously, he was UNDP's regional advisor on poverty and project manager at the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs. He is a registered lawyer and holds degrees in sociology and philosophy. He is board member of several development organizations and has published extensively on human development, social policy, poverty, disability, gender and youth and adolescents.

Writing in the Heat of the Moment

As I write these lines in mid-March 2011, both Tunisia and Egypt continue to change their bearings as they seek to agree and approve promising initiatives aiming to establish new, democratic states. At the same time, it appears that Libya has embarked on a journey of armed military conflict with the forces of the regime confronting opposition forces. Indeed, the conflict has taken on an international dimension following adoption of the UN Security Council resolution and the launch of international military operations – although the direction in which this struggle is heading is still very unclear. Matters are also becoming complicated in Yemen, as domestic tensions continue to escalate and the specter of violence, tribal division and internal conflict looms over the country. Meanwhile, the joint armed forces of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) member states have intervened in Bahrain, as permitted under the GCC agreement, and a state of emergency has been declared. It would appear that relations between the regime and opposition forces – as well as relations between parties which support the regime and parties belonging to the opposition – have reached a critical stage. And finally, protest movements have also started in more than one city in Syria.

Conditions are changing at such speed that it is impossible to predict what the situation in the countries referred to above – or indeed in other, neighboring countries – will be by the time this article is published. This is one of the difficulties encountered by writers during times of major upheaval, and it transforms all attempts at prediction and deduction into a kind of gamble – a gamble which, nevertheless, must ultimately be taken.

For this reason, rather than focusing on the unfolding of events, this article will instead attempt to propose a number of elements for an analytical framework based on a review of the preceding phases in history, and to predict what the future outcome of this process of

> The agendas of most of the institutionalized national and international powers – that is, the traditional political opposition movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the development sector – remained firmly limited to demands, interventions and projects which were not characterized by any dimension of radical change.

transformation may be. We start from the conviction that the current political movement – which is usually referred to as the young people's revolution and which is taking place in more than one country – represents the starting point for a more profound process of transformation which will, in the end, be subject to a sociological and historical analysis stretching over long periods of time. This we shall attempt to explain by making certain assumptions in our exegesis.

Surprise

It is reasonable to say that the latest political and social movement in the Arab countries – starting in Tunisia and Egypt – has taken almost everybody by surprise, including the young people who initiated the uprisings and who may not have expected events to proceed as swiftly and dramatically as they actually did in these two countries. In the first instance, the nations in the North were the most surprised, especially the European countries on the opposite shore of the Mediterranean. But the political and civil institutions in the countries affected by these revolutions were just as surprised – in particular members of the opposition parties.

There is a common factor underlying this similarity between the attitudes of mind of the European countries on the one hand, and the political and civil institutions on the other, because both groups had, for different reasons, ruled out any possibility of political change in the Arab countries for the foreseeable future. Everybody seemed to accept the existing *status quo* – indeed, some even contributed to it. Consequently, the agendas of most of the institutionalized national and international powers – that is, the traditional political opposition movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the development sector – remained firmly limited

> For a long time, analysts and activists believed that secular value systems did not possess the same ability to mobilize people as religious or nationalist ideologies.

to demands, interventions and projects which were not characterized by any dimension of radical change. In particular, they disregarded any direct link between the political dimension and its bearing on democracy and human rights – in the fullest sense of the term – as well as any engagement with movements calling for change at the street level. They also neglected to analyze or even examine the question of the state and its particular characteristics: its pivotal role in creating and perpetuating tyrannical structures, and its systematic destruction of any prospects for democratic change. If they had engaged with these issues, they would have been obliged to confront the question of how to build a state and society governed by the principles of citizenship and civic responsibility (in the modern sense of these terms).

Revolution Without Intermediary

If we wished to apply a scientific, objective description to these revolutions, we would say they represent uprisings of civil society against statist regimes, and in this sense show certain significant similarities with the uprisings that led to the collapse of the Soviet system some two decades previously. Civil society started these uprisings directly, bypassing the traditional intermediaries embodied in existing institutions. This resulted due to decades of extreme oppression by the state, coupled with the *de jure* and *de facto* criminalization of any political or promotional activities by elements of civil society – especially in respect of political and human rights – which severely restricted the capacity of political parties and NGOs to take any meaningful action, by confining the latter within the narrowest possible boundaries and thereby limiting their effectiveness. The longer this state of affairs continued, the less effectual was the impact of these institutions.

Political parties – by which we mean primarily opposition parties involved in opposing the ruling regime – have experienced a general erosion of their civil engagement. They were largely tamed into becoming either part of the system or mere decorative facades. Most of the other civic organizations, which took a developmental approach based on human rights, effectively became captive to the exigencies of donor parties or toothless international institutions whose agendas had little to do with dismantling the steady encroachment of systemic rigidity and formal political stagnation. So it was

natural that once the forms of institutional expression became incapable of generating a civic pro-democracy movement driven by those institutions, civil society expressed itself without intermediary. Thus, civil society expressed itself directly as a broad mass movement of the people, transcending not only the modes of action available to NGOs, but also those of the political parties which were past their prime and no longer able to inspire loyalty or show leadership. Information and communication technology provided the practical basis for creating and consolidating networks, offering not only new and highly effective methods for leading and directing, but also methods for organizing and uniting political movements and popular gatherings.

The Secular Model Succeeds
Where Other Models Failed

For a long time, analysts and activists believed that secular value systems did not possess the same ability to mobilize people as did religious or nationalist ideologies. Consequently, attempts by civil activists to address very large groups of people were very timid and ineffectual. In the Arab world in particular, these activists did not attempt to transform themselves from active, well-organized cadres with good organizational and promotional skills and abilities into a social movement with genuine continuity, capable of proposing radical slogans. What happened in Tunisia and Egypt demonstrated that institutionalized civil society had committed a very serious error by failing to raise and transform itself from the status of organizations and networks into a genuine political movement.

Furthermore, previous attempts were held to form wide-ranging social movements, both at the national and pan-Arab level. In the past decades and in more recent years, such attempts were sometimes under the nationalist banner; nationalist in the sense of expressing solidarity with the Palestinians and their sufferings (most recently during the war on Gaza in 2008). They were also sometimes under the banner of Islam, which represents

a strong continuity of awareness and is firmly anchored in the public psyche both in individual Arab countries and across the Arab world as a whole. Such attempts had access to significant resources and funding, starting with a huge media interest, and subsequently passed through a state of legitimate anger and conviction that tyranny and oppression were affronting national and personal dignity, and resulted in rage at external and domestic aggression.

Despite this, neither the nationalist nor the religious ideologies succeeded in uniting all classes of society within individual countries. Nor did they succeed in generating a cross-border desire for change comparable to the infectious mood which spread from Tunisia and Egypt to various other Arab countries, and which was further intensified by adapting the slogan, "The people want the downfall of the regime," into slogans applicable to all political movements in all the countries concerned. Where the religious and nationalist messages had failed, the democratic secular movement

> Those promoting specific religious or nationalist ideologies, which innately represent the ideologies of specific social or political groups, were unable to persuade all classes of society to adopt these ideologies.

succeeded in communicating a message that transcended many of the divisions and differences between opinions and tendencies within particular countries. This message also successfully evolved into a collective message shared by countries in widely differing circumstances such as Yemen, the Kingdom of Morocco and all the other Arab countries.

For the Arab peoples, this is what made the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions appear complete, being revolutions for democracy in

the broadest meaning of the term, including the revolutions' multiple dimensions. In essence, the inclusion of all the various meanings and concepts associated with democracy and, rather than neglecting or rejecting national or nationalist aspects, incorporating them into this larger framework. Democracy is capable

> If we focus on the socio-economic axis, we identify ourselves, as Arabs, as belonging to the South, while Europe, North America and other industrially advanced nations are identified as belonging to the North. But if we instead focus on the axis of cultural identity, we tend to define ourselves as belonging to the East, whereas the industrialized nations belong to the West.

of this kind of all-embracing initiative, whereas by their very nature the nationalist and religious messages excluded both the abstract idea and practical mechanisms of a secular state. As such, they consequently failed to unite the various currents, tendencies and groups in the population as a whole, or across the social classes. Quite simply, those promoting specific religious or nationalist ideologies, which innately represent the ideologies of specific social or political groups, were unable to persuade all classes of society to adopt these ideologies. The success of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions – and the new factor in the revolutionary equation – is due to the ideas and demands of the social groups, which initially launched the diverse political movements in Tunisia and Egypt, and which were then transformed into a social project that united all of society behind it and in support of it. The secret behind the success of these revolutions is that they embodied a social project representing almost the whole of society.

The question as to whether the revolutions will encounter difficulties in the future – and it is highly likely that they will indeed encounter difficulties as they run their course – will be determined primarily by the extent to which this social cohesion may be eroded. If the cohesion is broken into multiple feuding interest groups, with each focusing on its own political message, then we will witness an abandon of the idea of democracy, along with the concept of taking turns in power and the ideal of building a truly civic state in the modern sense of the term.

Returning to the Project of an Arab Renaissance

In the current ideological and informational climate of the media, more than one duality exists in the various ways we define ourselves in reference to others. If we focus on the socio-economic axis – i.e., on the relationship between domination and subordination – we identify ourselves, as Arabs, as belonging to the South, while Europe, North America and other industrially advanced nations are identified as belonging to the North. But if we instead focus on the axis of cultural identity, we tend to define ourselves as belonging to the East, whereas the industrialized nations belong to the West. In the case of fundamentalist and reductionist religious ideologies, this latter duality is transformed into a religious duality consisting of the Muslims (ourselves) versus the rest (i.e., the Christians in the West and the Jews living in Israel). This religious duality represents a specific, more limited instance of the cultural duality between
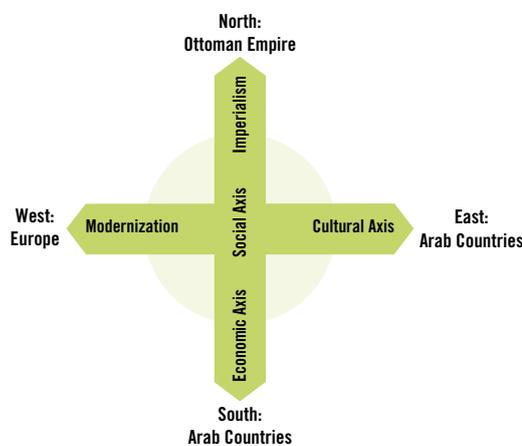
First Formative Phase. Arab Renaissance 1: End of 19th Century to Early 20th Century

East and West, and we shall not discuss it in this article, simply because it is already incorporated – in a general sense – into the broader cultural duality between East and West.

At present, no real distinction is drawn between North and West when national identities are defined, simply because both terms imply the same countries (Europe, America and the advanced industrial nations). But this has not always been the case.

If we examine the major historical periods, the Arab region passed through two formative phases of the greatest importance (and is currently, in our opinion, passing through a third such phase). The first phase was the phase of Arab Renaissance, extending from the end of the nineteenth century into the early part of the twentieth, and ending more or less concomitantly with the end of the First World War. Prior to this phase, the Arab world consisted of various societies and regions, most of which came under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. The Empire justified its existence on the grounds that it was a continuation of the Islamic Caliphate. At that time the various Arab countries had not yet formed nation states as understood in the modern definition of the term. Thus, if we were describing the situation in terms of the dualities mentioned previously – i.e., based on the concept of domination and subjugation – the Ottoman Empire would represent the North (the dominant colonists) whereas the various Arab societies would represent the South (the subjugated indigenous peoples). Because both the colonists and the colonized shared the same religion, the Arab peoples – in the words of the Arab liberation movement at the time – identified themselves as Arabs; that is to say, they identified themselves as having national identities that transcended and united their various religious and tribal affiliations and established the concept of Arab nationalism in the modern sense of the term. This was the only way they could gain independence from the Ottoman Empire and liberate themselves from its colonial domination, particularly as both sides had a single religion in common.

On the other hand, our European neighbors with their modern nation states were distinguished by their cultural differences, and by the fact that they lived in modern states built on institutional systems – they were modern Westerners as opposed to traditional Orientals. At that time, the relationship between the Arabs and the Europeans was, for the most part and in a general sense, not the relationship of imperialists to subjected peoples, meaning it was not a vertical (top-down) relationship. Rather, it was a relationship displaying varying degrees of cultural, institutional and organizational development. Consequently, the leaders of the Arab Renaissance at the time regarded Europe as an attractive model – indeed, they regarded the European system, and especially the systems underlying the modern nation state, as an advanced model compared to the outdated, decaying model of the Ottoman Empire. As such, up to the beginning of the twentieth century, the Arab Renaissance movement was built upon integrated elements, starting with the concept of pan-Arab identity as a desirable alternative to religious or tribal identity. This movement considered the model of European liberal democracy used to build a nation state – in particular the separation of powers, the concept of taking turns in power, as well as modern institutional and legislative frameworks – as the most appropriate model for Arab countries striving to liberate themselves from Ottoman rule. In addition, the European model boasted attractive, modern cultural concepts such as universal access to education, the rejection of habits and traditions incompatible with the modern era, the liberation of women, religious reform and other similar elements. At this stage, the term "North" referred to the Ottoman Empire and not to the European West.

The Second Phase: Building Nations After Independence

The end of the First World War did not result in the independence of Arab societies, nor in the creation of one or more independent nation states. Instead, Ottoman imperialism was

replaced by other forms of imperialism, this time as practiced by the European nations. This continued throughout the period between the

> By portraying Western liberalism as an imperialist project to be resisted, both nationalist and socialist messages also succeeded in suffocating any attempts at religious reform and the modernization of Arab societies.

First and Second World Wars and, in the case of certain countries which only belatedly won "independence," continued for about twenty years after the end of the Second World War. During this transitional phase certain parts of the State of Israel were established, then officially ratified in 1947 by a UN Resolution.

This phase laid the foundations for the second formative phase in the evolution of the Arab world, ultimately resulting in national independence and the formation of independent nation states. Arab nation states started to take shape at the end of the Second World War, and this formative period continued through to the 1960s in a series of political movements, rebellions and international agreements, as well as a number of military coups.

Broadly speaking, this second phase
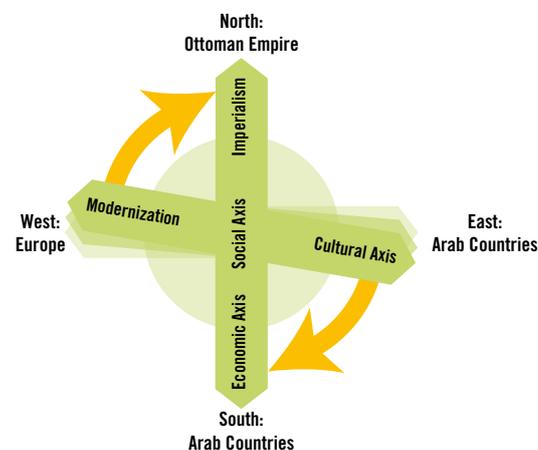
Transitional Phase: End of WWI to Independence

developed in more or less the same way in each of the Arab countries, as they shared certain political and cultural values despite their historical differences and differing models of government. Generally speaking, this phase was characterized by a gradual departure from some of the elements featured in the earlier renaissance, as follows:

- **Decline of the liberal political approach** and the concept of legitimacy conferred by the principle of fairness, the rule of law and a political system based on the division of powers. This was suppressed in favor of the revolutionary styles of populist legitimacy based on messages of national liberation, including opposition to Israel and neo-imperialism, as well as power blocs founded on a mixture of religious and tribal law.

- **Primacy of the state** in determining how social and economic growth and development should take place.

- **Decline in the importance of cultural and social dimensions**, including issues associated with social traditions, the liberation of women and other elements which were regarded as more important during the first Arab Renaissance. In the early stages, these elements were not deliberately treated in a negative or contemptuous way; they were simply neglected because they effectively existed apart, requiring continuity, management, protection and support. The dominant attitude at this time regarded the policy of liberation as a mixture of nationalist and socialist ideologies, and considered it to be sufficient for the purposes of overcoming existing divisions and discrimination by subsuming all elements in a greater struggle confronting major issues. The aim was to focus firmly on economic independence once political independence had been achieved, thereby building a strong state apparatus capable of confronting Israel and neo-imperialist

ambitions. In countries where the cultural and political structure of the regime was traditional, tribal or religious, modernisation had never really appeared on the agenda in the first place.

- **Decline in the importance of religious reform**. Indeed, the voices of the leading religious reformers fell silent, even though they had played a decisive part in the first Renaissance by expressing strong support for the model of a modern democratic state. Once again, this decline did not express itself in the form of conspicuous hostility towards this movement, but arose rather from a naive belief that the national resurgence would in itself be sufficient to transcend or reformulate religious attitudes. As far as the political aspect was concerned, the revolutionary political and populist ideologies did not regard Western liberalism or the sharing of power as desirable models in any case, but rather sought to establish a model of the Supreme State which later opened the door to tyranny and enabled rulers to perpetuate their positions in power.

The project of the independent nation state rapidly lost its relevance, and its political message – nationalist, socialist or traditional – also lost ground before a new concept based on cultural identity and fuelled by the blurring of the former distinctions between North and South, and between East and West. This blurring of

North and West: Europe

Cultural Axis

Social Axis

Economic Axis

South and East: Arab Countries

Second Formative Phase. Independent Nation States: from National Independence to the Present Day

boundaries occurred as the North and West merged in the Arab consciousness to become "the other:" a fusion of Europe, America and other industrialized nations. Thus we shifted to a unilateral form of reductive polarization, aided and abetted by the ongoing expansion of the concept of cultural-religious identity at the expense of both the nationalist and socialist dimensions, which had in turn played a part in suffocating the reformist, modernist messages of the first Renaissance – especially in relation to the creation of a modern state. Indeed, by portraying Western liberalism as an imperialist project to be resisted, both nationalist and socialist messages also succeeded in suffocating any attempts at religious reform and the modernization of Arab societies.

The Current Revolution: Start of a Third Formative Phase

The essence of the decline experienced by Arab societies over the past 120 years resides in the rejection of liberal democracy in favor of a strong statist regime, and in the absence of any impetus to modernize the social and cultural domains. On occasion, this has worked to the advantage of the nationalist and socialist ideologies championed by the state; at other times it has benefited fundamentalist religious ideologies or the Salafiya school of thought.

From a historical perspective, the change began in Tunisia during the first months of 2011, and swiftly expanded to include Egypt. Both Tunisia and Egypt succeeded in toppling their regimes through a peaceful protest movement which is still in progress as this article is being written. In my opinion, this change represents the starting point for a new historical phase which is coterminous with modern-day globalization. This phase is equal in importance to the two formative phases described above, the first (the Arab Renaissance) at the beginning of the twentieth century, the second (the drive to create independent nation states) in the second half of the twentieth century. Let us consider not only the general nature of this political movement,
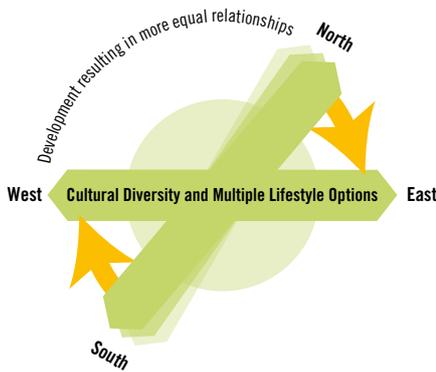
Third Formative Phase. Arab Renaissance 2:
Youth Uprisings 2011

but also the previously mentioned reasons why this movement has been so successful and spread so widely – reasons which include the demand for a modern, secular state with a model of governance based on dignity, justice, respect for human rights and the importance of taking turns in power. If we consider these reasons, we find that they represent a return to the ideas underlying the first Arab Renaissance, which revolutionary and traditional state policies subsequently neglected and marginalized. And yet these ideas were dominant after the Arab world achieved independence. What we are witnessing today is a reaction against the historical lack of democracy, a protest against the contempt for the democratic process displayed by the ideologies and regimes which ruled the Arab countries since the end of the Second World War. From this perspective, current events should be considered as the beginning of a movement which will result in

> The issue here is democracy, rather than stable, firmly directed governance.

a second Arab Renaissance during the era of globalization. This, at least, is my belief, even though I am very aware that this protest movement is walking a perilous path where it will encounter many obstacles and experience both advances and retreats. It will take many years for this movement to make its mark and

establish its demands firmly and irreversibly. But for better or for worse, the process has begun.

Concluding Thoughts

I shall now rapidly summarize the status of the current political movement and, for the purposes of this article, condense my ideas into a limited number of points relating to specific groups and issues.

The first group: International agencies, especially in industrialized and donor countries, and international organizations. I would like to suggest to them all that they carry out a genuine review of their policies and working methods, and also review their attitudes toward the countries and peoples in the region in the light of the changes which are currently taking place. These changes leave no room for doubt that their knowledge of the situation and its potential was very scant, and that their interventions, policies and programs were very inadequate.

Today we can see certain weak, hesitant signs that they might be prepared to admit their errors. But these will soon vanish again once matters move on to the practical implementation of policies. Heavy political pressure is being exerted on the Arab countries in order to force them back into conformity with the existing political, economic and social programs which were the cause of past and current problems in the first place. The group mentioned above is not acting in a way that genuinely acknowledges their previous errors. Instead, they continue to apply their former, inadequate attitudes and practices, starting from the premise that Arab societies and countries are mere markets, and thus, spreading the erroneous impression that people from the region are desperate to emigrate to Europe, or that they are all terrorists and should be feared. Finally, they continue to advise the Arab countries to return to neo-liberal economic prescriptions.

On the subject of economic and social development, here are a few suggestions to consider:

- Show real concern for the cause of peace in the Arab world, and especially for finding a just solution to the Palestinian issue;

- Refrain from attempting to impose neo-liberal economic policies, and instead actually interact with national and regional mindsets and priorities, staying away from models that were overthrown;

- Review the approach of international donor countries and parties in supporting development via financing mechanisms and development aid. In addition, review the existing approach toward projects and programs which have shown limited viability and may even create new conditions for local subjugation, as well as wasting energy and resources by pursuing dead-end strategies. This attitude should be replaced by a focus on genuine development achieved through structural changes to policies, frameworks and practices;

- Take into consideration the political dimension of the development process, and streamline that process by using clear language that is the opposite of the flowering, circumlocutory language used to circumvent the real issues at the heart of development:

  - the issue here is democracy, rather than stable, firmly directed governance;

  - the priority should be justice and equality, not just woolly "fairness"

  - it is essential to eliminate a state apparatus which lives on what it can loot, rather than signing treaties aimed at combating corruption;

  - it is vital to strive for equality between women and men in all spheres of life, not based on a particular "social standing" or "gender," or on cliques built on the social circles surrounding the wives and relatives of rulers;

- Finally, remember that our societies are passing through a genuinely formative phase, not some mechanical phase of transition from state A to state B, with known characteristics that can be calculated and predetermined by the group which is "assisting" us to reach state B.

The second group: civil society and its institutions in the Arab countries themselves. There are some important lessons to be learned from the current process of change:

- The organizations and institutions of civil society should have greater confidence in the power of secular government and the ability of a clear concept of human rights to engage the people and inspire movements of radical change. The present moment represents a historic opportunity – which may not arise again in the near future – to implement a democratic transformation and build a modern secular state founded on a real-life agenda, rather than one which seeks to ignore difficulties or complications;

- The conceptual distinction between the *institutions* of civil society and civil society itself is a theoretical one familiar to those working in the field. However, it has now become a practical issue, because civil society has expressed itself strongly and directly, bypassing traditional institutional and organizational intermediaries. Institutions and organizations need to find swift ways to converge back to the needs of civil society, both by abandoning their restricted organizational perspectives and by taking serious steps to transform themselves into social movements. Moreover, while the civil movement itself has succeeded in driving forward change despite a lack of formal organization, it must in turn take steps to find new structures and mechanisms. These mechanisms will allow the movement and

its various component groups to not only be able to exert greater influence during the rebuilding phase (which will follow upon the revolutionary phase), but also to play a significant role in the creation of a new state and democratic society.

The greatest threat to the current process of change is that the outdated, erroneous policies

> The greatest threat to the current process of change is that the outdated, erroneous policies pursued by the international agencies will once again combine with the complex social structures of Arab countries in such a way that restrictions are imposed on the modern, secular component of the movement for change.

pursued by the international agencies will once again combine with the complex social structures of Arab countries in such a way that restrictions are imposed on the modern, secular component of the movement for change. These restrictions will ensure that the abortive experience of the first Arab Renaissance more than one hundred years ago is repeated once again. If this happens, the current process of change will stall and the opportunity for a smooth, orderly transition to democracy will be lost, such that any such transition is at best slower, more complicated and more costly.

During this formative phase, the revolutionaries – and all other forces of change and democratic transformation – are responsible for ensuring, first and foremost, that the core issues are not obscured or abandoned; second, that they do not succumb to the kinds of pressure that result in the suppression of the secular, modern essence of the movement; and third, that they do not allow the seeds of future tyranny to be sown.

Translation from Arabic by Word Gym Ltd.

Arab Leaders and Western Countries:
Swapping Democracy for Business Interests

Ibrahim Saif

Ibrahim Saif is a Jordanian Economist and Secretary General of the Economic and Social Council. His areas of expertise are the political economy of the Middle East and international trade and structural adjustment programs. He authored The Oil Boom in the GCC Counties: New Dynamics Old Challenges (2009), and co-authored Status-Quo Camouflaged: Economic and Social Transformation in Egypt and Jordan (2010). He is affiliated with the Carnegie Middle East Center, the Economic Research Forum, and the Global Development Network.

At a time witnessing the collapse of Arab regimes – beginning with Tunisia and Egypt, with events currently unfolding in Yemen and Libya, an unprecedented shake-up in Jordan demanding a return to constitutional monarchy, demands by the Lebanese to abandon the confessional political system, as well as calls by Palestinians to end

> The period from 2002 to 2008 witnessed a sharp increase in the size of direct foreign investments flowing into Arab countries – with Egypt and Tunisia topping the list of countries receiving most foreign capital.

the existing political rift – important issues come into question. What is the West's (the United States and Europe) position on these shifts, whose core demands are undeniably democratic? How do these changes relate to the trade and business relations and shared interests of countries under corrupt authoritarian regimes, and to the United States and Europe?

Until recently, Arab regimes could boast of good relations with Brussels and Washington. Political and human rights dimensions were quasi absent from joint agendas; at best, they were alluded to in press statements and reports about the Arab countries. However, far from being core issues, political pluralism and increasing participation were often relegated to the background, while commercial interests and investment opportunities dominated and shaped relations.

Relations up to the Recent Past

There are three ways to build economic relations between countries. The most obvious are trade and investment relations, which amount to the size of import and export dealings between the countries involved, and which essentially encompass the service sector: financial transactions, tourism, insurance, transportation and others. For most countries of the Mediterranean basin, the service sector represents the largest percentage of the gross domestic product.

The second way comprises direct investments: The period from 2002 to 2008 witnessed a sharp increase in the size of direct foreign investments flowing into Arab countries – with Egypt and Tunisia topping the list of countries receiving the most foreign capital, whether from oil rich Arab countries or from Western markets investors. These direct investments contribute to developing shared interests between the parties concerned.

The third way involves employment and its restrictions, largely due to Europe's concern with stemming the flow of immigration through its borders. That challenge has shaped much of Europe's economic and foreign policies. It is therefore not surprising to see Libyan leader Gaddafi threatening Europe with unprecedented waves of immigration, should his regime fall. Whether accurate or not, Gaddafi's threats implicitly remind Europe of the services he has rendered. Indeed, despite Gaddafi's widely known suppression of his people, efforts have never ceased to bring Libya into the fold of

the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. No issue was made of the trade relations between Libya and Italy, or Gaddafi's association with Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi. These relationships garnered little media attention; as long as trade ran smoothly between the two countries, and investment deals were signed, political and democratic issues remained low on the list of priorities.

Rarely discussed, because they are harder to ascertain, are the bilateral deals between businessmen of the two regions that have a direct effect on policy-making. Within this context, one can point to arms deals between the United States, Europe and oil rich countries, with the clamor that usually accompanies them about commissions and lack of transparency. For example, the deal that secured the release of Abdel-Baset al-Megrahi, the convicted Lockerbie bomber, and the promises that Gaddafi appears to have made to then-Prime Minister Tony Blair, clearly indicate that principles upheld in public are forsaken behind closed doors. To this day, it is still unclear how that agreement was reached, but it is expected that businessmen and politicians on both

> 50% of Tunisian exports went to European markets, and the country attracted a large number of European investment companies.

sides sealed a parallel deal, which guaranteed important shares for British companies in new and yet untapped oil fields in Libya.

This, of course, is not limited to Libya. The collapse of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's regime revealed the extent of trade, investment and personal relationships between members of the French ruling elite and Tunisia's deposed government. The size and degree of Ben Ali's corruption were clear to the men and women on the street in Tunisia. The former president, along with his wife and people in their orbit,

had treated the country as their private enterprise. This went on while attestations of good behavior were heaped upon the country by international financial institutions. Despite Tunisia's characterization of rampant corruption and suppression of liberties, financial aid and investments continued to flow. The authoritarian system of governance was thus cemented, and was even marketed to other countries as an undisputable way to increase exports and economic growth. As a result, 50% of Tunisian exports went to European markets, and the country attracted a large number of European investment companies.

The same scene played itself out in Morocco. In cooperation with a number of European countries, Tangier's famous port was expanded into one of the world's largest shipping complexes, for a cost exceeding US$1 billion. This happened despite alarming figures on the indicators of income distribution, poverty levels, and unemployment. In a scenario also replicated across a number of other countries, businessmen working hand in glove with the authorities dominate economic capabilities. The country and its different apparatuses are held hostage by the interests of businessmen who have bent the legal system and laws to their personal advantage and that of their partners and allies. Again, this was a secret to no one: The United States' Free Trade Agreement with Morocco held no political or social conditions, but focused solely on the expected size of trade exchanges. The United States also signed an agreement with Jordan under similar terms.

A Free Trade Agreement was also signed between Bahrain and the United States – despite many observers' awareness of the precarious political condition in Bahrain, which lacks even the most basic elements of justice. However this issue was not enough to prevent the deal from being concluded.

Two years ago Egypt celebrated its top ranking on the indicator for improving investment climates, an award conferred by the International Financial Corporation (IFC) and the World Bank based on their Doing Business

Report. At the time, no one mentioned high unemployment rates, income disparity or the new slum neighborhoods sprouting at the periphery of Cairo. The rampant corruption raised no eyebrows. The path to investment was sacred. Trade and aid flowed, in an equation that was clearly unsustainable, yet the few who warned of an impending crisis were eyed suspiciously. They were discredited on the basis that they did not show "objectivity" in their reading and analysis of economic indicators.

As a general rule, Western countries do not support initiatives aiming at improving transparency and accountability in public spending. According to the Open Budget Initiative indicator,[1] oil rich countries were the

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least forthcoming in disclosing details of their national budgets, with most Arab countries ranking in the bottom half of the list. But despite that, no pressure to reform was exerted. On the contrary, the West showed, and still does, unjustifiable tolerance towards the conditions of instability in these countries. Meanwhile, the commercial relations (which are the easiest to measure) show steady growth.

One should not forget the financial aid provided to Arab countries, as well. Whether the aid is meant in support of the national budget, of military and security establishments, or of certain commodities, it proves conducive to preserving the authoritarian political regimes, and their various establishments.

International financing organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank advocate many of the policies that have led to the economic explosion in these countries. Thus, to some extent, these organizations are (indirectly) responsible for the

current crisis and late awakening in the Middle East, although this was not their intention.

Late Awakening

The talk about corruption in Tunisia, the bad state of the economy and social affairs, and the high rates of unemployment coincided with the collapse of ousted President Ben Ali. A similar situation occurred in Egypt, with the talk of freezing the financial assets of deposed President Mubarak and his family. As for Gaddafi, assets from his American-based investments valued at US$30 billion were already blocked in the United States, along with €10 million in the United Kingdom, and €1 million in Austria. As the crisis progresses, we learn that Gaddafi's investments in Swiss gas stations exceed US$1 billion. And the reports are still piling up about the fortunes of rulers who have been overthrown, and others who are currently facing real problems with their people.

Let us consider the commercial relationships between the West and Arab countries with bad human rights records. Most oil rich countries invest their oil revenue in American Treasury bonds, or across Europe. As a result, much is tolerated and overlooked, provided the Arab leaders endorse the West's policies in the region. With the exception of Iran, on which harsh sanctions have been imposed, there is no Arab country under financial or economic blockade. On the contrary, there is a race in the West to sign deals and contracts, whether in Libya or Saudi Arabia. In other words, the connection between democracy, improving public spending, transparency, enhancing good governance, foreign aid and investment became relevant only when spotted by the media, or when used to discredit and weaken governments or leaders. Thus, there is no real justification for the late awakening of the West and its attempts to display a more ethical side in its dealings with Arab regimes.

Legitimate Questions

The Arab street often wonders about the West's constant support of these dictatorships. Is the

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[1] http://internationalbudget.org/what-we-do/open-budget-survey

West unaware of the deposed presidents' assets and investments? Is the West not aware of their failed records in achieving development, or in promoting human rights? In reality, it is not difficult to figure out that business interests are the main motivators of the relationship linking the West to the dictatorial regimes. While it is

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important to comprehend decision-making processes in the West, under one-party-rule, such as in Tunisia and Egypt, these processes seem simple enough. The alliance between businessmen and politicians, in the absence of real mechanisms of regulation and control, was evident in the cases of Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.

In Egypt, the one-time secretary general of the former ruling party, Ahmad Ezz, is a businessman with extensive contacts inside and outside the country. A steel and iron tycoon, he often circumvented competition laws to preserve his monopoly. Ezz signed deals with his partners under the care and auspices of the government, as well as the financiers of "development." This calls into question the validity of aid programs, which end up buttressing a small number of businessmen in countries whose growing social tensions are not being acknowledged.

In Tunisia, the situation went beyond corruption and ensuring joint agreements. Tunisia was almost considered an exportable model: under authoritarian rule, it had still achieved high growth rates in its gross domestic product. The results were highly praised, but no attention was given to the narrowing of liberties and the political marginalization of some regions and sections of society.

The paradox is that the indicators were well within observers' view; many academics have elaborately discussed how aid programs contribute to keeping authoritarian leaders in power. The equation clearly privileged the alliance of politicians and businessmen, and had none of the intended effect on other sections of society.

Absent from the scene is another party – not Western governments, but Western businessmen – who actively lobby and pressure their governments behind the scenes to advance development programs and to facilitate trade exchanges and the flow of capital.

This explains the influx of almost US$70 billion to a number of Arab countries in 2009, with trade exchanges clearly tipping in favor of Europe – except in the case of oil.

One cannot discount oil and petroleum investments as main factors in shaping relationships between Western governments and Arab regimes. In Algeria, Europe's principal provider of liquefied natural gas, the state of emergency imposed since the beginning of the 1990s was only lifted in the past few weeks. This was not the result of pressure by Western countries, but from the domestic pressure inspired by regional developments. Despite the Algerian military's control of the principal economic arteries, and widespread corruption across the country, Western governments' calls for reform were timid. The same scene can be observed in Saudi Arabia, a strategic ally of the United States. Seldom do we here hear demands addressed to the Saudi rulers to implement reforms in the areas of political and women's rights – even though women's rights are an issue Western governments and agencies have actively been paying lip-service to when it comes to the region as a whole. It is a good example of these double standards, which call for democracy and pluralism, but ignore what occurs in those countries where the West has vested interests.

It appears that the West does not intend to draw lessons from the events in Tunisia and Egypt. The lesson should be that business interests must not replace relationships that are based on shared interests and devoid of

corruption and repressive political control. The current crisis has clearly delineated the limitations of the alternative. In order to regain credibility, basic principles such as political pluralism and human and women's rights must be prioritized over commercial interests. These have too long dominated the relations between the West and Arab rulers and their agents, at the expense of the people in whose name everything is done.

Translation from Arabic by Joumana Seikaly

The Revolutions of the Arab Region:
Socio-economic Questions at the Heart of Successful Ways Forward

Unexpected Revolutions?

The pace and rapidity of the change that the Arab region has witnessed since the beginning of 2011, both with regard to the level of mobilization of people from various social groups and its spread across the region, as well as the relatively short period it took to topple presidents and power figures that were long characterized

> While the pace and form by which change came about was unexpected, the achievements were an accumulation of the efforts and struggles of various societal factions and civil society groups.

as untouchable, caused significant surprise to various stakeholders. These include the people in power themselves, the international community and the allies of the Arab countries, as well as the people participating in the mobilizations, whether organized into various forms of civil society groups or not. That said, it was evident that the Arab region has been rapidly climaxing towards a certain kind of change. Indeed, the witnessed revolutions reflected the region's arrival to the climax of a period that compounded political repression and a lack of democracy with economic and social marginalization, high inequalities and the violation of rights. This was associated with high levels of corruption and the centralization of economic resources under the control of the few that were either part of the ruling family, party or close to those circles. Corruption and

lack of accountability, which sometimes turned the state and national resources into private property for the people in power, reached levels that could not be ignored or unfelt by the citizen.

The culmination of popular mobilizations in the streets and the ability of the people in the region to demonstrate in large numbers and demand change were not expected[1]. Before the peoples' revolutions, analysts often considered that the inevitable change in the region would possibly occur as a result of a combination of factors: shifts in the regional power balance, external political pressure and more intensive internal pressure from civil society groups. Mass popular mobilizations were sidelined as a probable factor of change. The ability of the people to reclaim their right to have a say in the governance of their countries and to defend their human rights was not a popular consideration.

While the pace and form by which change came about was unexpected, the achievements were an accumulation of the efforts and struggles of various societal factions and civil society groups, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, opposition political parties and citizens active in various forms of social and political networks. It is worth noting that since 2002, the region has witnessed multiple forms of political dynamism, although within a limited framework and impact. Several Arab countries organized parliamentary elections, others local and presidential elections. This was paralleled with a certain level of increased dynamism among civil society groups and political movements, who monitored these processes or took part in them. Several

Ziad Abdel Samad

Ziad Abdel Samad is the Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) in Beirut, a regional network of Arab NGOs active in the fields of social development, human rights, gender, and the environment. He is on the boards of several Lebanese and international organizations, such as the International Council of the World Social Forum and the World Alliance for Citizen Participation.

official and civil initiatives and calls for reform were taken, including the Sana' Declaration in 2004, the Alexandria Bibliotheca Declaration in 2004, and the Declaration of the League of

> Since 2008 several Arab countries – specifically Egypt and Tunisia – have witnessed new forms of social resistance at the community level, as well as in industries and factories.

Arab States Summit in Tunisia in 2004. This emerging dynamism was interrupted in 2005 by the international community's reaction to the Palestinian parliamentary elections, in which Hamas won the majority. These elections were perceived by the international community as an alarming sign that Islamic parties were ready to take power in Arab countries open to democratic changes. This gave the ruling regimes strong arguments to convince their foreign partners, mainly the U.S. and the EU, to compromise the demands for democratic reforms.

Since 2008 several Arab countries – specifically Egypt and Tunisia – have witnessed new forms of social resistance at the community level, as well as in industries and factories. These were spurred by the economic and social pressures resulting from the series of global economic, energy, food and climate crises. These forms of resistance erupted in communities that were not previously considered part of the organized social resistance, especially communities in rural and periphery areas that are far from the center of organized efforts by civil society groups in general. Among the factors that shaped the climactic mobilizations was the role of educated youth who were marginalized and excluded from the economic and productive cycles of their countries. Overall, the climactic popular mobilizations that Egypt and Tunisia witnessed, and toward which other Arab countries are

heading, cannot be explained by a specific set of factors, but ought to be kept open to be understood as a reflection of the amalgamation of various complementary elements that led to change, or that were conducive to change.

Neo-liberalism and Authoritarian Rule in the Arab Region

Neo-liberalism has been the basis of economic models and formulae promoted and adopted in the Arab region, as is the case in many other developing regions and countries. The former, now deposed, heads of states of Egypt and Tunisia, and the regimes they led, adopted neo-liberal economic liberalization unconditionally. This was one of the factors[2] that swayed the European Union, the United States and other international actors to extend their support to these regimes, even though these regimes' governance fell short of all the values of democracy, defense of human rights, socio-economic participation and transparency that the West claims to hold[3].

Neo-liberalism is built on an assumption that strongly links economic liberalization and democratic transformation. This approach claims that by undertaking reforms of regulations pertaining to competition, investment, dispute settlement, etc., new economic stakeholders would play a bigger role in the national economy. Under this pretext, international trade liberalization has been presented as a necessary tool for promoting human rights and democracy abroad, and ultimately for a more peaceful world.[4] It was part of the package, based on which external actors maintained their unquestioned support of oppressive regimes, to adopt this economic model. Yet economic liberalization including policies on trade liberalization, attracting foreign direct investment, privatization, tax reforms and overall economic deregulation,[5] have been applied by undemocratic regimes in a way that is detached from actual national development priorities, and thus became tools for monopolization of economic powers and resources. Indeed, in many Arab countries,

Kinda Mohamadieh

Kinda Mohamadieh is the Programs Director at the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) in Beirut. She holds degrees in economic law and public affairs from universities in Beirut, Lausanne and Los Angeles, with a focus on international development and nonprofit management. She specializes in international trade and development, social and economic policies, and youth unemployment in the Arab region, as well as human rights monitoring.

including Egypt and Tunisia, there remains a convergence between those in control of political power, the major economic actors, and the owners of national economic resources. In Tunisia, for example, economic resources were concentrated in the hands of the family of the former head of state. In Egypt, the economic elite was a wider circle consisting of investors and businesspersons close to the head of state, who themselves took political office in various capacities.

In addition to the narrow concentration of economic power, neo-liberalism and its instruments, such as free trade agreements and investment arrangements, also contributed to restricting the space available at the national level for participatory policy-making that engages local stakeholders and considers their priorities. This includes limitations on policies which favor productive sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing,[6] and restrictions on local governments' role in dealing with development challenges, such as employment and poverty eradication.

Developmental Questions Raised by the Current Revolutions

The revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt have precipitated processes of critical reflection on systems of political governance. Various stakeholders are part of this debate, including existent and new political parties, civil society organizations, labor unions and groups that emerged as a result of the revolutions themselves, representing a variety of youth voices and adopting various forms of organization. There has been much focus on issues like constitutional reforms, electoral laws and procedures, and the powers of the legislative and judicial branches, as well as dealing with authoritarian institutions such as security agencies, in addition to many other important steps for new and democratic governance. Tunisians and Egyptians are increasingly looking beyond specific individuals as the source of their political and social crises and are instead starting to tackle the institutional reforms necessary to establish democracy,

transparency, accountability and oversight, as well as to combat corruption.[7]

The sustainability of these democratic reforms will rest on the ability to establish a new basis for the relationship between the citizen and the state, rooted in the respect of rights, active

> Building democratic governance systems necessitates thinking about a new social contract.

participation, the existence of accountability mechanisms, and acknowledgement of mutual responsibilities. Indeed, building democratic governance systems necessitates thinking about a new social contract that establishes the foundation for a state that is rooted in the protection of human rights and the rule of law. Working toward a new social contract requires national processes of democratic policy dialogue and institutional reforms that revive the concept of consent or agreement by the citizen to social arrangements and public policies that are based on justice. This relationship between responsible and active citizens and accountable and democratic state institutions forms the complementary basis of a new social contract.

This, in turn, entails a comprehensive process of reforms on the political, economic, social and cultural fronts. Both of the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt have demonstrated the interlinkages between the political, the economic and the social. These revolutions, along with revolutionary movements in other Arab countries like Libya, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain were triggered by factors of economic and social exclusion and quickly grew toward mass mobilizations with political demands.

Economic and social questions ought to address the nature of the vision and model that is to be adopted by new governments and its relation to the developmental challenges that the region faces. Indeed, the United Nations Commission for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) noted that, "the current upheaval

in North Africa and West Asia represents a day of reckoning for the trade and economic policy choices made in the region over the past decades, and this is an opportune moment for these countries (and others facing similar pressures) to rebuild neglected public institutions so they can lead the process of reshaping economic and labor governance."[8] The disconnect between economic policies and the challenges related to governance and to poverty reduction – which include redressing social inequalities, creating employment and

> One of the institutional reforms for consideration includes a process that would launch a broad national dialogue on the establishment of a new economic and social model that reflects developmental challenges.

developing the productive sectors – have characterized the region for the past decade and were highlighted in several regional and international reports.[9] For example, in December 2009, the League of Arab States and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) called on Arab states to adopt a new economic approach aimed at constructing a new social contract. The report entitled "Development Challenges in the Arab States: A Human Development Approach"[10] recommended that Arab states undertake, "a shift from a growth model based on oil and raw materials, to the model of a developmental state, where the measures of success are the performance of the productive sectors, the reduction of poverty and inequality, and job creation." It also highlighted the need to ensure, "the right to food for all Arab peoples through a social contract that would commit rich Arab countries to support the process of eliminating hunger in the region as a whole." Furthermore, according to UNCTAD,[11] the current period

presents an opportunity for, "a re-assignment of macroeconomic policies for sustained growth in ways that trigger a virtuous circle of investment, productivity, income growth, and employment creation so that income gains from productivity growth are distributed equitably between labor and capital."[12]

Accordingly, one of the institutional reforms for consideration includes a process that would launch a broad national dialogue on the establishment of a new economic and social model that reflects developmental challenges, prioritizes citizen's rights and redresses exclusion on various fronts. Such a process would need to be based on "national ownership," which is one of the main principles of development effectiveness, and would necessarily be an inclusive process, on the national level, to elaborate economic and social visions, strategies and policy interventions. It would be characterized by healthy and inclusive national dialogue that engages policy makers, political groups, civil society organizations, and citizen's voices in general.

Questioning the Role of International Financial Institutions in the Region

International financial institutions (IFIs) have played a major role in shaping economic and social policies in various Arab countries. Contesting foreign conditionality on economic and social policy-making has been increasingly absent from public spheres in these countries. This absence is partly due to political repression and limitations on public participation in shaping policies, as well as the preoccupation of opposition political parties and civil society groups with fighting for their right to exist. Advice from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), which has often been supported and implemented by other international actors, such as the European Union and the United States, was readily received by authoritarian regimes.

The IFIs were at the forefront of shaping the Structural Adjustment Programs which developing countries, including Arab countries, adopted in the 1980s. A review

of IMF documents suggests for example that consecutive governments under Ben Ali's regime had faithfully abided by IMF and World Bank conditions, including the firing of public sector workers, the elimination of price controls over essential consumer goods and the implementation of a sweeping privatization program.[13] Similarly, the IMF has had a major role in Egypt since the 1980s; workers and farmers were especially hurt by the increasing prices and cuts in agricultural subsidies that were part of enforced conditions.[14] These programs promoted the reorientation of macroeconomic policies to focus on combating inflation, attracting foreign direct investment and greater openness to trade and capital flows, while marginalizing employment and equitable income distribution.

Overall, these constraining foreign policy recipes escaped the scrutiny brought by a healthy and vibrant political economy context,

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had local stakeholders such as political parties, labor unions and civil society groups been active participants on economic and social policy fronts.[15] It is important to note that in some cases, Egypt witnessed lively civil society debates on, and effective campaigns against, neo-liberal projects. This includes, for example, the move of the government under former Premier Minister Ahmad Nazif to privatize Egypt's health insurance system, which was halted by the Administrative Court (in 2008) as a result of a campaign by civil society groups.[16]

The Role of the League of Arab States: Failures and Prospects

Decision making within the League of Arab States (LAS) has been exclusively dominated by undemocratic and repressive governments. The LAS was thus unable to actively contribute to enhancing and shaping a constructive and effective debate around regional policies and cooperation. As its member states were – and many still are – detached from their citizens, then, as a regional institution, it also failed to address the challenges and aspirations of the people of the Arab region. Indeed, the inability of citizens to participate in national decision-making procedures limits their capacity to affect regional processes, as well. Yet, besides the unwillingness of the member states, the LAS also suffers from weak and ineffective institutional structures.[17] If democratic and effective, such structures could have played a role in critically addressing regional socio-economic and development challenges. Successive LAS summits, including the two Economic and Social Summits (2009 and 2011) issued statements but lacked the capacity to implement decisions because of weak political commitment and weak institutional implementation mechanisms.

Such failures in the role of the LAS reflects, in part, what came to be described as an increasingly introverted approach and role of Arab states, which limited their interaction with each other and, "ignored, dismissed, or rejected interaction with outside civilizations and different schools of thought."[18] In the near future, regional integration and enhanced economic cooperation could be an effective tool to re-vitalize national economies. Economic cooperation among Arab countries need not adopt a mainstream neo-classical model of economic liberalization. Future cooperation ought to be effectively linked to the development challenges in the region, and build towards a competitive bloc of Arab economies. An improved role for the LAS should be part of processes of reflection on the future of the Arab region. The role of Egypt is central in this process.

The Role of Civil Society Organizations in the Arab Region: Current and Future Prospects

For a long time, civil society organizations in the Arab region have faced many restrictions and violations with regards to their freedom of association and expression, and their independence. The civil society sector was being systematically destroyed by the regimes in power, seeking to restrict the emergence of any strong and effective opposition movements. The developments in the region have reinforced the role of civil society and social movements as key stakeholders in enriching and preserving the continuous struggle for democracy and freedom. The revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia signal a new era for the role of civil society

> Civil society groups face the challenge of shifting from a defensive position to a more proactive role in public life.

organizations and their standing in relation to political power and to public policy making in general. Yet, the old status quo still prevails in other Arab countries where civil society organizations are still facing restrictions and repression.

When it comes to the space and opportunities made possible through the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, civil society organizations face multiple challenges. During the current transition period, civil society faces the challenge of protecting the changes and reforms acquired so far and preventing a retreat from the process of democratic change. Consequently, they should continue to pressure for further reforms. Moreover, civil society groups face the challenge of shifting from a defensive position to a more proactive role in public life. They face the challenge of elaborating and promoting alternatives on all fronts: the political, social and economic. Indeed, civil society is much closer to the processes of policy making than before. They

have a major role in ensuring that reforms integrate concepts of justice, human rights, non-discrimination and equality.

Future strategies and work agendas of civil society organizations should consider engagement with the overall process of rebuilding the state, including setting the foundations for a new social contract. The process of democratic change requires an active role by civil society organizations in: reforming the constitution or adopting a new one; reforming legislative structures including the electoral, association, media and communication laws; and enhancing the right to access information, as well as other necessary legal reforms. Moreover, civil society organizations have a major role in questioning the economic and social policies that were implemented under previous regimes, and promoting alternatives based on inclusiveness, non-discrimination, justice and respect of human rights. In this regard, civil society groups should be aware of the influence of foreign interference in shaping economic and social frameworks. While cooperation with international actors, such as the IFIs and other donors and countries, ought to be welcomed, such cooperation must be based on clear national development agendas and should prioritize principles of democratic national ownership, mutual accountability and strong partnership.[19] This in turn necessitates a respect of national policy processes, including the adequate time, resources and space needed for establishing inclusive national dialogue.

The breadth of the challenges requires that civil society groups enhance inter-sectoral and cross-sectoral cooperation and shared thinking, as well as planning and working beyond the urban centers where activities and interventions have thus far been concentrated, thereby addressing rural and peripheral areas. They should also focus their support on voices and communities that are often marginalized from the policy and legislative processes, such as women. These challenges are linked to the ability to establish effective mechanisms of

cooperation with other stakeholders. These include emerging labor unions, political parties, social movements and community movements, as well as new forms of organizations that might emerge among individuals that were actively present in the revolutions, especially young activists. Besides providing national spaces

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of engagement, the ability to nurture regional spaces of exchange, thinking, cooperation and solidarity also promises significant added value. The spread of uprisings across the Arab region, carrying the same demands for dignity, rights and freedom, reasserts the regional dimension of the identities and a sense of belonging for the citizens of the region.

Finally, the role and the impact of civil society organizations ought to be objectively assessed based on the classic definition of their role: as by which they occupy the space between the state and the market, and not as an alternative to either of them. Thus, the incapability of the state to effectively play its role ought to be addressed by civil society organizations, whose activities can sometimes complement the role of the state, but never replace it.

Endnotes

[1] Similar views expressed in: Marwan Muasher (2007), "The Arab World in Crisis: Redefining Arab Moderation", January 27, Carnegie Endowment.

[2] Other factors include positions on the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, on the fight against terrorism, on migration issues (when it comes to the EU), and others.

[3] See Rym Ayadi, Silvia Colombo, Maria Cristina Paciello, and Nathalie Tocci, "The Tunisia Revolution: An Opportunity for Democratic Transition," MEDPRO commentary.

[4] Daniel Griswold (2007), "Trade, Democracy and Peace: The Virtuous Cycle," (April 20), http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=10712 ; It is worth noting that in 2001, the Bush administration called for the democratization of the Arab region through promoting bilateral free trade agreements.

[5] These are part of the package of neo-liberal policy reforms that came to be known as the Washington Consensus, see: http://www.cid.harvard.edu/cidtrade/issues/washington.html.

[6] See Bhumika Muchhala (2011), "The International Financial Architecture and Free Trade Agreements: Roadblocks in the Path to MDG Achievement," Third World Network.

[7] See Amr Hamzawy (2011), "What Egypt Must Do During Transition," The Pioneer (March 10), http://www.carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=42768.

[8] UNCTAD policy brief (2011), "Social unrest paves the way: A fresh start for economic growth with social equity," referenced by "UNCTAD: Social unrest - an opportunity to reshape economic policies," published in SUNS #7107 (14 March).

[9] See for example: "Development challenges outlined in new Arab States Report by UNDP and League of Arab States," (December 2009) http://content.undp.org/go/newsroom/2009/december/development-challenges-outlined-in-new-arab-states-report.en;jsessionid=axbWzt8vXD9%3E?categoryID=349423&lang=en.

[10] Ibid.

[11] UNCTAD policy brief (2011), "Social unrest paves the way: A fresh start for economic growth with social equity."

[12] ibid.

[13] Michel Chossudovsky, "Tunisia and the IMF's Diktats: How Macro-Economic Policy Triggers Worldwide Poverty and Unemployment," www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=22867.

[14] Gaye B. Muderrisoglu and Jonathan K. Hanson (2008), "Authoritarian States and IMF Conditionalities," see page 21.

[15] Research has shown that dictatorships are more likely to enter into agreements with the IMF than democracies (Vreeland 2003); see as source reference 14.

[16] See Yasmine Saleh (2008), "Journalists' Syndicate discusses 'historic verdict' on health sector privatization," http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/archive/journalists-syndicate-discusses-historic-verdict-on-health-sector-privatization.html.

[17] It is worth mentioning that the quorum in the League of Arab States was the total number of the countries and the voting process remained concessional until 2007, whereby the voting rules were changed. Now the quorum is 2/3 and the decisions can be taken with the majority of the 2/3 as well.

[18] Marwan Muasher (2007), "The Arab World in Crisis: Redefining Arab Moderation."

[19] These principles were core to the Paris Declaration and Accra Action Agenda, which the international donor community agreed to.

Feeding the Arab Uprisings

Introduction: The Food Regime in the Arab World

Since the first oil was struck in the Arabian Gulf, the food economy of the Arab World has suffered from a compounded "oil curse." For one, the surplus from oil monies and the lure of a service-based economy has driven the regimes to neglect the productive sectors such as agriculture, allowing them to degrade. Secondly, the availability of oil and other essential resources in the region has brought imperial U.S. interests and its Western allies into the game. Control over oil requires a strong military presence in the region, which is achieved through unwavering support to Israel, and by direct military intervention, such as in Iraq. It also requires subservient rulers. Thus, the U.S. and its allies have fostered Arab dictatorships since the end of the colonial period in the 20th century.

With the help of a small class of capitalists, Arab dictators have pillaged the Nation's resources. Most of their regimes have blindly endorsed the recommendations of the Bretton-Woods institutions for economic reforms, adopting a fundamentalist market-oriented approach to the economy. Through a lethal combination of corruption and neo-liberalism enforced by the iron fist of a myriad of security apparatuses, they facilitated the work of a compradorial business elite. The rich industrial countries of Western Europe and North America encouraged this partnership, which provided invaluable services in both directions: open access to Arab oil and mineral resources, and open Arab markets for imported goods from the U.S.

Among these goods, food occupies an important share and plays a crucial role. The ecological limitations on food production prevalent in the Arab World were exacerbated by national policies that deliberately damaged food sovereignty. Against this background, Western Europe and the U.S. readily deployed

> Free Trade Agreements and the pressure to join the WTO made the Arab world an easy open market for Western-based multinational food corporations.

food power, using surpluses originating from the European and American subsidies. Bundled within a nefarious triptych including Free Trade Agreements and accession to the WTO (World Trade Organization), subsidies provided cheap food commodities and animal feed, and damaged the local food systems. Free Trade Agreements and the pressure to join the WTO made the Arab world an easy open market for Western-based multinational food corporations. In some countries such as in Iraq, U.S. occupation gave free reign to U.S.-based corporations to control the food and farming sectors.[1] Never has the slogan "food for oil" – which is how the UN named its "relief" program to Iraq in 1990-1991 – carried more meaning.

The role of the subsidies-FTA-WTO triptych in destroying food systems in the countries of the South has been extensively analyzed and documented in a number of publications originating from international non-governmental bodies. For further details, one may refer to OXFAM's "Make Trade Fair"

Rami Zurayk

Rami Zurayk is professor at the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences at the American University of Beirut. He blogs on www. landandpeople.blogspot. com, is active in Arab civil society and writes a weekly column on food and farming in the Lebanese daily *Al-Akhbar*. His book publications include "From Akkar to Amel" (2008) and the forthcoming "Food, Farming and Freedom" (2011) and "The Empty Breadbasket: Food Shortage and Farming Crisis in the Fertile Crescent" (2012).

campaign,[2] which has produced numerous publications on the topic. A recent document by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, "Slow Trade – Sound Farming"[3] expounds on the uneven power relation between countries of the North and South and highlights the damaging role of farm subsidies. While none of the publications focuses specifically on the Arab world, evidence from our field studies in Lebanon, Yemen and Jordan indicates that for those Arab countries where there exists a potential for agriculture, the dumping of subsidized food has contributed to the demise of the local farming sector. In some of the poorer areas of Lebanon, the cost of harvesting and milling one kilogram of wheat can be equivalent to the price on 1 kg of imported flour. No wonder farmers chose to opt out from agriculture and to migrate to the cities where they become net food buyers.

The impact of the triptych has been the demise of an already frail family farming, but some aspects of capitalist agriculture flourished under this regime. Where the biophysical endowment permitted, export-oriented production draws heavily on non-renewable resources such as soil and water to produce perishable goods destined for the Northern palates. These include organic produce, winter tomatoes, out of season strawberries and cut flowers. The operation of these industrial

> Food rapidly disappeared from the list of popular demands, as people expressed their disillusionment with the regime as a whole.

production sites relies on farm workers who were previously small-scale farmers. They are often migrant workers and receive a minimal, if any, compensation package and social security. While they toil during the day to produce quality foods for elite niche markets, they themselves survive on a diet essentially based on imported processed foods, originating from the subsidized Northern surpluses. This exposes them to the vagaries of the global food prices and increases their vulnerability. We have recently reported on the condition of Syrian female farm workers in the potato fields of Lebanon.[4] Morocco has witnessed a similar transition, and the plight of Moroccan women farmers-turned farm workers in the tomato fields and orange orchards destined for export to Europe has been amply documented in a recent article by Raimbeau (2009).[5]

What Role Did Rising Food Prices Play in the Current Revolutions?

In this context, it is not surprising that a large number of analysts have quickly placed the sharp rise in global food prices that the world is currently witnessing among the prime causes underlying the Arab uprisings. The issue is pertinent: food prices are at their highest since the 2008 food crisis, and food commodities markets are set to continue to be unstable. In spite of the measures taken by the Arab regimes to dampen the impact of the crisis,[6] the real price of wheat has increased by more than 30% in the past 12 months.[7]

It is difficult to isolate food prices from the other drivers of the current uprising. In Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen the increase in the price of food as a significant component of the cost of living has certainly contributed to the initial mobilization of the people, especially in the less favored classes. However, food rapidly disappeared from the list of popular demands, as people expressed their disillusionment with the regime as a whole, rather than their need for cheaper food.

While there is no appropriate empirical method to validate any such proposition, an cursory perusal of the slogans chanted by Egyptian protesters, as compiled on the Angry Arab website[8] on January 27, 2011, reveals that out of 40 popular slogans, none addressed food or cost of living or services. Twenty were aimed personally at Hosni Mubarak, his son Gamal or the regime, six expressed the rejection of the normalization with Israel and the subsidized

sale of natural gas, six were nationalistic and praised Egypt, five were expressions of the need for freedom, five expressed steadfastness and two were anti-sectarian.[9] A similar survey of some of the slogans chanted by the Yemeni protesters dated February 17, 2011 revealed that out of 38, 24 were directed against the regime and Ali Abdullah Saleh, six were in

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support of the Egyptian uprising, two were calls for steadfastness, two were calls for freedom, one was in praise of Yemen, one was a call for peace, one referred to bread and food being a common demand of protesters, army and police, and one was a thank you to Al-Jazeera.[10]

In spite of the imperfection of the approach, it provides an insight into the expressed demands of the protesters. The millions who took to the streets or who took arms, as in Libya, are demanding the end of regimes which have exploited them for decades, and made them dependent and subservient and poor. They are not demanding cheaper food as aid; they are demanding the right for dignity, freedom, state services such as education, and employment so that they can afford the price of food. Rather than focusing on the micro-dimension of food prices, it is the systemic policy of control through dictators and a business elite that controls food and other basic needs that is being opposed. One of the outcomes of this systemic control is the loss of food security and food sovereignty.

Some witness and expert reports appear to confirm this analysis. A *Wall Street Journal* article covering the Egyptian uprising[11] reported from both an international NGO worker in Egypt and a senior FAO (the UN Food and Agriculture Organization) economist their convictions that the protests were unrelated to soaring food prices. The FAO economist confirmed that Egypt had absorbed the rising costs of wheat imports at an estimated cost of US$678 millions prior to the toppling of Mubarak.

Are These the Uprisings of the Poor?

Except for a few privileged elites closely connected to the regimes, all classes of society in the Arab world are yearning for their basic rights: the right to health, the right to food, the right to education, the right to decent housing and the right for dignity and freedom. It can be safely stated that the Arab uprisings involved all segments of society. Observations and reports by eyewitnesses and participants confirm that middle class youth was closely involved in the leadership of the protests. The "Facebook" and "Twitter" youth, as they came to be known, played an important role in organization and communication. But in places such as Egypt, where poverty is rampant and 40% of the population lives on less than US$2 a day,[12] there is no doubt that poor people were amply represented among the protesters.

There is, however, a strong element of class struggle in the protests, as has been perceptively argued by SOAS academic Adam Hanieh. In an extensive article, Hanieh analyzes the context of the Egyptian uprising and convincingly demonstrates that it cannot be understood without a full comprehension of the economic context in which it is deployed. Hanieh dissects the policies of privatization hailed by the IMF and underscores their implications on the impoverishment of a large segment of the workers population. He is one of the few analysts who have linked global food inflation with the systematic policy of inflating money supply practiced by the U.S. Federal Reserve and other core countries. On the other side of the political spectrum, George Melloan, writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, makes a similar assertion, and accuses the Federal Reserve of fuelling the "turmoil" in the Arab world through pumping cash into the system.[13]

In Egypt, the protests also brought together the middle class and the workers, who had been on strike for many years prior to the uprising. Egyptian journalist and activist Hossam El-Hamalawy echoed Hanieh's analysis in one of his articles published on February 12, 2011,[14] covering the role of the workers in the Egyptian uprising:

"All classes in Egypt took part in the uprising. In Tahrir Square you found sons and daughters of the Egyptian elite, together with the workers, middle class citizens, and the urban poor. Mubarak has managed to alienate all social classes in society including a wide section of the bourgeoisie.

But remember that it's only when the mass strikes started three days ago that's when the regime started crumbling and the army had to force Mubarak to resign because the system was about to collapse.

Some have been surprised that the workers started striking. I really don't know what to say. This is completely idiotic. The workers have been staging the longest and most sustained strike wave in Egypt's history since 1946, triggered by the Mahalla strike in December 2006. It's not the workers' fault that you were not paying attention to their news. Every single day over the past three years there was a strike in some factory whether it's in Cairo or the provinces. These strikes were not just economic, they were also political in nature."

There is little doubt that a similar process took place in the other Arab countries that are witnessing uprisings or a fully-fledged liberation war as in Libya.

What Next?

The Arab uprisings are rapidly turning into revolutions that may do away with the current political systems and their symbols. The recent developments in Egypt and in Tunisia, where the uprisings have achieved their initial goal of overthrowing the tyrant rulers, provide an indication of the shape of things to come.

Characteristic features seem to be a reorganization of the leadership and a raising of the bar when it comes to focusing and radicalizing demands. Little is known of the dynamics that have facilitated the spread of the protests. There were no clear leadership, and some groups, such as Islamist actors, which were expected to play an important role, had a low visibility. But the process itself appeared to be akin to a self-assembling dynamic network. Following the demise of the rulers, a new leadership is emerging, which

> It is expected that the more affluent segments of society will seek to retain their privileges.

appears now to be organized and aware of its negotiating power. It also became clear that the uprisings would not stop there. The protesters flatly rejected the regime's attempt at self-preservation by retaining some of its core administration. Instead, they called for judiciary enquiries into the workings of the repression apparatuses, stormed into the state security building and, in Egypt, were able to pressure the temporary military command to appoint a prime minister that received his credentials from Tahrir Square.

Returning to the topic of this article, class polarization seems inevitable. As the uprisings evolve and mutate into revolutions, the demands of the people may start to evolve and even conflict. It is expected that the more affluent segments of society will seek to retain their privileges, while agreeing to a change in the oppressive nature of the dictatorial one-

man rule. Those fighting for social justice alongside freedom and dignity will develop an agenda requiring more radical changes. There are reports[15] of such polarization occurring in Tunisia, where the middle class was opposed to the stepping down of Ben Ali's Prime Minister Ghannoushi and accused the trade unions and the left of blocking the way to "normalcy." It is expected that similar class-based confrontations will take place in Egypt, where the inequality is more pronounced than in Tunisia.

Where is Arab Civil Society in All This?

Civil society is neither the state, nor the market; rather, it is the space between these spheres where people can freely debate and take action to improve their condition. I use here the term "Arab Civil Society" to refer today to a highly heterogeneous assemblage with blurred, negotiable boundaries, and which may include entities with diametrically opposed ethos and goals. It is a space that is wide enough to include religious fundamentalist charity organizations and anarchist artist collectives.

Arab civil society organizations (CSOs) date back to the end of the 19th century but their number has escalated in the past 20 years, especially in Bahrain where it increased 400 times and in Yemen where it increased 100

> Notoriously missing from the formal uprising scene were Western-styled NGOs.

times. In Egypt, their number is in the tens of thousands. In 2002, the total number of Arab NGOs was estimated at 130,000 (Nasr, 2005). An important characteristic of Arab CSOs is that many were founded by former leftists of trade union leaders disillusioned by Arab politics. A number of them also serve as the social outreach network of religious groups.

The Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings were instigated by civil society. This was their principal element of success. Through spontaneous individual acts or organized activism, civil society rose up to the challenge and prevailed. The social networking was facilitated by modern communication technologies, and satellite TV channels, especially Al-Jazeera, was very helpful in conveying information and keeping the spirits high.

CSOs (as opposed to civil "society" which includes them) did not play as prominent a role during the uprisings as they did in preparation for them. For instance, the Kifaya (Enough!) group in Egypt was crucial in mobilizing people around the agenda of rejection of corruption and nepotism and demanding political change. Trade unions also played a similar role, but were more organized during the uprisings, and their demands were focused and deeply political. In Bahrain, civil society organizations, which critics of the regime have traditionally used as an organizing space, are leading the protests.

Notoriously missing from the formal uprising scene were Western-styled NGOs. These have been nurtured for many years by the West, and have been receiving lavish financial and technical support from aid organization, especially from USAID under the general headings of "democracy," "peace building," "gender" and "environment." Their lack of visibility may be due to the image they conveyed of being surrogate to the donors. This image undermines their credibility during a uprising directed specifically against an oppressive regime that was supported by the NGOs donor countries.

Aware of the potential importance of civil society, and of the limited role played by the U.S. minions in the uprisings, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton rushed to organize a "Strategic Dialogue" with civil society groups on February 16, 2011, in the wake of the Egyptian uprising.[16] It was symbolic that the only two non-U.S. speakers in the opening ceremony were from Egypt and Afghanistan. The Egyptian participant, who was introduced by Clinton as a "prominent activist," described Egyptian civil society as, "the permanent partner for the U.S. in the long run." His speech makes fascinating reading, and provides ample justification for

why the role of the U.S.-supported NGOs was and will continue to be insignificant in the deeply nationalistic Egyptian uprising.

What Role to Expect from the "International Community?"

The Arab People has undertaken a long overdue journey of self-liberation. The "international community" must refrain from interfering in this process, and from attempting to impose an agenda that cannot be, in view of its political aims and economic goals, devoid of self-interest.

Moreover, the international community has lost much credibility among the peoples of the Arab world. This is essentially due to support

> One must learn here from the experience of Latin America, where the U.S. accepted and even supported the overthrowing of dictators. Instead, it fostered pseudo-democracies where political power is spread among a class of neo-liberal political elites closely associated with the global business sector.

given to the establishment of autocracies subservient to the West, which have exploited and oppressed the people. The current shift in positions in support of the uprisings may pave the way to reconciliation, if the sincerity of these positions can be established. Few people in the region have forgotten the reaction of the U.S. and the rest of the Western nations following the democratic election of a Hamas government in Palestine.

In spite of the potential disagreements that may emerge among the different groups involved in the protests, one issue has been made clear: the rejection of foreign (specifically Western) interference. Arabs across the Nation feel the heavy burden of decades of manipulation by imperial powers seeking their own interest. They are strongly and unequivocally rejecting it. The empty rhetoric of democracy and freedom peddled by Western Europe and North America has been exposed to what it truly is: an insidious strategy to impose "market economy" and keep the Arab countries under imperial domination.[17]

The rejection of foreign interference in the Arab uprisings has been accompanied by the return of openly pro-Palestine and anti-Zionist stances. These were repressed by the regimes since the signature of the Camp David Accord. In Egypt, as in Tunisia, the protesters accused the dictator and his clique of being agents of Israel and traitors to the nation, and chanted for the liberation of Palestine. Pundits[18] trace the protests in Tahrir Square to the year 2000 when, for the first time, the Egyptian people occupied Tahrir Square in support of the Palestinian Intifada.

In view of its strategic economic interests in the Arab world, and in light of the unwavering partnership with Israel, it is unlikely that those Western powers with vested interests will just sit and watch the Arab world being reshaped by the will of its people. While the initial position has been to support the dictators against the people,[19] a number of Western leaders have now adopted an opportunistic approach. They appear to be willing to make concessions regarding the dictatorships, as long as the essential political and economic nature of the regime and its subservience is not affected. The current feeling of elation running through the Arab world following the successful demise of two of the longest running dictatorship subservient to the U.S. is being tempered by warnings about the hijack of the revolutions by the powers of reaction associated with imperial designs. One must learn here from the experience of Latin America, where the U.S. accepted and even supported the overthrowing of dictators. Instead, it fostered pseudo-democracies where political power was spread among a class of neo-liberal political elites closely associated with the global business sector.

In the Arab world, a strategy of this type would ensure that the ruling class continues to provide access to oil and minerals; and to markets wide open for manufactured goods, among which food will continue to occupy the lion's share. It will promote a neo-liberal economic environment that will cultivate capitalist market fundamentalism, and a political and economic and cultural normalization with Israel. This approach will soon be tested in Egypt by the litmus test of the gas exports to Israel and by external pressure (also through military and development aid) on retaining the Camp David Accords.

Seemingly unshakable Western support to the continuous colonization of what has remained of Palestine is the other main reason why people would doubt the motives of any offer of support by the "international community." It is impossible to envision a trust-building process between the Arab peoples and that "community" without a radical shift in this position and sincere and unequivocal actions in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to their land.

Endnotes

[1] In 2004, when L. Paul Bremer left Iraq, he signed over 100 executive orders that arranged for certain laws in "sovereign" Iraq. Order 81 dealt with agriculture and opened Iraq to GMO markets, as well as paving the way for Iraqi farmers to be sued should GMO business suspect them of saving patented seed. The dictatorship of Saddam Hussein had not allowed seed patenting, yet it was one of the first actions of the U.S. occupiers, along with insuring that no state support would be offered to Iraq's farmers. The exploits of ADM and Cargill have been chronicled here, and so it should come as no surprise that the U.S. government installed a former Cargill executive to manage Iraq's agricultural policy. Iraq is now the fifth largest market for U.S. corn.

[2] www.maketradefair.com

[3] www.ecofair-trade.org/pics/en/brosch_ecofairtrade_el.pdf

[4] Lucile Garcon and Rami Zurayk (2010), Lebanon's bitter harvest. Le Monde Diplomatique. http://mondediplo.com/2010/11/14lebannon

[5] Cecile Raimbeau (2009), Colère des paysannes de l'Atlas Marocain. Le Monde Diplomatique. 04.2009. http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2009/04/RAIMBEAU/16979

[6] For example, the deposed Tunisian despot Zine El Abidine Ben Ali vowed to reduce the price of staples such as sugar, milk and bread, but this did not prevent his ouster. Algeria, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Yemen have been purchasing large supplies of wheat in the world market to pre-empt protests.

[7] David Biello. 2011. Are food prices fuelling revolution in the Middle East? Scientific American. 01.02.2011. http://www.scientificamerican.com/blog/post.cfm?id=are-high-food-prices-fueling-revolu-2011-02-01

[8] The Angry Arab News Services (27.01.2011). Egyptian Slogans, http://angryarab.blogspot.com/2011/01/egyptian-slogans.html

[9] Total number is more than 40 as some slogans were double-barreled and fit in two categories.

[10] The Angry Arab News Service (15.02.2011),Yemeni protest chants, http://angryarab.blogspot.com/2011/02/yemeni-protest-chants.html

[11] Caroline Henshaw (1.2.2011), The Politics of Food Prices in Egypt, The Wall Street Journal Blogs, http://blogs.wsj.com/dispatch/2011/02/01/the-politics-of-food-prices-in-egypt/

[12] Adam Hanieh (14.2.2011), Egypt's Uprising: Not Just a Question of 'Transition'. MRzine, http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2011/hanieh140211.html

[13] George Melloan (23.2.2011), The Federal Reserve is causing turmoil abroad, *The Wall Street Journal*. http://online.wsj.com/article/SB100014240527487046577045761502025678153800.html

[14] Hossam El-Hamalawy (12.2.2011), The Workers, Middle Class, Military Junta, and the Permanent Revolution, Jadaliyya, www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/629/the-workers-middle-class-military-junta-and-the-permanent-revolution

[15] The Angry Arab News Service (1.3.2011), Class analysis of Tunisia, http://angryarab.blogspot.com/2011/03/class-analysis-of-tunisia.html

[16] Clinton, USAID's Shah at Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society. U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE. Office of the Spokesman. 16.2.2011 http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2011/February/20110216144118su0.4438985.html

[17] Interested readers are referred to the excellent analysis by Samir Amin (2010) in Monthly Review, http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/amin070210.html

[18] See for example http://www.challenge-mag.com/en/article__283 http://www.arabawy.org/2011/03/01/anti-zionism-anti-imperialism-and-the-jan25-revolution/

[19] France offered military support to Ben Ali, and Obama's initial position was to demand reforms to the Mubarak rule.

Freedom Is the Prerequisite for Bread
Interview with Ibrahim Awad

Ibrahim Awad

Dr. Ibrahim Awad is Professor at the Public Policy and Administration Department of the American University in Cairo. He has held positions with regional organizations and United Nations agencies in Argentina, Spain, Switzerland, Lebanon and Egypt. He was director of the International Migration Programme at the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva, of the sub-regional office of the ILO for North Africa in Cairo, and Secretary of the Commission at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in Beirut. His recent publication is "La question de l'emploi entre la recherche arabe et les institutions financieres internationales" (2010).

Perspectives: Dr. Awad, the fact that a large part of highly educated Arab youth are unable to find adequate jobs is often seen as a factor of social unrest. Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself alight, ignited Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution. Was youth unemployment also one of the factors that triggered the Egyptian revolution?

AWAD: No revolution of such proportions has a single cause. Employment should be put in the socio-economic and political context. The past years in Egypt have witnessed numerous workers

> Egypt reached a peak annual economic growth of around 7% in 2007. The question is, how were the benefits of this growth distributed?

strikes. Strikes are an indicator that people actually do work, but that they are not satisfied with their terms and conditions of employment. Even with employment, huge gaps in income exist. Egypt reached a peak annual economic growth of around 7% in 2007. The question is, how were the benefits of this growth distributed? One of the answers is that growth is translated into increased employment. But what happened in reality is that only a minority benefitted from economic growth and a few became extremely rich, while among the majority of the population a general deprivation took place and their living conditions were crushed. So it was not only the poor who became even poorer, but also the middle classes started losing ground. Income disparities became very visible. People learned

that growth occurred and concluded logically that, if they grew poorer, somebody else was getting the fruits of this growth of which they were not benefiting. In addition, prices were increasing, especially food prices.

Perspectives: Who, then, benefitted mainly from this economic growth?

AWAD: In order to know who benefitted, just take a look at the background of the members of the past Cabinet. In 2004, Prime Minister Ahmad Nazif formed a government in which a number of successful businessmen held ministerial posts in the same sectors of their businesses. The Minister of Agriculture was an agricultural entrepreneur. The Minister of Health owned a hospital. The Minister of Housing Utilities and Urban Community owned a construction company. It is quite self-evident that these actors and the business circles close to political power reaped the fruits of growth. Economic and political power became concentrated in the hands of a few. This is the that reason economic growth did not create sufficient employment at decent terms and conditions.

Perspectives: Why is that?

AWAD: This is mainly because of wrong policies. These last days for example, the government announced that monthly work contracts were to be turned into a minimum of one-year contracts, and that there should be open-ended contracts for employees who have been working for several years. My question is: If it is possible to do this now, why was it not done before? The only answer is that our policy makers are, simply said, dealing with issues that are crucial for people's survival in an irresponsible way.

The problem may even be larger than that. The government of businessmen pursued what they called "reforms," but which were essentially neo-liberal policies following the principles of trade liberalization, deregulation and privatization. One of the main objectives was to

> Policies guided by the IMF and the WTO, which cut down on state subsidies and liberalized trade, for example, destroyed the local industries, especially the textile industry.

push the privatization of the public sector even further, a process that had already started in the 1990s. Other examples are the deregulation of the telecommunications sector and the decision to sell state-owned land. All these measures contributed to economic growth, but they did not create sufficient fresh employment. Quite to the contrary: Policies guided by the IMF and the WTO, which cut down on state subsidies and liberalized trade, for example, destroyed the local industries, especially the textile industry.

Perspectives: How does education play into the situation you just described?
AWAD: The quality of and access to education are, of course, also problems that need to be addressed. But the lack of education is not the main factor in unemployment. In Egypt, as in many countries of the region, it is rather the case that the better educated you are, the less likely you are to find a job. This might seem paradoxical at first sight, but it is not. Firstly, large-scale investment focuses on low technology, low value-added industries that do not need experts, but rather request blue collar laborers who are paid very low salaries. Secondly, really qualified persons want to contribute and to participate according to their merits. But in Egypt they were left out of the political system at a time when Gamal Mubarak, the son of Hosni Mubarak, established a powerful committee in the ruling

party that formulated economic policies, which the government implemented. There was just a blatant absence of participation. In addition, a systematic destruction of trade unions and infiltration of political parties took place, so that the latter were degraded to nothing more than appendices to the system that didn't represent anyone. If the ruling party continuously wins overwhelming majorities that reached 93% of the votes in the November-December 2010 elections, what did you maintain a Parliament for? Imagine that the law regulating the establishment and functioning of political parties gave the secretary of the ruling party the right to accept or reject the founding of new parties! And I don't even want to mention the control over civil society through another law, and the control over the media. Not to forget that average people were increasingly finding themselves at the mercy of the state security apparatuses that grew steadily in numbers and finally took complete control of internal affairs. In such a system, how can education be valued and play an effective role?

Perspectives: Was the revolution started by these people who mostly suffered from the conditions you are mentioning?
AWAD: The revolution was initiated by young people deprived of effective political participation, who witnessed generalized corruption and experienced repression. They didn't want to participate in politics because they despised the existing political system. But it is actually their will to participate seriously and effectively that made them sustain the struggle. In the revolution large segments of the population also participated whose living conditions had become dismal. It was joined by people who probably wouldn't have participated ten years ago. Last Tuesday, I was marching with university professors, and we asked people who were watching us from their balconies, to come down and join us. They clapped in support, but didn't join. I'm sure that as we are speaking now, they have joined the protests. The government somehow thought that time would

be on their side, but it was not. It rather played against them. The millions who suffered from the consequences of the neo-liberal economic policies progressively joined the protests. The government made a strategic mistake, which shows its incompetence and inability to analyze.

Perspectives: Was the revolution predictable?
AWAD: No, it was not at this particular time. But what was predictable was that the situation would somehow explode. The ongoing deprivation and the bad living conditions certainly could not have continued without growing protest. During the past years, I told myself, that once

> In our part of the world, the cause of democracy will only be advanced if it is connected to social justice. Otherwise it will remain a theoretical concept.

claims for the right to political participation and liberty would be combined with socio-economic protests, something major would happen. But I didn't know how exactly this would be triggered and when.

Perspectives: What created its momentum?
AWAD: Protests in Egypt are nothing new. Actually, the country has been rocked by protests for the past four years. Before, however, claims and demands had been rather specific: better working conditions, academic freedom, etc. While the workers fought out their strikes, the political protests were always somewhat removed from the broad public, and both never really connected. Now both clicked together, and this is what created the enormous momentum that stunned all of us. In our part of the world, the cause of democracy will only be advanced if it is connected to social justice. Otherwise it will remain a theoretical concept. Once people realize that the lack of democracy is one reason for their deteriorating living conditions, they will join the cause.

Perspectives: Hasan Hanfi, the renowned Egyptian philosopher, recently gave a talk in Beirut. He mentioned that he had asked his students in Egypt the question, "What are your main demands?" to which they answered "Bread and freedom." When he asked them "How are these two issues related?" they answered, "They are not related at all." He concluded by stating that the relation between bread and freedom has to be rediscovered. Can you comment on this?
AWAD: Yes, but I would even go beyond this. Bread and freedom are not only related. Freedom is the prerequisite for bread. This is why those Arab governments that now distribute charity to their peoples are fundamentally wrong if they think this makes people shut up. They don't understand at all what these revolutions are about. We can no longer talk about developing the economy alone. In the same fashion, employment is not only about catering to the labor market. Countries are more than markets. Education is a value, and not only supposed to make young people fit for work. Education forms the citizens committed to their societies and countries.

Perspectives: There were observers, also in some media channels such as CNN, who argued that the protesters were the minority of the population, while the majority preferred stability and continuity, also for economic reasons. What do you think of that?
AWAD: I find this argument rather dull. I am trying to compare, but I can't recall any uprising of such a magnitude. The Iranian revolution started with student demonstrations that continued for almost nine months. In Egypt, millions were mobilized within two weeks. Tunisia, of course, was stunning, but Egypt was even more impressive in terms of numbers. And since when does a revolution bring everybody to the streets? Did all the French rise up in the French revolution? Doesn't every population have little children and elders that cannot demonstrate in the streets? Revolutions are about a critical mass, and this mass was

certainly reached in Egypt. And finally, it is not only about the mass of people. It is also about the critical composition. While previously demands had been put forward rather separately, this

> The Barcelona-process initiated by the EU turned out to be much ado about nothing.

time students, workers, media professionals, bloggers, academics, the poor, the middle class and the upper class people marched together. This combination was an important energy for the revolution.

Perspectives: What, in your view, has to be done in terms of economic reform?
AWAD: First of all, there need to be redistributive policies. This is not an easy task, given the political economy of Egypt and the concentration of power. But if we are able to build a pluralistic system in which the leaders respect the citizens, then we will be able to formulate policies that improve conditions and meet the needs of the population. They would include social policies, such as public health, housing and education. Such policies will not improve the lives of everyone immediately, but if progress is made, then people will at least see that their leaders take their needs seriously. Secondly, we need to invest in sectors that provide employment. High youth unemployment is not only a problem in Egypt and the Arab world, but also on the European side of the Mediterranean, such as in Greece, Italy and Spain. Speaking of the Mediterranean, the economic policies that were so detrimental in Tunisia and Egypt were promoted by the EU among others. The Barcelona-process initiated by the EU turned out to be much ado about nothing. A lot was done, but nothing really had impact on the lives of people. Policies of cooperation at best maintained the status quo at a time when it was change and a healthy economic environment that were required, and which would have been in the best interest of both Europe and the Arab world.

Perspectives: What is, in your view, the greatest achievement of the Egyptian revolution?
AWAD: Whatever happens from now on, those who are governing will have to reckon with the people and justify themselves before them. For now, that is the greatest accomplishment. The time of impunity is over.

Perspectives: How do you assess the decision to arrest ministers and business men and freeze their assets? Do you think that pursuing high profile economic crime will increase the belief in social/ economic justice efforts and demands for accountability? Is it a useful step or do these persons only serve as scapegoats?
AWAD: A number of ministers, who also happen to be businessmen, have been arrested and accused of corruption. Fighting corruption is always positive. However, reinforcing belief and adherence in change requires more than that. It is not logical to lay responsibility for the many ills of the regime on a few persons. Accusing everyone is not conducive to truth either. In contrast, it is striking that the most emblematic figures of the Mubarak regime, responsible for political corruption and strongly suspected of serious economic misconduct, are free. A systematic uncovering of cases of political and economic corruption is necessary. Individuals responsible for these cases should be submitted to justice. But they should enjoy fair trials. The democratic Egypt should abide by the lofty principles that inspired the revolution.

Interview by Layla Al-Zubaidi, 11 February 2011

"The People Demand..."
The Downfall or the Reform of the Regime?

The Youth Revolution:
A First Reading of the Social and Cultural Conditions Surrounding the Tunisian Revolution

Mehdi Mabrouk

Mehdi Mabrouk is professor at the Sociology Department at the University of Tunis. He has published extensively on clandestine migration, violence and youth. His recent book publications include "Voile et Sel: Culture, Foyers et Organisation de la Migration Clandestine en Tunisie" (2010). Following the revolution, he co-founded the Forum Tunisien des Droits Économiques et Sociaux. In March 2011 he was appointed to the Comité Nationale pour la Réalisation des Objectifs de la Révolution et la Transition Démocratique et les Reformes Politiques.

Introduction

Revolutions will always retain a certain degree of ambiguity, particularly if we choose to approach them by only looking at the objective reasons that cause a revolution to erupt. In order to overcome such a challenge, some of those who insist on finding "the causes" of a revolution revert to assessing the direct causes. They then try, with certain unwarranted and imprecise juggling, to review the indirect causes more often than not in an arbitrary manner.

However, besides the causal question of "what caused" a revolution is the other question, which is actually more valid, but at the same time also liable to be more

> Several hasty readings on the Tunisian Revolution have limited their view to the facts and events that unfolded between mid-December 2010 and mid-January 2011, the duration of one month only.

disappointing and frustrating, and which was posed by the renowned French historian Ernest Labrousse[1] following the centennial celebration of the French Revolution; That question is: "How did the revolution come about?" This historian, who devoted most of his life's work to the French Revolution, concluded with results that were most frustrating for followers of causal reasoning as he presented numerous, varying and even contradictory readings of that revolution, without closing any of the proverbial doors to the floodgates of yet more questions and perplexities.

To avoid the less systematic approach of the causal, we propose to exchange the causal question with the methodical, so that our efforts will be channeled toward finding the, "logic behind the functioning of the revolution." It is a question that does not negate the causes, but rather considers these among all the other factors involved in creating an environment that was conducive – within and upon the wills of the actors involved – for their resources and their competencies to interact and work throughout the various stages of the revolution.

Indeed, the epistemological dilemma increases when we recognize that the Tunisian revolution is still in progress and in motion. It has not stabilized and remains full of life, dynamics and vigor. Thus, the distance in time between scholarship and the revolution remains quite short, and the immediacy of emotional attachments will likely cloud certain truths.

How did events unfold in Tunisia, such that in less than one month they produced a revolution that no one could have predicted, or planned for in advance? What is the sum of symbolic and material resources that the actors so hurriedly invented and devised throughout the course of events in the shadows of this "revolutionary" environment?

A Collective Memory of Social Protest

Several hasty readings on the Tunisian Revolution have limited their view to the facts and events that unfolded between mid-December 2010 and mid-January 2011, the duration of one month only. As such, the revolution is uprooted from the historical and from its context of memory, and the link between the revolution and its historical and psychological roots is broken.

It is possible that the suicide of the young man, Mohamed Bouazizi, in front of the Sidi Bouzid governor's office could have been just another addition to previous incidents; it may not have led to the kinds of events that followed, had it not been for a sum of factors that were not borne of any prior planning or preparation. Indeed, in many cases, improvisation, adventure and risk play a critical role in changing the course of events and in

> Throughout its modern history, and particularly with the rise of the Tunisian nation-state, Tunisian society has witnessed and experienced a series of social and political protests and intifadas.

transforming them qualitatively. This is where the causal approach stumbles, as it insists on explaining revolutions through the rationality of its actors and their precise, pre-defined calculations. Indeed, reducing the revolution to its events, and cutting its ties to the past is a frequent scholarly error.

Throughout its modern history, and particularly with the rise of the Tunisian nation-state, Tunisian society has witnessed and experienced a series of social and political protests and intifadas. However, so as not to become entangled in the folds of the past, (despite its importance), it is sufficient to refer to events that took place starting with the late-1980s. The events of January 1987, which became known Black Thursday, witnessed the government authorizing the use of arms against protests led by Tunisia's only workers' union, the General Union of Tunisian Workers. In addition, there were the "Bread Protests" that took place in 1984, the Mining Basin protests of 2008, the protests in the border area of Ben Guerdane in October 2010, and finally, the social protests that began in the city of Sidi Bouzid, which quickly escalated and transformed into the

revolution that would overthrow one of the most ruthless and repressive political regimes in the Arab world. In addition to all these events, political and military clashes took place between the former political regime and the Islamist Al-Nahda movement in 1991, as well as armed confrontations between the regime and groups affiliated to al-Qaeda, better known as the events of the city of Suleiman.

Regardless of the particular social, economic and political contexts of these events and their spontaneous and impulsive nature, they were nevertheless indications of unrest, although no one took much notice. However, these incidents became lodged in the collective subconsciousness, along with the hope that they could nurture the action and mobilizations of individuals and groups when needed.

Other than these diverse events, the country was defined as being relatively stable, at least on the political level. With the defeat of the Al-Nahda Islamist movement after its bloody struggle with the regime, the state was able to take hold of the reigns of power and to take full control of the public domain,[2] which it monopolized in a violent manner. Indeed, to control this domain, it held part of the opposition hostage by blackmailing it, while it disbanded and scattered other elements of the opposition, laying siege upon all those who opposed this. Meanwhile, on a social level, the country entered into a phase of "social peace" based on a policy of negotiations between the government and the General Union of Tunisian Workers, the only recognized labor union – negotiations which mostly revolved around an increase in wages every three years.

The ranks of this peace were left undisturbed save for a few, scattered individuals and limited group protests every now and then, which usually took the form of sit-ins or hunger strikes that became so prevalent that, at one point, some came to call Tunisia "the capital of hunger strikes."[3] These forms of protests were mostly related to social and political grievances regarding issues such as depriving persons from obtaining passports, expulsions from

jobs and arbitrary terminations of employment for political or union-related reasons, and protesting against unjustly tried cases in court. Moreover, these incidents of protest usually ended without achieving their objectives.

Meanwhile, and on a more general level, the legal political power map lost all its representation of political powers and social forces. The result was a distorted collective social fabric used by the prevailing political regime in its strategy of political blackmail and bartering loyalties for services provided.

> The legal political power map lost all its representation of political powers and social forces. The result was a distorted collective social fabric used by the prevailing political regime in its strategy of political blackmail and bartering loyalties.

Wide segments of the population, and particularly the youth, remained distant or resisted being inducted into any specific framework, because of fear or apathy. This also occurred in remote places and communities where politicians and the elite rarely ventured, until an invisible and inconspicuous feeling of opposition began to grow. The political community lost its connection to the social community,[4] and political structures disintegrated as did the social "center," which usually maintains social frameworks and the role of mediation, especially in times of crises. The Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH), the General Union of Tunisian Students, the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists Union (SNJT), the Tunisian Bar Association and others were all disbanded or virtually eliminated. The regime suffered from this when it lost control over the escalating protests and sought out a mediator, to no avail.[5]

In the meantime, the regime continued its strategy of employing its "firefighters" to extinguish any social or political fires. Moreover, it succeeded in containing inflamed areas every time a fire was ignited; it succeeded in extinguishing the fuse every time. The dread of terrorism and treason were some of the most effective tools employed in confronting these social eruptions. However, the last wave of protests, sparked in 2008, exposed the limits to employing such tactics and means.

All of these protests took on different forms. But, in every case, protesters ended up face to face with the security forces. In general, all of these would progressively transform from a tone of peaceful demonstrations at the beginning, into clashes with state security forces toward the end.

However, day after day, the protests in Sidi Bouzid managed to attract a wider social strata that already offered varying and sometimes even contradictory experiences, expectations and expressions. This phase would become the first of the many phases of the revolution. By the first week of January 2011, or nearly two weeks after the first outbreak of protests, the characteristics of the protesters would no longer be homogeneous. Indeed, as bullets of the security forces rained down to kill the university professor, Hatem Bettaher, on Wednesday, January 12, 2011, in the city of Doux in the southwestern part of the country, other groups of protesters in other cities across the country were burning down government buildings, security headquarters and other government administrations. Certain neighborhoods were transformed into liberated areas, where all traces of the state were eradicated with only the bullets remaining to bear witness to its presence.

With that, in our opinion, the Tunisian Revolution entered its second and decisive stage, which would conclude with the former president fleeing the country on January 14, 2011.

What, perhaps, represented the momentous difference between the social protests that

Tunisia experienced previously and what took place in the city of Sidi Bouzid, in our view, was not the extraordinary nature of the suicide

> As of the mid-1990s, the unemployment crisis among university graduates began to develop into a very serious problem for the political authorities.

and its magnitude – several Tunisian cities witnessed similar, and perhaps even harsher and more abominable events – but rather the logic of the catalytic and creative improvisation that characterized and evolved throughout the course of events that followed this act, and the revolutionary environment which swiftly developed thereafter.

The Forest that Concealed the Tree

As of the mid-1990s, the unemployment crisis among university graduates began to develop into a very serious problem for the political authorities and the bodies concerned with engineering higher education systems. At first, the matter was limited to the graduates of the liberal arts disciplines and humanities, but after almost a decade, the crisis extended to graduates of scientific and technical disciplines. Later, this became a dilemma that all the programs and systems in the country were unable to transcend, for many reasons. All this coincided with the global financial crisis, the repercussions and distress of which are still affecting the national economy today. Indeed, official sources estimate that there are over 150,000 unemployed university graduates.

In 1991, the state introduced an incentive package to encourage the private sector to absorb these graduates; however, it seems, this initiative was insufficient. The financial and administrative corruption that plagued the economy and its management also represented a major impediment to the kind of domestic and foreign investment that could have absorbed these numbers. Two decades later, the unemployment rate still hovered at the same level, edging up to 13.8%, according to official statistics issued prior to the revolution. In the meantime, according to statements made by ministers in the first and second transitional governments, the real unemployment figures are much closer to 25%.

The underlying reasons behind this failure are complex. The first originates in a higher education policy that has progressively reduced selectivity and generalized higher education under various categories. This occurred at the same time that the demographic boom of Tunisian youth peaked. Moreover, according to demographic estimates and projections, these numbers will only begin to decline after 2012. The other reason includes economic factors related to certain development patterns, where the absorption of work applications in the national job market did not exceed one-fifth of those seeking jobs in general, and even much less among university graduates. The third reason is related to the way admissions to higher education institutions have been configured to channel a third of the students into liberal arts and humanities disciplines because they do not have sufficient scientific competencies, while disregarding the possibilities for their future employment.

These problems would become increasingly exacerbated. But contrary to what would be expected, Tunisian youth confronted all this, over the past twenty years, with modest and limited protests and movements. These protests were generally led by smaller organizations that were not recognized, such as the Union of Unemployed Graduates, which often employed innovative protests such as creating human chains across streets, sit-ins, hunger strikes and so on. However, the reaction of the security apparatus, as well as political and ideological differences, led to divisions in these groups which then led to the rapid disintegration of their protest actions.

Without delving into the details of what took

place in Sidi Bouzid and in the rest of Tunisia's cities, it appears that – especially when one considers the weakness of Tunisian civil society, social movements and political parties in framing their movements and mobilizations

> Expressions of dissent over the past two years have led to suicide as a form of protest, where the isolated, defenseless individual casts upon himself the manifesto of his own futile death.

– expressions of dissent over the past two years have led to suicide as a form of protest, where the isolated, defenseless individual casts upon himself the manifesto of his own futile death. This is the most extraordinary of suicides, where one bears witness against oneself, incriminating and sentencing oneself to a death sentence, pushing one to depart permanently from the holds of serenity, tranquility and hope. Indeed, this social fragility led to conditions and fertile grounds that finally began to find bolder forms of expression.

The Suicide Manifesto: A Conducive Environment
The suicide committed by the 23-year old man with a university degree, Mohamed Bouazizi, was the spark that ignited the protests that finally led to the revolution. However, this would not have been possible if it were not for

- the vulnerability of economic and social conditions in the country, as demonstrated by socio-economic statistical data.[6] Indeed, numerous medical reports warned of these conditions as being related to the risk factors in the growing suicide rate in Tunisia over recent years. Moreover, with the expansion and development of random free market economics in the country and the widening circles of the marginalized, one can state the following:

- The country was increasingly afflicted by the prevalence of a suicide "ethos." A study conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) warned of an ethos that undervalues life and facilitates death (perceives death with ease). A feeling of loss of value, of lack and of deficiency, particularly among the wide strata of young unemployed and marginalized men, gave death a certain appeal. This may explain the "suicide contagion" which prevailed throughout the weeks of the protests.

- A form of acute deafness afflicted the state apparatus, particularly that part of the state related to public sector services and interests, which lost the capacity to hear the voices of the people, or incited or pushed these voices away through its programmed, endemic apathy or its deliberate humiliation of the people.

The frequency of suicides in Tunisia requires a more in-depth analysis. The feeling that the individual had been stripped of everything was exacerbated by the deterioration of the traditional social fabric, which once provided a feeling of refuge among family and a sense of security by association in a collective social security net. Meanwhile, this collective social security net was transformed, in its entirety, into an arm of the state that provided the state with a reservoir to reinforce its legitimacy through deepening political patronage and nepotism, blackmail and a form of bargaining similar to political handouts. The latter included charitable societies being allowed to deal with social problems in return for funding, in juxtaposition to prohibiting any independent social and charitable initiatives due to fears that these could develop into opportunities for political exploitation.

Individuals were stripped and disarmed of the moral mantel that once supported them during times of adversity and crisis. The Tunisian individual found himself under the terrible wheel of the state, naked of any

human protection or value to support him. Thus, suicide became one of the more feasible options for this individual. Indeed, the scenes of suicides posted by social networking sites would become an eloquent declaration of condemnation and a manifesto of a country that eats its own children.

These suicidal tendencies were the

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outcome of the state's strategy to dry up all proverbial springs during its battle with the Al-Nahda movement, in the 1990s. The psychological resources and tools required to cope and to act in times of acute crises were greatly undermined, adding disaster to misery. Tunisians were to endure times of extreme hardship, lacking the psychological and socio-cultural resources required to confront and to cope, while being denied any shape or form of collective or institutional shelter, support or protection.

Deadly Timing

The timing of these social protests became an ally of the protesters. No one planned for this, or chose this path. The events took everyone by surprise. The circumstances and situational context was likely the primary actor driving these protest movements, pumping meaning and life into them with the intricacies of the social and political scene. The time was more than ripe, or so most thought. Suicide represented the ultimate form of protest, drawing forth sympathizers on the basis of blood ties, sides taken or the cause – a drive that progressively

took root in Sidi Bouzid and later, in other parts of the country.

At the political level, the timing of these events unfolded in the wake of campaigns conducted to support allowing the country's president a nomination to another, fifth term, in violation of the current constitution, which had already been altered more than once to allow him other extended terms in office. Less than three months after the 2009 elections – and without any apparent justification – professional bodies, social associations, persons of influence and newspapers pro-actively launched this campaign in a way that still raises questions. The hypothesis that there may have been internal struggles taking place at the edge of power, at that time, would perhaps make all this easier to comprehend.

The mobilization of media in propagating total consensus and unrivaled support for the political regime and its choices could not be continued after the events which unfolded in Sidi Bouzid. Indeed, the regime's choices, especially those related to unemployment, equitable development and dialogue with the youth, could no longer be sustained except at terrible cost. For, unlike the narratives told by the political regime, it was proven beyond a reasonable doubt that these choices, in themselves, were the greatest of failures.[7]

In addition, the events in Sidi Bouzid took place:

- with the conclusion of the International Year of Youth (IYY): This was "our initiative" that the political regime marketed so well – a year that Sidi Bouzid celebrated with funerals, where the choice was between suicide and being shot to death. Meanwhile, the image that was propagated by the media regarding Tunisia's youth was no more than misinformation that benefited the regime's narrative: That this was a gentle, meek, docile, malleable youth; This was a youth unconcerned about bread on the table, but rather more concerned and more passionate about the colors of rival sports teams and emotional chitchat. But

the events proved that the features and character of Tunisia's youth were different than that propagated by the official media. They are indeed rather more ambiguous and confusing features.

- and less than one month after the inauguration of the "youth parliament:" Indeed, the criteria used for appointing members to this "parliament" did not take into account the most minimal of standards when it came to truly representing the political and social diversity that marks this social stratum.

- at the same time that the National Youth Consultation[8] survey presented its finely packaged and previously known results:

> The image that was propagated by the media regarding Tunisia's youth was no more than misinformation that benefited the regime's narrative: That this was a gentle, meek, docile, malleable youth.

A report that was endemically replete with deontological flaws that undermined its scholarly and ethical credibility. I do not believe that this study presented, despite its pleasant and softened approached, the concerns expressed by the youth of Sidi Bouzid and the rest of the areas in Tunisia inflamed by protests.

- during a fledgling experience of "dialogue with members of the government:" This included a broadcast by Tunisian national television in its usual composed and calm manner. In this "dialogue," the true voices of the legitimate spokespersons for these real segments and strata of society were absent, and substituted by perverse and false extras that recited an archaic script.

- and after Tunisia headed the Arab Women Organization: A position that was not only promoted by propagating Tunisia's successes in the domain of women's rights and freedoms, but more so because of the exaggerated image of one woman's stubborn political ambitions that fed into the silent revolutionary environment. The theatrocracy[9] and its political conduct adopted by the regime reached a point of provocation that bred an environment appropriate and conducive to revolution, and where the silent spectators bemoaned this theatrical performance which humiliated them with barefaced arrogance.

At the social level, the revolution erupted at a time when:

- mobility at a political level was nearly stagnant. Legal and even illegal forms of opposition were marked by stagnation, volatility and decline. Political movements, including political alliances, had splintered, weakened and disintegrated.

- social movements were weakened, such as the women's movement, unions and youth movements. Students were being arrested, yet universities did not witness any protests of real significance. The same was the case with the waves of lay-offs and arbitrary terminations that resulted from the global economic crisis.

The situation, in its entirety, inspired some to propose various scenarios in which these events were planned for in advance, and that matters were prepared for in a manner that would push the revolution towards a certain direction by pre-defined groups, with the capacity to maneuver, adapt and meet expectations.

The Circles that Embraced the Revolution

Numerous researchers and thinkers prefer to use the terms "revolutionary episodes" or "revolutionary stages" in order to avoid using the single term "revolution", which signifies

an abrupt and surprising moment that accomplishes all its tasks at once in a linear way. We understand revolutions according to an ascending, accumulative, incremental and progressive course within which ruptures, volatility, hesitation and confusion are its most candid and realistic attributes.

The Tunisian Revolution worked according to the logic of the alternate ebb and flow of the tide. It was a revolution marked by successive waves that broke, and every time a wave ebbed it left behind a residue that was then carried away with the next wave.

Those watching the first scenes that unfolded directly after the suicide of the young man, Mohamed Bouazizi, also noted that this event was embraced by three societal circles, even if they vary and are dissimilar in form. These circles sought to mobilize their human and symbolic resources to act in these events without ever having marked their place as clear landmarks in the path before. Indeed, these circles' ability to improvise, to adapt and to act with the psychological and emotional resources, that included will and morale, is what would govern the course of events that took place thereafter.

The weakness of social movements (students, youth and women's movements) and political movements, in a context marked by

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an absence of the ability of civil society and its organizations to attract youth, was what made these protests uncontrollable and viable for revolution. This weak point in Tunisian society was what significantly and qualitatively changed the nature of these protests and transformed their dynamics into that of a revolution. Between the incident of the individual suicide and the revolution, certain circles worked to embrace the protests without actually having the ability to direct or control them. Indeed, in many cases, events dragged these circles, sweeping them into the momentum of their rumbling, violent currents – willingly or unwillingly.

- The first circle that embraced these events included family and kin, or clans and tribes; this circle did not act as social structures, as these structures no longer exist, but rather as feelings and emotions – as tenderness, empathy and sympathy. Memories were milked, pumping forth a history of persecution and oppression that goes back to even before the establishment of the nation-state. This collective history quickly evolves into a culture of the persecuted and the wronged, which finds its legitimacy and justification in unjust and unequal patterns of development. The support that family and kin gave the protests should be considered a decisive factor in the evolution of events in Tunisia, particularly in terms of moral and emotional support. Indeed, during past social and political protests, the political regime sought to incite families against their sons and daughters, convincing families that rebellious children were the victims of groups who have deceived them and led them along the wrong path.

- The second circle included the unions. When the families and kin of the victim gathered in front of the governor's office in Sidi Bouzid, local unionists and syndicate members were quick to join. Most of these came from the elementary and secondary school sector, as these individuals represented the largest part of the union structure that was most opposed

to both the policy of the centralized union and the political regime at the same time. This segment was the most politicized,

> It was the union members who rooted these popular, social demands within a deeper political reading of the context, and then took on the task of spreading these demands outside their original geographical domain to inflame the broader social public in Tunisia.

anchored and stubborn part of the unionist structure; It was also unlike, for example, the union scene in the Mining Basin, which was fragmented by and vulnerable to tribal rivalries, as well as burdened by the fact that their regional leadership was dependent on and benefited from the centralized union structure. In the Mining Basin protests, the centralized leadership sacrificed the local leaders of the Mining Basin union (who were educated men that were consequently expelled at the height of the protest movements that the south Tunisian Mining Basin witnessed). Indeed, during the last two years, the weakness of the central trade union was the reason for the growing defiance and increasingly headstrong nature of the local unions. Indeed, it was local trade unionists who rallied around the protest movements, and who were able to take hold of the unclear and hesitant demands of the protesters, and gave these demands a clearer language and terminology. It was the union members who rooted these popular, social demands within a deeper political reading of the context, and then took on the task of spreading these demands outside their original geographical domain to inflame the broader social public in Tunisia, where the

environment of oppression and resentment would also play a crucial and catalytic role.

- The third circle included the legal sector. Lawyers were also among the first to follow and join the family of Bouazizi. Sympathies, empathies, feelings of incitement, anger and condemnation represent psychological resources for mobilization that are too often ignored by scholars of past revolutions for the benefit of a more rational computation and analysis. The Tunisian protests took on another dimension when they gained a legal and rights-based conscious. This consciousness documented the outrageous political and human rights violations that provided these protests with the grounds for much greater degrees of international sympathy, and with the momentum and capacity to network internationally.

Despite the fact that the significant role that these three circles played is clear, this synergy may not have been as highly effective were it not for the proper employment and efficient use of new technologies in communications, social networking and the media.

Media, Citizenship and Social Networking

What happened in the media was a principle factor in the Tunisian Revolution to which all its stages are indebted. Indeed, two other young men committed suicide in the same, if not more

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heinous manner; however, these incidents blew over and a snowball effect never took place. But, this time, this generation of youth was able to support the protests and carry out battles in the media that changed the course of events and that greatly embarrassed the political regime. This was represented:

- In the manner in which events were relayed immediately (and even live); the way that detailed investigations into events unfolding locally were carried out and relayed; the ability to grasp the smallest of details and the documentation of these details – all of which began to form a living memory of the events that could be reproduced and invested in repeatedly and continuously; and, the ability to successfully relay and rapidly exchange information related to the clashes that took place between the protesters and the security forces in all parts of the country, particularly the Tunisian interior, where coverage of the beginning of the revolution in the media was of great importance. Indeed, this form of communication, social networking and exchange of information is the most important manifestation of the power of media, par excellence.

- In the manner in which public opinion was mobilized in support of the protests, to defend them, and to respond to the distortions and misinformation that was spread about them, particularly in the state media – which insisted that these were isolated incidents led by extremist groups who were trying to ruin and ransack the country. These alternative commentaries, analyses and reading of events would make a great difference. Through this media and communications activism, youth were able to inspire citizens and especially youth to assemble and mobilize in the protest movements and to take part in all its activities, from the very beginning. The passionate communications stirred emotions and feelings for the sake of a cause that both communicators and the communicated to believed was just.

- In the manner in which the misinforming official story relayed by the state media was refuted. The official story continued to insist that these were riots carried out by criminal gangs and terrorists, and that

those killed by security forces were killed in legitimate acts of self-defense. The media and communications that countered the state media was a form of "defensive" communications that sought to disprove the image that the regime was trying to propagate. Indeed, in the last week, video clips were amassed and published, showing the extent of the human rights violations and the corruption committed by the ruling family. The documentation of the various forms of security and financial violations and the cases of corruption, among others, committed by the former regime kept the collective protest memory alive, and allowed this collective memory to be continually and instantaneously reproduced for the sake of reinforcing the increased assembly and mobilization of people, until the "revolutionary" moment was generated and produced.

Third and fourth generation mobile phones, and all the other advanced forms of communications were used. With these tools and their fertile imaginations, the youth played a decisive and critical role in continuously producing and nurturing events. In contrast, the official and semi-official media continued using a backwards discourse and technology that languished in its archaic place. All of this showed the clash of visions and interests. It was a time where certain figures were exposed as belonging to another world where some still imagined it was possible to monitor and stop information, fence-in events and monopolize the image and representations presented to the people and to the outside world.

Certain satellite stations also played a decisive role, such as France 24, Al-Jazeera, Al-Hiwar, among others, in maintaining the rhythm of the protests in the lives of people, who became increasingly more repulsed by the official media. These satellite stations came to represent a stronghold that the citizens could take refuge in; where they could escape from the distortions and misinformation presented to

them by the official media's rhetoric.

In addition to the latter, the new culture (the Internet culture) created the appropriate groundwork for civil mobilization and lifting the siege. Statistics disseminated via the World Wide Web showed that Tunisian youth occupied the first rank from Africa and the Arab world in the percentages of penetration and engagement on social networking sites on the web. These youth came to represent a reserve army capable and willing to use all the resources available to them in what they believed was a noble cause. Additionally, the prevailing belief that information could remain hostage to the limits of social chatting was a miscalculation that the Fourth Youth Consultation depended on.

This culture was able to create a quantum difference in the manner in which people received information about the events taking place. It took the protests, citizenship and patriotism to a higher level, and managed to spread this synergy across the entire virtual frontier. It seems the entry of youth proficient in the use of modern technologies (the new generations of computers and mobile phones, of managing and engaging with social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter…) is what pushed events to a wider level, nurturing the popular culture of non-politicized social groups with its wide circulation of poems, songs, video clips, caricatures and anecdotes. Indeed, we stand before a new political culture that has its own language which no longer relies on political rhetoric, but rather on (at times) raw and spontaneous, images and slogans. These networks were able – despite the absence of figures with national-political or trade union charisma – to speak in the name of the more vulnerable strata of society as its real, "official spokespersons." Youth have become involved in proposing and debating on every level. They are engaging in a space, a new frontier that is public, virtual, interactive and effective that genuinely embodies and embraces Tunisian youth and their true discourse and dialogue.

Future Challenges

The bulk of the substantive and social causes that were behind the eruption of the protests in Tunisia have moved forward, to another stage. It is very important, despite all difficulties, that the (next) state show good will and intentions in responding to all the challenges before it in a manner that meets with the expectations of

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the populations that took to the streets and overthrew the previous regime.

We stand before positive developments, at the start of dismantling the tyrannical system and its institutional structures, such as: eradicating all the links between the state and the ruling party; disbanding the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) that represents the former regime's ruling party, which is responsible for a large part of the oppression and repression meted out by the authorities for more than twenty years; bringing those figureheads responsible for political and economic corruption to justice; and taking immediate measures to liberate the media and the political scene. However, we must also take note of the following challenges facing the country's future:

- The "protest consciousness" may splinter and will become displaced into provincial and tribal-based ideologies, particularly in the absence of a single revolutionary ideology with which the protesters were previously mobilized. The underlying signs and traces of this subliminal ideology began to emerge during the Mining Basin protests, where the coast was accused that it "had occupied" the "interior" of

the country. Similarly, and in this context, there was noteworthy display of return of pride of Aroushi,[10] tribal and provincial loyalties (such as al-Mathaleeth, al-Jallass, al-Farashish, al-Humama, al-Ayar, etc.) in chat discussions that took place on social networking sites during these last protests. Meanwhile, Tunisia has always been proud that it was able to build a state based on institutions with a profound international heritage. However, the anarchy that the country witnessed after the fall of the regime revealed a terrible setback in this regard and a strengthening of the traditional structures that lie beneath the state.

If we were to compare between the events that took place in the Mining Basin in 2008 and those which took place in Sidi Bouzid, the uprising in the Mining Basin was the largest and the longest protest in Tunisia, up until now. These protests went on for almost six months, and they were led by union leaders with local influence and impact. For those who believed that the point of weakness in the Mining Basin protests was embodied by a dependency on a Aroushi-tribal logic, which was unable to speak the language of a wider social strata, it also seems that those events continued under a veil of cautious sympathy by the political class. Indeed, Aroushi dependencies and Aroushi-quotas governed the workings of this mobilization and paved the way for creating an environment conducive to blackmail and barter.

- The demands and broad causes upheld by this uprising, especially political ones such as freedom and transparency, may be circumvented by fomenting and reproducing the kind of fear the former regime nurtured in a manner that recreates the political exclusion of certain political considerations, particularly pan-Arab and Islamic ones.

- There may be a tendency among certain political forces to want to reproduce, in the name of the revolution, a totalitarian system based on an ideology that is presented as a panacea. This is particularly the case since the revolution took the intellectual and political elite by surprise. Thus, dialogue and alternatives to the past were not allowed the latitude and time to mature in a consensual manner. We must also be wary of the nature of many political movements that, more often than not, are not open to plurality and the right to differ.

- Regional and universal revolutionary forces may be "besieged," or at the very least, blackmailed and curbed so that they will not become a source of inspiration for Arab and other communities as well.

Conclusion

Regardless of which characterization is used to describe that which took place in Tunisia – whether it was a social "intifada," revolution or otherwise – the fall of the regime and Tunisian society's entrance into the phase of transition to a democracy by storm were not the sum of objective causes which may have led to the birth of a revolution. For, as we have shown, the causal approach, which implicitly builds on an absolute fact, remains inherently and inevitably incapable of understanding the full scope of what actually takes place during times such as these.

The environment in Tunisia was conducive to what eventually transpired, fueled by mistakes made by the regime and the incapacity of centrist, civil society structures to contextualize and provide a framework for that which was unfolding. The severe polarization that took place between the ferocious, security regime and the masses of unbridled feelings led to an emotional flood that had nowhere to channel its expression. This synergy allowed the inventive imagination to gain a creative and reproductive spontaneity in a manner that shows that the protesting social strata could not have won the battle according to a logic of pre-determined

objectives and pre-planned scenarios, but rather according to the logic of accumulating cycles, sequences and strikes. Every time the protesting forces entered into a new cycle, the ceiling of protest was raised until, in the

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last stretch, it was radically transformed in its nature, in its character and in the nature of its demands.

A revolution was born in Tunisia in the course of this creative and catalytic volatility, uncertainty and chaos that even surprised those in the very womb of the revolution. It would indeed wildly inspire the admiration of many – if all this was really the objective of the protesters from the beginning. Perhaps, it is all this that justifies the absence of the term "revolutionaries" from the literature of the Tunisian Revolution.

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[1] Ernest Labrousse, "1848-1830-1789. Comment naissent les révolutions", Actes du congrès historique du centenaire de la Révolution de 1848, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1948, p. 1-20

[2] For more details on this, please refer to Jürgen Habermas, l'espace public, Paris, Payot, 1986

[3] Tunisia witnessed a wave of hunger strikes by political prisoners, civil society activists and political party members. Perhaps the most prominent of these hunger strikes was the one undertaken on the occasion of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2005 (which took place in Tunis). This summit also became an opportunity to form the October 18th Coalition between some leftist political parties, Islamists affiliated with the Al-Nahda movement at that time, and independents, such as Ahmad Najib al-Shalabi, Lutfi Hajji, Mukhtar al-Tarifi, Ayyash al-Humami and Mohammad al-Nouri, among others.

[4] For a more in depth analysis on the particular perplexities of civil society in the Arab world, refer to Azmi Bishara's "A Contribution to the Critique of Civil Society," Centre for Arab Studies, Beirut, Lebanon; 2000.

[5] Tunisian newspapers published the contents of a telephone conversation that took place between President Ben Ali and the head of the National Bar Association asking that the latter intervene to calm the situation. Despite the latter's acquiescence, in principle, the majority of lawyers refused this. It is also important to mention that not so long ago these same newspapers had described the head of the association as an "extremist" (in the religious sense).

[6] Refer to the General Union of Tunisian Workers' economic study on the regional development of the Sidi Bouzid region (Between a Constricted Reality and Promising Possibilities), Tunisia; 2010.

[7] At the peak of the events taking place in this region, Tunisian television, as represented by Channel 7, covered the visit of a youth delegation from the German Youth Parliament, in which a group of German youth was shown as being very enthusiastic and in awe of the "Tunisian experience."

[8] A survey conducted by Tunisia's National Observatory of Youth every four years. In it, the National Observatory tries to diagnose the attitude of youth with regard to a whole series of issues, as it seeks to gather knowledge about their aspirations. It is also accompanied by great deontological and scholarly flaws that undermine its sincerity and credibility.

[9] See Georges Balandier, Le Détour: pouvoir et modernité. Fayard, Paris 1985; [Translator's note: "This close association between political power – or abuse of power – and ostentatious, duplicitous show – that is, what is nowadays known as "theatrocracy", quote taken from, "The Spectacular In and Around Shakespeare", Edited by Pascale Drouet; first published in 2009 by Cambridge Scholars Publishing]

[10] Aroush is one of Tunisia's most powerful tribes of Berber origin. (Editor's note)

What Kind of Transition for Egypt?

On 1 April, 67 days after Hosni Mubarak was toppled, tens of thousands of Egyptians gathered in Cairo's Tahrir square for a "march for the salvation of the revolution." Their chief complaints were directed at the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) that had been ruling the country since 11 February. They complained that SCAF had acted too slowly and hesitantly in arresting

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the leading figures of the fallen regime and in addressing corruption, and that it had failed to give a clear blueprint for the transition to democracy. Some protesters even, for the first time, voiced calls for the resignation of Field Marshall Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, the head of SCAF and Mubarak's long-serving Minister of Defense.

The protest is illustrative of the extent to which Egypt's revolution remains unfinished, and the final destination of an ongoing transition process uncertain. The country is divided between a large number of ordinary Egyptians who, while desiring a real break with Mubarak's regime, are growing weary of continuous protests, massive disruption to economic life, and the possibility that the relationship between political forces and the military will sour. Some are also becoming obsessed with the previously dormant forces the revolution unleashed, such as the revival of a debate about the role of religion in public life and whether or not previously banned Islamist movements should be allowed to assume a role. Others are concerned that, without a focus on the economy, Egypt is headed for a crisis that will render the question of political reform moot. Meanwhile, the political activists who launched the uprising that began on January 25 worry that the revolution that they fought for (and at least 840 Egyptians died for) is being subverted by what they call "counter-revolutionary forces."

A Divisive Referendum

It has taken SCAF over two months to finally clarify its blueprint for transition back to civilian rule. The process employed was, for most Egyptians, unclear and haphazard. SCAF made much of the 19 March referendum on amendments to the 1971 Constitution, yet did not restore that Constitution. Instead, it chose to create a 63-article Constitutional declaration to partially assuage the fears of those who had opposed the amendments on the ground that a new constitution altogether was a preferable choice. The debate over the referendum itself turned out to be largely about other things than the content of the amendments, and gave an early taste of some of the emerging divisions in an Egypt, where for the first time in a long time, politics matter again. For many, this ended the moment of national unity that followed the departure of Hosni Mubarak and the country's celebration of its revolution. It also precipitated a shift in debate, away from defining what the end-goal of the revolution — a democratic state — might look like.

Issandr El Amrani

Issandr El Amrani is a Moroccan-American journalist and political analyst based in Cairo since 2000. He writes for The Economist, The London Review of Books, the Financial Times and other publications and blogs at www.arabist.net.

Instead, it became dominated by questions of stability — defined as the transition process chosen by SCAF, even though the range of alternatives remained unclear — and the question of Islam's role in public life. Among the "yes" voters in the referendum, most mobilized in support of the army and in favor of a return to normal life after almost two months

> The rush to hold the referendum may be in part explained by the military authorities' alarm at how quickly the "no" position was spreading among the political and intellectual elite, and on television.

of disruptions, during which many suffered from a drop in income and from insecurity. A substantial minority, driven by campaigns by the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist Islamists, saw the referendum as a debate over Article 2 of the 1971 Constitution, which stipulates that, "Sharia is the source of legislation," even though this was in fact not part of the proposed amendments. Because the Muslim Brotherhood endorsed the constitutional amendments and called for a "yes" vote alone led many, including leaders of the Coptic Orthodox Church, to see the vote as a debate over the role that Islam should play in Egypt's political life. Yet, the Muslim Brotherhood's motivations appeared to be entirely secular, particularly since the relationship between Sharia and state law was not in fact at stake: the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood, facing for the first time in its 80-year history the prospect of full legalization and integration into political life, decided to back the position of the military. That it, along with other Islamists, encouraged voters to understand the "yes" vote as a backing for a religious state was in fact an (arguably dishonest) electoral maneuver, and not about the fundamentals of the poll.

On the "no" side, many decried the referendum process itself. One initial complaint was the appointment of the respected but culturally conservative jurist Tareq al-Bishri as the head of the constitutional committee tasked with drafting the amendments. There was also concern regarding other members of the committee. For many, the inclusion of a former Muslim Brotherhood MP, Sobhi al-Saleh, was puzzling. Saleh, although a practicing lawyer and professor of law, has no particular constitutional expertise. Other judges on the committee were seen by some activists as being too close to the former regime. The scheduling of the referendum was also contested. Some argued for more time to discuss the content of the amendments and to inform the public about what they would be voting for. Others argued that too quick a transition would be to the advantage of the two strongest existing political forces: the Muslim Brotherhood and the remnants of the National Democratic Party (NDP). Indeed, only two days before the referendum was held, many newspapers still speculated that it would be canceled. The rush to hold the referendum may be in part explained by the military authorities' alarm at how quickly the "no" position was spreading among the political and intellectual elite, and on television. It appears that the "no" side – mainly representatives of liberal and leftist trends within the political spectrum, including prominent political leaders and presidential hopefuls such as Secretary-General of the Arab League Amr Moussa and former Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Mohamed El Baradei – would have preferred an alternative to what the military proposed, namely an amendment to the 1971 Constitution which would lead to new parliamentary and presidential elections under the same electoral system, but with limitations to the office term and to the powers of the president.

A national feeling of elation prevailed, now, that after the deeply flawed election of November 2010, Egypt was finally holding what was perceived by most as a free and fair

election: the referendum was held peacefully, with only few reports of irregularities; and there was an important turnout in which 41% of eligible voters cast their votes (while not a high percentage in absolute terms, it is the highest turnout seen in decades of polling under Mubarak). Even among activists who said that they had witnessed irregularities — unstamped

> There is a general consensus that the "constitutional declaration" is a good enough interim document to regulate political life.

ballots, the presence of campaigners inside the polling station, the absence of judges who monitor the process and lack of privacy for voters — there was a sense that the sanctity of the referendum had to be accepted, and that the debate had to move on.

A Blueprint for Transition?

For SCAF, the referendum was an endorsement of its transition plans. Within a week of the results, SCAF announced that it would set the constitutional framework that would lead to new elections and a return to civilian government. Yet, the messages it sent were muddled. Although the referendum had been about amendments to the 1971 Constitution (and the opposition vote was mainly motivated by the preference for a new constitution), SCAF arbitrarily decided to issue a "constitutional declaration" that included the amended articles as well as others inspired from the 1971 Constitution, rather than restore the old text outright. This raised the question of why it had not been made clear what the vote in the referendum was about, why the "constitutional declaration" had not been submitted in its entirety for referendum, and why consultations with political forces on the whole process had not taken place. From SCAF's point of view, not restoring the 1971 text may have been a concession to the "no" voters

for whom this text, so frequently violated by the old regime, no longer had authority. But if so, this concession backfired and made the legal logic by which SCAF acts ever more baffling.

Nevertheless, there is a general consensus that the "constitutional declaration" is a good enough interim document to regulate political life. It includes positive measures, such as making a renewal of the Emergency Law (which SCAF says will remain in place until the parliamentary elections) subject to a referendum. It also grants the right to establish free unions, associations and political parties. It restricts the authorities' power to conduct surveillance or arrests without judicial consent; and it specifies the right of detained or arrested citizens to be free from torture, and stipulates that a confession extracted under duress is null and void. Further, freedom of the press, of expression, of assembly and freedom of religion are guaranteed. All of these steps send a positive signal, even if the military's practice (notably its use of military tribunals and torture of protesters) falls short of this. The constitutional declaration also stipulates that Egypt is a democracy, another positive signal intended to assuage the fears of "counter-revolution" among the protest movement. Likewise, it includes a reference to Sharia being the source of legislation, in line with the previous constitution, as a move towards reassuring conservatives.

The confirmation that parliamentary elections will be held in September 2011, and presidential elections within the following two months, also settled the debate over whether more time should be given to new parties to prepare. Again, this was a compromise between those who wanted a return to civilian government as soon as possible, and those who were alarmed by the thought that if parliamentary elections were to be held as initially planned in June 2011, the NDP and Muslim Brothers would overwhelm newer parties. Yet again, however, the decision-making process of SCAF was inscrutable, confirming for many that the military is essentially operating without a plan

and is making decisions mostly based on what it believes the public will tolerate. The dismissal of Prime Minister Ahmed Chafiq after a disastrous appearance on a television show, and the late replacement of the ministers of information, justice and foreign affairs in February – which was the result of mounting public outrage that they remained in their posts – had suggested this already. There are other signs that SCAF is being guided by a sense of what it can get away with rather than by a clear blueprint.

After the referendum, SCAF also issued (by decree) two new important regulations for political life. One was a modification of the political parties law, setting out the rules for the formation of new parties. Again, there was criticism that these rules were concocted without consultation with political forces, and that these rules included unusual changes, such as banning Egyptians holding a foreign passport from leading or funding a party, or such as raising the number of signatures needed to form a party from 1,000 to 5,000 (a rule that could hurt smaller parties.) Another decree, raising grave concerns, seeks to criminalize strikes and protests that are held "against the national interest." This decree provoked a series of protests, culminating in the biggest demonstration since the clearing of Tahrir Square in February. At a time when new independent trade unions are forming, and strikes are taking place at many public sector institutions with the aim to get rid of

> Egypt now has the basic framework for its political transition back to civilian rule: an interim constitution and rules for political participation.

the former regime cronies who head them, the vaguely-worded ban was seen by many activists as a "counter-revolutionary" move. They worry that, even though this decree has not been implemented thus far, it will hang as

the Sword of Damocles over the activists, who have decided to continue contesting SCAF's arbitrary decisions.

Other, less important, decrees also showed that SCAF was eager to be responsive to public opinion. The 1 April demonstration was largely one against corruption. The day before, the military had announced that the assets of three key political figures of the Mubarak regime – former Chief of Presidential Staff, Zakariya Azmi, former Secretary-General of the National Democratic Party, Safwat al-Sherif, and former Speaker of the People's Assembly, Fathi Surour – were frozen, and that they were banned from traveling. For critics, this move only reinforced the impression that SCAF was dragging its feet on combating corruption. Similarly, SCAF, on the day following the protest, appointed four judges to help hasten investigations into corruption. The decision yet again showed that the military is willing to be responsive to public pressure, but also that it is struggling to remain ahead of it.

No Systematic Approach

Egypt now has the basic framework for its political transition back to civilian rule: an interim constitution and rules for political participation. The referendum showed that religion may become a major point of contestation in the coming elections, especially because the next parliament will be tasked with drafting the new constitution; Islamists have built on the fear that secularists would remove references to Sharia from the constitution as a rallying point. Moreover, the political scene is undergoing a major structural shift. The Muslim Brotherhood, forming at least one "new" party (some dissidents could form another) finds itself, for the first time, faced with potential opposition from other Islamists, whether ultra-conservatives such as the Gamaa Islamiya (a former terrorist group that has renounced violence), or the previously apolitical Salafist movement. Liberals and leftists, on the other hand, are in the process of overhauling existing parties and expanding their grassroots presence, in addition to forming new

parties and coalitions. They must also develop a strategy for competing with Islamists and overcoming the latter's reliance on religion as a rallying point. Meanwhile, the NDP could still

> It would also be naive to expect that the military will not impose "red lines" on what the parliament and president can do, be it with regard to policy issues (such as foreign policy and the peace treaty with Israel) or to transition issues.

be banned (a lingering demand of activists) and its remnants may form new formations that will seek allies either with secularists or Islamists. The military, for its part, could be tempted to create a new party in the NDP mold to ensure it has a political counterpart to its executive power. In short, Egypt is about to undergo a political gestation period and the new political landscape may not be entirely clear for several months.

In the meantime, many questions related to transitional justice remain unresolved. There is no systematic approach to handling corruption cases, and those of abuse by officials of the former regime, or even to preparing for an overhaul of the security sector – despite demands for this from the general public and activists. SCAF has thus far ordered trials of individuals on ad hoc basis, but is not carrying

out any public accounting for the system as a whole. This is partly understandable, since the military – particularly senior officers such as Minister of Defense, Tantawi, or Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Sami Enan – was part of that system. Nor is SCAF taking any measures toward establishing any kind of truth and reconciliation commission to deal with the decades of abuse practiced by the police state through its different institutions such as the State Security, whose Cairo headquarters were raided by activists in February. The question of what will happen to the Mubarak family will have to be addressed, too.

It could be argued that these issues can be tackled at a later point, for instance by a freely elected parliament and president. But it would also be naive to expect that the military will not impose "red lines" on what the parliament and president can do, be it with regard to policy issues (such as foreign policy and the peace treaty with Israel) or to transition issues (such as limiting investigations into corruption, so that military corruption is not tackled.) This is why many Egyptian activists prefer to continue pushing now, having seen that the military is responsive (and indeed may be internally divided on how to proceed). The debate has now shifted to the question on how far to push, and whether pushing too hard could alienate the substantial part of the population for which the stabilization of the economy and ending insecurity is more important than the abstract issues of democratic transition.

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and the 25 January Revolution

Dalal Bizri

Dalal Bizri is a Lebanese researcher and writer. She specializes in contemporary Islamic movements and authored several studies on women's issues. She served as lecturer in Political Sociology at the Lebanese University and spent ten years as researcher in Egypt. Today, she regularly contributes to the Lebanese cultural supplement "Nawafidh". Her most recent books include "Egypt against Egypt" (Arabic, 2008) and the forthcoming "Egypt is on my mind" (Arabic, 2011).

Constitutional Amendments and the Place of Sharia[1]

In the first few weeks after the victory of the Egyptian revolution, voices were heard demanding that Article 2 of the Constitution, which states that "Islamic Sharia Law is the main source of legislation," should be removed and replaced by an article affirming that the proper sources of legislation are the revealed religions, international agreements and statutory regulations. Political Islam – in all its varieties – issued a clear and forceful reply to these demands. Dr. Essam al-Aryan, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, forbade

> The exchange of views on Article 2 could have turned into a debate if the more extensive, urgent and compelling debate of the referendum covering constitutional amendments had not taken precedence.

any discussion of the article, claiming that it was "above the Constitution," while Abboud al-Zumar, an Islamic Jihadist jailed for planning the assassination of President Sadat who was only recently released from prison, issued a Fatwa ruling that the full canon of Islamic Sharia Law should be applied – for example, punishments such as limb amputations for those found guilty of theft should be implemented. Other Islamic apologists and ideologists expressed similar views.

The exchange of views on Article 2 could have turned into a debate if the more extensive, urgent and compelling debate of the referendum covering constitutional amendments had not taken precedence.

The committee that formulated these amendments was chaired by Tareq al-Bishri, a jurist of Islamist inclinations; other members of the committee included Sobhi as-Saleh, a former Member of Parliament representing the Muslim Brotherhood. The amendments dealt with a number of issues, and included reducing the number and length of periods for which a president of the republic is permitted to remain in office to just two terms of four years each. The amendments also placed limits on the president's authority to dissolve parliament or declare a state of emergency, while opening the door for anybody to seek nomination as a candidate for the presidency of the republic, provided they succeed in obtaining the signatures of at least 30,000 citizens or 30 Members of Parliament

Those who voted in favor of these amendments publicly announced that their reasons for doing so were procedural. They stated that the amendments should result in parliamentary and presidential elections in a few months' time, thereby shortening the current transitional phase and paving the way for economic stability and prosperity. Those who rejected the amendments did so on the grounds that they were too patchy and granted the president wide-ranging powers. In their view, adoption of the amendments would mean that parliamentary elections were held too soon, making it too easy for the Muslim Brotherhood and their allies to win the elections with the support of the army.

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[1] *Sharia*: Islamic canonical law based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet (*Hadith* and *Sunna*)

A New Islamist Bloc: Preserving the Constitution

A new Islamist bloc emerged from the campaign to secure the success of the amendments in the referendum. This bloc was primarily comprised of the Muslim Brotherhood and their allies, the Salafists (followers of the traditional-fundamentalist trend in Islamic political thought), jihadists, the remnants of the Islamic group Gamaa and activists of the Islamic Labor Party and the Center Party, which had been permitted to return to the political arena after the revolution. One of the factors which united them was their belief that support for the amendments in the referendum constituted a religious obligation under Sharia Law, and that those who rejected them oppose the Sharia and wish to curtail its influence on the constitution. Mohammed Hussein Yaaqub, a spokesman for the Salafists, stated that victory in the referendum represented a, "conquest of the ballot boxes," and a sign that Article 2 of the constitution should remain in place. He also asserted that the issue of Article 2 is, "a matter of life and death for the Salafists." In short, the campaign supporting the constitional amendments effectively urged people to vote for Article 2 of the constitution.

The Eastern Center for Regional and Strategic Studies analyzed the breakdown of votes by province: the turnout for the referendum represented 41.19% of the 45 million Egyptians entitled to vote, and of this turnout 77.2% voted in favor of the amendments, while 22.8% voted against.

On closer analysis, the results show that the highest percentages of those who voted in favor came from remote and rural provinces, while large cities such as Cairo and Alexandria appeared at the bottom of the list of those voting in favor of the amendments. The Eastern Centre for Regional and Strategic Studies posits that the reason these two blocs voted against the amendments is because they represent the largest urban demographic in Egypt, with clearly defined middle and upper classes and high economic, educational and cultural standards.

Thus two broad trends are gradually becoming apparent: the first trend represents a majority who wish to preserve the constitution, albeit with some minor amendments, and who are doing all they can to preserve a constitutionally Islamic state by operating behind the scenes, possibly in collusion with the remnants of the ousted regime. It is becoming increasingly clear that this trend is aligned with the inclinations of the army. Mixed into the broad base of this trend is a conservative rural tendency largely consisting of poor, illiterate, uneducated people whose rights and development have largely been ignored in the past.

The Minority Stance

Various reasons separate the organized majority from the less-organized minority which rejects the amendments and yearns for a secular state. The main reasons are sectarian, for example, a

> Each new day in Egypt brings with it signs that contradict the – purely tactical – electoral humility shown by the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists.

Coptic Christian may be unhappy the fact that the new regime marginalizes his citizenship even more than the previous regime, and cultural: liberals, left-wingers, democrats, Nasserists and secularists all disapprove of government by religion (and are in their turn branded as "infidels" by Islamists). The battle between the two camps intensified after the referendum, because the result caused the religious groups to believe they were on the brink of taking power, despite modest claims by the Muslim Brotherhood that they only expected to win some 30% of the seats in parliament. Each new day in Egypt, however, brings with it signs that contradict the – purely tactical – electoral humility shown by the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists.

The Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists will both benefit, of course, from the legacy of the Mubarak era – in the form of a society which has become Islamicized both because of the beatings to which the Muslim Brotherhood was subjected by Mubarak's regime, and because this oppression was followed or accompanied by highly publicized, cultural support for a religious way of life. Egyptian rulers President Sadat and President Mubarak – and indeed many other Arab rulers – have frequently used the threat of Islamic rule as a reason for refusing to relinquish power, while at the same time taking every opportunity to Islamicize their people. The most oppressive aspect of this legacy is the level of illiteracy, which according to official statistics stands at 35% in Egypt, while unofficial figures suggest it is closer to 65%.

In this situation, the minority does not have an easy task. Either it allows the revolution of 25 January to take its natural course, or else it embarks on a new revolution. On that historic day, the minority launched its quest for freedom. Religious manifestations during the revolution were open-minded and tolerant, unlike the religious stance of the Muslim Brotherhood

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and the Salafists, which has become stricter and more intolerant as they become steadily more confident of their impending accession to power.

But while it is not easy, the task is not impossible. The old regime lost its legitimacy, and attempted to recover some kind of validity by encouraging Islamism. Today, this legitimacy

has – at least in principle – been transferred into the hands of the people. Those who seek a swift victory in the elections will play the Islamist card as best they can, but at the same time, they must operate within the constraints of the legitimacy conferred upon them by the people, who ultimately will remain responsible for the Islamicization of Egyptian society.

A Historical Power Struggle

At heart, it was an old power struggle between the "Free Officers," headed by Gamal Abdel Nasser, and the historic organization of Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin (the Muslim Brotherhood), led by Hasan al-Banna – in other words, between the predecessors of the national party which ruled until the revolution of January 25 this year, and the current Brotherhood organization under the leadership of Mohamad Badee.

What at first was a competition between allies – the Free Officers and the Ikhwan – became the race of two opposition movements against the regime of King Farouq. This contributed to the collapse of the monarchy and the evacuation of the British from Egypt. It was a clear victory for the Free Officers, the strongest party at the time. When the Free Officers seized power, they pursued members of the Ikhwan and put them behind bars. This took place in 1952, 24 years after the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood, 24 years spent in preparation: holding tactical training camps, giving lessons, organizing themselves, and participating in parliamentary elections, in the hopes of acceding to power. The Officers' success thwarted their plan. And so occurred the first divisions within the Brotherhood's ranks: some cadres who opposed the leadership's hostility towards Nasser joined his camp and subsequently occupied influential positions in political and security establishments.

In 1956, shortly after the first wave of arrests of Ikhwan, Sayyid Qutb, a theologian of the Muslim Brotherhood, published a book entitled Ma'alim fi al-Tariq (Milestones). After reading it, Nasser decided to put the author to death: he felt two ideas greatly threatened his

non-religious rule. The first involved "society's thought:" Qutb described it as *jahili*[2] (un-Islamic) and called for actively fighting and combating it. The second idea, closely linked to the first, involved "God's sovereignty" and advocated that the only true and worthy society

> This radical Islamist movement, from within the organization toward the outside, would mark the later stages of the Brotherhood's struggles with authority.

was the one that derived its laws from the Qur'an, the Hadith[3] and the Sunna[4].

Qutb espoused an extreme radicalism in Islam. Nasser's decision to execute him strongly affected the Muslim Brotherhood, who suffered the consequences of the theologian's radicalism: another split occurred, with some avowed *Qutbiyin* (followers of Qutb thought) abandoning the organization, while other *Qutbiyin* remained in its midst.

Integration vs. Radicalization

The division was instigated by the more radical members of the Ikhwan. It was the first instance of an event that would recur throughout the Brotherhood's political life: members would complain about a "failure" or "laxness" of the mother organization in facing the ruling party's hostility towards them. They would break away from the organization, establish new Islamist groups, brandish their weapons in the face of the government, always in a hurry to undertake jihad. Besides forming *Qutbiyin* organizations, some members also joined more aggressive Islamist jihadist groups.

This radical Islamist movement, from within the organization toward the outside, would mark the later stages of the Brotherhood's struggles with authority. A familiar scenario would replay itself: A group would disapprove of the Brotherhood and the weakness it demonstrated in its campaign against the government, they would decide to break away, championing an extremist jihadi perspective premised on armed combat and *takfir*.[5] The Muslim Brotherhood was the root from which all the more Islamist jihadist groups emerged.

Nasser's integration of some Ikhwan members into his fold was accepted: Nasser was greatly loved by his people. Even after the unexpected defeat of his army in the 1967 war against Israel, the Egyptian people refused his resignation.

Two years later marked the beginning of the following stage: In 1969, the Virgin Mary miraculously appeared in Zaytun Church. The official newspaper *Al-Ahram* described the apparition as a "heavenly promise of victory," and used other such religious expressions. Nasser's era ended soon after, with his death in 1970. His deputy Anwar al-Sadat took over as president, in a climate where religiosity had slowly begun to infiltrate itself into most aspects of daily life.

The Surge of Religiosity

Sadat's genius lay in his firm grasp of the religious climate. He presented himself as "the believer president," and offered all manifestations of his religiousness to the camera, which showed him praying, and focused on the *zbeiba* (mark) on his forehead as proof of his regular praying (it was later revealed that the mark was a surgical scar). Furthermore, the "believer president" also demonstrated his faith by releasing incarcerated Ikhwan members from prison, and granting them and their sheikhs podiums, freedom of movement and freedom of assembly.

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[2] The expression *Jahiliyya* or the "era of ignorance" is usually used to describe pagan times preceding the advent of Islam.

[3] *Hadith* means talk or conversation, in Islam: narrations surrounding the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, considered important tools in Islamic jurisprudence.

[4] *Sunna* means habit or usual practice, in Islam: sayings, habits and practices of the Prophet, significant as they illuminate aspects of Islamic spirituality and law.

[5] *Takfir*: excommunication, declaring one an unbeliever, a *kafir*.

Within that context, Sadat's most important "accomplishment" was his amendment of the second article of the Egyptian Constitution in 1971. During the Nasserite era that article stated: "Islamic Sharia is one of many sources of legislation." Thanks to Sadat, it became: "Islamic Sharia is the principal source of legislation." Since then, Egypt has witnessed an increasing overlap of religion, politics and public interest, which has greatly affected its political and cultural fates.

However, Sadat also committed the gravest of sins, in the eyes of his new allies. He approached Israel with a surprise initiative, and signed the peace treaty known as the Camp David accords in 1978. This marked the rupture between Sadat and the Muslim Brotherhood, along with its Islamist offshoot groups, sheikhs and preachers. Among these was the "Jihad", the group that planned and eventually executed Sadat's assassination in October 1981, during festivities commemorating the October war of 1973. Abboud al-Zumur, a lieutenant colonel in military intelligence and a member of the Jihad, masterminded the operation, and Colonel Khalid al-Islambuli executed it. The first was sentenced to life imprisonment, but was released shortly after the revolution. The latter received capital punishment and became, at his death, a symbolic icon for armed jihadist groups that thrived after Sadat's death when Mohamad Hosni Mubarak took over. Mubarak's reign lasted from 1981 until the present year, when he was ousted by the January 25 revolution.

An Old Couple

The relationship between the new Mubarak rule and the Muslim Brotherhood was marked by the continuation of Sadat's "faith constants," and was further nurtured by increased religiosity, which reached new grounds and expressions. A new rule was added to the list of unique Mubarak precepts, namely the standstill. The standstill suited Mubarak's cautious character.

The combination of religious overbidding, standstill and paralysis confined the relationship between the ruling party and the Ikhwan to an unhealthy cyclical fight-or-flight pattern, which lasted for three decades – a period long enough to strain any relationship.

Mubarak fought fierce battles against internal terrorist organizations such as the Jamaa al-Islamiya, the Jihad, and other Qutb-inspired groups in the 1990s, and it shaped his relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. He restrained the Ikhwan on a security level, while he bolstered their intellectual control over society, by unleashing Islamist rhetoric to a degree of utter chaos: sheikhs, preachers, muftis, platforms, screens, media… All means

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were good to propagate a heightened religious state among the people – until it became virtually impossible to differentiate between a citizen who was an actual member of the Ikhwan, and a citizen who was Islamized by state apparatuses in their fight against the Brotherhood.

The other facet of the official stance toward the Muslim Brotherhood consisted of keeping them under control: the regime officially designated them as "banned," forbade offshoot groups (15 years spent trying to obtain a license for the Wasat (Middle) party remained fruitless), deprived them from growth and dialogue, perpetuated their intellectual dogmatism, allowed their members to run as "independents" in elections (in 2005, for example) then rescinded that right in the last elections (2010) through a series of procedures which made for an unprecedented degree of electoral fraud.

But the relationship was long-lived, and

engendered a degree of fusion. Like an old couple, always at odds, but needing each other to survive, the regime needed the Muslim Brotherhood to be a player in public life, so that it would not be acting alone. It also held the Ikhwan up as a scarecrow, a reminder of the threat the Brotherhood would represent should the regime fall. The regime alternately loosened and tightened its grip, as it saw fit, maintaining a certain balance that suited the general atmosphere. It allowed the Ikhwan a chance to enter parliament, after many crushing battles, to later deprive them from it, by arresting its active members. The regime then promulgated an overtly religious atmosphere, conservative and Salafi-like, in its refusal of politics. The regime needed these religious bids in order to

> A strange chemistry permeated the ambiguous coexistence of the ruling party and the Muslim Brotherhood and plunged them deeper into Islamization, along with the rest of society.

confirm its legitimacy – especially after it had lost its military legitimacy with the Camp David Accords, and its credibility with the prolongation of Mubarak's rule without consulting the electorate, through falsified referendums.

However, the Muslim Brotherhood also needed the regime. First and foremost, the organization had been occupied, since its inception, in a struggle against the ruling authority. While this brought on many divisions and offshoots, none were strong enough to dissolve or scatter the Brotherhood, perhaps due to the government's insistence on their unity, as it tried to control them. The Brotherhood also depended on the regime for its survival. Mubarak's security apparatus had wide reaching control across most of the country, and would be able to eliminate the Ikhwan at a moment's notice should it choose to, as it had done with other armed Islamic organizations in the 1990s.

Effects on Regime, Ikhwan and Society

A strange chemistry permeated the ambiguous coexistence of the ruling party and the Muslim Brotherhood and plunged them deeper into Islamization, along with the rest of society.

First, and with regards to the regime: The regime's original founding text was non-religious. With the gradual accumulation of failures, and the absence of elections or real alternatives, the text randomly fused politics and religion. Here are two eloquent examples indicative of the consequences of that haphazard amalgamation by the regime: During the 2005 legislative elections, which allowed members of the Ikhwan to run, albeit with great difficulty, posters appeared on walls and streets of the capital bearing the Brotherhood's familiar slogan, "Islam is the solution." Soon after, some candidates from the ruling national party, who felt that the Ikhwan posed a threat in their districts, decided to produce "more Islamic" posters of their own appealing to the heightened religiosity of their constituents which claimed "The Quran is the solution."

Another example: Farouq Hosni, Minister of Culture, unofficially declared to a reporter that his mother and grandmother were beautiful women who did not wear the hijab (veil), and that he disliked the veil which he did not find attractive. The reaction was quick: the comment caused widespread disapproval. However, the most salient reaction did not come from the Muslim Brotherhood, or other religious parties, but from members of the regime itself. While parliament was in session, one member stood and shouted at the minister that his comment was an insult, to his daughter, his wife and his mother. He became so emotional, that he fainted and in a somewhat farcical extension of the scene, the unconscious member of parliament was carried out of the room on the shoulders of his colleagues from the National Democratic Party. All of this, of course, under the watchful eye of the media.

We could say that the regime was often as theatrical as a magician with his hat. At times the magician would pull out the Islamist rabbit

from his hat, wave it to the public and then hide it. At others times, the magician would pull out the enlightened, progressive rabbit of the thinkers and the intellectuals, and praise it, and bask in its glory before hiding it again. And so on and so forth.

Secondly, for the Muslim Brotherhood itself, this embattled coexistence with the regime had an effect. The Ikhwan, whose internal relations were built on the premise of "hear and obey," found internal divisions difficult to assimilate. They did not enjoy real freedom, which would

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allow them to interact constructively with some of their members who advocated dialogue or openness. They were deprived of fresh air, despite the important parallel society they had built, which offered its members education, friendship, marriage and work opportunities in an integrated Islamic space.

Their literature, which championed the "hear and obey" precept, treated any public opposition to the organization's official dogma as a sin. Of course this tendency was enhanced by Mubarak's suppression, which strengthened the Ikhwan's sense of unity and coherence. The cohesion in reaction to persecution, and the precept of obedience, eradicated democracy within their organization. Their slogans during elections were understood only as means to attain power. Democracy was an (instrumental) abstract concept.

In 2008, the Ikhwan published the agenda of the party that they sought to establish. It included the re-marginalization of women and Copts. It was based on the Iranian model of authority: "A body of eminent theologians," "directly elected by clerics," would stand in complete autonomy from the executive branch of power. This assembly of theologians would impress its views upon the parliament, and its opinion would be sought in all matters regarding Islamic law, which would then be obeyed to the letter. In other words it was a "Supreme Leader democracy."

The third area which bore the brunt of the close yet hostile relationship between the regime and the Ikhwan was Egyptian society itself. As a result of that abnormal relationship, society slowly proceeded to Islamize itself, and plunged into a world of interpretations, sermons, and fatwas, which grew more constricting and intolerant with time. Some community and government members even displayed a tendency to break the law, and violate the country's institutions in an effort to establish a *haram/halal*[6] system. These growing trends did not necessarily stem form the core of the Ikhwan, or the regime, but were the logical outcome of the chemical interaction between them. It is safe to say that the degree of Islamization of Egyptian society went beyond the Ikhwan's power of framing and organizing. Indeed, a majority of Islamic manifestations in Egypt, women's veils for example, did not automatically imply loyalty to the Brotherhood.

The Ikhwan in the January 25 Revolution

On the eve of the January 25 revolution, the Ikhwan were forbidden from electing their men. They were the hardest hit by the regime's new procedures, as they had won 88 seats in parliament in the previous elections. However, the Ikhwan were not the ones who started the revolution, nor did they quickly determine their position on it. The reservation shown by the Brotherhood's leadership did not prevent the organization's youth from participating in

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6 *Haram*: forbidden by *Sharia* law. *Halal*: in accordance with Sharia law.

the revolution from day one – if only in their individual capacity. The leadership held back until the third successful day of the revolution, the Friday of Rage, after which it decided to join

> The revolution did not only terminate thirty years of Mubarak rule, but also erased the 58 years of legitimacy of the Free Officers. Mubarak was the scion of that legitimacy.

the movement, hold its own demonstrations and events, and slowly but surely integrate itself into the uprising.

The revolution did not only terminate thirty years of Mubarak rule, but also erased the 58 years of legitimacy of the Free Officers. Mubarak was the scion of that legitimacy. Sadat had paved the way for its fall, but perhaps it had already lost its credibility with the June 1967 defeat. However, with Nasser's undeniable charisma, with Egypt rising in importance in the Arab world and internationally under his reign, with the "legitimate" opposition inextricably linked to the Nasserite legacy, (and in stark contrast with Sadat who only left behind a slew of relatives drawing their relevance from their family name), it proved difficult to criticize Nasserism, or more precisely, to disparage it.

The revolution established a new legitimacy, on the ruins of the Free Officers' legacy, and thus reclaimed its historic past from before the fall of the monarchy, when pluralism was fed by tolerance, and when religion (not excessive religiosity) reigned. The prayers observed during the revolution differed from the ones observed before it, the latter carried more hostility, hatred and distress, with sheikhs spewing out expressions of militant *takfir* as if they were ordering non-practitioners to disappear. During the revolution, we saw Muslims praying alongside Christians, and surrounding them were young men and women who were not praying. The mixing of the sexes occurred in a similar manner. We read time

and again about "a young man, wearing a short *jilbab* (Salafi style of dress) sharing a bottle of water with a pretty unveiled young woman who was also smoking," or about the lack of sexual harassment incidents despite crowds of both sexes.

Will the Ikhwan Change?

All these manifestations inevitably react with the collective consciousness, mix intellectual trends, and bring on a reassessment of political beliefs. But until now, the Ikhwan still teeter between the old and the new. In a recent talk conducted by the promoters of the amendment of the second article of the constitution (Islamic Sharia is the principal source of legislation), the Ikhwan defended their position, which regarded the second article as an "Islamic gain." Essam al-Aryan, a leader of the Ikhwan, participated in that discussion and summarized his party's stance by saying: The constitution's second article was "above the constitution." Another similar example: the Ikhwan welcomed the "civil state," playing on the word's double meaning: unrelated to the military or to religion. But they enthusiastically support it because it resembles "the state at the time of the Prophet, which was a civil state with Islamic authority."

"Mubarak and the Muslim Brotherhood are twins," say many Egyptian commentators. Now that Mubarak has stepped down, will the Ikhwan change? Will they overcome their initial reactions? Will they take advantage of the new environment of freedom, and open up their organization to fresh air? Will they hold workshops and interact with the figures of the revolution? Or will they stick to the partisanship that Mubarak confined them to? It is likely that those who are most threatened by the positive influence of the revolution are the Ikhwan leaders themselves. If they open up their organization, as the current conditions are inviting them to, they risk losing their positions of power, as a new generation and new faces rise through the ranks. The leaders will surely resist that impulse, in the same way dictators oppose regime change.

And the battle that the Muslim Brotherhood were fighting today to defend constitutional amendments is but a first indication of their

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anticipation of reaping the fruits of a seventy-year-old struggle.

For the minority this raises the question of whether it will succeed in defending its threatened interests. Does it need to embark upon a second revolution to defend those interests? Will a second revolution be similar to the first one, displaying the same pace and the same kinds of behavior? Or does it need a new breath of life, new forms of expression and change?

Translation from Arabic by Joumana Seikaly

Yemen's Revolution
The Lack of Public Reasoning

The sound of heartbeats was deafening in Sanaa's 20th Street when protesters moved to the demonstration's forefront. Around 15 snipers were positioned on the rooftops of two sides of the intersection of Dairi with 20th Street. Protesters had planned on Friday, March 18, to expand the sit-in area and to erect new tents at the intersection. Members of the National Security Intelligence

> A popular joke in the Arab world states that an Arab leader came across Aladdin's magic lamp. When asked what three wishes he desired, he said: Cancel Fridays, make Facebook vanish and remove Al-Jazeera from the screens.

Service, aided by plainclothes security forces, burned rubber tires in an attempt to foil the expansion plan. They were mistaken. Eye witnesses said later that the frontline demonstrators kept moving forward, even though they met sniper bullets with their bare chests, one row after the other, until the crowd captured the snipers. After all, and despite their weapons and specialized training, the snipers were unable to defeat protesters solely armed with passion and the desire for freedom. This incident, dubbed "Bloody Friday," tipped the balance in Yemen's uprising. It changed the international community's attitude towards the regime. Until 15 March, the Yemeni President Ali Saleh, who played the card of being the only force able to contain "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula," had been their man in Yemen.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why toppling the regime is taking much longer than it did in Tunisia and Egypt. It seems that the West, mainly the U.S., has not yet identified their new man in Yemen. Nevertheless, the international rhetoric on Yemen, especially from Germany, has been quite outspoken against Saleh since then, condemning his acts of violence. It was the killing of nearly 60 protesters on March 18 that categorized Saleh among the Arab leaders to be removed.

The Yemeni Revolt Between Political Parties and Protest Movement

A popular joke in the Arab world states that an Arab leader came across Aladdin's magic lamp. When asked what three wishes he desired, he said: "Cancel Fridays, make Facebook vanish and remove Al-Jazeera from the screens." The joke highlights the three significant tools used in the Arab Spring: the regional news channel, Facebook and, even more interesting, the importance of Friday's religious ceremonies as a catalyst of political mobilization. The religious opposition party in Yemen, the Islah (Reform) Party, orchestrated the so-called Shaheed (Martyr) Project. Through this project young men are enlisted who are willing to die for their cause. This mobilization relies on people's passion for change while promising them a better life on earth, as well as the promise of heaven in the afterlife. The potential shaheed wears a dishdasha – a long, white robe symbolizing a shroud – and a headband with the word "shaheed" written on it. These men have said their goodbyes to their loved ones before joining the demonstrations, and are fully aware

Nadia Al-Sakkaf

Nadia al-Sakkaf is the editor-in-chief of The Yemen Times, since March 2005. She is the winner of the first Gebran Tueni Award and one of the leading media and development activists in Yemen. Al-Sakkaf is a member of the Yemeni and the International Journalists Syndicate and was a student member of Amnesty International while studying in the UK. She edited numerous publications including "Breaking the Stereotype," a book on Yemeni women's experience as political candidates in elections.

of the risk they are taking. The "chosen ones," or potential shaheeds, walk in the front rows of demonstrations. On Fridays, when millions of protesters march in the streets across Yemen after prayers, they also honor the men who gave their lives in the struggle for freedom in their chants and on their banners.

However, blind passion is problematic, especially in a country whose citizens are not used to taking responsibility for their lives, such as Yemen. Public reasoning is lacking. One

> The nation's entire demands are summarized in one word, "irhal" – which translates to "Get out!" This is a deliberate political move by opposition parties who feel that raising detailed demands might divide the crowds – or worse – force these parties to be held accountable if and when they assume power.

glance at the demands of the protesters clearly reveals the existence of a unified political message: Topple the regime. Despite the fact that Yemeni demonstrators are learning the jargon of the intellectual elite, there is a huge disconnect between the political language and what people really feel. For example, when asked why they are protesting, most of the revolution's youth talk about dignity, corruption and poverty. However, the official line of the revolutionary opposition makes no reference to that. In fact, the nation's entire demands are summarized in one word, "irhal" – which translates to "Get out!" This is a deliberate political move by opposition parties who feel that raising detailed demands might divide the crowds – or worse – force these parties to be held accountable if and when they assume power. For example, the semi-organized women's movement in Yemen, the Watan

Coalition, demands a 30 percent quota for women in elected and non-elected bodies of a new government. Yet none of the banners, even those carried by women, reflect this demand, and none of the negotiations among political parties touch on this point, even remotely. If the quota demand were raised publicly, all political forces would then have to address it, hence revealing their true colors. This lack of public reasoning, and the vagueness of political vision in the popular movement, is used by existing political parties to reach power. On more than one occasion, politicians of the established opposition parties described the youth movement as a mobilizing actor who will disappear once the regime is toppled.

In a way, this argument is legitimate – because crowds cannot make policies or rule a country. Countries need institutional bodies and political parties to manage them. The lack of democratic and political experience among the revolution's youth is an obstacle to their organized political representation. One example of this problem is that there are at least 72 factions and independent activist groups who make only up for one-third of the 300,000 protesters in the sit-in area near Sanaa's university; on Fridays, the protesters easily surpasses one million people, coming from all walks of life. In contrast, the established parties have achieved a higher level of organization. At their main protest site, the Tagheer (Change) Square in Sanaa, they established specific committees with defined roles and responsibilities for protection, medical aid and media contacts. Without this important organization, Yemen's revolution would probably not have achieved its momentum and success, especially as the protesters come from very different backgrounds and orientations.

Shattered Stereotypes
The tribes of Yemen surprised the world and the Yemenis alike when they refrained from using their arms – even when being shot at. Instead, they joined the protestor's "*silmiya silmiya*" (peaceful, peaceful) chants when marching in

their traditional attire from all across the country. The defection of the prominent army General Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, a member of the president's tribe, two days after the "Bloody Friday" gave Yemen's revolution an extraordinary push. Equally important was the role of tribal leaders in the areas of Marib, Khawlan, Sa'ada, Shabwa, including even sheikhs from the president's Al-Ahmar clan who joined the revolution against Ali Saleh. Most astonishingly, the tribes accepted, initially, to leave their weapons at home and to join the peaceful protests, despite their almost historic involvement in armed conflict and possession of heavy artillery. The ability of those tribesmen to let go of a centuries' old

> As Yemen's women have tried the taste of being publicly active and engaged in their own country's affairs, they are likely to continue playing a significant role after the revolution, even if not as prominent.

culture of violence and revenge killing for the sake of ousting the president indicates that the stereotype of Yemen as a culture plagued by tribal conflict was exaggerated for at least most of the first five months of the year. With political will and education, many Yemenis were hoping in this period that a civilian state based on equal citizenship could become a political option in Yemen. In fact, this is what the tribesmen themselves were demanding as they joined the revolution. Moreover, the demonstrations in Change Square achieved what many mediation efforts had failed to produce. Rival tribal sheikhs from clans fighting each other reached agreements, ending conflicts that lasted decades.

However, on 21 May, the rules changed. With the attacks by State Security and Republican Guard forces against the powerful

leader of the Hashid tribe, Sadeq al-Ahmar, the political conflict transformed gradually into tribal warfare. Moreover, armed tribes had already taken over several government offices and security checkpoints outside Sanaa.

Another stereotype that was shattered to pieces was about women. Given that 50 percent of Yemeni women are illiterate, and that less than 20 percent are integrated into the formal economic sector, it was amazing how women were not only part of the revolution but on many occasions, especially in the beginning, leaders of it. The conservative, male-dominated society somehow allowed women to play a leading role. One publicly expressed explanation is that these extraordinary times required desperate measures. However, as Yemen's women have tried the taste of being publicly active and engaged in their own country's affairs, they are likely to continue playing a significant role after the revolution, even if not as prominent.

The Role of Social Media
The reference to Facebook in the above-mentioned joke seems valid even in Yemen, where Internet penetration does not exceed five percent. Facebook and mobile media played a crucial role in rallying the public and getting the young people of the silent majority involved. Yemenis with a Facebook profile are relatively better-off than the 40 percent Yemenis below the food poverty line, whose first concern is where the next meal will come from. Yet, even they joined the revolution and lobbied for it through creative artwork on the revolution and forming events for protests. In fact, using Facebook and text messaging was the main tool used in Yemen's revolution to organize the public. It only requires one person with Internet access to convey the time and location of the next protest to 100 people in a room, and so on. Yemenis also set up a website to lobby for the prosecution of Ali Saleh as a war criminal.[1]

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[1] See under: http://yemenportal.net/ and http://yemenportal.net/ thawra (both Arabic)

Yemen Left on Its Own

The Gulf Initiative, despite all the shuttle diplomacy to and from Yemen, has failed by all standards. The Gulf States, along with the international community, tried to convince Saleh to let go of power, although there are question marks over the wholeheartedness of the Saudi King Abdullah and the Bahraini Crown Prince Salman al-Khalifa. This initiative was Yemen's last chance for a non-violent exit. Now the

> Should the protesters be unable to takeover vital state institutions, their fight will become similar to that of Libya's opposition.

international community is empty-handed and, in simple words, Yemen is left on its own to sort its problems.

From the onset of event, three possible scenarios seemed possible. Reports from Saleh's close family said that he had fallen ill again, after recovering from cancer. If this takes the better of him he might have one or two strikes against protesters before he surrenders and leaves to Jeddah to join his fellow Arab ruler Ben Ali of Tunisia.

A more violent scenario was chosen by the opposition political parties through the protesters' escalation committee. The plan included the takeover of sensitive state institutions such as the Cabinet, the TV and Radio Corporation, as well as governorate offices outside the capital Sanaa. The protesters know that they cannot take over the Presidential Palace without thousands of them being killed, so they opted for the Prime Minister's office.

Should the protesters be unable to takeover vital state institutions, their fight will become similar to that of Libya's opposition. It is likely that security and army officers may defect and join the revolution, especially when they see that they are going against their countrymen to protect a regime that is already falling. The effort it will take to rebuild the nation after the revolution is proportional to how long it takes for a regime to be changed. Today, there are already shortages in fuel, cooking gas and electricity. Many private sector companies are losing money and international investors have packed up and left. Many jobs were lost and it will take enormous efforts and billions of donor money to stabilize the economy and restore a semi-normal life in the country. What Saleh chooses to do in Yemen will define the pace of recovery in the country – and how he will be remembered by history. Will his place be as the man who unified the two Yemens and who established the oil industry? The way things are going, this image is highly unlikely.

Bahrain: Change of the Regime or Changes Within the Regime?

The 14ᵗʰ February Uprising

Bahrain has witnessed an uprising since 14th February 2011, the eruption of which was signaled by a call on Facebook two weeks earlier. The call promoted two slogans: one, that the protests should be of a peaceful nature; and two, that the aim is to topple the regime. Both demands were in line with their precedents in Tunisia and Egypt, and with the popular

> **Despite the peaceful nature of the protests, it was quelled with ruthless force resulting in deaths and tens of causalities among the protesters.**

expression, "The people want the downfall of the regime" *(ash-shab yurid isqat al-nizam)*. The call came from anonymous persons, but thousands of Bahrainis supported it on the Facebook group entitled "14th February Bahrain Revolution."

The "legal" opposition, namely those opposition political organizations that are licensed by the government, were perplexed but supported the right to peaceful protests. Two of them, both important, the Shia-Islamist Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society and the leftist Waad - National Democratic Action Society supported the call openly to avoid a possible rift with the so-called 14th February Youth. The non-licensed opposition groupings, namely the dynamic Al-Haq Movement for Liberty and Democracy and the Al-Wafa Islamic Trend, were part of the group that initiated the 14th February movement. Hence, the opposition of

all shades was in agreement with the uprising, despite differences on the agenda and means of protests.

The first days of the uprisings (14–17 February) witnessed increasingly dramatic developments, which led to an unprecedented situation in the country. None of the concerned parties, nor the opposition, the security establishment, the government nor the general public expected such a large turnout of protesters amid tight security measures. Tens of thousands showed up in defiance. Despite the peaceful nature of the protests, it was quelled with ruthless force resulting in deaths and tens of causalities among the protesters. The funeral of a victim at Al-Daih village, east of the island's capital Manama, on February 15, was massive. Thousands advanced towards the so-called Lulu (in English, Pearl) roundabout[1]

in Manama. The circle is a vital intersection of Bahrain's roads network, with empty areas around to accommodate thousands of cars. These areas came to the advantage of the protesters. They seized the roundabout and renamed it, in commemoration of the killed, "Martyr's Circle."

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[1] Its official name is the GCC-Roundabout (GCC = Gulf Cooperation Council).

Mostafa Abdulla

Mostafa Abdulla (pseudonym) is a senior Bahraini human rights defender.

The army and security forces waged a dawn raid against the protesters in the circle, killing more people and wounding hundreds, including medical staff. Waves of protesters advanced towards the circle, and finally, after heavy civilian causalities, gathered there again on the afternoon of February 19. The U.S. pressed the Bahraini authorities to withdraw the army and called for restraint in the use of force. The ordered withdrawal from the circle caused the collapse of security morale, and the troops fled from the advancing masses.

The circle subsequently emerged as the public center of the uprising's activities, similar to Tahrir Square in Cairo. Successive funeral processions galvanized wider protests. With time, protests spread to other parts of the country, bringing hundreds of thousands to the streets. A new tactic evolved to enforce

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demands, by targeting particular ministries or government premises, moving the masses from the circle toward these premises and encircling them for hours. Among them were the Ministry of Interior and the Council of Ministers, which were pressured specifically with the demand to dismiss the Prime Minister.

The Background to the Protests

It is the island's majority Shia population (accounting for around 70% of the population[2]) that has been particularly disenfranchised by the regime's discriminatory policies. It is important to note, though, that dissatisfaction with authoritarian rule, corruption and economic stagnation cuts across sectarian divisions. Attempts to mobilize opposition go back more than ten years when mostly Shiites,

but also Sunnis, protested against the lack of political participation, systemic discrimination and corruption during what has become known as the 1994-1998 intifada. The response of the government was violent, and thousands of protesters were detained and opposition leaders expelled.

At the beginning of the new millennium, then Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Issa Al-Khalifa (who in 2002 declared himself King) promised reforms that would end the political repression that marked the 1990s and that would transform Bahrain's absolute monarchy into a constitutional one. Instead, however, he established a sham parliamentary system and single-handedly issued a constitution that monopolized power in the hands of the elites. The already existing discrimination against the majority Shia population, that runs through all sectors of society, was even further institutionalized. A consultative council, appointed by the King, can block any legislation issued by the elected lower house. Electoral districts were set up in a way that limited Shia representation. All these steps contradicted his reform promises and served to exacerbate popular hostility.

Within the framework of its controversial "naturalization policy," the Bahraini regime has long pursued the recruitment of Sunni foreigners (including non-Bahraini Arabs and Pakistanis) into the army and police and grants them citizenship. Meanwhile the majority Shia population remains largely excluded from the country's security forces. This policy was deliberately intensified with the uprising during the 1990s to avoid defections from security ranks, and has hence alienated the Shia population even further.

Both Al-Wifaq and Al-Waad boycotted the 2002 elections. In 2006, however, the opposition suddenly decided to run for parliamentary elections with the aim of changing politics from "within." This led to the emergence of other, more effective and confrontational platforms for political opposition, including the Al-Haq Movement for Liberty and Democracy,

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[2] The Sunni-Shia ratio may have shifted as a result of the regime's naturalization policy of Sunni foreigners.

which came to enjoy broad legitimacy in the population, but is brutally repressed up to this day.

The Actors of 14th February

The forces for change were a blend of the 14th February initiators, political opposition groups, civil society coalitions and professional associations and unions, mixed Shia and Sunni. Despite the broad diversity in nature, positions, agendas and organization, there was a general consensus on the need for a radical change. The slogan, "No Shiites, no Sunnis, only Bahrainis," reflected the broad rejection of the regime's attempts to portray the opposition as sectarian.

The forces of change can be categorized into two groups:

The first group was formed of the 14th February Youth, the unlicensed opposition (Al-Haq Al-Wafa, and Al-Ahrar), and a large number of protesters who called for the fall of the Al-Khalifa rule, and thus refused the dialogue with the regime.

The second group included the seven licensed opposition associations (Al-Wefaq, Al-Waad, Al-Minbar al-Taqaddumi, Al-Tajammu' al-Qawmi, Al-Tajammu' al-Watani, Al-Ikha' and Al-Amal) and those civil society coalitions who demanded a truly constitutional monarchy and opted for conditional dialogue with the regime, after it met certain preconditions and guarantees. These included the dismissal of the government and the formation of a national coalition interim government, the security of the protesters, the release of all prisoners of conscience, and an independent investigation into the attacks and abuses committed by the security forces.

A Growing Sectarian Rift

Apart from applying brute force, the regime moved to rally its supporters, mainly Sunni loyalists, for a counter-rally at Al-Fateh mosque and surroundings after the Friday prayer on February 25. More pro-regime rallies and demonstrations followed in different Sunni-dominated districts.

Despite immense differences in size, sequence and between the commitment of the opposition on the one hand and loyalist manifestations on the other, the sectarian Sunni-Shia rift increasingly threatened to divert the conflict away from its original course. Several sectarian skirmishes, both verbal and

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physical, occurred, in which Sunni Arabs that were granted Bahraini citizenship by the regime's naturalization policy participated actively.

This motivated the political opposition and Shia clerics to urge their public not to respond to these attacks, and addressed the Bahrainis at large to denounce sectarianism and to preserve national unity. However, the official television and radio, as well as Sunni sectarian channels and websites loyal to the power elite, promoted and exacerbated sectarianism animosities and in particular anti-Shiism.

Responses by the Regime

During the course of events, some important developments unfolded:

After its onslaught on Pearl Roundabout the regime refrained from using force against protesters, and the anti-riot police, who terrorized people and quelled protests, were withdrawn from the streets. On 22 and 23 February 2011 more than 200 persons, mainly

human rights defenders who were charged and convicted (including 25 who were on trial for very serious charges such as terrorism and plotting to overthrow the King), were released. However, 91 convicted activists remained behind bars.

King Hamad announced a gift of 1,000 Bahraini Dinars (approx. 2,600 US$) for each family, and the creation of 20,000 jobs. A grand plan to construct 50,000 new housing units in order to fulfill growing demand was also declared.

A partial cabinet reshuffle took place. Four ministers, including two belonging to the Al-Khalifa family, lost their positions (Minister of Housing and Cabinet Minister); two Sunni ministers (Minister of Electricity and Water and Minister of Health) were assigned to other ministries; and two new ministers were appointed (a Shia Minister of Labor and a Sunni Cabinet Minister). The Council of Ministers

promised to solve the chronic problems of unemployment, housing and other social issues.

King Hamad also assigned his son, Crown Prince Sheikh Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, to engage in a dialogue with all the relevant parties in order to achieve a political solution to the crisis. At the same time, however, the regime consolidated the National Unity Bloc (NUB), a loyal political Sunni bloc, in order to counter the opposition under one umbrella. The prominent Sunni cleric Sheikh Abdulatif al-Mahmud, who publicly denounced the protests as a "threat to the very existence of Sunnis," was appointed as the head, and all state support and patronage networks were rendered to its service.

Socio-economic Appeasement vs. Political Demands

The Crown Prince delegated envoys to meet with the leadership of the seven licensed political opposition associations on 11 March, with a proposal for dialogue. They responded with their vision for this dialogue. He also addressed the NUB and several public associations, inviting them to submit their visions for dialogue.

> What he and the other Gulf rulers did not realize, was that the root of the protests is a political one and a quest for dignity across all the GCC states.

The major ones did present their visions, either as blocs or as individuals. There was a general consensus among the pro-reform grouping on the necessary preconditions for dialogue, as well as on the terms of dialogue for the collective negotiation process. The regime refused to accept some of the preconditions, including to dismiss the government, to form an interim government of national consensus, and to draw up a new constitution through the constituent assembly. The NUB responded by proposing a dialogue agenda that included some reforms, but that neither commented on the preconditions nor envisaged constitutional changes.

The positions of the regime and the opposition on the major issues were so far apart, and the gap of confidence – especially on part of the opposition bloc – had widened so much, that the opposition started to seek international guaranties and welcomed a Kuwaiti mediation initiative.

On 6 March, thousands of protesters surrounded the Qodebia Palace, the Prime Minister's office, and demanded his resignation. On state television on the afternoon of that day, the Crown Prince admitted the gravity of the crisis and offered his vision of solving it through dialogue with all parties, including the 14th

February Youth. Yet, his speech was short of an indication that the radical changes demanded by the opposition would be addressed.

He refused the demand to dismiss the government and to form a coalition government, and he opposed demonstrations outside the Pearl circle. Instead, he stressed the need to satisfy the demands for jobs, housing and other socio-economic needs, which could be met with the GCC Marshall Plan – a plan which is underway to support Oman and Bahrain to overcome the roots of unrest, through the improvement of living conditions, job opportunities and housing schemes. What he and the other Gulf rulers did not realize, was that the root of the protests is a political one and a quest for dignity across all the GCC states.

Between Negotiated Settlement and Security Crackdown

The race between a negotiated settlement and the security crackdown accelerated amid grave risks. Three unregistered movements (Al-Haq, Al-Wafa and Al-Ahrar) raised the stakes after the exiled Al-Haq leader Hasan Musheme returned from his exile in the UK once a royal amnesty was issued.

On 11 March, at the Pearl Roundabout, Musheme announced the formation of the Alliance for the Republic, composed of Al-Haq, Al-Wafa and Al-Ahrar. This happened in agreement with the 14th February movement, and fuelled the demand for bringing down the regime, instead of reforming it, among the protesters and the Shia community at large. This was contrary to the proclaimed demand by the six registered opposition associations (a seventh, Al-Amal, had joined the other camp) to reform the regime. The trend among the masses shifted in favor of those forces that brought forth more radical demands.

On the ground, the anti-reform camp expanded its realm and heightened its demands. Its followers occupied part of the Financial Harbor business hub, and closed the King Faisal Road, a vital route connecting Muhraq island, via business and government

ministries areas, with highways and roads to the rest of the country and eventually to Saudi-Arabia. In addition to that, everyday, a march against a ministry or official agency was organized to paralyze their functioning and to press for the demands. The pressure was intensified with the radical groups declaring civil disobedience. The Teachers' Society called for a strike in the education sector, triggered by arson attacks that pro-security militia launched at Shia students at Bahrain University and other schools. The safety of Shia protesters and population was increasingly at risk due to militias and security checkpoints. The strike in the education sector was followed by a call for a general strike, issued by the Bahrain Trade Union. This, in addition to road blocks and security threats, created a chaotic situation and caused massive economic losses.

Amid this frenetic atmosphere, the disagreement among the opposition forces prevailed. The Crown Prince put forward a "last offer" to the opposition during a meeting with an official delegation of the leaders of the registered opposition. It claimed to respond to some basic demands of the opposition, such as the establishment of a representative

> Tens were assassinated and hundreds were detained or simply "disappeared."

government, a fair electoral system, a fully empowered parliament and an investigation into the naturalization policy. However, it fell short of the preconditions demanded by the opposition in order to engage in dialogue. These included the dismissal of the government, the formation of an interim government, the guarantee of the security of the protesters, the formation of an investigation committee, a new constitution by constituent assembly, and a time table for implementation. Bowing to the pressure of the radical groups and the protesters, the registered opposition did not engage in the dialogue according to the crown prince's initiative.

The negotiated settlement slipped away, and international security resolution was imminent.

Saudi-Emirati Military Intervention and Crackdowns

On 15 March, Saudi-UAE Forces, alongside a Kuwaiti naval unit belonging to the GCC Peninsula Shield (Dera Al-Jazeera), rolled into Bahrain across the Saudi Arabian-Bahraini causeway. It was mainly an infantry and armored force that was deployed in key positions and vital areas. This was designed as a clear warning to the Bahraini opposition, and freed the Bahrain Defense Force (BDF) to carry out security operations together with the security forces. The opposition did not realize the significance of this development. Instead of clearing the roads and the Pearl roundabout voluntarily, they organized anti-Saudi protests and issued a condemnation of the invasion.

On the morning of 17 March, joint BDF and security forces, with GCC forces back up in the vicinity, launched a massive attack against the protesters occupying Pearl circle, King Faisal Road and the Financial Harbor. They cleared the area in a "cleansing operation," according to the BDF spokesman. On the same day, a State of Emergency was decreed by King Hamad, thus granting the High Commander of the Armed Forces full power to use the army and security forces to impose security. Eventually the Pearl (actually the GCC) monument was toppled to erase "the bad memories," according to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Khalid Al-Khalifa.

This opened an unprecedented political campaign against the opposition, even the registered seven organizations, activists and the Shia community at large. The forces involved were the armed forces, the security, the intelligence and militias. Tens were assassinated, and hundreds were detained or simply "disappeared." Among those arrested were the leaders of the opposition, including Ebrahim Sharef, a secular Sunni and leader of Waad, Hassan Mesheme, the leader of Al-Haq, and Abdul-Wahab Hosen, leader of Al-Wafa, as

well as numerous political and human rights activists, physicians, paramedics, bloggers and people of all walks of life. Officials called for sanctioning the opposition associations, for holding accountable its leaders and cadres for their "crimes against the country and the people," for penalizing strikers by dismissal or other measures. A process to recruit expatriates

> One of the worst outcomes is the collective punishment of the Shia population and their districts.

in order to replace dismissed employees and workers is already in swing.

This was accompanied by sectarian propaganda attacks. Shia beliefs and the Shiites' loyalty to the ruling families of the GCC, particularly Bahrain, is now being questioned, and they are portrayed as plotters, saboteurs and clients to Iran. One of the worst outcomes is the collective punishment of the Shia population and their districts. Operations of siege, search, arrests and attacks are in full swing. Shiites are even being threatened eviction from mixed Shia-Sunni neighborhoods. The premises of the opposition, as well as the residencies of some of its leaders, are being attacked and burned down by militias.

Gloomy Scenarios

It is already grave that, despite the attempts of the opposition to represent their movement as a national instead of a sectarian one, the protests are being discredited as a Shia-sectarian

agitation. The other dangerous development is that the uprising in Bahrain is increasingly being portrayed as part of a plot mastered by Iran and the Lebanese Hizbollah, targeting the GCC region as a whole. Fancy allegations of secret military cells and arms are proclaimed by Bahraini officials and echoed in the Gulf.

> The hopes for a constitutional monarchy are dashed, while grim authoritarian rule will prevail for years.

Gulf Air and Bahrain Air had suspended their flights to Lebanon, Iraq and Iran. Due to a travel ban to Lebanon, Bahraini nationals who visit Lebanon have to fear reprisals. Consequently, a campaign to expel alleged pro-Hizbollah Lebanese Shiites, as well as pro-Iran Pasdran, has been launched in Bahrain, and may spread to other GCC member states.

Saudi Arabia, on which Bahrain strongly depends, is not only supporting the oppression of the uprising militarily, but is also pressuring the Bahraini King to contain Shia and opposition demands. There was a slim hope offered by the official Kuwaiti initiative of Emir Sobah Al-Jaber Al-Sobah to mediate between the Bahraini rulers and the registered opposition (headed by Al-Wefaq), and to engage in a dialogue as envisioned by Crown Prince Sheikh Salaman Al-Khalifa – according to his terms this time. Eventually, however, the Kuwaitis abandoned their initiative as it was refused by the Bahraini rulers.

It will take a miracle to recover the national unity of the Bahraini people. The hopes for a constitutional monarchy are dashed, while grim authoritarian rule will prevail for years. It appears likely that the opposition will be further marginalized and the persecution of the Shia population will continue.

A Tense Syria in a Changing Arab World

This article was written before the recent escalation of protests in Syria. For an update, it is followed by an interview with the author. [Editor's note]

Successive revolutions in a number of Arab countries have become the trend of political events receiving the widest attention and greatest enthusiasm in the Arab world in decades. More than one Arab generation has lived without experiencing the kind of good news it has witnessed and followed since the beginning of this year. Perhaps these events are the second most important in the history of each country after its independence from colonial rule six decades ago.

> These revolutions are not Islamic, nationalist or Arab, nor are they revolutions demanding bread.

The amount of attention given to the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, followed by the large protest movements in Yemen, Bahrain and Libya, among others, has also led to fierce competitions between parents and their children over the television. Whereas previously it was sufficient to follow news coverage sporadically, today this generation of parents wants to follow the latest news constantly, switching between Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, the BBC and other stations – a matter which is of course contrary to the interests of their children, who want to watch children's shows and music stations.

Family negotiations vary and fluctuate, but nonetheless a fair amount of the news on the revolutions has begun to echo in the minds of children, fermenting inside them. Last February,

a brave Syrian journalist wrote that he found his child, who is not yet two years old, chanting the call to overthrow the regime! And, in one school in the city of Homs, eighth graders were playing and began to chant the slogan, "The people want to overthrow the regime and… Miss (their teacher)!" This, of course, occurred before the school's administration was quick to show there would be merciless punishment for such reckless play.

In the meantime, this rare political activism among a wide and diverse public throughout the Arab world has been met with apprehension and awkwardness on the part of the rulers and governments of these countries. It is clear to everyone – the ruled and the rulers – that these revolutions are targeting the aggressive practices of the authorities, and the intimate relationship between the authorities and wealth. It is clear to everyone that the driving spirit behind these revolutions is a democratic spirit that is aspiring for equality, freedom and dignity – these revolutions are not Islamic, nationalist or Arab, nor are they revolutions demanding bread.

When it comes to matters of money and authority, the differences between the Arab regimes are negligible. These regimes are all united by their shared ambition to monopolize all power for all time. As such, they all share the desire to bequeath their power to their heirs, in addition to monopolizing all the wealth. Indeed, this kind of wealth is not amassed independently, and perhaps it has led to developing an independent political resolve to

Yassin al-Haj Salih

Yassin al-Haj Salih is a Syrian writer and dissenter based in Damascus. He was a political prisoner between 1980 and 1996. He is the author of "Syria in the Shadow: Looks inside the Black Box" (Arabic, 2009). He writes for several Arab newspapers and journals outside of Syria and regularly contributes to *Al-Hayat* newspaper.

achieve such aims; all this is notwithstanding the attempts to monopolize access to all sources of information. However, success in this area has been limited by the communications revolution, satellites and particularly the Internet. As for the foreign alliances of the Arab regimes, and the ideological disparities that exist between them, they have all been neutralized by these revolutions in an unprecedented manner.

Another party has been hurt by these ongoing revolutions, the Egyptian revolution in particular: Israel. A remarkable divergence in the approaches of the U.S. and Israel emerges in this regard. The Mubarak regime was an intimate and trusted friend of Israel, where all political resolve and hope for independent aspirations were completely absent (on the part of the Egyptians). As such, one of the concerns of a democratic revolution, such as the Egyptian revolution, is to grant a larger margin for the voice of ordinary Egyptians in determining the political course taken by the regime, and in driving the policies of the new state toward aspirations and directions that are much more independent. It is no small matter that anti-Israeli slogans had little presence during this revolution. However it was clear that the general stand taken by the revolution was contemptuous of Israel. Many found that there was no better way of degrading and debasing Mubarak and his ability to comprehend the people's desire to overthrow him than by telling him so in Hebrew.

The American position was more positive and flexible. In part this posture was an attempt to avoid any clashes with a revolution that was unquestionably just and exceptionally moral, and where any antagonism or apathy toward it could lead to great American losses, perhaps losses similar to those suffered in Iran over three decades ago. Perhaps there was a genuine element of sympathy inspired by the peacefulness of this revolution, as well as its courage and its non-ideological and non-Islamic nature. In this regard, the Americans were also more positive, forthwith and proactive than the Europeans. Indeed, the latter were hesitant and

reluctant at first, taking on a negative attitude before they followed that of the Americans.

Syrian Impressions

It was only at a later stage in the Egyptian revolution that the Syrian media began to show interest in these revolutions, and began to respond positively to them. However, the Syrian media would also hasten to interpret and present these revolutions as being directed against regimes allied to the West, in an attempt to label these revolutions and symbolically seize the moment, as well as to thwart and undermine any unpleasant fallout from entering Syrian minds.

In parallel, the Syrian authorities also adopted a policy of denial: We are not like Tunisia, Egypt and Libya… and so on. But, in reality, it has behaved in a manner that shows

> The Syrian authorities adopted a policy of denial: We are not like Tunisia, Egypt and Libya… and so on. But, in reality, it has behaved in a manner that shows that we are exactly like Egypt, Tunisia and Libya…

that we are exactly like Egypt, Tunisia and Libya… Suddenly, the conduct of the police and of state employees toward ordinary Syrians has become more courteous and cooperative. And, suddenly rumors have begun to circulate about the intention of the authorities to employ university graduates and to raise the salaries of state employees. It is not unlikely that government bodies are responsible for promoting these rumors as a measure to pacify and calm the general public mood.

In any case, the authorities have not limited their actions to such measures alone. In parallel, the state security's grip has been seriously tightened and any form or possibility of public protests is dealt with severely. On February 23, activists planning to gather and

rally before the Libyan Embassy in Damascus were beaten, with 14 of them detained for short periods of time. In the first week of February, activists lighting candles in solidarity with those martyred in the Egyptian revolution were beaten and humiliated. The Syrian authorities are certainly well aware that any Syrian empathy toward the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions involves some form of opposition to the Syrian regime, taking into consideration that the situation against which the Tunisians, Egyptians and Libyans revolted is the same as the situation which prevails in Syria today.

Accordingly, talk abounds about a return to "public sector" economics, and about activating the role of the Ba'ath Party and the "Union of Revolutionary Youth," (an organization affiliated with the Ba'ath Party that has a monopoly over youth employment in Syria, but which has been neglected for the last ten years). If what is taking place is true in this regard, then it is an indication of a predilection to adopt a holistic solution in confronting the wave of democracy. Meanwhile, it is difficult to ascertain the accuracy and truth behind all the rumors circulating. But what can be said with a certain degree of confidence is that there are many rumors, and that many of these rumors contradict each other, all of which are strong indicators of the general atmosphere of confusion and disorder prevailing in the country.

While it is difficult to speak about what Syrians are actually thinking, one would not be mistaken in stating that some are more honest, today, in expressing their opposition and in expressing their desire for political change. These voices are no longer limited to the usual narrow circle of political dissidents and activists, but also include youth of both sexes who are speaking out with unprecedented audacity and boldness on the pages of Facebook or within their own circles. A restless and eager hum about change can be heard from diverse circles, that once used to be more discreet. It appears that no one is seriously contemplating the idea that we are different from Egypt or Tunisia, or that we cannot have a revolution, or

that there is nothing to justify the eruption of a revolution.

This does not negate the fact that there are genuine differences between Syria and these other Arab countries, which in any case also differ from one another. However, the differences are in the types of obstacles, challenges and problems facing the prospects of revolution. Among these factors, fear of the

> **But perhaps we should ask whether the Syrians fear one another?**

regime is not the most important. Of course, this fear is present. However, the situation was the same in Tunisia, in Egypt and in other countries, but perhaps to a lesser extent. At the same time, it has been proven that peaceful, popular protests can triumph, especially if tens and hundreds of thousands participate in them. Indeed, the simplest lesson to be drawn from the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions is that the cost of change is much less than the cost of maintaining the status quo; and that the moral and political gains of change are immeasurably higher than what the status quo has to offer and, perhaps at a later stage, in material gains as well. It may well be that the hopes of Arab governments in deferring this lesson, or in raising the cost of changing these regimes – including tipping the balance in favor of the status quo – are hanging on the fate of the Gaddafi regime. All this is being carefully monitored on an extensive scale in Syria by the authorities and by many different segments and generations of Syrian society.

But perhaps we should ask whether the Syrians fear one another? Syria is a Near Eastern country comprised of diverse religions, sects and ethnicities. The level of national consensus is not ideal in Syria. Moreover, all Syrians are aware of this reality and fear it. Syrians live adjacent to the painful Iraqi experience, and to the Lebanese example, which is also not encouraging. And, although

it increasingly appears that these communal differences and disparities do not carry in themselves the risk of civil strife and conflict, there remains a framework for conflict that is not immune to manipulation by internal and external forces, which may find a fertile environment for exploitation. This is what haunts any prospective hopes and aspirations for extensive political change in Syria.

Syria is also different from other countries in the region, in that it is the only Arab "republic"

> Is the regime in Syria 11 years old or 41 years old? The president's youth partially obscures the regime's progression in age.

in which hereditary rule was actually imposed. The Syrian president is a young man in his mid-forties. This is in contrast to the fact that hereditary rule was one of the first tenets brought down by the Egyptian revolution, and before it the Tunisian revolution; it was overturned before the two leaders in these countries actually fell from power. It also seems that this same principle has been brought down in Yemen, by an explicit pledge made by Yemen's president himself. The same is true of Libya, where its patriarch and all his successors have lost all legitimacy both domestically and externally.

Is the regime in Syria 11 years old or 41 years old? The president's youth partially obscures the regime's progression in age.

Another important difference is that Syria is a "rejectionist"[1] country. It has opposed peace with Israel and has long been a supporter of resistance movements in the region, particularly Hizbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, in addition to having maintained a close alliance with Iran in confronting the American-Israeli

axis. This is an important matter. The regime in Syria has a "cause," and no real differences exist between Syrians on these issues. This was not the case with the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, and uprisings against other regimes. In Syria, as in other Arab countries, there is a lack of individual and collective dignities. However, the lack of collective dignity in Syria is less severe due to Syria's open enmity and hostility towards Israel's occupation of Arab territory.

Thus, due to the concerted influence of all these factors, different sectors of Syrian society identify with the regime and stand by it. The question is whether this support is greater than that enjoyed by the Ben Ali and the Mubarak regimes among Tunisians and Egyptians? There is no definitive answer to this question, but it is most likely in the positive. Mubarak and Ben Ali supporters are opportunists. In Syria however, ideological elements factor into the support shown for the existing regime, in addition to the gains and privileges enjoyed by opportunists. Besides the "rejectionist" policy, the regime espouses elements of "modernity" and "secularism" that are welcomed by religious and sectarian minorities within a pluralistic Syrian society comprised of diverse religions and faiths, which also includes a not insignificant part of the Sunni Islamic community that also embraces these values.

Ultimately, it is difficult to predict the possibilities and prospects for Syria in the near future. The grievances regarding freedoms, justice and dignity do exist, as do grievances about corruption, unemployment, mismanagement and poverty. However, factors also exist that partially mitigate these grievances.

The number of youth in the Syrian age pyramid exceeds that of most other Arab countries, with unemployment among youth aged between 15 and 25 years currently being very high, at over 25%. Moreover, in recent years, poverty has increased. A United Nations study conducted seven years ago estimates that the number of people living under the

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[1] The Arabic term *"mumana'a"* refers to the act of rejecting or opposing the normalization of relations between Israel and Arab countries.

poverty line is high, with 31% of the population (or over 23 million people) at the higher end of the poverty line living on two U.S. dollars per day, while over 10% of the population is at the lower end of the poverty line on $1.00 per day. It is likely that these numbers have grown today with the reduction in the state's role in the

> Is it possible that the impact of youth unemployment, poverty, corruption, marginalization and humiliation will triumph over fear, "rejectionism" and the preference of security over freedom – and give rise to a popular intifada?

country's social and economic development. There is also no doubt that the numbers of those marginalized have increased as well. This is especially the case after the exodus from the Syrian Peninsula that occurred over the past three or four years, as a result of rising fuel prices, poor agricultural seasons and the growing shortage of land due to high population growth in that region, which also suffers from the lowest economic growth in the country.

Is it possible that the impact of youth unemployment, poverty, corruption, marginalization and humiliation will triumph over fear, "rejectionism" and the preference of security over freedom – and give rise to a popular intifada?[2] Can the educated middle class engage in a peaceful, popular intifada that alleviates the apprehensions associated with fractional and factional identities, and expands the popular base of social and political protests?

Calls were made on Facebook for two "days of rage" in Syria on the 4th and 5th of February 2011. However, this call met with little resonance and instead led to a rigorously

heightened security alert. In part, the reason for this failure was the fact that those calling for the protests included names of people who live abroad, carry little weight in Syria and who do not enjoy broad respect. Another reason was that the call appeared to come "from above," with little heed paid to the opinions of those most concerned, or with little understanding of their psychological and political readiness. Moreover, the call was made without allowing enough space for people to absorb the experience of the Egyptian revolution, which at that time had not yet achieved its primary objective, the overthrow of Mubarak.

In what direction has the collective Syrian psychology shifted in recent weeks? Perhaps, it has become more daring and more confrontational across wider circles. It has been repeatedly said that slogans against the regime have appeared on the walls of several cities. People with direct links to anti-regime activities have been arrested, some of them teenagers in the southern city of Daraa (during the first week of March).

Despite this, it remains impossible to predict the course of events. All possibilities exist. Diverse age groups from the educated middle class appear motivated and ready to engage in protest activities. What is not clear is how these agendas will be met, and when and how they will rise above the wall of fear and submissiveness. From a personal perspective, it appears that the situation is more fluid than what appears on the surface, and the prospects of taking to the streets seem greater than ever before.

A great margin of the uncertainties in our assessments is induced by the general surprise generated by these revolutions; and, it is likely that these revolutions surprised Tunisians and Egyptians as much as anyone else. Moreover, there are factors involved that were previously not so clear to intellectuals and political activists, such as the role that youth would play, the impact of communications technology and the fact that strong aspirations for dignity and freedom exist en masse in our countries.

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[2] The Arabic term for *"uprising"* that has been adopted by most contemporary Western dictionaries.

Furthermore, the transformations are taking place in a number of Arab countries and Egypt in particular, which in itself is a catalytic factor whose ramifications are difficult to assess now. These conditions make it even more impossible to predict Syrian possibilities. Indeed, a success for the Libyan people in bringing down their tyrant and his regime would be an encouraging step for other countries, including Syria.

The Role of the Opposition

Two contradictory points can be made vis-à-vis the Syrian opposition. The first is that in this century it has been able to establish a definitive presence over the years – the kind of presence that the local opposition in Tunisia and in Egypt was also able to establish. At the same time, the influence wielded by this opposition has been limited, and its impact weak with regard to the course of events unfolding in the country. It has succeeded in positioning demands for democracy, general freedoms and state reform in the minds and thoughts of the public. However, it has been incapable of communicating and connecting with broader social forces or with the country's youth. Moreover, the opposition's thinking has remained strongly focused on the question of authority. Whatever the developments will be in the coming months for Syria, no one expects that the local "secular" opposition will have a proactive or catalytic influence, in much the same way as was the case in Egypt and Tunisia.

The situation of Syrian Islamists resembles that of their Tunisian counterparts, yet differs from that of the Egyptians. Syrian Islamists suffered from extremely harsh suppression in the early 1980s; for over thirty years, the penalty for being affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood was the death sentence (in recent years, this has been reduced to 12 years imprisonment). Accordingly, leading Syrian Islamist figures reside outside the country, in Europe or in certain Arab countries. Thus, it is difficult to assess what the socio-political weight of the Islamists would be if they actually enjoyed a legal presence in Syria; however, it is safe to say that they are probably much less influential than local state security forces claim or would like to imagine.

One of the gains made in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions is that, in part at least, the efficacy of the "Islamist dread" was undermined. It was proven that the Islamists were not the only alternative to the regime and that the general sentiments for prospective intifadas were nationalist and civic, not Islamic. Moreover, the Islamists actually joined these intifadas as followers – indeed, in the case of the Egyptian Islamists, they showed a willingness to stop early on, and it was the dynamics of the revolution that actually drove them forward.

The Syrian-Kurdish component has a unique place in the general Syrian context. Making up about 10% of the population, Kurds in Syria suffer various forms of discrimination that have culminated in the state not recognizing them as an ethnic group. They are not allowed to teach or speak their language, and are prohibited from developing or pursuing their cultural characteristics and identity. At the same time, over 300,000 of them are denied Syrian citizenship, and do not possess any other form of citizenship. Due to this discrimination and prohibitions, the Kurdish community in Syrian society is highly politicized and is strongly opposed to the regime. However, this opposition to the regime often overlaps with an opposition to Arabs in general – the signs of which appeared in 2004, during an incident at a football game which ignited a widespread Kurdish intifada in the cities of Qamishli and Hasaka that spread to areas in Aleppo and Damascus with Kurdish presence.

And, although certain Kurdish organizations participated in the opposition coalition of the "Damascus Declaration" (for National Democratic Change), the influence of these organizations on the Kurdish public is not a foregone conclusion. In the spring of 2004, Kurdish parties were reluctant and hesitant about how to proceed. They put a foot inside the protesting public and a foot outside, in fear of the authorities. The question today is would

the eruption of Kurdish protests stimulate wider protests in which Arabs would participate; or, on the contrary, would they incite Arab concerns that the authorities could exploit these protests to raise fears on a national scale, and thus thwart any prospects of a wider popular intifada? It would be difficult to say with certainty. But undoubtedly an intifada instigated by the Arabs, in which the Kurds participated, would surely be more in accordance with the public's interest.

Recently, there has been talk about promises made by the authorities during a meeting with Kurdish leaders in Aleppo, to address Kurdish grievances. How? When? The exact details are unknown.

The "International Community!"

The modern Arab experience has engendered a deep suspicion about the intentions of the "international community," which both generally and specifically means the West. The case of Palestine and the 2003 Iraq war justifies these suspicions to the utmost degree. And, despite the abhorrence felt by Syrians towards the crimes committed by the Gaddafi regime, they do not want to see Western intervention in their country.

In addition to old suspicions, there are fears that the democratic and nationalist nature of these revolutions will be corrupted or manipulated. And no one believes that it was the the flowing red blood of Libyans and not their black petrol that gave rise to the fragile sympathies of Western powers. Finally, there is nothing in the memory of current generations that can detract from this mistrust. This applies to Syrians, like other Arabs – perhaps even more so due to the deeply hated Israeli occupation regime in a part of the country.

Indeed, the U.S.-Israeli alliance is one of the main obstacles to democracy in Syria. This is the case especially as the militarization of political and cultural life has been facilitated by this axis. Feelings of injustice and alienation are channeled towards isolationist currents and interests that exploit factional identities, and

ideas of law and justice are undermined by the justification (by the West) of everything Israeli does, despite the vast similarities between Israel and Arab regimes, in its tyranny, in its belief in the use of force, and in its refusal of the principle of equality.

Ultimately, the best one could hope for is that the "international community" will play no role in any political developments that may unfold in Syria. The greatest gift to democracy in Syria would be for the West to oblige Israel to withdraw from the Occupied Golan Heights, after it has remained silent or supported that occupation for almost 44 years. Is the aim of the democratic Arab revolutions to encourage American and European positions that are more advantageous to Arabs and Arab interests? It is too early to judge in this regard. The revolutions, which rose up in the name of

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dignity, anticipate respect from Western powers and expect them to rectify negative cultural representations and perceptions about Arabs. For Arabs, and naturally Syrians, there is great interest in reducing the psychological, political and cultural barriers that exist between them and the West, which is still today the cultural and political center of the world.

Finally, some aspects of Western interest in Syrian affairs can be less controversial and less suspicious from a Syrian point of view, for example those related to media coverage and humanitarian affairs. Everything else can be counterproductive.

Translation from Arabic by Mona Abu Rayyan

The following interview, "On Syria: Interview with Yassin al-Haj Salih," conducted by Iraqi writer Sinan Antoon, was published by Jadaliyya on April 4, 2011.

Antoon: What is your analysis of the current situation in Syria? More specifically, how is the regime handling the demonstrations and their consequences?

AL-HAJ SALIH: Syria is going through an acute national crisis. We have a closed and intractable political system facing unprecedented peaceful popular demonstrations, and the system only applied security solutions to political problems, which is why it is endeavoring to portray the popular uprising as the work of "armed gangs" or terrorists. The system needs that type of diagnosis, because it knows no other cure than

> Briefly, Syria is at a crossroads. Either it takes the hard path towards democracy, or the even harder and costlier Fascist option.

violence for national problems. Briefly, Syria is at a crossroads. Either it takes the hard path towards democracy, or the even harder and costlier Fascist option. Going back is no longer possible.

Antoon: What is your reading of Assad's speech? Does it indicate that lessons have been learned from the Arab revolts and other events in the region, or the opposite?

AL-HAJ SALIH: As far as analysis goes, the speech was stern: a conspiracy from the outside, and sedition inside. This kind of reading only allows for a violent security treatment of the problem, which is how the government has proceeded within the days since the speech, specifically in the town of Duma, but also in Daraa and Homs. As far as promises are concerned, there is nothing specific. In reality, the mood preceding the speech ("spontaneous popular marches" in all Syrian cities), and the

disgraceful scene that accompanied it in Majlis al-Shaab (the National Assembly), as well as the atmosphere that followed in the media and on the city streets, all pointed to a country in a state of war, not in a state of reform or the like. You're not reforming when you're provoking an atmosphere of hysterics that is neither valid nor conciliatory in the country – an atmosphere of fear, hostility and psychological distancing between Syrians. In my opinion, all the talk about reforms in Syria, while protesters are being killed and arrested every day, is irresponsible and self-deceiving. The speech doesn't show that we've learned lessons from the Arab revolts. One would think that a revolution in Tunisia, and another in Egypt, are reason enough for the Syrian regime to implement even wider reforms than it has promised. But after more than ten days of demonstrations in Syria, the president's speech and the official Syrian discourse are out of touch with reality, and caught in a great state of denial: Denial of any similarity with Tunisia and Egypt, denial of the legitimacy of internal demands. The regime gains its support from its ideology of "opposition," which incorporates standing up to the American-Israeli axis regionally – a winning point in Syria and the Arab world – and the doctrine of cultural difference and hostility towards the foreigner. The latter approaches the Islamic fundamentalist Asala doctrine, albeit a secularized version of it, under the general banner of Arab nationalism in its more traditional and isolationist form. Claiming that the uprising is a great external conspiracy can only result from this ideology.

Antoon: What options will the regime resort to, should the demonstrators increase their demands for change?

AL-HAJ SALIH: It seems to me that the regime is torn between the traditional logic of suppression, on one hand, that of implementing reforms in appearance that have with no real content, such as lifting the emergency law, creating a new party law and new media law, and that of a Fascist nihilistic logic. The latter incorporates a wide crushing suppression with the mobilization

and incitement of loyalists against the mass of protesters, a strident national discourse that equates patriotism with loyalty to the regime (and thus opposition with treason), and finally the cult of the ruler. Syria has already experienced this, three decades ago, and the memory of the widespread intimidation during those crazed years is still fresh in the mind of my generation and the older one. And because of that costly memory, you see the youth spearheading the democratic mobilization that the country is witnessing today. They do not remember the years of horror.

The first option is more pragmatic, with its underlying motto of: There is no problem changing anything, as long as everything remains the same. This has been the dominant orientation of the country in normal times. I doubt this can continue after today. But everything depends on the development of the popular uprising, and its ability to impose serious political change in Syria, which would turn the page on single-party and perpetual rule, and open the door for democratic progress.

Antoon: Do you think that the regime's allies and its new friends will play a role?
AL-HAJ SALIH: Turkey has generally played a positive role. It advised the Syrian government to implement serious reforms early on. It is believed to have a hand in the promise of the government to deal with the issue of 300,000 Kurds who are deprived of Syrian nationality, due to a chauvinist survey conducted 50 years ago. Turkey wants a stable Kurdish situation in Syria, to rehabilitate and repatriate hundreds of fighters from the Kurdistan Workers Party, which has origins in Syria. The Syrian-Turkish relation is based on reason and mutual interests, with a sense of cultural similarity as well. This gives Ankara a degree of influence, but it seems to me that the current crisis has revealed its limit, due to the quality of the Syrian political system and its weak mechanisms for rational decision making. In contrast, there are no confirmed reports about the possible roles of Iran and Hizbollah in the current Syrian events.

I have no doubt both parties stand behind the regime. But they are being cautious. The talk about the alleged participation of members of Hizbollah or the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in crushing Syrian demonstrations in Daraa and other cities, in my opinion is irresponsible, and smacks of low propaganda, which could have corrupt sectarian motivations. When it comes to suppressing demonstrations, the Syrian regime does not import – it exports. It is true that Hizbollah is closer to the regime than it is to the Syrian people's demands for freedom, which is at odds with its description as a resistance and liberation movement. The same applies to Hamas, which claims solidarity with Syrian leadership… and the people!

Antoon: What are the different currents, political and social, which form the core of the opposition's political mobilization?
AL-HAJ SALIH: The organized opposition did not have a role worth mentioning in leading the popular protests or directing them, or even in attempting to shape their political vision. In my opinion, whatever becomes of the Syrian uprising, the traditional opposition that stemmed from Socialist and Arab Nationalist roots has entered its final phase. That is one side of a process whose obverse is the aging and exhausting of the power of the Syrian political system inherited from the early 1970s. While the regime can compensate for its loss by forced expansion, the traditional opposition has no means at its disposal to counter it. It appears to me that the nucleus of the uprising is a varied popular group, and includes a high percentage of educated middle class youth, who have a good knowledge of the world, a good relation to technology, very little social security (due to the lower chances of employment), and dwindling chances of immigration. The age pyramid in Syria is very young, with 60% of the population under the age of 25, whereas the pyramid of power and influence is old, heavy and sclerotic. In Syria, as in the Arab world more generally, the youth represent a social argument, not an age argument. And the varied range of people

participating in the uprising, with the youth in the lead, have nothing in common with a closed oligarchic system – which is rude in its security, closed in its politics and based on social privileges and discrimination. A sensitive issue in Syria relates to the religious and confessional configuration of Syrian society. And the question that arises here is: Are the demonstrators mainly or exclusively Sunni Muslims? Two things can be said about this: First, the uprising and its aspirations for freedom and democracy speak to a wide variety of Syrian sensitivities; its supporters and its active members represent

> A sensitive issue in Syria relates to the religious and confessional configuration of Syrian society.

the whole Syrian spectrum including detainees and men and women from very different origins. Secondly, however, some of the most important figures began their demonstrations in mosques. This understandably upset the non-Sunni, secular demonstrators, and we've already started hearing some voices raising objections. The lack of religious slogans in the demonstrations is supposed to calm a part of that unease. The main chant of the demonstrations has been: "God, Syria and freedom only!" which is better understood in comparison to the dedicated counterpart that calls for: "God, Syria and Bashar only!" Another important chant has been, "The Syrian people will not be humiliated!" The most prominent chants at the Rifai mosque on April 1 were: "Our soul, our blood, we would sacrifice for you, oh Daraa," and then, "One, one, one, the Syrian people are one!" These are all general patriotic chants, which steer clear of religious and confessional differences. Some divert traditional chants praising the authorities, by exchanging the name of the ruler for freedom, Syria or Daraa. And at the funeral procession for the martyrs in Duma, on April 3rd, which I personally participated in, the main chant was: "There is no God but Allah, the martyr is God's beloved!" This is a traditional

religious chant with no particular political orientation. It is also interesting to note that the slogan, "National unity, Islam and Christianity" was chanted in this conservative Islamic town. The content of most chants refers to Syria, freedom, the martyrs and to Syrian cities and towns, especially Daraa, Latakia and Homs. The general feel of the uprising is that it is national and all-embracing, where Islam represents a general heritage and language rather than a particular ideology. On a separate note, there was no Kurdish participation in the first two weeks of demonstrations. The Syrian authorities had contacted Kurdish leadership before any protests began in Syria and promised to right the chronic injustices. Also, Kurdish leadership in Iraq has apparently advised Syrian Kurds against mobilizing. But Kurds did participate in the marches of "Martyrs' Friday" on April 1st, in the towns of al-Qamishli and Amuda. They chanted, held up slogans in solidarity with Daraa and banners that claimed: "Freedom is not an external conspiracy." Will the Kurds increase their participation in the coming days? It is possible.

Antoon: What do you hope for as a voice from the opposition?
AL-HAJ SALIH: I aspire to a normal political life in Syria, where I would feel safe, and where I could go back to my daily habit of reading and writing that have been accustomed to over the years. I was jailed for a very long time in my youth, and I intimately know the meaning of prison, the meaning of torture, and the meaning of humiliation. And I know the meaning of dehydration, and of horror so great that your knees become brittle. I know what my detained friends are going through, like Amer Matar and Zaher Amrayn, and my friend and fellow prisoner from Hauran in the Adra Jail, near al-Zarzur, who was arrested on April 1. It is ugly; it is inhuman. And it has to end.

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It is Imperative that the International Community Sends a Clear Message

Interview with Anas Abdah and Astepho Ablahad

Perspectives: Mr. Abdah and Mr. Ablahad, to what degree is the Damascus Declaration[1] involved in the current uprising in Syria?

ABLAHAD: What has been happening in Syria since March 15, 2011 is almost a miracle. It is the outcome of the struggle of young Syrian women and men who are taking to the streets to demand change. This movement has not been directed by the Damascus Declaration (DD), but its tenets build on what, for years, the DD has called for. The demands of the protesters – civil liberties, a democratic state and an end to emergency law – are also the demands of

> After what is happening now, how can you expect a people to accept a leadership that is killing civilians and calling them terrorists?

the old opposition. Yet, these demands are now being promoted by Syrian youths who have been inspired by the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and the Arab Spring in general. Because the older opposition and the young people share the same goals, the DD is supporting these young protesters. For example, the largest Facebook group in Europe in support of the uprising, "The Syrian Revolution Against Bashar"[2] with 200,000 members, is maintained by DD. Syria is currently very much isolated, as foreign journalists cannot enter the country and many Syrian journalists have been arrested or killed. Internet access is restricted, satellite phones do

not work anymore, and many areas have been cut off from mobile phone networks. Bashar al-Asad's cousin Rami Makhlouf owns all the Syrian communication network operators. Yesterday, he made a statement very similar to what Saif al-Islam said in Libya – that the uprising needs to be crushed. As the DD, we have to counter such propaganda.

Perspectives: Do you believe that there is still potential for reform under Bashar al-Assad?

ABDAH: Maybe there was. Bashar al-Assad could have used the winds of change in the region as an opportunity to implement reforms. In general, the Syrian people are very forgiving. However, after what is happening now, how can you expect a people to accept a leadership that is killing civilians and calling them terrorists? What triggered the uprising was that, in Deraa, security forces detained 25 children and tortured them. We may call this our "Bouazizi" event.[3] Since Deraa is a tribal area, the incident touched almost everyone. The regime could have dealt with it in a different way. It could have apologized and punished the people in charge. Instead, people saw videotaped images of bodies showing signs of torture – torn-out nails and backs with lash marks. If Bashar al-Assad's mind were open to reforms, how could he allow detention camps for protesters be set up in schools and stadiums? Even business people are forced to turn over their storage facilities so that they can be used as detention centers. The regime obviously doesn't grasp what's happening in the region; it is incapable of

Anas Abdah

Anas Abdah is Chairman of the Damascus Declaration for National Democratic Change, General Secretariat Abroad, and Chairman of the Movement for Justice and Development. He resides in Manchester, UK.

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1 http://www.nidaasyria.org/en/home/
2 Ar: ath-thawra as-suriyye didh bashar

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3 The Tunisian protests that led to the overthrow of Tunisian dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali were triggered by the self-immolation of street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi on December 17, 2010.

reform. We were always against purely cosmetic changes, and doubted that the regime would be willing and able to reform itself. Now this position has become mainstream.

Perspectives: When Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father, he was widely hailed as a reformer. What or who do you think stopped him from implementing reforms?

ABDAH: I believe it was wrong to see Bashar al-Assad as a reformer. In 2000, the Damascus Spring began with the expectation that Bashar would initiate reforms. Dialogue forums flourished and there was some public debate. But only a year later, in 2001, there was a crackdown. French journalist Caroline Donati wrote about the "Syrian exception." The term "Arab exception" described how the Arab region seemed to be untouched by global democratization. Within this exception, Syria seems to be its own special case. The regime's brutality is nothing new. In the past, it has imprisoned and brutalized thousands of Syrians.

Perspectives: In the region, the Syrian regime has long enjoyed a certain legitimacy because of its "rejectionist" stance towards Israeli aggression and Western imperialism. Do you believe that rejectionism[4] is still something the regime can cling to in order to mobilize popular support?

ABDAH: No, the rejectionist discourse has completely collapsed. The mood in the Arab world is changing. When people see Syrian tanks attacking civilians, this kind of talk doesn't work any more.

Perspectives: Both in the region and internationally, many seem to have an ambivalent stance towards the potential overthrow of the regime. Why is there this fear of change in Syria?

ABDAH: The regime has been repeating one message over and over again: "We are a secular regime – we are protecting the minorities." This implies that any alternative would be non-

secular, would be oppressing the minorities. The revolution has made it clear that it is not sectarian, and the EU and the U.S. are beginning to rethink. However, the claim of the regime still has some resonance.

Perspectives: There is no truth to it?

ABLAHAD: The regime's claim has no basis in fact. The Assyrians, for example, suffered considerably under the Assad regime, their

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emigration has reached high numbers. The situation of the Kurds is even worse. By the way, Mubarak made the same claim regarding minorities – while in reality, the situation of the Egyptian Copts was miserable.

Perspectives: Nevertheless, it is true that many Syrian Christians are concerned?

ABDAH: Yes, they are very concerned. This means, then, that we have to show that we cannot have democracy without the full participation and protection of all the minorities, including not only the Christians, but also the Alawites[5].

Perspectives: Do you believe that the protesters can overthrow the regime?

ABDAH: The Syrian dictatorship rests on three pillars: Bashar al-Assad, the elite army units and the elite security services. They, in turn, rely on other groupings: the army, the security services, the Baath party, the religious establishment,

Astepho Ablahad

Astepho Ablahad is Chairman of the Assyrian Democratic Organization, Europe. The Assyrian Democratic Organization was a founding member of the Damascus Declaration. He resides in Brussels, Belgium.

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[4] Ar: mumanaa

[5] The ruling Assad family belongs to the Alawite sect, and Alawites predominate among top military and intelligence officers. They constitute about 10% of the Syrian population.

the bureaucracy, the business community, etc. For non-violent activists, it is impossible to bring down this system on their own accord. Either they succeed in bringing some of the ruling forces onto their side, or they will have to convince them to at least stay neutral. For this reason, it is imperative that the international community sends a clear message.

Perspectives: What are the conditions for the democratic movement in Syria to win?

ABDAH: First, it is paramount that the movement stays a hundred percent peaceful. This is very important, not only as a tactic. Second, it has to be national and inclusive. If the movement abandons one of these principles, it will lose. The regime systematically targets these principles. On the one hand, it tries to provoke violence through violence, and on the other hand, it is playing the sectarian card by portraying the movement as confession-based. It is essential that the Syrian movement abide by its principles. In the past years, we trained hundreds of Syrian activists within Syria on NVS (non-violent strategy). NVS is like war, only without the guns and bullets. It was a challenge to convince activists that it would work. People liked the idea and concept, but there was always a question mark concerning its viability. When they saw what happened in Tunisia and Egypt they suddenly realized that peaceful change was possible. In this, the media played an essential role.

ABLAHAD: I agree that it is especially important that the movement stays peaceful and non-sectarian. We are approaching the breaking point, and the regime is acting very irrationally. It tries to provoke schisms,[6] and therefore we have to be very careful. At the end of the day, Syria is unlike Tunisia or Egypt. We will need mediation, a mixed European-Turkish approach, for example.

Perspectives: What are the main challenges facing the movement?

ABDAH: Although the uprising spread very

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[6] Ar: fitna

quickly, it still faces problems in the cities, namely in Aleppo and Damascus. The movement is stronger in the countryside, because the urban centers are strongholds of the religious and business communities.

Perspectives: What are the possible scenarios?

ABDAH: One scenario is that the regime doesn't survive. There are several possibilities as to how this might happen: A) Certain elements within the military and security apparatuses abandon Bashar al-Assad. A clear stance by the EU could speed up this process. This would be the best way. B) Some of the pillars of support start to crumble, such as the business community. This would also be a good way, but it would take more time. C) The regime might collapse in an

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uncontrollable way, with divisions, violence, etc. Another scenario is that the regime survives and crushes the revolution. Although we dread this possibility, we have to consider it. This is the Iranian scenario, where the regime crushed the so-called Green revolution. However, Iran is entirely different because the Iranian regime has more internal legitimacy and is much stronger. The Syrian regime draws more legitimacy from the outside than the inside, due to Western support one the one hand, and the rejectionist discourse on the other.

A third scenario is the "white coup d'état." This means that elements in the regime will tell Bashar al-Assad to step aside to initiate roundtables on reform. This wouldn't be a bad scenario, but it would only be acceptable under three conditions: The violence has to stop, investigations have to be carried out and the right to protest has to be guaranteed. This option doesn't seem likely, though.

Perspectives: Is it true that members of the regime, such as Bouthaina Shaaban (the political and media advisor to Bashar al-Assad), are already meeting with representatives of the opposition?

ABDAH: Bouthaina Shaaban only met with independent figures that are members of the opposition, but not its representatives. The DD will not meet with members of the regime as long as the crackdown continues. We have to be very careful to not be divided. The regime always tries to single out individuals.

Perspectives: The Kurdish community has been suffering for a long time. Does state security specifically target protests in the Kurdish areas?

ABDAH: When there were protests in Qamishli, in 2004, Kurdish protesters took to the streets of Damascus and Aleppo. Today, the regime seems to be adopting a very soft stance toward the Kurds in order to avoid such protests in Aleppo and Damascus. There are powerful protests in Kurdish areas, some of them with 8,000 to

> The international community mainly wants stability. The Assad regime cannot provide this anymore. Because of its brutality, the Syrian regime is inherently unstable.

10,000 protesters, but the security forces have withdrawn. Measures seem to be in place not to clash with Kurdish demonstrators. The regime knows exactly that one dead protester might be one too many. Until now, not a single killing has been reported from the Kurdish areas.

Perspectives: If the Syrian regime falls, what would be the consequences for its allies, the Lebanese Hezbollah and Iran?

ABDAH: The fall of the Syrian regime will be bad news for both Hezbollah and Iran. Damascus is the main conduit through which Iran exerts its influence on the Arab world. If this conduit is closed, Iran will have to shift its focus.

Perspectives: In its statements, Hezbollah has been very supportive of the Arab revolutions – with the exception of Syria. Do you think that, over time, members of Hezbollah will pressure its leadership to acknowledge the struggle of the Syrian, too?

ABDAH: I don't think so. Hezbollah is too ideological and follows its leader too religiously. Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah and the Iranian leadership fully support Bashar al-Assad.

Perspectives: Are Hezbollah and Iran actively supporting the Syrian regime in its crackdown on the uprising?

ABDAH: There is no evidence that members of Hezbollah are supporting the Syrian security services; Iranian forces, however, do. They are not present on the front lines, but provide "back office" support, in terms of logistics, IT, etc.

Perspectives: How will they react should the Syrian regime crumble?

ABDAH: Iran will do whatever it takes to prevent this from happening. However, there is a limit. Iran can delay the fall of the regime, but if the Syrian people are adamant, it cannot stop them. Hezbollah's priority will probably be to protect its own turf in Lebanon.

Perspectives: Some observers suspect that there is a deal between the U.S. and the Syrian leadership, that if Syria breaks with Iran, the U.S. would close its eyes on the regime's behavior. Do you think there's truth to that?

ABDAH: I don't believe that there is such a short-term deal. To separate Syria from Iran has been a long-term strategy. Syria is in a critical geopolitical position, a neighbor to Israel, Turkey, Iraq and Jordan. Neither the U.S. nor the EU will tolerate instability in this region. They supported the dictatorship as long as it provided stability. However, today there is serious doubt

about whether the Syrian regime can provide stability any longer.

Perspectives: What, in your vision, should be Syria's future stance towards Israel?

ABDAH: Syria's main tenet was the return of the Golan to its sovereignty. This should be further pursued – with peaceful means. Even for the Palestinians, the fall of the regime would be good news. Now that there is Palestinian unity, Hamas leader Khaled Mashal has left Damascus as Bashar al-Assad was unhappy with him signing the reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas. Mashal's move took another card out of the regime's hand.

Perspectives: Which countries have the most influence regarding Syria?

ABDAH: Right now, three regional powers have the most leverage: Iran, Qatar and Turkey. Iran is a strategic ally of Syria, and whoever wants to break this link is deluded. Qatar is exerting its influence mainly through international diplomacy and through the media: Its satellite channel, Al-Jazeera, decided to support the Syrian uprising. Then there is Turkey. Ever since Syria changed its position on the PKK, Turkey has developed close links with Syria. The two countries now cooperate on many levels, and Erdogan and Bashar al-Assad have become close.

Perspectives: What is Turkey's stance on the Syrian uprising?

ABDAH: Both Tayyip Erdogan and Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar, were surprised by Bashar al-Assad's hard line. The refusal of Bashar al-Assad to talk made Erdogan angry. He sent several delegations to Syria, and when the Syrians still declined to negotiate, Erdogan began to criticise the regime in public. With its stakes in the region, Turkey will do everything to prevent that anti-AKP forces come to power in Syria.

Perspectives: How do you assess the reactions of the EU member states?

ABDAH: Some EU states have issued very positive statements. Generally, though, the EU stays in the background and lets Turkey take the lead.

Perspectives: Which concrete steps do you expect from the EU?

ABDAH: It is good that Bashar al-Assad is on the EU's sanction list. It was a smart move to not put him on the list initially to give him a chance to make concessions. However, since he maintained his hard line, he had to be added to the list. Today, as on every Friday, massive protests are taking place. A source has told us that Bashar al-Assad has given strict orders not to target civilians. From this, we can know that there used to be orders to the opposite. This shows that EU sanctions have frightened the regime.

In addition, the EU should help make the Syrian regime indicted before the International Criminal Court, as it is clearly

> There are two schools of resistance in the Arab world. The first is Al-Qaeda; the second are non-violent strategies – and the latter one is on the rise.

committing war crimes against civilians. Finally, the EU should make it very clear that it no longer considers Bashar al-Assad the legitimate leader of Syria. This will not only be a message to the president, but it will also encourage people around him to abandon him.

ABLAHAD: We appreciate the EU sanctions, however they will not have much effect. We would prefer the kind of approach that the Germans used toward Iran, i.e. a mix of diplomacy and threats. The EU should forcefully support the UN commission that is supposed to go to Deraa to investigate events there. A liberty boat could be sent to Banias in order to provide humanitarian aid, and the EU could assist refugees in neighboring countries.

Perspectives: No doubt, the moral aspects of the situation are important. However, to win the support of the international community, you will have to tell it why it should back political change in Syria. What is your answer?

ABDAH: The international community mainly wants stability. The Assad regime cannot provide this anymore. Because of its brutality, the Syrian regime is inherently unstable. The Arab and Syrian people have changed the equation. Before, the wisdom was: Uphold stability and forget about human rights – anyway, people do not understand what freedom and democracy are good for. Now, Arabs and Syrians have

> One week after the 2007 Damascus Declaration conference, all leading members were arrested. Overall, 43 people ended up in prison.

shown that freedom and democracy are important to them. Therefore, the main question will be: Is there an alternative to the Assad regime? The task of the opposition is to make it very clear that political change doesn't mean instability. Nobody in the DD is talking about religious politics or confessional rifts. We have established a common language, and this will help us tremendously.

In addition, you may have noticed that since the Arab spring began, nobody talks very much about Al-Qaeda anymore. Its demise has begun, because people have realized that there are other, better ways to resist.

Perspectives: Such as what ways?

ABDAH: Today, there are two schools of resistance in the Arab world. The first is Al-Qaeda; the second are non-violent strategies – and the latter one is on the rise. Dictatorships have produced fertile ground for terrorism. Democracy in the region should, therefore, be in the best interest of the West, especially because the international war on terror has completely

failed. We cannot stress enough how important it is for the West to side with the revolutions and to support the democratic movements in the Arab world. For the Arab world and internationally, Egypt is paramount. However, due to its strategic location and alliances, Syria is also very important.

Perspectives: You said that stability is the international community's main focus. Are there other interests?

ABDAH: Yes, another interest is to limit emigration from the Arab world. There are Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, the EU, etc. Erdogan is even talking about the need to establish safe havens within Syria. Ablahad and myself have been in exile for over 30 years. During the last decades, over 500,000 Syrians have been forced into exile due to political reasons.

Perspectives: Please tell us more about the Damascus Declaration.

ABDAH: The DD is the largest coalition of Syrian political opposition parties, civil society, independent intellectuals and public figures. The majority of its members are actually independent. It was founded in October 2005, when, for the first time, Arab, Kurdish and Assyrian parties assembled and formed a coalition. Organizational structures were first established in 2007, at a conference held in Damascus. Around 170 people attended and elected a general secretary, president and a national council. We pride ourselves on being the first Arab opposition group to have elected a woman, Dr. Fida Hourani, as president. Riad Seif, a prominent reformer, was elected Chairman of the General Secretariat.

Perspectives: How did the Syrian authorities react to the formation of the DD?

ABLAHAD: One week after the 2007 DD conference, all leading members were arrested. Overall, 43 people ended up in prison. Out of these, 12 remained in prison until about six

months ago. In general, the accusation was that they had "weakened the national sentiment."

Perspectives: Is the Damascus Declaration mainly a Damascus organization? How about your presence in other parts of the country?

ABLAHAD: The DD is neither an opposition-in-exile group, nor is it just a Damascus organization. Two-thirds of the national council elected in 2007 consisted of Syrian opposition figures from inside the country; the rest were

> The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood has come a long way. It has renounced violence and today aims to create a secular state without gender or religious discrimination. I believe that religion is based on constant values, while politics change constantly.

Syrians in exile. A council was set up in each governorate (muhafazah) and our members come from all parts of Syria. The current Chairman of the General Secretariat is Samir Nashar, a resident of Aleppo. The coalition reflects the mosaic of Syrian society. There are members from all religious and ethnic groups, including Muslims, Christians, Assyrians, Druze, Kurds, etc. We also have many Alawite members. The coalition represents the complete political spectrum, including leftists, liberals, moderate Islamists and nationalists. Most of the Kurdish parties are represented, too.

Perspectives: How are you organized in the Arab world and internationally?

ABDAH: We do have committees in several countries outside of Syria, including Austria, Belgium, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the USA. In August 2010, the head of the German council, Ismail Abdi, a German-Dutch citizen, was

arrested at the Aleppo airport; he was just recently released. In many Arab countries it is impossible to set up councils because, when it comes to political activism, they tend to be either very restrictive, or they want to maintain good relations with the regime. Today, there is a great deal of Syrian activism in Tunisia, Egypt and Turkey. A month ago, we participated in a meeting of the Syrian opposition in Istanbul. The Egyptians are a bit queasy, right now, because they are in a transitional period and are afraid to upset anyone. In the future, we hope to have a council in the United Arab Emirates.

Perspectives: What are the criteria for joining the coalition? Do you reject certain opposition parties or individuals?

ABDAH: I'm against excluding individuals or organizations. Nevertheless, we have to have some standards. There are three fundamental principles: One, we don't accept forces involved in killing Syrian citizens. Two, we don't accept anyone involved in corruption. Three, we only accept individuals or organizations that support the unity of Syria. The Kurdish parties that have joined the DD have made it clear that they don't want to secede.

Perspectives: Is it correct that you refuse to accept certain individuals who were close to the regime but are now opposing it, such as Rifaat al-Assad[7] and Abdul-Halim Khaddam?[8]

ABDAH: Yes, but this is not for personal reasons. They are excluded because they were involved in killing Syrians and in corruption. In general, the Syrian people are very tolerant and they could have forgiven them. However, neither Rifaat al-Assad nor Abul-Halim Khaddam has ever apologized. This is not acceptable.

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[7] Rifaat al-Assad is Bashar al-Assad's uncle. After a coup attempt in the 1980s, when he tried to seize power from his brother Hafez al-Assad, he went into exile in Europe. He was involved in brutally quelling the unrest in the city of Hama in 1982.

[8] Abdul-Halim Khaddam served as Syrian Vice President from 1984 until 2004. He was seen as a leading hardliner, but claimed that he resigned because reforms were not forthcoming. From his exile in Paris, he accused Bashar al-Assad of involvement in the murder of Lebanese ex-Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri.

Perspectives: The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, the traditional enemy of the current regime, is also part of the DD. How do you see their role?

ABDAH: The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood has come a long way. It has renounced violence and today aims to create a secular state without gender or religious discrimination. I believe that religion is based on constant values, while politics change constantly. Therefore, it is dangerous to mix the two. Especially in our region, this mix leads easily into disaster. The revolution we see today is so progressive that this will certainly influence the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and other religious parties to further modernize themselves.

Perspectives: Mr. Abdah, apart from being Chairman of the Damascus Declaration, you are also Chairman of the Movement for Justice and Development. What is this party's vision for democracy in Syria?

ABDAH: It is the Syrian version of Turkey's AKP. That doesn't mean that we want to copy everything that has happened in Turkey. The model has to be adapted to Syria, developed according to its needs and traditions. Unlike traditional Islamist movements, it is certainly a very liberal model. I believe that it is appropriate for Syria, and that Syrians view it very positively.

Perspectives: After the recent events, what's your view of Syria's younger generation?

ABDAH: I don't want to overly brag about the Syrians, however, they are so creative and they are taking so many risks – even more so than in some of the other countries that are undergoing their revolutions. You have to grasp that Syrian activists, before joining the demonstrations, bid farewell to their relatives. In addition, they are not only threatened on the streets, but also in their homes. People are being kidnapped and arrested. One might wonder why they continue even now, when it has become clear that the regime will not fall over night. Why do they take the risk? I believe that sometimes extreme violence can produce unexpected things. It can be like an electric shock – it revives body and mind. This is what happened to the Syrian people when this whole machinery of violence was unleashed upon them. The people feel revived, dignified, hopeful and free. And they are angry. This makes them think less about risks.

ABLAHAD: Don't get us wrong, Syrians love life. It is a stereotype that the people of this region love to die as martyrs. We love life, and we are no kamikaze commandos. Syrians take to the streets not to die, but to live. These young people are like you and me. They are even better, as they have the courage to go out and protest.

The interview was conducted on May 13, 2011 in Berlin by Layla Al-Zubaidi.

Libyan Re-independence and Reclaiming the Revolution

It was the fuzzy images that we saw from amateur mobile phone video clips that broadcast the Libyan popular uprising all over the world and broke the wall of silence and fear in a country besieged for decades by a feudal regime. A regime that had attempted for many years to wipe out the Libyan identity and replace it with the image of the "Brother Leader."

Libya, the nation and the people, was the born out of decades of fighting between

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the major powers of the region in the early twentieth century, and became independent in 1951. It scarcely had the means to support itself as a country, let alone forge a new identity of nationhood, in an era when Pan-Arab nationalism was the major ideological and political driving force in the region.

By the late 1960s the country, driven by its newly discovered oil wealth, was transformed in many aspects, especially on the social and political levels. A tribal rural country began to resemble a more modern urban society, which allowed for greater political debate and the newly educated middle class became politically active and worked toward modernizing the country and achieving further basic rights.

From Revolution to Dictatorship

The Gaddafi regime that came into power through a bloodless coup in 1969 found a nation ready for change and revolution, the same revolutionary wave that engulfed the Arab world, beginning with Egypt in 1952. Many Libyans from different classes and backgrounds welcomed the revolution-branded military coup, and believed that they could work from within the new political structures to achieve a more modern society. Democracy and human rights, as we know them today, were not a priority at that time, as there was more of a focus on achieving more socio-economic equality and ridding the country of the remnants of the colonial era. But once those goals were moderately achieved, the calls from a new generation of Libyans toward a democratic, liberal political system became a challenge for a regime that had begun to use its huge amount of oil revenues to export its definition of liberation and rebellion in many countries.

Faced with new challenges of reform in Libya, the Gaddafi regime began to build its political structure, which was akin to a secret feudal system with tribal elements aimed at ruling and controlling a small population scattered over a large geographic area that had historically manifested its resistance to any central government. Over the years, it became apparent that the regime had become similar in structure and characteristics to those of organized crime groups, dependent on secrecy and close loyalties in decision making and crushing the opposition.

The Gaddafi regime ruled through the power of fear and paranoia, the fear of unlimited brutality in a society that was still recovering

Ghazi Gheblawi

Ghazi Gheblawi is a Libyan writer, blogger and activist based in London His blog www.imtidad-blog.com and podcast projects focus on promoting Libyan culture and literature. He has published two collections of short stories in Arabic and some of his poems in English have been published in Britain. He is now campaigning to highlight the situation in Libya through the media and Twitter (@gheblawi).

from the horrific years of its colonial heritage. Collective punishment and publicly televised executions, as well as a campaign of intimidation and persecution, became the cornerstone of an attempt to transform the Libyan people into functional entities, concerned solely with the daily question of survival and preservation, paving the way for frustration, despair and in most cases passive civil disobedience by avoiding participation in regimes activities and political organizations.

Gaddafi used other tactics to divide and rule, by invoking a traditional tribal power structure in a country that had began to resemble a more

> Nearly five years after Saif al-Islam Gaddafi launched his reform project, it was apparent that the project was not intended to change the status quo in Libya, but rather to give it more legitimacy.

modern society: tribal ties had become less apparent and the old division between the main three Libyan provinces was fading away as people moved and built new social ties based on nationhood and mutual interests.

Facelifts and Sham Reforms

After years of international isolation, a new reality dawned on the regime, especially with the introduction of the Internet and new media into the country, and with a growing young population. The regime decided on a facelift to avoid alienating itself from the changing demographics in the country, as the majority of Libyans lived in cities and urban centres. All of this, combined with other factors, made the reform project driven by Saif al-Islam Gaddafi a possible initiative to prevent any chaos or in-fighting in a country that lacks a constitution and any civil society.

The reform project, named Libya al-Ghad

(Libya Tomorrow) attracted many young active Libyans in and outside of Libya, as well as many Libyan intellectuals and academics, all driven by the prospect of rehabilitating and reforming the regime from within and preventing any political vacuum and in-fighting in the event of Gaddafi's demise.

Nearly five years after Saif al-Islam Gaddafi launched his reform project, it was apparent that the project was not intended to change the status quo in Libya, but rather to give it more legitimacy and also to contain all elements of the Libyan society that might challenge the regime's rule over the country. It was Saif al-Islam's speech a few days after the Libyan uprising had begun that made it clear that his reform stunt was dead and that the possibility of rehabilitating the regime had become a laughable matter.

Libyans suffered in silence for decades, and as the Gaddafi regime tightened its iron grip on the people, they also suffered from being marginalized and abandoned in some cases by their Arab neighbors and many countries in the region. For many years Libyans were associated with Gaddafi and his eccentric, clownish and brutal image. Libya became a box of secrets and sand, its culture and history descending daily into oblivion and, under pressure, many Libyans fled Libya and found refuge in other countries, adopting new identities and distancing themselves from a Libya that had become synonymous with a brutal and mad dictator.

It is important to stress that the Libyan popular uprising on 17 February 2011 did not emerge out of a vacuum, as opposition and dissent against the Gaddafi regime had been building in Libyan society for generations. Although most people kept to themselves and chose passive disobedience when dealing with the regime – and while Gaddafi tried to buy loyalties, rewarding certain individuals, groups and even tribes – the majority of Libyans exercised their passive opposition at homes and in private gatherings, which had grown during the last few years, and leading to the human

explosion on 17 February 2011, inspired by the influential revolutions in neighboring Tunisia and Egypt.

The Gaddafi regime planned for many decades to overcome any opposition and continued to survive in a surreal, out of time place in the world. Ironically, it was Saif al-Islam

> The Libyan popular revolution has revived their sense of who they really are, and has given them the historic chance to regain not only the symbols of revolution and freedom, but also their independence and cultural identity.

Gaddafi who summarized the regime's standard threats toward the Libyan people: by invoking the myth of tribal divisions between Libyans, a looming civil war between east and west Libya, and finally by brandishing the threat of foreign invasion and intervention due to Libya's oil and gas wealth, thus stressing deep-seated cultural fears toward foreigners and foreign intervention. These tactics, combined with the unrestrained use of force and brutality, were used by the Gaddafi regime since it came into power four decades ago to maintain its grip on the country.

Revolutionary Renewal

For many years, Libyans were reduced to being a reflected image of the "The Guide" and "The Brother Leader," their history, culture and identity defaced and torn, and replaced by new symbols of fear and terror. The Libyan popular revolution has revived their sense of who they really are, and has given them the historic chance to regain not only the symbols of revolution and freedom, but also their independence and cultural identity. Thus it was not surprising that the flag that was adopted by the Libyan Constitution in 1951, which was the symbol of Libyan independence and then

abolished by the Gaddafi regime 1969, became the symbol of resistance and the call for freedom and opposition to his rule.

The images of a young Libyan ripping the Gaddafi green flag in the centre of Tripoli, throwing it into the flames, cursing Gaddafi and shouting, "This is not our flag, let's burn it!" is a clear indication that the Gaddafi regime failed to brainwash Libyans with its false symbols of revolution. Generations of Libyans, who were deprived from any information about pre-1969 Libya, were not only reclaiming the meaning of revolution – which was tainted by Gaddafi's revolutionary ideology and his notorious revolutionary committees – but also regaining Libya's independence and cultural identity with symbols like the flag, the old Libyan anthem and clear calls for unity and nationhood.

Despite the brutality and terror inflicted on the Libyan people by the Gaddafi regime, the Libyans are living for the first time the freedom and liberation they were denied, and they know that the stakes are high not only for them as a nation, but also for the peoples of a region, affected by the regime's ambitions to dominate and intervene in neighboring countries. A peaceful, free and democratic Libya, in a region that is changing dramatically every day, will play a pivotal role in maintaining a stable, more peaceful Middle East and Africa, which is a region that has suffered the most, after the Libyan people, from Gaddafi's terrorist adventures.

The wall of fear has been razed to the ground and Gaddafi's regime will try to survive as long as it can – but its legitimacy to govern and to rule inside and outside Libya is lost completely. Its only option for rule over the remaining land under its control is through the tactics of occupation, and Libyans will be struggling in a resistance campaign to deny the regime the illusion of normalcy and control that it is trying to invoke through its media propaganda machine.

The path to a new Libya will not be easy, many years of dictatorship and corruption will not be made to disappear by the magic wand

of revolution. The demons of political division, counter-revolution and foreign intervention are some of the threats Libyans face. However, it

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is important to emphasize that all these fears were used by the Gaddafi regime to associate stability with his rule, which was prioritized over the limitless possibilities, and uncertainties, of exercising freedom and the difficulties of implementing democracy in a country that has never experienced its manifestations. These are some of the challenges Libyans will learn to overcome by themselves, with the help and support of the international community.

Being a Libyan during the last few weeks has been and continues to be an emotional and intimate experience. The Libyan uprising of "re-independence," which purified the meaning of revolution, helped many Libyans regain their confidence in themselves and their ability to change their country, after years of the regime's attempts to kill the true meaning of being a Libyan inside the hearts and minds of generations of Libyans. Never again will it be possible for a tyrannical regime to be allowed to rule over their country.

Algeria, or the Desire for a Future

Woman's Day and National Wounds

In Algiers, March 8, 2011, turned into a special day. Hundreds of women workers made the most of a paid but work-free afternoon and invaded the city's public spaces, turning our austere streets into a joyous "celebration of womanhood," while men – torn between mockery and courtesy – made way for them, offering plastic roses. These few hours, stolen from the harsh conditions in which our women usually live, are the modest but symbolic results of years of women's struggle – dating from the mid-1980s – for equality between the sexes. Legal equality, at least, albeit undermined by the Family Code adopted by the National Assembly in 1984 under the auspices of the country's one political party, the National Liberation Front (FLN). But this struggle would soon be overshadowed as the Civil War overwhelmed the country – a civil war lasting from 1992 to 2002 – the trauma and misery of which we are no longer permitted to discuss or even mention, following the adoption of the National Reconciliation Act. The Act, adopted in February 2006 by a referendum, stipulates that, "anybody who, by their declarations, writings or other acts uses or exploits the wounds of national tragedy is liable to incur a serious prison penalty (3-5 years) and a heavy fine."[1]

And yet on March 8, the national tragedy still managed to gatecrash the celebrations and defy the ban. On Grand Post Office Square in the centre of Algiers, a modest rally seeks to revive the memories of the Association of Families affected by Terrorism. At first there are only some twenty demonstrators, carrying a modest bouquet of flowers and small posters on which you can read the names of the victims – all of them women – along with their dates of birth and the places and dates of their murders. They were all so young that these reminders cause a physical feeling of heartsickness, and suddenly this little patch of pavement transforms the light-hearted mood into a sombre one. Bystanders and passers-by stop to read the posters. Voices are raised, foreheads furrowed, while young girls in bloom stop sucking their chocolate ices, taken by surprise by this tragic reminder. The security forces

> The Civil War, which we have been ordered to forget, which we may even wish to forget, is still here, still present – and now it is dividing society.

have turned out in large numbers to prevent the rally – after all, not only is it forbidden to recall misfortune, it is also forbidden to demonstrate on the streets of Algiers – and make embarrassed attempts to move the loitering onlookers along. But in vain, this unexpected confrontation between Algerians and the memories of all that happened will last until the end of the afternoon. Meanwhile, a mile and a half away, in May 1 Square, the mothers of the "disappeared," whose children were abducted by the security services during the Civil War, are also holding an improvised rally. In distress now familiar on the streets of Algiers, in an impossible parody of mourning, they brandish the portraits of the abducted, surrounded in turn by security personnel. A little further away,

Ghania Mouffok

Ghania Mouffok is a journalist based in Algiers. She serves as correspondent for TV5 MONDE and writes for various journals, including Le Monde Diplomatique, the Swiss La Liberté and the Algerian online-journal Maghreb Emergent. Among her publications are "Une autre voie pour l'Algérie" (1995), "Etre journaliste en Algérie" (1994) and the forthcoming "Vivre ensemble" (2011).

[1] AD 250,000-500,000, equivalent to approx. US$3,500-7,000.

on Martyrs' Square, thousands of patriots are holding a demonstration. Over 100,000 civilians were recruited and armed while the country wallowed in the morass of civil war, so that they could help the security forces "combat Islamic terrorism." Since the adoption of the National Reconciliation Act, they live abandoned by the state, and today they want society to tell them what status they can claim now that the war is over. Families affected by terrorism, families of missing persons, patriots – they all spread out across the city like a widening net of memory, a return of the repressed.

Old, New Fears

The Civil War, which we have been ordered to forget, which we may even wish to forget, is still here, still present – and now it is dividing society into those who advocate forgetfulness as a way to end the war, and those who believe that cherishing memories of the departed is the only way to attain lasting peace. But above and beyond these differences of opinion, Algeria between war and peace is still haunted by the Civil War, despite the many attempts to straddle it, to treat it as some kind of anomalous break, as some kind of empty black hole. We killed each other, sordidly – beyond policies or ideologies, beyond reason or unreason, we killed each other. Algerian against Algerian, axe against hatchet, in massacres, slaughters, tortures, kidnappings, rapes, looting, destruction, bombings, suicide bombings – a nightmare that lasted more than ten years. Since then, Algerians have learned the price of peace, and live in constant fear that one day this violence might rear up again. It is their single, abiding fear: fear of civil war. Nothing frightens them so much as themselves.

This partially explains the failure of the CNCD, the National Coordination for Change and Democracy, an organization which came into being after the January riots, representing the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH), small parties like the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) and a number of independent trade unions and individuals. CNCD called for a march on February 12, 2011,

which would make its way from May 1 Square to Martyrs' Square along the edge of Bab El-Oued and the Casbah – three neighborhoods in the capital which have never been short on victims of protest. Enthused first by the "Tunisian Revolution," then by the "Egyptian Revolution," the organizers hoped that "the Algerian street" would, in turn, rise up and "overthrow the regime," although the demands they actually made were less strident and controversial, like lifting the state of emergency. The state of emergency was created by emergency laws passed after the military coup in 1991. It aimed to suppress all institutions after the first multiparty legislative elections held in Algeria were won by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), a party that has since been banned. But on the day of the demonstration, the huge numbers of security forces deployed en masse around May 1 Square – reflecting the newfound fear that has taken hold of all oppressive regimes south of the Mediterranean – could not hide the lack of popular support for the march, or for the demonstrations which followed it.

Adults from the surrounding areas watched the rally as mere spectators, while their children, from 10 year olds to 20 year olds, persecuted the demonstrators, acting as unexpected allies to the anti-riot forces. With their fiery youth they insinuated themselves into the ranks of the anti-government protesters – all older representatives of the tattered middle classes – and challenged them by asking, "Where

Young anti-demonstrators are expressing their own refusal to become the future cannon fodder for political struggles.

are your children?" While we cannot exclude the manipulations of a ruling power that has shown itself – with breathtaking cynicism – to be a past master of the art of setting Algerian against Algerian, it is nevertheless clear that, by repeatedly asking this question, these young

anti-demonstrators are expressing their own refusal to become the future cannon fodder for political struggles about which the organizers did not think it necessary to make them aware. The young people made a mockery of the demonstrators' slogan, turning "ash-shaab yurid isqat al-nizam" (the people want to overthrow the regime) into "ash-shaab yurid zetla batal" (the people want to get high for free). Meanwhile, from the sidelines, a mother in her haik[2] asked more serious questions: "But what do you want? That the war should begin again? Have you forgotten the days when we were so terrified we didn't dare go out of doors? The days when our blood flowed? What has Bouteflika done to you? He brought back peace, didn't he?"

Institutional Facades

Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika came to power in 1999, as the savior of the regime, at the request of the army's top brass who, in Algeria, are the ones who really hold the power. Although the election was rigged, President Bouteflika is still credited by certain sections of society as the man who brought back peace with the National Reconciliation Act. And while the Act may only represent the window-dressing of a behind-the-scenes arrangement between Islamist rebels and the army's general staff, it is true that the intensity of the violence diminished once it was passed. Even so, armed groups still occupy the country's waste areas, still create victims and all of Algeria is still checkered by police and military roadblocks, while in the capital – the center of power – plain-clothed and uniformed policemen now number in the thousands.

We should add that since Bouteflika came to power the price of oil – the country's main resource – has sky-rocketed, allowing the Algerian regime not only to repay its debts, but also to stash away some US$150 billion in foreign reserves whilst engaging… in a development plan. At the international level, we should also mention the events of September 11, 2001 (better known as 9/11). Until then, the

Algerian regime had been a pariah in the comity of nations. The security services, previously subject to international tribunals – accused by many, including dissident intelligence services, of sponsoring massacres and crimes against humanity – has since then posed as a pioneer in the fight "against Islamist terrorism." Now, under the leadership of the United States, this fight has become a global cause. Encouraged by this unlooked-for support, the Algerian regime made efforts to become respectable once again – indeed, from accused, it turned into a vociferous plaintiff, accusing the Western world of failing to support it in its fight with extremists.

Further bolstered by global and national economic trends, President Bouteflika – who claimed the presidency as the violence came to an end – managed to avoid becoming a symbol of a regime that is still loathed by the overwhelming majority of the population. He is known to disagree with a number of senior army generals, including the "janvièristes" (January-ists) – a French term for the army chiefs who conducted the so-called "fight against terrorism" with an implacable iron first, including Generals Khaled Nezzar and Mohamed Lamari, later sacrificed to save the regime by General Mohamed Mediene, better known as Tewfik, because they knew too much

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and had become too controversial. Tewfik was a faceless but omnipresent personality who dominated Algerian politics as head of the DRS, the Directorate of Intelligence and Security, having, it appears, allied himself with the president before in turn becoming embroiled in disputes with the presidential clan. The key to these differences lay in the

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[2] Traditional veil.

presidential succession – after three terms as President, Bouteflika knew he was too ill to continue in power, but wished to appoint his successor himself. Algerian society is well aware of the ongoing power struggles behind the scenes, which riddle the regime despite its outward facade of unity. The people gauge the progress of these hidden battles by observing the succession of appointments to positions of power and influence in the civil service, police

> Operating by the consensus of its co-opted members is undoubtedly one of the keys to understanding the strength of the Algerian regime.

and military. Thus, the assassination of the Chief of Police in his own office, in a bunker in the heart of the capital, is simply one of the more recent – and implausible – expressions of this turmoil. Crude – more like the machinations in a seraglio – and managed as if it was just a routine news story, this event nevertheless indicates the violent nature of the confrontations between the different power groups.

Nothing is working smoothly anymore for this circle of conspirators – a shadowy group of civilians and soldiers which, unfettered by legal constraints, has made and unmade rulers since Algerian independence in 1962. Operating by the consensus of its co-opted members, this complex secret network – where vast fortunes go hand in hand with military and police powers and a sealed-border mentality – is undoubtedly one of the keys to understanding the strength of the Algerian regime. The system is capable of catapulting an individual from a position of ultimate power to the status of a common, retired civil servant without damaging its own integrity – without bringing about the collapse of the entire edifice – precisely because it is not embodied in a single individual, face or name. Each member is constantly watching to make sure that no one rises higher than his peers

– all are ready to sacrifice, by their constantly changing alliances of convenience, those individuals who threaten the sustainability of the structure as a whole. The Civil War claimed 200,000 lives – horrific massacres took place just yards from army barracks, thousands of people went missing, the financial impact on the country's destroyed infrastructure was huge, the economy brutally disrupted. And yet despite all this, despite the assassination of President Mohamed Boudiaf – a man who embodied the values of November '54 and co-founded the FLN – by a member of his own bodyguard, the army did not implode, with the exception of a few dissenting individuals and a group of officers in exile. This solidarity, in spite of apparent chaos, is cemented by the black mud of oil money and by mutual collusion in the repression of all attempts at autonomy in Algerian society.

As for institutional facades, the army is very good at inventing coalitions which, while they fail to confer any legitimacy in the eyes of the overwhelming majority, nevertheless perform an effective balancing act between rigged elections and corruption. The Presidential alliance is based on three parties – the FLN, its clone the RND (presided over by the hated head of government, Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia), and Hamas, an Islamist proxy for the Muslim Brotherhood – and holds the National Assembly and the Senate. Meanwhile, the powerful trade union congress, the UGTA, has effectively become a firefighter, using meaningless promises to assuage workers' demands made in strike after strike. These regime-supporting institutions are accompanied by a number of satellite organizations, including the Muslim Scouts, the Shaheed children's associations of the war of national liberation, and various employers' organizations. The entire complex teeters between civil society and client status, negotiating their support for the regime privilege by privilege.

The Social Costs of Liberal Modernity: A Resistance Continued

And yet Algerian society shows an astonishing ability to resist: Every ten years or so, a new generation rejects the renunciations. And while the entire Arab world – in Egypt, in Tunisia – is

> While the entire Arab world – in Egypt, in Tunisia – is waiting, hoping that the "Algerian street" will join its voice to this extraordinary spring of peoples in revolt, it is also important to understand that Algerians of both sexes are engaged in a different kind of struggle.

waiting, hoping that the "Algerian street" will join its voice to this extraordinary spring of peoples in revolt, it is also important to understand that Algerians of both sexes are engaged in a different kind of struggle. Infuriated by superficial change (they have seen plenty of presidents fall since the assassination of Mohamed Boudiaf, including the figurative assassination of President Chadli Bendjedid in 1991, the overthrow of President Zeroual in 1999 after the latter replaced Ali Kafi in 1994, along with a corresponding merry-go-round of governments), they are now trying to build a bottom-up alternative. Entire segments of excluded society are learning once again to organize themselves as they rebuild social bonds based on genuine debate – they are learning anew how to talk to each other, how to be counted, how to fight in new ways as people who know and acknowledge each other. They are organizing themselves in terms of housing distribution, water distribution, access to schools; by holding daily demonstrations they are forcing the spokespeople of the local authorities – falsely elected mayors, walis representing the central administration – to acknowledge and to

answer their questions about the opaque ways in which cities are currently managed. They are building trade union organizations, based on independent trade unions representing various sectors, including senior teachers, temporary teachers in general education – the country has more than 20,000 of them – as well as doctors, resident physicians, paramedics. In fact, the unions represent all that remains of the country's public services in education, transportation and health, wiped out both in terms of their workers' status and the quality of the service they provide by a barbaric liberalism presented as the prerogative of a modern society. Similarly, it is in the name of this "modern society" and its supposed efficiency that whole swathes of the industrial public sector have been sold off – dismantling workers' collectives and destroying decades of accumulated expertise by way of mass firings. Today, these collectives are defending themselves, and in strike after strike, they are questioning the industrial and financial decisions made by their firms and challenging their bosses. For example, strikes held at the El Hajar foundry in Annaba – the third largest city in the country – which, from being a public-sector property, has turned into private property owned by steel giant Arcelor Mittal. In the universities a powerful student movement has sprung up – to general astonishment – and in a spirit of infectious dynamism students are refusing to be the guinea-pigs for yet another course reform (this time to an American-style system), challenging both the government and society on the best ways to acquire academic knowledge. At the same time, they are positioning themselves as a serious competitor to the existing student union – closely associated with the Islamic authorities of Hamas and widely believed to be unshakable – the UGEL or General Union of Free Students.

Every day the sidewalks outside the Presidency are flooded by yet another group of citizens claiming their rights, in the process transforming an area under heavy police surveillance into the dictatorship's very own Trafalgar Square. And now – the

most unprecedented step of all – even the unemployed are organizing themselves into a national association. Employment and housing

> Employment and housing are the big social issues in Algeria, and represent two major problems for this regime.

are the big social issues in Algeria, and represent two major problems for this regime, which has so far proved incapable of dealing with them. Emboldened by these citizens' protests, non-party-political elites are attempting to set up alternative political options, to reflect more openly on the issue of democracy in view of its growing urgency, and rather than taking an activist stance, to learn again how to think constructively about this new country which Algeria has become – to think constructively about it with the aim of transforming it. In a recent address to the president of the republic, Abdel-Hamid Mehri – resistance fighter against French colonial rule, former Secretary General of the FLN, outspoken opponent of the regime since the annulment of the 1991 elections – gave shape to the process by calling for a review of the past 50 years of independence, and the organization of a collective rethinking across the country as a whole. "The issue," he stated, "is not to change a person or overthrow a system, but to transform the mode of governance" –

a point of view shared by the overwhelming majority of the population. From one riot to the next, from strike to strike, from peaceful demonstration to peaceful demonstration, the Algerian authorities have, thus far, been content to lift the state of emergency, instigate certain populist initiatives by distributing oil money, and contain the protests by sending thousands of new police recruits to box them in, remaining within acceptable bounds by using minimal violence.

The images have become familiar throughout Algeria: peaceful demonstrators confront walls of law enforcement personnel in their Robocop uniforms who, although unarmed, are equipped with clubs and transparent shields. Almost at loggerheads with each other, each group takes the other's measure – young people come face to face with young people of the same age, from the same backgrounds. The only question is: who will give way first? An unsustainable situation prevails, while all around the suburbs of the excluded, the shanty-towns of high-risk classes which surround all the country's major towns and cities, threaten to burst into flames if the Algerian regime persists – with the help of Western powers – in refusing to understand this immense uprising of souls filled with a new sense of brotherhood and a genuine desire for a future, as they move away from the fury and furore of the recent past.

Translation from French by Word Gym Ltd.

The Arab Revolutions-in-the-Making and Palestine

George Giacaman

George Giacaman is a political analyst and faculty member in the MA Program in Democracy and Human Rights and the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Studies at Birzeit University. He is co-founder and director of the Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy (Muwatin) in Ramallah. His most recent book is entitled "After Arafat: Political Transformation in the Second Intifada" (Arabic, 2011).

The president of Israel, Shimon Peres, was among the first in Israel to make the connection between the upheavals in Egypt, which began on January 25, 2011, and the conflict in Palestine. Speaking at the 11th annual Herzliya Conference during the first week of February, he said that because of what is happening in Egypt, there is a need to make a settlement with the Palestinians.[1]

> The lone veto cast at the UN Security Council on February 18th against condemning the illegal settlement enterprise on Palestinian land was very embarrassing for the Obama Administration.

By contrast, Ehud Barak, the Israeli Defense Minister, could only warn of the "earthquake" rattling Middle East regimes. Speaking at a convention in New York in late March, he warned of an "anti-Israel diplomatic tsunami that is rising against Israel."[2]

The President of Israel was speaking from the perspective of the interest of the State of Israel in light of the changes in Egypt. This is not the view of the Israeli Cabinet yet, nor will it be in the short term. The interests of politicians and parties, especially a right-wing Cabinet like the one governing Israel at present, are local, electoral, careerist and even mercenary. Only when the interest of the state appears to be under threat, and when this is also clear to the general public, will they make the shift. And the time has not come yet, even if the President of the State sees the outlines on the horizon.

The same applies to U.S. politicians who work as lobbyists for the State of Israel. The lone veto cast at the UN Security Council on February 18th against condemning the illegal settlement enterprise on Palestinian land was very embarrassing for the Obama Administration, given that the text of the proposed resolution reflected its own position on the issue. President Obama was prevailed upon by various Senators and other lobbyists working of behalf of the present Israeli government. Moreover, this vote occurred at a time when upheavals were rocking the various authoritarian regimes in the Arab world that have so far acquiesced to U.S. policies in the region, especially its de facto support for Israel's occupation, against the wishes of the vast majority of Arabs.

Various American writers also began warning of a possible strategic shift in the region and its implications for U.S. policy, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Even Hungary's Foreign Minister, whose country is chairing the EU, warned in the EU's name that it is imperative to resume the political process with the Palestinians because this is, "the core issue."[3] Still, it is too early to know where the dust will settle, and when. Already, various Egyptian writers are warning that a "counter revolution" is afoot with the collusion of external actors, as well.

A Hundred Years of Defeat

Not only governments where surprised by the

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[1] *Haaretz*, 6 February 2011.
[2] *Haaretz*, 23 March 2011.

[3] *Haaretz*, 22 February 2011.

turn of events, but practically all Arabs as well. Tunisia provided the first "shock." And when Mubarak's Foreign Minister Ahmad Abul Gheit was asked if there was any possibility that Egypt would be next, his answer was simply: "nonsense." The mood in Israeli official circles was described as "near panic," especially in relation to Egypt. But from an Arab point of view, it is important to understand what these events meant, and the depth at which they ran.

Since the end of World War I, several generations of Arabs grew up under colonial regimes or Arab regimes subservient to the colonial metropolis. The Nakba (catastrophe) of 1948, which saw two-thirds of Palestinians expelled from their land, was a major Palestinian and Arab trauma. Several revolutions and coup d'état's took place in Arab countries as a result. These included Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Libya. Arab unity was sought under Nasser as a means to empower the Arabs vis-à-vis direct and indirect colonial hegemony by Western countries, including Israel. The defeat of several Arab armies in the 1967 war was another major turning point, at least as traumatic as the Nakba.

The "six-day war" of 1967 was a pivotal moment in more than one way. A new genre of writing emerged that came to be described as "self-criticism after the defeat." A plethora of books, studies and articles sought to locate the causes, not only of the defeat at the military level, but the defeat of Arab society and culture no less, and at every level. Such self-criticism was often so harsh and so deeply felt that it betrayed an existential crises that verged on extinguishing any hope for the future. A classic example of this genre is Sadiq Jalal al-Azm's book "Self Criticism After the Defeat," and the post 1967 poetry of the great Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani.

For close to half a century, then, Arabs languished under authoritarian regimes that ruled by fiat, were corrupt and corrupting, and unaccountable to their people and their needs, wishes and hopes. Two factors kept those regimes in existence: the violence perpetrated by their security forces, and external support by the U.S. and other European countries. For the "generation of defeat," first Tunisia, and then Egypt, was a stunning jolt of hope, almost difficult to absorb, that seemed to come from nowhere. In an interview on Al-Jazeera TV, Muhammad Hasanein Haykal, the famous Egyptian writer and journalist who is 87 years

> Egypt under Mubarak was a close ally, but the PA was also afraid of any spillover effect in the Palestinian context.

old, expressed what many of this generation felt. He said: "I am happy and thankful that I lived to see this day." By mid-April, ten Arab countries were rocked by upheavals.

Palestinian Hopes and Fears

From the daily Palestinian press that exercises self-censorship, it was difficult to tell what ordinary Palestinians felt. But talking to people and looking at the various alternative media, the joy was palpable and the hope was clear. A veritable revolution appeared to be taking place, from Morocco to Bahrain. It is true that the demands in Morocco, Jordan and Bahrain were reformist and did not aim at regime change, nevertheless, such reforms were still capable of giving a voice to the people in policy, no matter how partial.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) was more reticent. Egypt under Mubarak was a close ally, but the PA was also afraid of any spillover effect in the Palestinian context. The predicament of the PA was threefold: First, the political process appeared quite dead and the establishment of a Palestinian state appeared nowhere in sight. The political program of Mahmoud Abbas (Abu-Mazin) on which he ran for elections in January 2005 ran aground. He had declared that he is opposed to the "militarization" of the Second Intifada and supported negotiations. For a whole year after he was elected, the government

of Israel gave him the cold shoulder and hardly any negotiations took place. The "Annapolis Process" that began at the beginning of 2008 under the Bush Administration ended with no results. When President Obama was elected, the PA received a new lease on life in the hope that he was the hope for progress. Obama made the right pronouncements, but two years into his presidency he gave in to internal pressure and was not able to stop the settlement process. Political will is not generated in a vacuum and the Israel lobby, including a majority in Congress, proved more powerful.

Since the Madrid Conference in late 1991, nearly twenty years of negotiations have taken place. The PA simply does not have the luxury of another twenty years of similar negotiations. And since Palestinians did not envision that the PA should function permanently as a large municipality to administer the affairs of Palestinians under Israeli occupation, the justification for the very existence of the PA is at stake. It was no surprise, therefore, that when the upheavals rocked Arab countries from the "Ocean to the Gulf" as Arabs are wont to say, renewed calls for the dissolution of the PA filled the alternative media.

Second, the PA has not done anything to fight corruption within it – one main reason why Hamas won the parliamentary election of January 2006. And even if corruption is routine in Arab countries, Palestinians are simply not willing to tolerate it if they have a choice.

Third, the recent revelations of "the Al-Jazeera Leaks," the so called "Palestine Papers" revealing details of negotiations between the PA and Israel, dealt the final coup de grace, since the revelations were widely read as showing weakness and unacceptable concessions to Israeli demands.

At present, the PA has its back to the wall. It is attempting to change course to gain credibility, hence it did not relent in the face of pressure from the U.S. to withdraw the proposed resolution placed before the Security Council, in the hope of gaining some credibility. Its options for the future are limited. Various plans were announced, then withdrawn, but some form of "diplomatic resistance" is now envisioned – including encouraging various states to recognize a Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, and at some point in September 2011, putting the matter before the UN General Assembly.

Revolution and Counter Revolution

In spite of the euphoria that gripped Arabs and Palestinians as a result of the upheavals in Arab countries, caution needs to take precedence. In Tunisia and Egypt, the revolutions are still in the making and counter-revolutionary forces inside those countries with support from the outside are at work. The removal of Mubarak or Ben Ali does not change the regime as demanded by the demonstrators in Tunisia and in Tahrir Square. Unlike Libya, where the regime will change if Gaddafi departs, the regimes of Tunisia and Egypt are more institutionalized and entrenched.

Two processes are now at work in Tunisia and Egypt: The first internal pressure to change the regime, largely through the pressure of the multitudes, in millions as the case in Egypt. The second, a determined attempt to delimit

> An early possible sign of the changing political drift in Egypt is the invitation extended to Mahmoud Abbas to visit Cairo on April 7th expressly to discuss steps for reconciliation between Gaza and Ramallah.

and contain change in so far as possible by remnants of both regimes with the support of external actors. It was no accident, therefore, that the demonstration in Tahrir Square in Cairo that took place on Friday April 1st was called "The Friday to rescue the revolution."

One should expect that such a process of contestation will continue for some time to come. It will be in stages and may well last for

several years even if in stages. Revolutions-in-the-making do not end in one fell swoop. One should expect that in the case of Egypt and Tunisia, at least, that there will be periods of internal contestation, interspersed with periods of relative relaxation, the thermidors of the revolution-in-the-making.

Still, one should expect that if there are free and unrigged elections for new parliaments, particularly in Egypt, those new parliaments will have to reflect public opinion to some degree or another in relation to policies, both internal and external. This is the dilemma for the U.S. and Israel, and this is the crux of the matter as far as Palestine is concerned. It is here where hope lies from a Palestinian point of view, a hope that the Mubarak regime succeeded in blocking for thirty years. An early possible sign of the changing political drift in Egypt is the invitation extended to Mahmoud Abbas to visit Cairo on April 7th expressly to discuss steps for reconciliation between Gaza and Ramallah. Opening the Rafah crossing from Gaza to Egypt is the first item on the agenda.

To the extent that the ferment now taking place in several Arab countries leads to similar changes, the balance of diplomatic power in the region could shift in the interest of the Palestinian cause. This is the hope that most Palestinians have. But it is not necessarily the promise. We are at the beginning of a process, and the end is not quite in sight. But the beginning is indeed glorious.

Distorted Democracy:
Democratic Transformation and Sectarian Identities in Iraq after 2003

Anbara Abu-Ayyash

Anbara Abu-Ayyash is a Program Manager at the Heinrich Böll Stiftung's Middle East Office in Beirut. She is an economist, specialized in monitoring and evaluation analysis of development programs. Her work experience in the Middle East, especially in Iraq, focuses on democratic governance and human rights projects.

On 25 February 2011, thousands of Iraqis took to the streets in Baghdad and other major cities to protest for better living conditions, and against the insufficient provision of basic services and the complete lack of credible solutions to solve the unemployment crisis. Mismanagement, dysfunctional government institutions and the endemic corruption have taken a high toll on the quality of life of the majority of Iraqis. An estimated 25% of Iraqis live below the poverty line, with only US$2.2 per day, the unemployment rate varies according to the source between 15%-30%, and female participation in the labor force is as low as 14.2%. Power cuts are the norm, clean drinking water is a scarcity for millions of Iraqis, and food insecurity is widespread with an estimated additional 6.2 million Iraqis at risk of becoming food insecure should the Public Distribution System continue its poor performance. Freedoms of expression and of association are curtailed, torture is known to be widespread in Iraqi prisons, the independence of the judiciary is questionable, and a functional separation of powers is at stake. Recent actions taken by Nouri al-Maliki, Iraq's Prime Minister, to centralize power by undermining the independence of important state institutions such as the Central Bank and the Commission on Public Integrity to Combat Government Corruption, are observed with irritation and concern. Indeed, eight years after the fall of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship in 2003 – a period that witnessed two democratic parliamentary elections – the living conditions in Iraq are not significantly different from the conditions of other Arab countries which have been under the firm grip of decade-old dictatorships.

It, therefore, comes as no surprise that the al-Maliki government, mindful of the slogans raised by protesters around the Arab world over the past few months, was quick in flexing its muscles. The government responded by sending out threatening messages in an attempt to prevent protests on the so-called "Day of Rage." State television was mobilized to broadcast threats and to make clear that any calls for the fall of the al-Maliki regime would be put down, reminding the protesters that the current government was democratically elected and that it enjoyed international acknowledgement – and hence legitimacy. The

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masses were neither convinced nor intimidated: across the country, thousands took to the streets, and in Baghdad many walked hours to reach the city's Tahrir square in defiance to the curfew laid down by al-Maliki; the day ended in the killing of no less than 29 protesters and in the arrest of several journalists.

In following days and weeks, Iraqi civil society organized further protests and submitted a letter to al-Maliki in which it stated that not only corruption but, more importantly, the way the Iraqi political system has evolved, (it has become a confessionalist system that is based on sectarian and ethnic quotas), are

> The fall of the Iraqi Ba'athist regime – as understood from the rhetoric of the U.S. administration prior to the invasion – would be the starting point for the process of building a democratic state.

both obstacles to the improvement of living conditions and to progress in developing a genuinely democratic state.

State Destruction Instead of State Building

Eight years earlier, in March 2003, the U.S.-led "coalition of the willing" invaded Iraq with two officially declared objectives: to eliminate Saddam's weapons of mass destruction, and to free the Iraqi people from dictatorship so as to pave the way for the emergence of a democratic Iraq. The fall of the Iraqi Ba'athist regime – as understood from the rhetoric of the U.S. administration prior to the invasion – would be the starting point for the process of building a democratic state, in which "reform-minded local leaders could build lasting institutions of freedom."[1] What followed in the years after the fall of Baghdad was the complete destruction of a state: the deliberate dismantling of major state institutions and national industries (e.g., dissolving the Iraqi Army, de-Ba'athification and privatizing state-owned enterprises); the destruction of all social infrastructure (health, energy, education, etc.); cultural devastation that robbed the Iraqi society of the symbols of their historical identity (looting of national museums and archeological sites, burning of national

Iraqi protesters in Basra, on 25 February, raising posters with pictures in which the top of forefingers, blue with the color of the election ink, are cut off. Underneath the picture it says "we regret." The protesters make clear their dissatisfaction with the government's performance.

archives and libraries, attacks on historical monuments); elimination of an educated middle class and the depletion of a skilled labor force (targeted assassinations of professionals and academics in the thousands); and the deprivation of the ethnic and cultural diversity that previously characterized the Iraqi society (ethnic cleansings of mixed neighborhoods, and targeted attacks against Iraq's minority groups that were part of society in the geographic area of Iraq for thousands of years), with 1.7 million refugees and 2.8 million internally displaced persons.[2]

The dismantling of the Iraqi Army, replaced by occupation forces, created a security vacuum. The door was opened to the uncontrolled import of arms, which ensured that militias were in a position to continue armed struggle for years. While other state institutions officially remained in place, in practice they had become dysfunctional and the provision of basic services came to a near stop. It comes as no surprise that under such conditions, the access to resources had to be guaranteed with the force of arms, strengthening further the militias that were able to provide both security and services to their various clienteles within the areas under their domain.

In addition to the security and administrative vacuums that came with the dismantling of

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[1] http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article1710.htm

[2] http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/iraq

the state, there was also a political vacuum that now needed to be filled. Under the rule of Saddam, loyalty was synonymous with loyalty to the one ruling party, the Ba'ath. There was no alternative. In 2003, the time had come for the Iraqi opposition groups and parties, whether exiled or not, to return to the political sphere, to pursue their political interests, and

> To establish legitimacy, all these different groups competed for a broad basis of followers. For this purpose, they played on primordial sectarian and ethnic identities by which they created a social environment.

to ensure their say in the shaping of the political system in Iraq. These groups and parties had distinct ideological visions on what the new state should be like. They needed to gain the support of the masses and create new loyalties in order to ensure their political survival. Mainly, the new loyalties were pre-dominantly based on the sectarian and ethnic identities of these groups, supported by the different historical narratives and ideologically colored readings of the current situation.

Among these groups were those who claimed to pursue a nationalist, secular project that would maintain the unity of Iraq under the umbrella of a democratic pluralistic state. Other groups pursued a religious agenda, supporting the formation of a state of Islamic rule. Here the different Shia political parties – mainly the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq (ISCI) and Nouri al-Maliki's Islamic Da'wa Party – held conflicting visions over how the Islamic state should be ruled. While the Da'wa Party envisioned an Islamic government that would be controlled by the Islamic "*umma*" (in other words, the Muslim community as a whole), the ISCI supported an Iranian-style Islamic government that would be ruled by

distinguished Islamic scholars ("*ulama*"). Another important player in the Shia camp is the Sadrist movement, led by Muqtada al-Sadr. This religious, popular movement envisioned a state where rule is based on a combination of religious and tribal values. In opposition to the Shia camp stood the various Muslim Sunni groups, the most prominent party among them being the Iraqi Islamic Party. However, the majority of these groups, including Al-Qaeda affiliated groups, were driven rather by the fear of becoming a marginalized minority, and their objectives were more concentrated on leading the resistance against the occupation of Iraq.

Groups whose membership was built on an ethnic identity included the two main political parties of Iraqi Kurdistan: Jalal Talabani's Kurdish Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Mahmoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). For many years, both parties had led the struggle of the Kurdish people against the terror of Saddam's regime. They are deeply rooted in the Kurdish communities and are traditionally perceived as the legitimate leaders of the Kurdish people in Iraq. However, the Kurdish opposition is critical of the ruling parties' corrupt and undemocratic style of governance, and is increasingly contesting their status as the legitimate representatives of the Kurdish people.

To establish legitimacy, all these different groups competed for a broad basis of followers. For this purpose, they played on primordial sectarian and ethnic identities by which they created a social environment conducive to expanding their bases (alternative delivery of services, family support to widows and orphans of martyrs, protection by the groups' armed militias). They injected these identities with values that would clearly differentiate them from the other groups. Hence, these identities were not only based on the sectarian or ethnic affiliation, but they came to stand for the different ideals promoted by the various Shia, Sunni, or Kurdish groups.

Moreover, these ideals over time became impersonated by the leader of each group.

Affiliating oneself with a group meant loyalty to that group's leader. This is evidenced by the fact that since 2003, the leaderships of the groups that have come to power have not changed. Those who assumed leading political roles in 2003 have remained in power, though assuming different political posts in the course of time.

Laying the Ground for Ethno-Sectarianism

The emergence of these sectarian and ethnic dynamics in shaping the political landscape of Iraq was supported by the Coalition Provisional Authority's (CPA) policy approach towards governance. The CPA was established in April 2003, and in May 2003 L. Paul Bremer became the U.S. Presidential Envoy and Governor of Iraq. Under his rule, the CPA took actions that

> An ethnic and sectarian formula became the organizing principle of politics in Iraq, facilitating the rise of polarized communal forces at the local level.

were favorable for the emergence of a sectarian/ethnic political system in Iraq. Most commonly known are the CPA's dissolution of the Iraqi Army and the rigorous de-Ba'athification process that it pursued. Regardless of the different visions of the Iraqi political groups, the CPA worked toward implementing its own vision for Iraq, that was that of a parliamentary democracy with a federal system of government.

At the beginning of its rule in early 2003, the CPA strongly backed "secularist" Iraqi opposition leaders returned from exile, specifically Ahmad Chalabi from the London-based Iraqi National Congress and Ayad Allawi, leader of the Iraqi National Accord. However, it soon became clear that these two political figures could not act as local leaders as they lacked the popular support needed for legitimacy. Instead, the CPA embarked on a process of brokering deals with the other, more popular, political groups, mainly Shia and

Kurdish. As an outcome of these deals, the CPA created the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) in July 2003. Its members were selected based on a sectarian and ethnic formula. Such a formula was also implemented for the appointment of ministry posts, and it was further implemented at the level of local governing councils where the CPA added seats, more or less randomly, to reflect ethnic and sectarian representation.[3] Henceforth, an ethnic and sectarian formula became the organizing principle of politics in Iraq, facilitating the rise of polarized communal forces at the local level. Moreover, as these councils and governing bodies were appointed by the CPA, rather than being the outcome of civic dialogue and elections, they were deprived of local legitimacy.

One year later, on 28 June 2004, the CPA appointed the Iraq Interim Government, which was transferred sovereignty and mandated with overseeing the process of drafting a permanent Iraqi constitution that would replace the Transitional Administration Law. The CPA was dissolved and Paul Bremer left Iraq on the same day. It was only in December 2005 that the first parliamentary elections for the Council of Representatives (Iraqi Parliament) were held, and consequently the elected council assumed its functions in June 2006. By then, the sectarian and ethnic dynamics of power sharing between the different groups and factions had become a reality, and the elections that took place in 2005 lent these tendencies further political legitimacy. In the following years, up to the March 2010 elections and in the formation of the current government, the same dynamics prevail, enforcing a political system where the division of power and the allocation of political posts are based on sectarian and ethnic affiliations.

The current constellation in the Iraqi political system is sadly reminiscent of another model in the region, that of Lebanon. Since 1943, the division of power in Lebanon is

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[3] Castles Built of Sand: U.S. Governance and Exit Strategies in Iraq, www.merip.org/

based on a sectarian formula that emerged from a general consensus among rival power groups. This formula survived for 46 years, dominating political, economic and social life. What is more, having become a long-term practice of politics, this system was legally enshrined in the Taef Accord of 1989 and is

> Civil society activists voice their concerns over these developments openly, most lately in a letter addressed to al-Maliki, in which the sectarian divide of the political system takes the main blame for the overall degenerated situation.

reflected up to today in Lebanon's electoral law. The struggle of different sects in Lebanon has resulted in a system in which political competition among "parties" is limited by the sectarian quotas and sectarian interests, as opposed to national interests. The decision-making process in Lebanon is paralyzed, the state is dysfunctional and sects have replaced the state to a large extent in the provision of services. With government institutions rendered to specific entities of specific ethnic or sectarian affiliation, clientelism is the outcome. The scope of opportunities for youth outside the realm of "their" sect is limited, thereby negatively affecting the domestic labor market. In addition, the threat of internal conflicts is prevalent and arises every time one sectarian party sees its interests threatened.

Moving Beyond the Sectarian Divide

Many Iraqis realize that the trend in which their political system is developing is producing a Lebanon-like political system. Political parties in Iraq lack real political programs that go beyond ideological visions and utopian ambitions for short-term change. They are voted into governing bodies not because Iraqi voters are genuinely convinced of the slogans raised during election periods, nor for the quality of electoral candidates. Rather, their supporters base their votes on ethnic, sectarian, tribal and nepotistic considerations, which have become the basis for voter decision making. Hence, even though Iraqi political parties fall short of proposing any true practical approach to solve economic and social problems, they still reach power. The influence of implementing sectarian quotas for political representation purposes can also be seen in the structure of the executive branch of the Iraqi government, the Council of Ministers. In Iraq, there are currently more than 40 ministers, who were appointed to maintain a certain ethnic/sectarian representation, but who assume no real role; they receive salaries, but often have no physical premises from which they can carry out their governance duties. There is valid concern as well that future elections and negotiations over government formations may not bring to office political forces interested in and capable of inducing real change.

Iraqi intellectuals and civil society activists voice their concerns over these developments openly, most lately in a letter addressed to al-Maliki, in which the sectarian divide of the political system takes the main blame for the overall degenerated situation; wide-spread corruption comes second on the list of factors. The signatories of the letter urged the al-Maliki government to put a real effort into countering the development trend of the political system that is heading towards a confessionalist regime.

Civil society representatives demand that practicable strategies be developed to address a number of areas. They demand that civil rights be guaranteed, including the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and the right to be free from torture and other inhumane treatment. They demand that accountability be practiced on all levels: the persecution of administrative corruption, the persecution of criminals and those who commit terrorist acts, and the persecution of organized crime. They ask their government to come forth and implement credible and realistic strategies

to reduce poverty, increase the living standard and quality of life, and to improve the education system and protect it from sectarian dominion. They request that the government, as evidence of its true willingness, improves the system of legal guarantees to rights and freedoms through legislative amendments and by ensuring the independence of the judiciary and that law enforcement bodies be held accountable. Civil society representatives, further, demand that they be given space to actively take part in political decision-making processes, and that other minority groups and women also be included. They want to have a say in the strategies that the state needs to develop to address the variety of problems.

Their hope is that if their demands are taken seriously and acted upon by the government in a way that gives priority to national interests instead of sectarian ones, then a social, economic and cultural environment may emerge that would hinder any further manifestation of a sectarian political system. Only then will there be a true chance for Iraq to shift to a different path that would eventually lead to a democratic, civil system of governance – one that is capable of addressing the needs of its citizens and of constructively dealing with the legacies of the past.

The Lebanese "Secularist" Movement in the Shadow of the Arab Democratic Movements

Standing before the democratic movements that have come to reign across the Arab world, the Lebanese find themselves in the midst of a spiral of change and protest against the paradigms practiced by the Arab political authorities in dealing with their populations. Protest movements have moved from one country to the next. One rejectionist protest movement brings down one regime and time barely passes

> All the Lebanese protest against the way they live. However, they differ in the extent of antagonism, on whom to blame for the nature of their suffering.

before the momentum of that success is passed onto another, similar movement. Where are the Lebanese in all that is taking place around them?

By virtue of the very nature of their lives, the fact that indignation and resentment exist among the Lebanese – the majority of the Lebanese – does not warrant debate. We suffer from a lack of justice and security. We suffer from neighborhood bullies who impose their authority over the peaceful residents of their neighborhoods. We suffer from a lack of democracy and individual freedoms. We suffer the repercussions of state corruption and the corruption of public administrations every day of our lives. We suffer from economic hardships, favoritism and nepotism. We suffer from deterioration in the quality of our public services and of our public education system.

All the Lebanese protest against the way they live. However, they differ in the extent of antagonism, on whom to blame for the nature of their suffering, now, and on whom to blame for the stress of what may lie before them. The Lebanese are divided. There are the Lebanese who follow their communities of sects and who have renewed their pledge of allegiance to the leaders of their sects. Moreover, the compass of their criticism has lost its direction in a reality where sectarian fiefdoms have obscured any central authority where one could direct blame for its policies. Other Lebanese count amongst the outcasts, who have chosen to estrange themselves from sectarian loyalties, and who have ambitions to live under a system that respects their human dignities. The former are much bigger than the latter. But, even among those who have rejected sectarianism, there is a sense of loss about who to blame and how one should direct one's indignation and resentment.

The best that the Arab popular intifadas have been able to offer, in the Lebanese context, is that they have laid waste to Lebanese narcissism. They have stripped the Lebanese of the claim that they are the most democratic of their Arab neighbors, and they have stripped this claim of all the legends that some of its intellects have wrapped around it. These uprisings have, indeed, bestowed upon all their real size.

The best that the Arab intifadas have been able to offer, in the context of each local movement, is that those who have risen up finally feel that they are human beings, deserving a life of dignity to the most extent possible, at the least.

Hassan Abbas

Hassan Abbas is a Lebanese author, journalist and activist. He published numerous contributions on political, social and cultural issues in local and regional newspapers, magazines and websites, including *Al-Hayat* newspaper. Among his research works is a recent study entitled "Random Acts of Violence vs. Civil Peace" (2011).

The masses who took to the street threw external policies behind them – these policies that violated their dignities with their pretexts for so long. Instead, they focused their targets

> In Lebanon, authority is not centralized. Authority in Lebanon is distributed among fiefdoms defined by sectarian zoning.

on internal politics and policy: freedoms, democracy, and rejecting favoritism, nepotism and corruption.

Some of these Arab intifadas have already succeeded, and soon other intifadas will succeed. That is because their authorities have a concrete form, shape and place at which the people's anger can be directed, and they can be blamed for the miserable situations they have created. These masses do not need to conclusively define their demands, nor do they need to work on what they want, positively. They can merely suffice with the negative, that they reject this reality and this status quo.

In Lebanon, authority is not centralized. Authority in Lebanon is distributed among fiefdoms defined by sectarian zoning. We cannot suffice with rejection and with the negative. The curse of our sectarian political system forces us to define what we really want – or, in other words, define the positive and affirm our needs.

In Lebanon, there are secularists, or those who deem themselves secular, who have been infected with the Arab "intifada" contagion. They established groups that communicate and connect through Facebook. They took to the streets in rejection of the sectarian system, and defined future steps contingent upon taking to the streets once again. Yet, these groups are diverse to a point that is worrisome. The concept of secularism among the Lebanese is so elastic that it includes everything and everything's antithesis.

There are the revolutionary secularists, who wish they lived in the time of the Paris Commune so that they may find the link between their convictions and reality. There are those who are secularists that reject sectarianism, but are in awe of their sectarian leader, on the pretext that the leader is part of the resistance, or that the leader is a socialist, or that the leader advocates loyalty only to Lebanon, and so on, and so on… to a point that is almost nauseating. There are secularists who truly seek the establishment of a civil state in which the relations between the people and the authorities are defined by the notion and tenets of citizenship. These are not so few. They may be a minority among the secularists of Beirut's Hamra and Gemmayzeh districts. But they are numerous in other, more remote Lebanese cities, towns and villages, where people are genuinely fed up with slogans and futile mobilizations empty of any meaning and content. These people are frustrated by changes they were once convinced would happen, but never materialized.

The latter are the people we worry about today, and whose disappointment and frustration we fear. We fear and worry for them, in contrast to those who claim they will rise up against the power of the 18 sects, but cannot even name the leaders of these sects. We fear and worry for them, in opposition to those who justify pledging allegiance to their sectarian leaders by manufacturing legends that acquit certain leaders of any guilt for our dismal, deteriorating reality. We fear and worry for them, in dissent against sweeping slogans that try to equate a "minority sect," such as the Ismaili sect, with sects that belong to hard-core leaders, such as the Shiite, Sunni, Maronite and Druze, and to which one could even add the Catholic and Orthodox sects.

Here, we want to address the "civil" Lebanese. And we will speak to these Lebanese about the "civil" and the "civic" because we do not want to burden Lebanese secularism with yet another notion. This way, the demand for civil marriage can remain the major link between secularists – so be it if secularism

Hussein Yaakoub

Hussein Yaakoub is a Lebanese author and researcher. He regularly writes for local and Arab newspapers and magazines, including *Al-Nahar*, *Al-Hayat*, and Al-Awan website, and he researches for human rights orgaizations. Among his publications are "On Modernity, Urbanity & Urban Dwellers" in an edited volume (2009). He is currently working on a book documenting Lebanese memories of the civil war (2011).

remains in their minds a sexual concept that fears penetrating the realms of the political and sociological.

We address these Lebanese, offering the

> The state that we want is a civil state which, first and above all, preserves and protects the rights of individual citizens; and, only as a second priority, pays heed to the specificities and unique character of the sects.

following points:

First: The popular revolutions taking place in the Arab world demanding democracy cannot be compared to and do not conform to the political and social conditions in Lebanon. The populations rebelling today in the Arab world are homogenous to a great degree, unlike the heterogeneous Lebanese society. The regimes of the countries under revolt today are also far removed from the arena of direct struggle with Israel, which is unlike the case of the Lebanese reality. Thus, we are obliged to find national commonalities that transcend the diversity of the Lebanese and of Lebanon. We must not allow our right to live as safe, secure and "civilian" citizens to come at the expense of the idea that we alone must resist Israeli aggression.

Second: Those who deem themselves secularists in Lebanon, based on their notion of secularism, choose to ignore the reality of Lebanese society. They are calling for a secular state without defining, preparing or even thinking about the transitions and the transitional period required to take us from our sectarian reality to a civil and civic reality. They prefer to feign purity, and avoid delving into any real thinking about the barrier of sectarian obstacles that hinder the reform of our political

system. They forget that penetrating politics and society is only possible by positioning oneself from within the realities of our societies and communities. Moreover, our society, our system is sectarian, to the core.

We reject this reality, yes; but we have no choice but to consider all options for reform. We do not want slogans that frighten those who still cling to the folds of sectarian into thinking in protective fear for the "sect's interests." Rather, we want these persons to let go of these folds and instead embrace the idea of the nation, which treats all its citizens as equals and does not discriminate against citizens due to sectarian considerations.

Third: All of Lebanon's sectarian leaders share in the responsibility for the dismal, deteriorating situation we have reached – all of them, with no one leader more innocent or more guilty than the other.

Fourth: The state that we want is a civil state which, first and above all, preserves and protects the rights of individual citizens; and, only as a second priority, pays heed to the specificities and unique character of the sects – and never to the leaders of these sects or the parties that dominate the members of these sects – except for matters that are contrary to the one nation under which all citizens are united. The state we want is a state where all arms are centralized under the auspices and authority of the state's official security apparatus, which is vested with the power to maintain and protect the security and dignity of its citizens. The state we want is a state whose authorities and governing bodies work toward developing Lebanon, economically; and is a state that understands the economy as a productive process and not a rentier agent for securing the interests of the most powerful and the interests of the networks and individuals associated with them.

Fifth: We must think about reforming our political system from within our current and

prevailing reality, not from what we wish was our reality and other aspirations that are empty of tangibles. Non-exhaustive examples of such possibilities include: demanding and insisting upon an electoral law based on proportional representation and on the basis that the country be treated as one electoral district; demanding and insisting upon restricting electoral spending and expenditures; demanding and insisting upon reforming social security; demanding and insisting upon a fair, just and impartial judiciary, uninfluenced by the powers-that-be; and, demanding and insisting upon the reform of our public educational system and state universities. These are far more fundamental, tangible and serious than the empty claim that we reject sectarianism and we demand a secular state, without defining what that really means and what we really want.

Let us all be "*for the nation.*"[1]

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Translation from Arabic by Mona Abu-Rayyan

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[1] "We Are All for the Nation" is "*Kuluna lil Watan,*" the title and first phrase of the Lebanese national anthem.

Testimonies

Heroic Resolve in the Face of the Omnipresent Machine of Oppression:

Recounting the Events of the Tunisian Revolution

When Mohamed Bouazizi set fire to himself inside the governor's office in the Tunisian city of Sidi Bouzid, this act ignited the spark that erupted into an intifada by the city's locals, and those in its neighboring towns and villages (Meknassy, Sidi Ali Ben Aoun, Jilma, Menzel Bouzaiane, Mezzouna, Regueb…). This spontaneous uprising expressed the extent of the resentment and frustration felt by the people living in the

> The people's mobilization was spurred by a fundamental awareness that the government's propaganda machine would quickly churn out the claim that this was, "an isolated incident."

entire area, due to rising unemployment, a total lack of basic resources and pervasive corruption in state apparatuses.

Thus on Saturday morning, December 17, 2010, in an act of rage and protest, Mohamed Bouazizi committed suicide by burning himself alive after all the avenues to a life of dignity were closed to him. The municipal police had once again forbidden him to set up a stand to sell goods near the city market, destroyed his cart, and insulted, humiliated and threatened him in front of passers-by. It is also important to note that Mohamed Bouazizi was a university graduate and a native of the city. He came from a large family that suffered from poverty, unemployment and a lack of opportunities and resources; he was also his family's sole provider.

As soon as news of the suicide spread, large numbers of people headed to the governor's office, blaming the authorities and the state for what had happened, and condemning the marginalization and oppression that characterized the relationship between the authorities and citizens. The masses gathered before the governor's office, demanding more information about the fate of Mohamed (who had been immediately transferred to the trauma burn hospital in Sidi Ben Arous in the capital city, Tunis). A large police force was unable to disperse the crowds. Matters quickly escalated into an outright protest and mass demonstration, where the people raised posters carrying slogans such as, "shame, shame on the government, "your prices ignited the fire" and demanded, "justice from the thief's gangs."

Bouazizi's suicide was the tipping point in the miserable economic and social reality of Sidi Bouzid. In its spontaneity, the people's mobilization was spurred by a fundamental awareness that the government's propaganda machine would quickly churn out the claim that this was, "an isolated incident." In response, the people armed themselves with protest slogans that demanded social justice, an equitable redistribution of the country's wealth, the elimination of corruption and the right to more employment opportunities.

For the entire day of December 17, Sidi Bouzid lived to the beat of mass popular demonstrations and gatherings. Several times during the day entrances to the city and its main sites witnessed violent clashes with police forces, who responded to the people's slogans with tear gas, and replied to their demands for dignity with brutal beatings, detentions and

Malek Sghiri

Malek Sghiri, 25, is a third-year student of contemporary history at the College of Sociology and Social Sciences in Tunis. He is a student activist, and participated in the protest movements in the city of Thala, and in the events that took place in the Tadamon District. He was arrested at the Ministry of Interior and was detained for a week during the revolution.

arrests. It was an exceptional night for Sidi Bouzid. Clashes between angry young men and the police forces continued late into the night. On Sunday, as news spread of the arrests of around 50 young men from the city, protests escalated even further, as it was common knowledge that the arrests meant possible torture for those arrested or imprisonment on fabricated charges.

The city witnessed violent clashes between the people and the now heavily armed police forces, who were joined by reinforcements from Sfax and Tozeur. These clashes took place in the neighborhoods of Wilad Shalabi, al-Awadi, al-Noor al-Gharbi, al-Brahimiya, Wilad Belhadi and al-Khadra'a. The local authorities also relied on state-backed militias to track down protesters, and to harass and terrorize them. Security agents and informants pursued protesters to gather information on potential mobilizations and to uncover those who played an active role in these mobilizations. These agents attempted to infiltrate and break the ranks of the activists. But, despite these tactics, the people of Sidi Bouzid persisted and carried on with their actions, united in their right to equitable wealth distribution and justice. They chanted slogans of protest (true to their Tunisian dialect): "We demand the release of all detainees," "The people are hungry," "Our lands have been expropriated," "The thief's gangsters must be brought to justice," "Work… freedom… and national dignity."

Monday coincided with the first day of the entrance examinations for graduates in Sidi Bouzid. The city was to host thousands of graduates from outlying districts, towns and cities from all the governorate's administrative districts, who had come to sit for their first round of examinations. Authorities anticipated some kind of student mobilization, especially given the highly charged and tense environment of the previous two days. Moreover, they were aware that the tension would elevate the aspirations of "unemployed teachers" and encourage them to join the demonstrations in protest against their own fragile and miserable conditions. Thus,

Malek Sghiri

the city became totally "militarized." Police reinforcements were deployed to all major intersections, inside "active" neighborhoods, and in front of government buildings and the ruling party's headquarters.

These examinations created an opportunity for the people to meet, and to be united in their pain. It became an opportunity to expand the protests from the center of the governorate to its periphery. In steady progression, the contagion of public, mass popular protests began to spread to almost every city, town and village in the Sidi Bouzid governorate.

By Tuesday, the entire Sidi Bouzid area was in a heightened state of resistance and struggle against their social, economic and political marginalization, and the misery they had suffered for so long. These popular movements succeeded in maintaining their resolve, resilience and cohesiveness despite the difficult circumstances and conditions in which they were operating. Their unity was the most important factor in their increased power and strength.

In the city of Sidi Bouzid, protests would continue with the support of many unions. Demonstrations, protests and sit-ins were organized, while young men in the city repeatedly clashed with the police. In the nearby towns and villages, Meknassy would witness popular mobilization and protests that would last an entire week, as people demanded work and the right to equitable wealth distribution that would provide opportunities for success in life, improvement in living conditions and the right to dignity. The police responded

to these demands by calling in even greater reinforcements, and continued clashes with the young men who heroically defended their city. Unity and victory were alive in these daily

> Sidi Bouzid and its surrounding towns were transformed into cantons of progressive national struggle.

battles between young men, armed with the justice of their cause, and the police, heavily armed with tear gas and rubber bullets. In the town of Menzel Bouzaiane, demonstrators took to the streets, protests and sit-ins were organized, and protesters clashed with the police deployed at the entrance of the city and in the town's major streets. The same was true for Sidi Ali Ben Aoun and Regueb, and to a lesser extent in Jilma and Mezzouna.

What further enraged people was the way in which the official and state media dealt with the protests. The local audio-visual and print media remained silent about these events, and when it did mention Sidi Bouzid, it did so only from the perspective of "accomplishments" and "gains." Indeed, as Tunisians received transparent and reliable information from "foreign" news channels (France 24, Al Jazeera, BBC, Al Arabiya, etc.) and social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), they became more and more convinced that, once again, the official state media was operating according to the prevalent official instruments of coercion by withholding information and falsifying facts and events.

Popular mobilizations continued for a week in Sidi Bouzid and its nearby cities. Whereas the suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi (which was followed by the suicide of Hussein Naji on Wednesday) was the event that directly ignited the intifada, the real causes were fundamentally rooted in the deteriorating economic and social conditions which burdened the entire Sidi Bouzid region. Indeed, as these mobilizations

became a catalyst and spread and become further entrenched, the social ills remained unaddressed. Despite claims that emergency measures would be taken (such as the convening of emergency meetings and the presentation of a "reform" package by the Ministers of Development and Information), the people were very well aware that such initiatives were little more than mere palliatives measures and further attempts to deceive them, "to throw ash in their eyes" (as the saying in Arabic goes). The people's anger and general awareness of the need for change in their lives fortified the popular mobilizations and prevented them from weakening or reverting, which would mean a continuation of extreme poverty and marginalization, and the plague of unemployment, misery and exploitation.

When the second week of protests began, the people's demands, as well as their defense of their interests, became firmly rooted. Severe clashes with the police continued, particularly in the towns of Menzel Bouzaiane and Meknassy. The police used brute force and live ammunition in clashes with protesters, raided activists' homes and made arbitrary arrests. The outcome of this arrogant police behavior was the martyrdom of a young man, Mohammad Al-Ammari, an unemployed graduate from the Fine Arts Institute. News of the young man's martyrdom further inflamed protesters and boosted their persistence, resilience and resistance in the entire area.

Sidi Bouzid and its surrounding towns were transformed into cantons of progressive national struggle. Meanwhile the heavily armed militias and police forces, operating under orders to kill, continued to employ brutal methods to stamp out the popular uprisings. Police methods included: the heavy use of tear gas, laying siege to entire neighborhoods, intensive reinforcements, the use of police dogs, the use of rubber and live bullets, storming impounded car lots and storage supplies, cutting off electricity and the Internet, etc. But despite this brutality, which also included the fabrication and falsification of facts on the ground, and the

depiction of victims as criminals by the state media (as well as other forms of tyranny against unarmed, popular protests), the protesters and demonstrators continued in their perseverance, providing the world with the finest example of resistance.

The Torch Passes from Sidi Bouzid to Kasserine (and Thala)

It is well known that the conditions that drove the people of Sidi Bouzid to protest and clash with the state's and the ruling party's security apparatus were also prevalent – perhaps, even, to a harsher extent – in all the nearby areas, especially the Siliana-Gabès belt which includes Kef, Kasserine, Kairouan, Gafsa and Kébili. The very high levels of unemployment, especially among university graduates, inthese regions, along with limited social services, which included the absence of university hospitals and decent health facilities, had forced residents to leave their towns. The regions had little appeal and limited conditions for investment, and suffered from weak infrastructure, modest capacity-building institutions and a complete absence of higher education institutions. All this is not withstanding rampant corruption and rising levels of poverty, whose appalling manifestations made these regions susceptible to an explosion similar to that which took place in Sidi Bouzid.

By the end of December, signs of such social eruptions began to appear. The cities of Kasserine and Thala became major centers of unrest and tension where tens of thousands of people took to the streets in support of Sidi Bouzid, demanding social justice and their immediate share in the country's development. For the first time since the mobilizations had begun, protesters raised the now memorable slogan (which became the mantra of all Arab people demanding change in their countries) that ignited the flame in every single Tunisian negatively affected by the policies of Ben Ali: "The people demand the downfall of the regime."

Kasserine and Thala witnessed the most

decisive demonstrations and protests up until that point; and protests began to progressively spread and edge towards the other areas in Tunisia, particularly the interior. Despite the massive security presence and reinforcements sent by the Ministry of Interior to the region, the people – to the astonishment of everyone– inspired true hope in all Tunisians that it was actually possible to bring down the regime. The extent of their heroic resolve pushed the young people of Thala on January 5 to write on the entrance to their city, "Thala is the Stalingrad of North Africa," in protest against the brutal repression of their small city (population of almost 40,000), as well as celebrate their brave and noble resistance.

Meanwhile, there was a gradual change in the way Tunisians viewed the events taking place in their country. When the incidents began, Tunisians had spoken hesitantly and in fear about the "isolated protests" in Sidi Bouzid. But when the outlying cities and towns entered the fray against the security services, the will of the Tunisians was fortified and, suddenly, it became permissible to talk about "a social movement with a political vision." As the protests in Kasserine and Thala came to a head, and with the entire world watching the battles taking place between defenseless Tunisian youth and the heavily armed security

> The resolve of Tunisians strengthened. They began to truly believe that there was real hope for change and that change could and would happen.

forces, the term "popular intifada" was used for the first time.

The foundations of the regime began to crumble. The pretexts used by Ben Ali depicting the protests as the work of "hostile groups" and, "hooligans who had nothing to do with patriotism," lost all credibility. The resolve

of Tunisians strengthened. They began to truly believe that there was real hope for change and that change could and would happen.

A critical juncture was Saturday, January 8, when security forces resorted to the use of live ammunition (after using tear gas, hot water cannons, rubber bullets, raids and arrests) against demonstrators. In one night, 62 martyrs fell in Thala and Kasserine. This unprecedented brutality marked the transformation of the "popular intifada" into "the people's revolution."

The news of the huge number of martyrs who fell in one night resonated throughout the country. On the morning of Sunday, January 9, control of these areas finally fell to the "revolutionaries," who demanded that the punishment of the murderers be promptly carried out. Enraged, they took control of state headquarters and institutions, as well as the premises of the ruling party (otherwise known as the RCD: The Rally for Constitutional Democracy). They expelled the security forces as part of a popular grassroots wave, which was unprecedented in modern Tunisia following the end of French colonization. Much of the "Tunisian interior" fell out of the control of the state and its security apparatus.

This newfound independence was reinforced by the bold stand taken by local and regional associations, as well as the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), the National (Bar) Association of Lawyers and the General Union of Tunisian Students (which declared their resistance by organizing partial strikes, sit-ins and protest marches). The retreat of the regime began after the politically, morally and ethically scandalous murder of innocent people was exposed and after the "great barrier of fear," which had shackled the Tunisian people for so many decades, finally fell. The revolution moved forward with mass protests finally coming to the fore in the capital city Tunis, marking it as the revolution's most defining moment.

January 14: A Rendezvous with History

Classes were cancelled on January 10 in

the wake of the wave of student protests that swept the country. The authorities launched a "preemptive" campaign of arbitrary arrests in an attempt to terrorize the people. They brutalized unionists and lawyers, banned gatherings and harassed and threatened anyone who attempted to organize any form of support. Internet sites were shut down and communications scrambled in tens of cities and villages. As these events were taking place, the Tunisian interior (i.e., two-thirds of the country) was transformed into territory "liberated" from the grips of Ben Ali's authority. The slogans of the revolution now became exceptionally political: "Down with the RCD," "Down with the people's executioner and torturer," "Down with the regime of October 7th[1], down with the fascist and traitor."

The last hour of the regime would eventually come with clashes that broke out between young people in the Tadamon District (the largest district in the capital, Tunis, which includes the most poverty-stricken and marginalized neighborhoods in the city) and security forces on the night of January 11. The crisis reached Tunis, for the first time, since December 17. The regime had tried to use all of its brute force and power to neutralize Tunis, and keep it isolated from the events taking place in the rest of the country. Its desperate reaction in the capital city heralded the collapse of the very foundations of the regime.

The confrontations in Tadamon were very bloody and violent, and culminated in the take-over by young men of most of the neighborhoods and roads in this huge district. The use of rubber bullets and tear gas by security forces in these clashes only further inflamed feelings of rage and indignation among the people. Thus, as soon as news of the people's victory in Tadamon spread, the uprising extended to other neighborhoods and districts in Tunis (al-Karem, al-Malasin, Al-Sayadeh, Hay Ibn Khaldun, al-Kibariya, al-Jabal al-Akhdar, etc.), as part of the tidal wave of "the revolution."

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[1] Ben Ali ascended to the presidency on 7 October 1987.

It was at this point that the regime imposed a curfew and called in the army to protect state institutions, thus entering into a stage of blind suppression.

On the morning of January 14, all of Tunisia, from north to south, called forth in one voice, "The people demand the overthrow of the regime." The state's repression did not succeed

> A massive protest of over 500,000 participants marched toward the Ministry of the Interior building, an immense structure which represented and symbolized the regime; a structure in which tens of young men languished in its dark corridors, tortured in the backdrop of the mobilizations and protest movements.

in silencing the roar of the masses, who in the early morning hours, found their way to the largest street in Tunis, Habib Bourguiba Avenue – the street that has always been the shining light of the capital, but which was also one of the security zones in which the authorities had always prohibited any form of demonstration or protest.

A massive protest of over 500,000 participants marched toward the Ministry of the Interior building, an immense structure which represented and symbolized the regime; a structure in which tens of young men languished in its dark corridors, tortured in the backdrop of the mobilizations and protest movements. The march succeeded in breaking and penetrating the security fortifications, and reached its goal.

The masses continued to protest and formed a massive sit-in in front of the ministry, demanding that Ben Ali and the Trabelsis be banished from Tunisia (the Trabelsis are the family of Leila Ben Ali, infamous in Tunisia for their corruption on all fronts, whether political, financial or administrative, and their appropriation of commissions). They also demanded that all those responsible for killing protesters be held accountable, and that all political prisoners be released immediately.

It was truly a historic moment; a moment reported by the media that resonated throughout the Arab world from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf. It was the moment in which the people chanted out, in one voice and in one movement, in front of the Ministry of the Interior, "*Dégage*!" ("Clear Out!"). It was the moment that the regime finally and truly fell, and not through the use of force. Immediately following this, bullets were fired at protesters, chaos ensued, and in memorable historic scenes Tunisians faced state violence with a show of solidarity, perseverance and martyrdom.

On the evening of January 14, as the masses were liberating neighborhoods and streets, a formal announcement was made from outside Tunisia that Ben Ali had fled to an unknown place. Despite the uncertain situation and the imposed curfew, the Tunisians could not be prevented from expressing their joy over their victorious revolution in the face of one of the most notorious dictators in the Third World. Since then, Tunisians have continued to protect their achievements, taking stock of the effort it took to topple their dictator. They are aware that they must persist in overthrowing all the remaining elements of the former dictatorship, its instruments of government, way of thinking and its structures.

Testimony
Fear and Revolution in Libya

Elephant in the Room

Recently, I was chatting on Skype to a Libyan friend in Tripoli when halfway through the stilted conversation – inevitable when the raging violence and bloodshed threatening that friend's very existence is the elephant in the room – I panicked. What if the person on the screen

> Like me, most people I grew up with were raised to not open their mouths in public, and some not even in private.

wasn't really who I thought he was? What if some security apparatus had hacked his account? Should I really be chatting to him? Not sure what to do, I kept the conversation mundane, avoiding mentioning names of common friends and navigated the conversation towards harmless topics. We even discussed the weather! Thankfully, I don't think he noticed and we signed off with his invitation to come and enjoy the glorious weather on the beach in Tripoli this summer, "inshallah" (so God wills), wink, wink. A few days later, I was chatting with another friend who had emigrated from Libya several years ago in search of better opportunities, and I found myself in the same situation. Only this time, I was the one whose identity was suspect. In the middle of the conversation, my friend panicked about discussing what was going on in Libya with me, and half-jokingly asked me if I was really who I claimed to be. I half-jokingly reminded him of a favorite meal we had shared over a decade ago and he relaxed slightly. Those two incidents sum up the environment

of fear under Gaddafi's regime. In Libya, fear is pervasive and borders on paranoia.

We never discussed politics or the regime when I was growing up in Libya or during the different periods of my life when I lived there. I did not even know if my friends supported the regime or were critical of it. When I first read Hisham Matar's novel, *In the Country of Men*, a few years ago, I cried. It was the first time I had read or heard another person's account of events I had lived through. Suleiman, the protagonist in the novel, was roughly the same age as I was during the late 1970s and early 80s, and the events he witnessed were eerily familiar. I, too, had witnessed televised interrogations and executions. I, too, had relatives who disappeared – a second cousin working in Libya was jailed for three years for a passing remark he made among coworkers on the country's involvement in the war in Chad. And I, too, had been hushed by my parents in case I said something in public. And like me, most people I grew up with were raised to not open their mouths in public, and some not even in private. While the extreme paranoia of the 1980s gave way to more relaxed attitudes in the 1990s, criticism extended only to corruption and nepotism in the country, and then only among close circles of family and friends. Gone were the public hangings and assassinations of the 1970s and 1980s, but people were still picked up and jailed for even a whiff of dissent, and many people lost their lives under torture. We continued to watch the news on television with the windows closed, in case there was anything broadcast which was critical of Libya.

Nahla Daoud

Nahla Daoud is a Syrian expatriate who grew up in Libya and continues to consider the country home, having returned to live and work there at different periods of her life. She currently works as a research specialist, with emphasis on social development, and resides in Dubai.

Timid Calls for Change

That profound, ingrained fear among the older generation, and to a lesser degree among the younger generation, continued to grip

> While most of the Arab world was unaware of the events playing out across Tunisia, Libyans were following the uprising there very closely and contemplating their own actions.

Libyan society until the start of the uprising in neighboring Tunisia in late 2010. While most of the Arab world was unaware of the events playing out across Tunisia, Libyans were following the uprising there very closely and contemplating their own actions. Emboldened by the protests across the border, and plagued by the same rampant unemployment, soaring living costs and endemic corruption, Libyan activists began to set up groups on Facebook calling for reform in Libya and an end to corruption. Naturally, most of the activists operated under aliases and not their real names.

The overthrow of Tunisia's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and the start of the Egyptian revolution on January 25 served to heighten the calls for reform in Libya and in early February, Libyan activists set a date for their uprising – still under the umbrella of reform – for the 17th of February. In an unprecedented and surprise move, Gaddafi reportedly met with a number of the activists on February 8 in Tripoli to reassure them that their demands would be met and to convince them to close down their pages on social media platforms, namely Facebook. Gaddafi's calls went unheeded and the number of members on the Facebook pages swelled.

The Unthinkable Happens

While few outside Libya had taken the calls for demonstrations seriously, the events that unfolded in Benghazi surprised everyone.

Everyone's attention had been focused on uprisings and potential uprisings elsewhere in the Arab world, and people predicted Algeria or Yemen would be next in line for regime change, while Libya would be one of the last places to rise. After all, there had been no blatant signs of social or political turmoil, but to those familiar with the Libyan situation, Benghazi and the eastern region had long been a thorn in Gaddafi's side. On February 15, two days before Libya's scheduled day of rage, security forces arrested Fathi Terbil, a prominent lawyer from Benghazi who represented the families of some 1,200 prisoners massacred in Tripoli's Bu'sleem prison in 1996. Most of those killed in Bu'sleem were from Benghazi and the eastern region. Terbil's arrest sparked widespread protests in Benghazi's main square – and the rest is history.

This time, unlike previous uprisings in the country, Libyans everywhere, and not just in the eastern region, rose up. On February 20, the protests reached the capital, Tripoli. Four decades of pent-up fear and anger erupted on the streets across the country and were mirrored abroad as Libyan émigrés, long cowed by Gaddafi's spies in Europe and the United States, demonstrated in front of Libyan embassies and consulates, denouncing Gaddafi's oppressive rule in solidarity with their countrymen under siege. Online, Libyans intensified their contributions on online social media, and Facebook and Twitter became the platforms from which they petitioned the world to stand up and take note of their struggle. These platforms served the revolutionaries in Libya well in the first days of the uprising, given the absence of any independent media presence in the country. While Gaddafi and his associates denied that any protests were taking place, hundreds of video clips were uploaded and news was shared on Facebook and Twitter, discrediting the regime's lies. Libyans were still united in fear, inside the country and abroad, but the need to speak up on behalf of friends and family being massacred in large cities and small towns across Libya prevailed over their fear. Numerous threatening speeches

by Gaddafi and his son Saif al-Islam served to fan that fear, but also made the Libyans more determined to push forward and overthrow Gaddafi. There was no doubt in anyone's' mind anymore that to back down now was a guaranteed death sentence for most Libyans and their family members who had taken part in the protests or voiced their support for the revolution online or on television.

An Emerging War

The international community, which had previously known Libya only through the bizarre antics of its leader or for its indictment in terrorist plots, began to pay attention to Libya's rebels. Emboldened by widespread defections from the army and political leadership in the eastern region, as well as the element of surprise, the rebels launched a number of critical attacks on Gaddafi's troops, forcing them to beat a hasty retreat out of Benghazi and the eastern province of Cyrenaica. The rebels announced that the latter had been liberated, albeit at a cost of hundreds of civilian deaths and much destruction to the region's infrastructure, and called on their countrymen in the west to do the same.

By then, Gaddafi's forces had overcome their surprise and had begun to organize. Rebels in Libya's western region faced a formidable adversary. News began to emerge from Tripoli of thousands of African mercenaries patrolling the streets of Tripoli; friends reported the erection of frequent and random checkpoints across the city, where mobile phones and computers were searched for any incriminating photos or videos of demonstrations; mobile phone networks and the Internet were cut to disrupt rebel communication channels and to quell the flow of news coming out of Tripoli; neighbors were kidnapped by Gaddafi's security forces for suspected support for the revolution or because family members had appeared on television speaking to the international media; weapons were distributed to Gaddafi's supporters, putting the city's population at the mercy of the personal whims of thousands of unrestrained armed militiamen. An untimely heart attack almost got a friend killed twice – beseeched by neighbors to transport their dying father to the hospital in the middle of the night, the friend found himself staring down the barrel of a machine gun when Gaddafi's troops stationed in the hospital insisted he was there with someone injured from the demonstrations. Only when the troops barged into the operating room and made sure for themselves that the patient had indeed suffered a heart attack, and was not injured, did they let my friend go. Making their way back home at dawn, my friend's car came under fire. When he finally managed to stop the car, my friend found himself staring down the barrel of a machine gun once again. He does not know if it was divine intervention or the sight of his neighbor's wife and daughters wailing and imploring the soldiers not to shoot that saved them, but they were allowed to pass.

While other smaller cities and towns in Libya's western region such as Misrata and Zawya continued to challenge Gaddafi's control, Tripoli, lacking weapons and supply lines to the rest of the country, was terrorized into submission. As one friend from Tripoli put it, "we are tired of sitting helplessly and watching, but we learnt that any desperate attempt to rise is simply suicidal." Even when Internet connections in Tripoli were restored, few went back online. Lists of Internet activists were drawn up and hunted door-to-door, news of which was enough to deter most people from using the Internet. After weeks of eschewing all communication mediums for fear of being traced or picked up, a friend called on my birthday to wish me a happy one in a simple act of defiance, determined not to miss the occasion.

Deadly Divisions

Against this backdrop of fear, loss, frustration and desperation, Libyans began to trade accusations among themselves. Tribes that had stood by the rebels from the start of the uprising accused other tribes of wavering on the sidelines; people in the east accused the west

of being cowards; people in the west accused neighboring tribes of betrayal; everyone accused the people of the south of collaboration with the regime. Racism reared its ugly head, and the line between Libya's indigenous black population and the African mercenaries fighting with Gaddafi was blurred.

Memories of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions seemed light years away, and the hopes that Libya's winter would blossom into an Arab spring were dashed. The number of Libyans massacred at the hands of Gaddafi's troops and mercenaries had risen to the thousands. Some estimates put the number of civilians killed in the first seven weeks of the uprising in Libya at a staggering 10,000 – a figure that is difficult to corroborate given the absence of independent investigative bodies in the country and the rumors of Gaddafi's forces hiding the bodies of those killed.

While initially opposed to foreign military intervention and determined to overthrow Gaddafi themselves, the high casualty figures and Gaddafi's brutal troops back on the outskirts of Benghazi forced the Libyan people to petition the international community to intervene. Decades of mistrust of the West were put aside

> Apart from a near unanimous desire to overthrow Gaddafi, there is very little debate taking place, two months into the uprising, on what Libyans expect from their government once Gaddafi is toppled or how the country's resources will be managed.

in the hope that the West would finally stand by the people of Libya instead of supporting its dictator and his oil reserves. On March 19, just over a month after the start of Libya's popular uprising, Libyans inside the country and abroad cheered as British, French and American-led military forces bombed Gaddafi's air defense systems and signaled the start of the foreign military campaign in the country. Since then, the campaign and its actual achievements on the ground have elicited mixed reactions. Many Libyans have begun to question NATO's intentions, not because NATO bombing resulted in civilian deaths, a necessary evil that Libyans have taken in stride if the final outcome is the overthrow of Gaddafi, but because of NATO's supposedly slow response and soft approach to the bombardment of Gaddafi's forces.

Which Way Ahead?

Amid the uncertainty and the varying positions, the lack of an agenda for the post-Gaddafi period among Libyans becomes glaringly obvious. Apart from a near unanimous desire to overthrow Gaddafi, there is very little debate taking place, two months into the uprising, on what Libyans expect from their government once Gaddafi is toppled or how the country's resources will be managed. The latter appear to be considered prizes or rewards for countries that helped the rebellion.

In late March, Libya's Transitional National Council published its vision for the future of Libya – a vision that includes the drafting a national constitution, the formation of political organizations and civil institutions and the guarantee of free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections, freedom of expression and the full rights of citizenship regardless of color, gender, ethnicity and social status. However, the Transitional National Council has done little to communicate these objectives to the Libyan population or to bridge the gap between leadership and citizens, running the risk of appearing to rule the liberated areas and their affairs in much the same way that Gaddafi ruled Libya for over 41 years. Trust and good faith in the rebels, NATO and the Transitional National Council will only take Libyans so far, against a backdrop of the ever-present fear and 41 years void of freedom and a true sense of citizenship.

The Price of the Divide on Libya:
Why I Support the No Fly Zone

An Opinion Divided

The international military intervention in Libya has divided opinion, particularly on the Left, into two camps: the pro-interventionists who argue that without this action the uprising would have been crushed, and the anti-interventionists who define it as a military assault equivalent to the war in Iraq. Central to this division is an apparent contradiction between supporting the people's revolution against autocracy and

> The questions fly: How can you believe that this is a humanitarian intervention? What about Yemen and Bahrain?

an anti-imperialist stance which denounces Western hypocrisy. As a Libyan, I reject this false contradiction. I see no logic in a tortuous argument which declares itself to be for the people's revolution, but against the intervention that sustained it. That, to me, would be the contradiction.

The accusations levelled at the pro-interventionists include the charges of hypocrisy and naivety. The questions fly: How can you believe that this is a humanitarian intervention? What about Yemen and Bahrain? What about Afghanistan and Iraq? What about Rwanda and the Congo? The charge of naivety is popular, because proving you are not naive can be difficult. I do not speak for all Libyans, but I can speak for myself and for those I know, and we do not need to be told that those intervening in Libya are acting in their own interests. None of us believes that this so-called humanitarian intervention is motivated solely by concern for

human life. Libyans know who rehabilitated Gaddafi during the last decade. We watched Berlusconi kiss his hand, Clinton pose with Gaddafi's son Mutassim, and Blair sit in his tent and announce a New Era, all during which the brutality of the regime was being masked by the thinnest possible patina of change, the change of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi's PR machine employed from the West.

We also remember when Gaddafi was lionized by some in the Left as an anti-imperialist Nasserite during the 1970s and 1980s, a time of public executions, when Libyans were poisoned against progressive ideas because of the brutality of the regime that pretended to espouse them. We remember when Gaddafi was the enemy of the West. We remember Operation El Dorado Canyon.[1] We remember the collective punishment of sanctions, as a whole nation was held responsible for Pan Am 103, only adding to the suffering of the most vulnerable. We remember when we were the pariah-state, and Libyans were the terrorists after the plutonium. None of us are apolitical or naive, we have not had a chance to be. Yet we supported the intervention.

Hypothetical Questions

Denouncing the Libyan pro-interventionist stance disregards the Libyan people's knowledge of their own history, and is made worse by the fact that some anti-interventionists are intent on justifying their stance at all costs, to the extent of overlooking or minimizing the atrocities committed against Libyan citizens by the Gaddafi regime, so as to bolster arguments

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[1] The 1986 U.S. bombing of Libya carried out in response to the Berlin discotheque bombing of the same year.

Tasnim Qutait

Tasnim Qutait is a Libyan blogger, writer and activist. She is currently a post-graduate student in Uppsala University's Department of English.

against the intervention. Some have gone so far as to justify the regime's brutal crackdown, using Gaddafi's claims of secessionist movements and ignoring the fact that resistance is as strong in Misrata in the west Libya as in Benghazi in the east. Others will mine neo-conservative material and echo Gaddafi's accusations that the uprising was led by Al-Qaeda, asking the by now ubiquitous question: "Who are the 'rebels' anyway?" Some point out that the leadership of the revolution is suspect, and argue that a post-Gaddafi Libya will prove to be worse than the Gaddafi regime. Others simply deny that Gaddafi's atrocities took place, arguing that the humanitarian crisis was engineered. This relies on an argument that the prospect of a massacre in Benghazi was overstated, an argument which ignores not only Gaddafi's own promises of going "house to house" to "cleanse" Libya, but the practical consequences of that rhetoric, demonstrated in the stifling of dissent in Tripoli, in the brutal crushing of the uprising in towns such as Zawiyah and Zwara, and the ongoing bombardment and siege of Misrata[2] and Zintan and the Nafousa Mountain. The truth is that what would have happened in Benghazi had the airstrikes not happened remains a hypothetical question. The city could have held out as long as Misrata under siege and bombardment, or Gaddafi forces could have moved in en masse to decisively crush the centre of the rebellion, ensuring that the greatest challenge the Gaddafi mafia has faced in four decades of rule is suppressed with enough force that no one can dare to dream about freedom from the regime again. What does seem self-evident is that the regime had no incentive to agree to a cease-fire while Gaddafi's forces were massed at the gates of Benghazi.

When I look at the arguments made by those in the anti-intervention camp, I am reminded why I made my decision. I need the reminder, because it was not an easy decision to make. The morning I woke up to find a column of

tanks a few kilometers outside Benghazi and wished for air-strikes to make them disappear, I asked myself whether it was only because I am Libyan. I imagined an alternate, and more just, universe where the UN Security Council had made the same choice to protect civilians during the Gaza war which left over 1,400 people dead. There is no question in my mind that whether the action was called a "no fly zone plus" or a "kinetic military action," I would have supported it, as long as those on the ground

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supported it. In Libya, I look to the cities that have been bombarded by Gaddafi's forces for over a month and I see none of the ideological arguments against intervention coming from them. I choose to take my cue from the people most affected, not from pundits.

The Argument of Double Standards

The most frequent case made against the intervention among leftists is that it is hypocritical, exposing the double standards of the West in the region. As protests rage across much of the Arab world, many raise the question why Libya, and not, for example, Yemen or Bahrain, where protesters have also been faced with deadly violence. The long history of Western support for Arab dictators provides this argument with an irrefutable logic, which obscures the illogic of arguing against intervention by arguing that other cases also merit intervention. The problem with the hypocrisy charge is that it avoids examining the escalation of events which led to the Arab League's call for a no fly zone and then to the implementation of UN Resolution 1973. Unlike in other Arab countries, where regimes at least made a pretence of "understanding" the

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[2] At the time of writing, the city of Misrata was being bombarded and was under siege. On June 13, Libyan rebels broke through the siege and once again advanced toward Tripoli. [Editor's note]

demand for greater freedom, in Libya there was a blatant demonization of protesters as "rats and cockroaches," the consequences of which were reflected in a shoot-to-kill policy where anti-aircraft guns and other heavy calibre weapons were turned against unarmed civilians. Unlike

> If Gaddafi had succeeded in crushing the uprising in Libya, what effect would that have had on the Arab Spring?

in Tunisia and Egypt's revolutions, in Libya the regime's brigades were deployed against the people, and there is evidence that the Libyan government has used mercenaries to wage war against its own people. In such an environment, the militarization of the conflict was inevitable.

The Libyans dreamed briefly about a revolution like the one in Tunisia or Egypt, where we could go out and chant "peaceful, peaceful." Instead, we went from unarmed demonstrations faced with heavy calibre weapons to forming a ragtag civilian army which was eventually sent by Gaddafi's brigades into retreat. Our dreams were confronted with Gaddafi's "alley by alley" ("zenga zenga") speech. We had to be realistic about our newborn revolution, because it was about to be "cleansed" off the face of the earth. So we adjusted. That optimistic banner in Benghazi that read "no foreign intervention, the Libyan people can manage it alone," was accompanied by requests for a no fly zone and support from the international community, with Libyans understanding that "no foreign intervention" meant no full-scale ground forces and no occupation of Libya. The current difficulty for many is that, unlike the initial coalition, NATO seems to be a compromise, a "light intervention," crippled by pressure from anti-intervention and pro-intervention nations. Yet what other options do the Libyans have? Those who opposed the initial air-strikes that took out the tanks heading into Benghazi seem to be short on realistic alternatives.

The idea that the Libyans must allow their nascent revolution to be crushed by a brutal regime which had until recently been bolstered by the West, rather than accept Western intervention in the hope for a better future, seems to me to be based on a short memory. The West has its interests, some on the Left warn, and simultaneously point out that many Western nations have aided the Gaddafi regime. Clearly, those insidious interests did not magically appear with the intervention, and they will not magically disappear after it. By intervening, nations are acting in their own strategic interest and banking on new deals, but the truth is that many Western governments could easily have looked the other way and continued benefiting from their deals with the Gaddafi regime.

Poisonous Division

What poisons the revolution is not Western interests – these are facts on the ground and play out in every single country in the region. What poisons the revolution is division, and the rhetoric that fosters division, exemplified in the idea that the intervention in Libya could poison the Arab Spring. This begs the question: If Gaddafi had succeeded in crushing the uprising in Libya, what effect would that have had on the Arab Spring? To dictatorial regimes across the Arab world looking for a way to counter the growing demands of their people for greater freedom, some method might have been detected in Gaddafi's madness.

With what is now being defined as a stalemate on the ground, the question of the future of Libya has been pushed to the forefront. The challenges ahead, beginning with finding a way out of the stalemate, are formidable and complex. No one can predict the future, but if fears over a post-Gaddafi Libya raise valid and important concerns, the fact that it will be a long and difficult process to build a democratic society after 421 years of an oppressive autocratic regime should not be an argument against supporting fledgling efforts to build that society.

Encounters on the Margin of Revolution

I realize, in detailing how I've been living the past few months - that whatever I write as an Arab expatriate in England will be as much about immigration and exile as it is about the revolution. Witnessing, albeit from a distance, the revolts in the Arab world has forced me,

> Londoners appear as reserved and distant as ever. Don't they realize what just happened? Don't they care about it one bit? I tweet my frustration: "How could people on the London tube not be as excited as I am about Tunisia? I feel like such a foreigner."

as well as many of the Arabs living abroad, to question and reformulate the definition of my identity vis-à-vis not only the nationals of the west European country that I now live in, but also the many other Arab identities I am surrounded by. I trace below four encounters I had in the context of political upheaval in the Arab countries with the aim of conveying the texture of and variation in the relationships among Arabs in the UK and more importantly, between them and the British nationals, as the Arab world attempts to reinvent itself.

Encounter One - Noah on London Bridge

January 14, 2011, around 6pm GMT. Still at college trying to wrap up for the day before I have to meet a friend in about an hour. A fellow Palestinian sends a message to my cell phone:

"He is out!" Tears roll down my face – joy, in its purest undisturbed forms. I rush to Facebook to verify the news; it was true! The Tunisians got rid of their dictator! I reach out through Tunisian and Arab news websites, Facebook and phone calls to Arab friends in the city.

As I head to the appointment with my friend, Londoners appear as reserved and distant as ever. Don't they realize what just happened? Don't they care about it one bit? I tweet my frustration: "How could people on the London tube not be as excited as I am about Tunisia? I feel like such a foreigner."

When I finally arrive, Noah is as oblivious to the breaking news as his compatriots. How could I explain to this Yorkshire lad how monumental this event was? Telling him that it was similar to the fall of the Berlin wall in Europe's recent history would not be a fair comparison. This was the outcome of years of action and the people's will and profound hope, in contrast to what most of the world powers would have wished for. The wonderful Tunisians overthrew their regime on their own, in spite of those powers.

For Palestinians and Lebanese, rare were the moments that were as happy as this. Growing up in war time Lebanon and living through one Israeli attack on the country after another, any cause for celebration was overshadowed by the burdens of a public event. Happiness was not pure, celebration rarely unadulterated by some public agony. For once though, a public event was the cause of celebration, not the obstacle to it. This was probably only comparable to the day the Israeli army withdrew from the south of Lebanon on 25 May 2000. At the time, just like now, I felt entitled to happiness, that I have a

Muzna Al-Masri

Muzna Al-Masri is a Palestinian/Lebanese researcher and activist. She is currently pursuing doctoral studies in the UK, exploring political clientelism, sectarian antagonism and football in Lebanon. She has worked and consulted on human rights, conflict and development in countries across the Arab world.

right to it. Most other times being happy felt like a selfish and inconsiderate act.

I can feel Noah's frustration with my babbling, so I ask him where to head to, but he thinks we should not decide on a place yet. I should first "walk out my enthusiasm" - as if I was suffering from some sort of malady that I needed to rid myself of. My sense of foreignness grows deeper.

Encounter Two - Between Three Worlds: Demonstrating in Support of Egypt

February 5, 2011. I cut two pieces of cardboard and staple A3 sheets on them. I want to make my own banner but have still not decided what I want to write. I slip the markers in my bag and head to the Egyptian embassy in west London with a friend from the neighborhood. Unlike

> My attempts to connect with fellow Arabs over the past few months expose the simultaneous fragmentation and unity of the different Arab groups who inhabit this cosmopolitan city.

me, he is a local, but has been campaigning for the Palestinian cause for many years. In fact, it was a picture of him with Arafat that had led to our first conversation. We arrive early for a demonstration, the organization of which I had contributed to - only to realize that for the moment, the organizers outnumbered the demonstrators. I write something about support for the Egyptian people in Arabic on one side of the banner, and an affirmation of how people can bring about democracy in English on the other side, as if I still am not decided what message I am trying to convey and to whom.

I worry that the crowd in front of the Egyptian embassy is too small, but I know that the Stop the War Coalition had called for a parallel demonstration in front of the - appropriately -

close U.S. embassy and would be joining us soon. Young Egyptian men and women with beautiful eyes and tight t-shirts are loud and excited. The slogans and chants are mostly in Arabic, and often copied from Cairo's Tahrir Square. Despite receiving pieces of paper with the chants and their English translation, they bear little significance to the British friend who is accompanying me. In the crowd are most of my friends who live in the city, a mixture of Palestinian, Lebanese and other Arab students, artists and professionals. Together with an ex-colleague, a Syrian dissident who is no longer allowed to return to his home country, I speculate which Arab country will be leading the struggle for freedom next – he is obviously clear on which he prefers. Surrounding us as well, is a relative minority of British people, mostly supporters of a multitude of socialist political groups who find in the Egyptian revolution proof that the, "proletariat has finally risen," and rejoice in the approaching inevitable end to capitalism.

I make way with friends to the demonstration organized by the Stop the War Coalition, beneath the wings of the U.S. embassy's huge eagle. The mood there is different and the crowd more numerous, though predominately, I dare say, white, British, and middle aged. There is a podium for speakers from which many of the long time activists address the crowd one after the other - Tariq Ali, John Rees and a recorded message from Ken Livingston. Unlike the youth organizers of the Egyptian side of the demo, the messages here are clear and well thought-out. I feel a bit envious; this is how "our" demonstration should have been, though admittedly, I do not conform to analysis that makes the links between Islamophobia on the one hand and the U.S. and UK support for the Egyptian regime on the other. As I make way to leave the crowd that has now become an amalgamation of the young Egyptians and the British activists, my sense of loss is amplified as I come across another huge constituency on the northern side of the demonstration. Veiled women and bearded men, some of whom are

performing their prayers in the street. These were not only Egyptians but also other Muslim Londoners, most of them with roots in one of this kingdom's past colonies.

My attempts to connect with fellow Arabs over the past few months expose the simultaneous fragmentation and unity of the different Arab groups who inhabit this cosmopolitan city. Despite the half a million Arabs living in the UK, the community appears divided across lines of class, national identity and the context of immigration. The spaces and organizations that aim to bring them together are also limited.

I am not in the UK because of voluntary or forced exile. I am merely here as a student, and my connections to "home" have remained

> Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, among others, are not foreign countries in some far away location for me. They are effectively and affectively home, or at least part of it.

as strong as when I was still living there. Though I never came to the UK with the aim of building a future for myself here, a sense of dismay with the Arab countries had some role in pushing me away. Other Arabs who I have met here have been less fortunate, as they were forced into exile by the tyranny of either politics or economics, some whom have limited opportunities for continued connections with home. The revolutions brought with them the possibility of an end to their expatriation.

In the past year, I have taken part in many demonstrations in this city; protesting the Gaza Flotilla killings last summer, supporting the Egyptian, Tunisian and Libyan revolutions, and marching against the planned budget cuts in the UK. I often felt alienated in these actions. I neither understood the local political scene, nor identified with any of its components. I was yet another person among thousands in

a demonstration, but, had I been back home, these would have not been my causes or I would have chosen to engage in a different way. True, I was physically in that crowd in front of the embassy, but I could not hear my voice in the chants and slogans.

Encounter Three: A University Lecturer, My Future, and a Political which is Personal

Early March 2011. I should be completing my doctoral dissertation. One university lecturer, as she checks on how my writing is going, finds it unjustifiable that I am distracted by the events in the Arab countries: "Remember, what is happening is important, but it will not have a serious impact on your life. Finishing the PhD will." I shrug, before a smile creeps into my face. What on earth is she talking about? Does she really think that holding a PhD will have more influence on my life than a change of regime in Egypt?

I wanted to tell her that Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, among others, are not foreign countries in some far away location for me. They are effectively and affectively home, or at least part of it. I have visited and worked in most of these countries and have friends in them. Through my work before coming to the UK and starting the PhD, I had the opportunity to visit the premises of the first Arab human rights organization in Tunisia and be surveilled by the country's intelligence services. I met activists from the 1990s Bahraini uprising – long forgotten now despite succeeding in turning the kingdom into a constitutional monarchy – who more than a decade later were still fighting against the past regime's criminal impunity. I had tea and smoked Hookahs with Yemeni socialists on the mountain cliffs of Tae'z, and danced with feminist Egyptians on boats cruising the Nile. None of the countries being reported on in the news were anonymous, neither were the demonstrators. I shared the cause and knew well how some were engaged in struggles for freedom and justice for decades, and not just today when they are making it into the UK media.

I also wanted to explain to her how personal politics has been in my, and most of my compatriots', lives. I am Palestinian, born to an exiled father and raised outside of my home country and away from my extended family because of politics. My childhood and all its memories were dictated by a civil war in the Lebanon I grew up in. It was the 1982 Israeli invasion of Beirut which inspired the first line of poetry that I wrote, and the invasion's consequences that forced my family to move to Jordan a year later. My significant love relationships all started around such public events, and even my day-to-day work patterns were circumscribed by corrupt Lebanese politics as I planned my days according to the country's daily electricity cuts and struggled with dysfunctional Internet services.

I wanted her to understand how a change of regime in Egypt could change the face of the region, if new representative governments stopped collaborating with the Israeli and U.S. governments or with the multinational corporations which are reducing the people to penury. That maybe soon, Arab countries would no longer be occupied and impoverished. Maybe then I would have a chance to get a decent job back home. Maybe then, our new people-led governments would invest in higher education so I wouldn't need to be here for a doctoral degree.

If she had looked closer, she would have seen that the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt had already made more of an impact on my life than the four years I had spent in a British academic institution. Their marks were not only personal, I could also feel them in my own body which tread lighter, in my skin that had softened, and in my eyes now bright with aspiration.

Encounter Four: Malcolm and "March for the Alternative"

March 26, 2011. The papers predicted that the demonstration would be the biggest London has witnessed since the anti-war movement brought half a million people onto the street protesting the war on Iraq eight years ago. The funding cuts planned by the UK coalition government have been at the heart of public debate and the center of political activism in the country for the past six months. The local struggle has been quite impressive to my foreign eyes, with its abundant grassroots action and cross-sectoral collaboration. Again, I join British friends on the day and this time I am in the company of a member of the Labor party, who opposes the policies of the conservative-led coalition government.

The mood is festive, but as we cross Westminster Bridge two men on the side of the bridge cast a solemn shadow on my day. They hold a poorly written banner saying that the intervention in Libya is about the oil and not the people. The UK government had begun

> The Conservatives have already started tightening their grip on the immigration law and are pushing me away, despite their international politics making life elsewhere impossible.

bombing targets in Libya a few days ago, under the claim of supporting the revolution and the United Nation's cover. A lot of British friends around me do not see a problem in that. "What are we supposed to do," my Labor Party companion says, "are we supposed to sit back as Gaddafi massacres his people?" He asks that in all sincerity and with a sense of obligation to the "people of the world," though he is fast to reflect on and mock his tone when I ask him who exactly the word "we" that he uses includes.

Malcolm is "smart as a whip," according to his friends, and very knowledgeable and political, which is all the more reason for me to be surprised by his position and willingness to adopt clichés repeated by the establishment and the media. I try to explain what I regards as

the basics, despite knowing that my arguments sound redundant: Is the UK government's real motivation behind the intervention protecting civilians or securing the oil? Have not past claims of support for human rights in countries, such as Iraq, actually made the situation of civilians worse? Were there not many cases where the UK government not only refrained from intervening, but in fact supported the oppression of civilians? I, for one, was only too aware of such a case. I was in Lebanon in the summer of 2006, when the UK and U.S. governments blocked a security council call for an Israeli cease-fire, despite knowing that just as many civilians were endangered then as in Libya.

But all of this is tedious and boring. Why am I here? What am I doing in this country? I am marching with friends against the UK's austerity plan, despite knowing that one way the cuts in expenditure will be minimized could be by bombing yet another country close to home. The Conservatives have already started tightening their grip on the immigration law and are pushing me away despite, their international politics making life elsewhere impossible. I am a foreigner, an alien, both on paper and in the possibilities and aspirations I could have here. I am going back, to the Arabic speaking side of the Mediterranean. There, at least, is now hope for change and there, I can hear my voice in the demos.

Participation and Justice

In the Wake of Arab Revolts: Women's Rights in the Balance

Interview with Hanan Abdel Rahman-Rabbani

Hanan Abdel Rahman-Rabbani

Hanan Abdel Rahman-Rabbani is the Open Society Foundations' Senior Program Officer on Women's Rights in the Arab regional office in Amman. Previously, she served as the head of Amman Human Rights Office with the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq. She worked with several local, regional and international organizations in the fields of human and women's rights and managed a national women's rights project in Palestine entitled "Palestinian Model Parliament: Women and Legislation," which was awarded a French government prize as an outstanding human rights projects.

Perspectives: It seems that many women, including young women representing different social groups, have been participating in the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and have been present in the public. Is that true?

RABBANI: The revolutions in both Tunisia and Egypt were of a popular nature where various sectors of society participated in the protests leading to the toppling of the two presidents and continued to take part in the events taking place in the aftermath. As women have always been active participants in the political, economic and social spheres in these two societies, it was only normal that they would play a role in the protests. The fact that these protests were led by youth encouraged more young women to be in the forefront and to have their share in paying

> After the revolutions, it was interesting to conclude that priorities in relation to women's rights in the context of the transition in Tunisia and Egypt were identical.

the price for freedom and democracy. Women were among the martyrs, injured or detained, and the price they paid extended beyond that, like when they were attacked, harassed and subjected to humiliating virginity tests carried out by the army in Egypt on March 9. In Tahrir Square, women were there leading the protests, using their creativity and talent in writing slogans, performing art, providing support to other protesters and keeping the morale high.

No difference was witnessed between secular and religious women as all felt part of the same people believing in the same cause. Melting down social, ideological and political barriers among the masses and strengthening the sense of solidarity and collectivity were, in my view, among the most important achievements of the two revolutions.

Perspectives: In the past months, you have been travelling between Tunisia and Egypt in order to talk to women's rights activists and network between them. Did they have an active role in the revolutions? If yes, how? If not, why? And what are the issues they are now discussing jointly?

RABBANI: Before and after the revolutions, my work brought me in touch with women's organizations to support their work on protecting and promoting women's rights, more so in Egypt – before the revolution – than Tunisia. My impression is that civil society actors participated in the revolutions as citizens concerned about the future of their country, rather than organized groups. Civil society organizations have been criticized for not taking a leading role in the revolutions, as they were taken by surprise by the rapid development of events in the two countries. The fact that the protests were initiated and led by youth with no clear political affiliations or visible leadership contributed to the success of the revolts. Moving away from the traditional, conventional way of thinking and acting in the framework of political activism brought in a refreshing approach which attracted large numbers of supporters, many of whom were never interested or involved in politics. After the revolutions, it was interesting to conclude that priorities in relation to women's

rights in the context of the transition in Tunisia and Egypt were identical. My own assumption was that in Tunisia, promoting women's rights in the democratic transition would start at a more advanced level, in light of the progressive personal status law and the gains achieved in the realm of women's rights over the years with full political will on the part of the Tunisian regime. The reality now is that extensive efforts need to be exerted to ensure that women play a prominent role in the democratic transition and that their concerns are identified and incorporated in any attempts for reform and democratization. In both countries the need exists for awareness-raising programs at the community level on human rights and women's rights issues, capacity building in terms of knowledge and skills for women's organizations and activists, support for newly emerging initiatives and organizations, in addition to mainstreaming a gendered approach across all thematic work related to the political transition. This could be done through strengthening the role and involvement of women in the political reform process manifested in any drafting or amendment of the constitution and legislation, promoting active participation of women in the elections processes as voters and candidates, and ensuring that the transitional justice processes are gender sensitive where gender justice is a prominent component guaranteeing the provision of tools and mechanisms to address women's grievances in an appropriate and sensitive fashion.

As women's groups in Egypt and Tunisia are currently very much focused on the situation within their own countries, and with the commonalities I outlined above, it is imperative that initiatives to coordinate efforts in both countries and encourage cooperation are strengthened. This will help women's groups to see the picture differently, more objectively, to learn from each others' experiences, strategize together on issues of common concern, and provide a sense of solidarity to each other. Regional coordination at a larger level is also important and would help deliver experiences and lessons learnt to women in other countries to utilize in the event their countries undergo similar political transitions. What we are doing at this point is to play the role of a facilitator in providing global and regional expertise related to women's role in political transitions and to strengthen the element of coordination between the two groups, keeping in mind that the details of the situation of women vary from one country to the other.

> The women's march was attacked by male protesters in Tahrir Square.

Perspectives: Are women's rights activists currently able to position themselves strategically in decision-making processes? (For example, did they participate in the committee for constitutional amendments in Egypt? Are they included in the Tunisian committee to safeguard the revolution?)
RABBANI: I think that the sense of euphoria in Tunisia and Egypt was overwhelming for all sectors of society, including women. Women were very optimistic that with the feeling of political freedoms from the authoritarian regimes, their own freedom from discrimination and oppression would inevitably prevail. To their disappointment, this was not the case and the scenarios which unfolded shortly after reminded them of the Algerian women's experience, where they actively participated in the Algerian revolution for independence but were pushed back to their traditional roles and excluded from real representation in running the affairs of the newly independent Algeria. This scenario was also repeated in the context of Palestinian women in the aftermath of the Oslo agreement and the ensuing establishment of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In Egypt, the first blow came when the Higher Military Council, the interim military body currently ruling Egypt, set up a committee to amend certain constitutional provisions

to enable the country to move forward on Presidential and national elections. The committee was assigned to amend the defective articles of the constitution, including Articles 76, 77, 88, 93, 189, while Article 179 was set to be eliminated. The problematic angle is the fact that the committee was composed of eight all male law professors, counselors, lawyers known for their Constitutional law expertise, with an absence of women representatives – despite the fact that Egypt has a number of strong women experts in Constitutional law. Similarly, the newly appointed transitional government has only one female minister on board. This reality has spurred extensive debate among women's groups, creating a division of two positions; one calling for the inclusion of women in the constitutional committee and considering their exclusion a manifestation of discrimination against them, and the other being more apprehensive of creating political conflict and divide among the people of the revolution. The latter argued that their ideology and women's rights activism is an integral part of their political ideology, which leads them to think of the larger picture rather than the women-focused dimension. Their biggest problem with the composition of the constitution

> During the revolution, Tunisian women played active roles in the popular protests all over the country. In the aftermath of the revolution, only two women were appointed ministers as part of the transitional government.

was the fact that some members come from conservative ideological backgrounds, which is bound to influence the amendments negatively, rather than the mere absence of women in the committee.

The second unexpected blow to the women's movement was when hundreds of women's activists commemorated the International Women's Day on March 8 by marching to Tahrir Square, the place that witnessed the birth of their revolution and was the home of all forms of opposition expression since January 25. The women's march was attacked by male protesters in Tahrir Square. The women were harassed, labeled with humiliating names, some were sexually assaulted and eventually forced to leave the square. Another incident targeting women took place on March 9 when the army was trying to evacuate protesters from Tahrir Square and picked up at least 18 females and detained them temporarily at the Egyptian National Museum nearby and later on transferred 17 of them to a military detention centre. According to Amnesty International and other human rights organizations, while in custody, the women were interrogated, harassed, beaten, subjected to electric shocks and strip searches while being photographed by male soldiers. The military went further by asking the women about their marital status (an indication of their virginity). Later on an alleged doctor performed virginity tests on some of the women by force, threatening them with prostitution charges. Some of these women were subjected to more abuse after the tests, on the account that their tests revealed otherwise. On March 11, all 17 women were brought before a military court where several of them received one-year suspended prison sentences and were released on March 13. It is not easy to pinpoint the reasons behind this incident in light of the general atmosphere in Egypt, and to place it in the right context. The only explanation in my view is that even though the revolution succeeded in toppling the president, the regime is still entrenched in all sectors of society, and, more importantly, the old patriarchal mentality and misperceptions regarding women still prevail in Egyptian society – and this will require years of work to achieve change. On the Egyptian level, I can't see strong indications pointing to more involvement of women at the decision-making level. This is partly related to the new realities, which opened up a good space for all sectors of

society and political orientations to be engaged in the debate. Women's rights, as a result, may end up being compromised in order to maintain political and social stability in the country. To face up to this unfolding situation women will have to come up with innovative strategies and approaches to ensure their representation in the democratic transition.

The Tunisian scene is slightly different as women's rights and status were safeguarded by legislation since the inception of the Tunisian Republic after independence in 1956. The culture of secularism was the ideology adopted and enforced by the regime since the time of the former president, Habib Bourguiba. Women were active participants in decision making and in all aspects of life with high education levels and achievement rates. During the revolution, Tunisian women played active roles in the popular protests all over the country. In the aftermath of the revolution, only two women were appointed ministers as part of the transitional government. Similarly, women were represented in small numbers in the three commissions, which were established to deal with political reform, investigating corruption, and looking into the human rights violations committed during the two months of the protests. In a recent move, members of the three commissions including professionals, law professors, lawyers, academics and activists, have been combined into a larger body called the "Tunisian Committee to Safeguard the Revolution." Additional members were invited to join this body, which is viewed by many Tunisians as a transitional parliament. Tunisian women are represented in a way that has not been very satisfactory to many activists; however, the door is open for more involvement as many decision makers are in favor of promoting women's participation in all aspects of governance.

Similar to Egypt, Tunisian women marched on March 8 to commemorate the International Women's Day with a big demonstration in the center of Tunis. The march included women activists and many male supporters of women's

rights. There were incidents where some men made fun of the protesters and called for women to go back to their traditional role at home, and media coverage of the demonstration itself was not sufficient in giving it the space it deserved in the press. New dynamics are emerging in the Tunisian society as the long-time banned Islamist movement "Al Nahda (Renaissance)" is back to the country and operating openly and strategically. Since the revolution, 51 political parties have emerged with varying ideologies and political direction. Tunisian women will have to act quickly and firmly to make sure they preserve their legal and social gains achieved over the years in the context of the democratic

> Adopting a gender approach to the transitional justice process lies in the heart of the democratic transition challenges.

transition. Any compromise in their rights at this point will shake their status and undermine their gains for many years to come.

In other countries undergoing popular protests against authoritarian regimes, like Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, Jordan, among others, the picture of women and their role in the revolutions are fairly the same as Tunisia and Egypt with varying details. In Yemen for example, which has a long tradition of conservative tribalism, women have been active in the protests nationally and their voices were heard internationally. They have been present in the Change Square (Sahat al Taghyeer) in Sanaa in increasing numbers, especially following March 25 in the aftermath of a dramatic attack launched by the army on the peaceful protesters, resulting in the killing of over 50 of them and injuring hundreds. Women from all walks of life, including mothers, sisters and other female relatives of those killed are steadfast in participating in the rebellion against Ali Abdullah Saleh to end his 33-year rule of Yemen. Hundreds of Yemeni

women demonstrated on March 8 peacefully to commemorate international women's day and to prove yet again that they are an important component of society that should not be overlooked in any political or legal reforms in the aftermath of the revolution.

Perspectives: What are the main concerns and priorities of women's rights activists in the moment?

RABBANI: After the revolutions, intensive work is underway on preparation for the presidential and national elections. Different civil society groups are busy preparing for these important events by raising awareness of the communities in relation to their role in the elections, especially among women promoting their participation as voters and candidates. Civil society organizations started identifying priorities relating to needs during the transitional period and the ensuing democratic transition. In this context, adopting a gender approach to the transitional justice process lies in the heart of the democratic transition challenges. This will

> The former Tunisian regime used women's rights and their advancement as a cover to beautify its image in Western perception and present itself as a modern and secular state.

ensure that women's roles and concerns are incorporated in the process to achieve gender justice. Legal reform is an additional area that deserves attention in a context that presents a golden opportunity to capture the moment and take advantage of the prevailing spirit of the revolutions to remind people that their aspired political freedom cannot be complete if not extended to include social freedoms and non-discrimination, which will guarantee justice and end the marginalization of women and other vulnerable groups in society. The road

for women's movements in both countries is still long and a lot of work lies ahead to achieve these goals.

Perspectives: Tunisia, until now, has the reputation of being the most advanced Arab country in terms of women's rights. At the same time it was one of the worst police states in the region. How do you explain this contradiction?

RABBANI: Tunisia had a unique position in relation to advancing women's rights in legislation and social practices for nearly six decades. Tunisian Personal Status Law of 1956 is considered the most advanced in the region and Tunisian women's activists have been leading women's activism in the Arab world, as they have always set the bar higher than others in regional meetings a dynamic that managed to strengthen the Arab regional discourse on women's rights. Notwithstanding this progress in women's status, the situation of women in rural and remote areas was far from perfect and Tunisian women have always complained about their inability to express their opinions freely in issues related to politics. This proves that promoting women's rights without basic human rights and freedoms is meaningless. It has always been puzzling to find a logical connection between advancement of women's rights by a highly authoritarian regime, while repressing freedoms and violating human rights. The former Tunisian regime used women's rights and their advancement as a cover to beautify its image in Western perception and present itself as a modern and secular state. The dichotomy between advancing women's rights, while violating other basic human rights, is intriguing and can only be perceived as part of the regime's agenda to claim civility and legitimacy in the eyes of the outside world. This fake image made the possibility of discrediting or criticizing the regime for its human rights record and repression more challenging. Promoting women's rights and secularism was, as well, one of the tools used by the regime to fight Islamists and limit their influence in the country.

Perspectives: Are women's rights activists in Tunisia, Egypt and other countries afraid that Islamist actors might gain more social and political weight after the revolutions?

RABBANI: Women activists in Tunisia and Egypt have woken up from their euphoria, trying to deal with reality and keep up with speedy developments on the grounds. The future looks uncertain and identifying a specific direction where the two countries are heading is a challenge at this point in time. Among the many issues they have to deal with is the growing political influence of the Islamist movement, known for their good mobilization and organization skills which came into play during the constitutional referendum in Egypt. In Tunisia, where secularism and modernity have been the norm, the society

> Tunisian women are worried that in the midst of political negotiations over power, their rights will be used as bargaining chips.

has been witnessing a slight shift to religious conservatism as the number of veiled women on the streets of Tunis has been visibly growing since the mid-nineties. The previously banned Al Nahda movement is active and has formally become a recognized political party, with its leadership returning to Tunisia from exile. The regime change has brought different elements into play. While freedom and the sense of liberty prevail, democracy dictates involvement and participation of various political and ideological views, including Islamists. Tunisian women are worried that in the midst of political negotiations over power, their rights will be used as bargaining chips and compromised for the sake of political stability and in order to please certain political parties. This is a great challenge ahead and women need to rally support from progressive forces to strengthen their voice in the quest for justice and non-discrimination.

In Egypt this is a more obvious dilemma, but the difference here is that Egyptian women have always been dealing with these dynamics in a traditionally more conservative and religious society. However, the emerging context requires bolder, more creative and strategic approaches in presenting their concerns and advocating for their rights.

Perspectives: What kind of support do women's rights activists need right now? What is their stance on receiving international support?

RABBANI: Women in Tunisia and Egypt need moral support and solidarity, especially from women activists in the Arab region, so they don't feel alone dealing with emerging challenges of the democratic transition. They also need support from international organizations, which can offer them the opportunity to explore and learn from women's experiences in similar situations in the world. Women activists expressed interest to meet with women from South Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Turkey and Indonesia to look at lessons learnt in order to come up with national strategies to consolidate women's role in the democratic transition. Additional work is needed to incorporate women into the transitional process for gender justice. Awareness raising within the community and working to strengthen women's participation in the elections and leadership skills remain a priority, especially during these important times. As for donors, dealing with women's organizations should be done with utmost sensitivity and understanding of the current political context. Women's organizations in the Arab region have been historically accused of adopting a Western agenda which contributed to their alienation. Added to that, the women's rights agenda in both countries was co-opted by the old regimes for the purpose of window dressing internationally. A good example is the way Egypt's first lady, Suzan Mubarak, was associated with women's advancement in Egypt through spearheading the National Council for Women, an Egyptian

governmental body created by Presidential Decree in 2000 to deal with women's issues and represent them in international forums, and her name was closely connected to certain family-related legislations. It will take time to uproot this association from the hearts and minds of post-revolution Egyptians to give the women's movement legitimacy and true national identity. Today, in the midst of the ongoing witch hunting campaigns and settling of accounts, any miscalculated move could result in harming the movement and setting it back, especially in Egypt where authenticity of any action is a prerequisite for acceptance and endorsement. In Tunisia, on the other hand, a culture of donor-recipient dynamics was almost nonexistent in the absence of active civil society organizations. Today, international donor organizations are actively working to provide support to the limited number of NGOs which were able to function during the Ben Ali regime and the many new initiatives and NGOs emerging after the revolution. It is vital that Tunisia doesn't get turned into another Iraq in relation to donor money that contributed to corrupting civil society organizations at the time of its inception. Even though Tunisian organizations welcome funding and support from certain donors, they are well aware of the shortcomings that donor money could produce if not handled strategically. Some NGOs are already playing an important role in coordinating the work of existing and newly emerging initiatives, by providing information and discussing ethical guidelines related to funding and civil society work in general. At this time, promoting and strengthening volunteerism within civil society will result in engaging youth and emerging voices in addition to maintaining a good solidarity spirit in the coming period.

Interview by Layla Al-Zubaidi, 9 April 2011

We Are Not Accomplices to Power!
A New Role for the Judiciary
Interview with Nizar Saghieh

Nizar Saghieh

Nizar Saghieh is a lawyer and researcher, based in Beirut. He is the co-founder of "Legal Agenda," which publicly debates issues pertaining to the law. He is active in numerous human rights cases, defending "illegal" refugees and victims of war crimes. He wrote extensively on the judiciary, war memory, amnesty laws, gender and censorship. He initiated a project to network among Arab judges and instigate collective action, and edited the study volume "Toward a Judges' Movement" (Arabic, 2009).

Perspectives: What are the main challenges that the Arab judiciary is facing today?

SAGHIEH: One problem the judiciary in all Arab countries is facing is the overwhelming centrality of the executive power. The role of the judiciary, by contrast, remains very limited. The second challenge is that, at least before the revolutions of 2011, there was no Arab country that fully granted judges the right to freedom of expression and association. Thirdly, there are no effective guarantees for the independence of the judiciary. The political pressures on judges are high, and in case they do resist, they do not enjoy any protection.

Perspectives: Can you give examples?

SAGHIEH: When some Egyptian judges in 2005 denounced the fraud that took place in the parliamentary elections – which they were tasked to supervise by constitution! – they were tried on disciplinary charges. In Tunisia the situation was even worse: In 2005, the Association of Tunisian Judges protested against the police taking action against lawyers for political reasons. As a result, the board of the Association was dissolved and the judges who had protested were silenced, removed from their posts, and transferred to remote provinces. This occurred even though the Tunisian judges were not even able to demonstrate, as their Egyptian counterparts did. They just circulated a communiqué. Also in Lebanon, which is widely hailed for its freedom of expression, Lebanese judges who pass verdicts based on social and human rights are also pressured. For example, recently, judge John Azzi ruled that a Lebanese woman who had been married to an Egyptian, now deceased, could transfer her nationality to her children. Until now, the Lebanese law doesn't grant women the right to pass their citizenship to their husbands and children. This however contradicts both the Lebanese Constitution, which stipulates gender-quality, and the international human rights conventions that Lebanon has ratified. Based on these principles, and because the Lebanese law is vaguely formulated, the judge ruled in

> As the representatives of executive power seek to control society, they define the judge as a pure servant of the law. This very narrow definition limits the judge's ability to actively interpret the law.

favor of the woman. The result was that he was transferred from his post to another one, and not authorized to speak in public. Another judge – ironically a female one – finally revoked Azzi's verdict. In 2010, the Lebanese Ministry of Justice also issued a circular, prohibiting public statements by judges without prior authorization from the Ministry. This attitude towards judges is often justified by the judges' "obligation to preserve a distance." But, in reality, it denies the judge the right to assume a social role.

Perspectives: What exactly do you mean when you say that the judge should have a "social role"?

SAGHIEH: As the representatives of executive power seek to control society, they define the

judge as a pure servant of the law. This very narrow definition limits the judge's ability to actively interpret the law. If a judge dares to give a bold interpretation of the law, s/he is considered as going beyond the legitimate authority assigned to him/her. It means that the judge is not only a servant of the law, but also becomes a servant to power and hence a pillar of the authoritarian regime. For a democratic society, however, it is very important that a judge can interpret the law according to social and human rights and international conventions. This requires a social acceptance of such standards. In our societies, we have to create this awareness and redefine the role of the judge in society accordingly.

Perspectives: In those countries currently undergoing change, what should be the priorities for the judiciary?
SAGHIEH: First of all, the judiciary has to build its credibility. To achieve this, citizens' problems need to be transformed into public problems. This is the main issue: our countries and citizens are in the hands of one or few men and the public discourse is mainly around them, about them. The judiciary has to serve as a platform for public debate, a space, which provides the opportunity for everybody to come and claim his/her rights.

Perspectives: During the past few years, you have been engaged in connecting judges and judges' clubs in different Arab countries. What is the function of judges' clubs and what do you seek to achieve by creating networks between them?
SAGHIEH: Ideally, judges' clubs are associations that create exchange between judges and represent their interests. Some judges' clubs in the Arab world have been able to retain some independence, even within authoritarian conditions. Others are controlled or infiltrated by the regime. We are working with those that try hard to retain their independence. Networking efforts are always taking place in the spirit of creating solidarity among actors who refuse

to submit to power. Simply said, we are trying to create a precedent by stating, "We are not accomplices to power!" Saying this jointly gives them strength. When a judge is left alone, s/he is weak in the face of power. Once judges

> Resistance exerted by judges was most successful in those countries where it could build on tradition. Both in Tunisia and in Egypt, the history of judges' associations go back to the 1940s and therefore there is a strong tradition.

are connected to each other, however, they will be more courageous. The collective movement of judges that we encourage creates an environment in which the judge will feel that s/he is not alone. This gives judges the capacity to resist, and the ultimate goal is to turn the judiciary into an institution that citizens trust, that they refer to.

Perspectives: Which country has the strongest judges' clubs or associations?
SAGHIEH: Tunisia and Egypt.

Perspectives: Tunisia and Egypt? That is interesting. Do you consider it a coincidence that the revolutions started in these two countries and that they are the most successful ones until now?
SAGHIEH: I may say that the existence of such strong associations in these two countries is significant. That means that some kind of discourse of rights exists. One of the findings of our studies was that resistance exerted by judges was most successful in those countries where it could build on tradition. Both in Tunisia and in Egypt, the history of judges' associations go back to the 1940s and therefore there is a strong tradition. They retained a forceful presence in the face of power and oppression.

Perspectives: Where have such judges' movements been less successful?

SAGHIEH: In other countries there were attempts to create judges clubs, such as in Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s. But they were not able to take root. In Morocco, an association was created by the king himself. As a result there was neither dynamism nor debate. The club served the authorities merely as a framework to control judges better. In Tunisia and Egypt, by contrast, the clubs are dynamic bodies that carry out elections and maintain other mechanisms to ensure internal democracy. The Egyptian club, especially, has served as a model for other countries.

Perspectives: Why is the Egyptian club hailed as a model for the Arab world?

SAGHIEH: Simply because of the importance of Egypt. Why do we hear more about the Egyptian revolution than the Tunisian one? Because Egypt plays a more vital and central role in the Arab world than Tunisia. It is also the biggest country in terms of population. The Egyptian judges' club has thousands of members. In addition, when the Egyptian judges revolted in 2005, there were surrounded by a fully-fledged civil rights movement: the Kifaya movement, the academics, the workers, the students and all the other segments of society that demanded an end to authoritarian rule. In Tunisia, civil society space was extremely restricted and judges were much more isolated. This is also the reason why they were not able to stage demonstrations and instead restricted themselves to publishing communiqués.

Perspectives: Did judges play a vital role in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions? Do they play a role in the other countries that are shaken by protests?

SAGHIEH: In Egypt, judges were acting more as individual citizens during the revolution than as a collective of judges. In the last elections of the Egyptian judges' club in 2009, pro-government judges won and reformists lost. The club has therefore become more reactionary,

due to political pressure. This might be a reason that judges did not act as a collective in the revolution. Prominent judges, however, participated actively in the protests. Judge Mahmud Makki, for example, was present in the protests in Alexandria and Cairo, and judge Hisham Bastawisi joined protests in Tahrir Square in Cairo. Bastawisi is now a presidential candidate. He enjoys strong support from many young people. This is a positive sign. It means that those judges who stood up against the dictatorship in difficult times enjoy a good reputation among the activist youth. In Tunisia, the judges who were silenced and removed from their posts appeared on the media during the revolution, especially on Al-Jazeera, and were

> The foremost task for the judiciary would be to claim a more central role and to become a credible and independent authority within the new order.

very outspoken. Now they are forming a real syndicate that may replace the association. In Yemen, judges revolted in front of the building of the High Judicial Council, which is controlled by the regime. They demanded its reform and the right to form an independent syndicate.

Perspectives: In Tunisia, there is some criticism that judges have lately become too involved in politics and political parties, and that some have compromised the distance that is required of a judge. What is your take on that?

SAGHIEH: Yes, this has happened in some extent. But, to be frank, I think this is normal after a revolution. Later, the situation will be more balanced and regulated. You also have to keep in mind that these judges have suffered immensely and that they were victims of massive pressure. It is quite natural that now, with the changed situation, they are eager to play a role.

They consider themselves beneficiaries of the revolution. This is why it is difficult for some of them to remain at a distance.

Perspectives: What, in your opinion, are the main concrete issues that the Egyptian and Tunisian judiciary need to tackle today? Is it constitutional amendments, or corruption, or political crimes and transitional justice?

SAGHIEH: The foremost task for the judiciary would be to claim a more central role and to become a credible and independent authority within the new order. For this to happen, it is necessary to establish an equilibrium between the judiciary and other public powers. For example, I personally find it very frustrating that the Egyptian revolution should conclude with a few constitutional amendments, as the military wants to make us believe. Judges supervised the referendum on the constitutional amendments, but they were assigned a purely technical role. Judges, however, could play a much more vital role in this transitional period. The process should have been much more comprehensive. The amendment process selected only a few points, while there are many other aspects in the constitution that are problematic as well, but were not addressed. The referendum on the amendments more or less forced people who were in favor of the amendments to vote for the

> Political corruption typically involves large numbers of people. A judge can try a hundred people, but thousands…? This goes beyond the capacities of the regular judiciary.

whole constitution, which eventually legitimized it. All in all, it would have been better to form a transitional assembly to prepare for a new constitution instead of electing a new assembly directly. Judges could have provided valuable input during this period.

Perspectives: In Egypt, political corruption engulfed all public institutions. Is it helpful to arrest a handful of ministers?

SAGHIEH: It is certainly positive to see that some of those figures who embodied corruption are being arrested and convicted. But if you want to achieve more comprehensive results, a process of transitional justice is needed. Transitional justice requires a framework that sets clear criteria for what constitutes a political crime, instruments for the investigation of abuses, and a mechanism for prosecution and compensation. The interim government in Tunisia established a committee to investigate corruption. Some judges are opposed to it, because they believe this to be the task of the judiciary. But it is a monumental task. Political corruption typically involves large numbers of people. A judge can try a hundred people, but thousands…? This goes beyond the capacities of the regular judiciary. This is why other countries established truth commissions. But there is no set recipe; the process has to be decided by the public of each country. It also requires time before people can start to think about the past calmly. There are hardly any countries where the process of transitional justice started immediately after political change took place.

Perspectives: It was impressive to see how quickly the Tunisians and Egyptians acted to freeze bank accounts of former presidents Ben Ali and Mubarak. Was this mainly the initiative of the judiciary?

SAGHIEH: Yes, some judges decided to claim appropriated resources. These were not verdicts, but rather a freeze of possessions. In Tunisia, an official commission on corruption was established quite rapidly, as I said before. In Egypt, lawyers and the bar association played a role by making cases in Egypt, Europe and beyond.

Perspectives: What about corruption within the ranks of the judiciary? Is it an issue now?

SAGHIEH: In Tunisia, some judges were sacked for corruption, but it didn't happen in

compliance with the disciplinary rules. In Egypt, until now, there is no talk of corrupted judges.

Perspectives: Are you in contact with judges in the Gulf countries that are witnessing protests?

SAGHIEH: No. The problem in the Gulf countries is that many judges are "non-citizens." Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the Emirates recruit judges mainly from Egypt, but also from Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. Since their legal system is based on the Sharia, and specifically on the Sunni Islamic schools, they particularly target Sunni judges. The reason might be a lack of qualified local personnel. Another reason, however, lies in the limited definition of the role of the judge, that I have identified as a problem. Judges usually have social influence. But if you define and treat them as mere technocrats, you limit their power. Can you imagine an Egyptian judge protesting against the Bahraini regime? Especially if this judge has a limited contract for two years, and is a foreigner with a work contract that may be terminated at any time. Therefore, apart from the lack of qualified personnel, there might be also a political intention behind this recruitment policy.

Perspectives: If their role is very limited, why are these positions so attractive to judges?

SAGHIEH: The answer is very simple: In Lebanon and Egypt, a judge earns approximately US$800-1500 per month. In Abu Dhabi, the average salary goes up to US$15,000.

Perspectives: The Arab judges' clubs and associations seem to be very male dominated. Do women play a role in the judiciary at all?

SAGHIEH: There are some countries with a number of female judges, including Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan, Algeria and Syria. In Tunisia, women were well presented not only in the judiciary, but also in the association of judges and on its board. There are also prominent female judges who took part in the judges' protests of 2005. In Iraq, there are some female judges, but they preside mainly

over juvenile courts. In Algeria, the situation has improved, with now approximately 25% female judges. In Egypt, most judges are male because the judiciary was opened to women only very

> Until now, an organized claim for social rights has not been put forward. We should remind ourselves that revolutions have as their basis social and economic demands, not only political reforms and constitutional amendments.

recently. There are still some formal procedures and conditions imposed on women that make it difficult for them to join the profession. In the Gulf countries, women are largely excluded from the judiciary.

Perspectives: You are promoting a rights-based approach in your work with the Arab judiciary. What do you mean in concrete terms?

SAGHIEH: You would expect that after a revolution, the "real" issue would be to address the broader socio-economic demands and demands for more direct democracy, which allows for citizens to directly bring forward their claims. In Egypt, people are now looking around and recognize that their living conditions have remained unchanged. Once they raise this issue, the military accuses them of "selfish demands." But in my opinion, a revolution should have high ambitions. Until now, an organized claim for social rights has not been put forward. We should remind ourselves that revolutions have as their basis social and economic demands, not only political reforms and constitutional amendments. What about education, housing, workers rights…? In South Africa, many strategic litigations on housing were made. Whole villages raised cases against the government and forced it to provide housing. In 2010, an Egyptian lawyer, Khaled El Ali, won

a case on the minimum wage. And around this case, a whole civil movement was formed. The judge ruled that, against the backdrop of

> ## The judiciary should be a counterpart to political power.

rising prices, the government should raise the minimum wage. This is precisely the job of judges: to provide a platform for rights claims, and to force the authorities to introduce and implement policies accordingly. The judiciary should be a counterpart to political power. Even if a "good" president and a democratic parliament are installed, the danger remains that democratic institutions and processes will erode. The judiciary has to play a role here. It should work to safeguard the dignity of the people. The ideal result would be to create a junction between a rights movement and an independent judiciary.

Interview by Layla Al-Zubaidi, 14 March 2011

A Chronicle of Legislative Developments in the Aftermath of the Tunisian Revolution
A Revolution Seeks the Means to Succeed!

Wahid Ferchichi

Wahid Ferchichi is Professor of General Law at the University of Tunis. He is President of the Tunisian Association for the Defence of Individual Rights and Vice-President of the Tunisian Association of Management Sciences. He also heads the Master of Environmental Law program at the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of the University of Tunis. His publications include "Child Labor in the Arab World" (2008), "Homosexuality in the Laws of Arab Countries" (in collaboration with Nizar Saghieh, 2009); and "Independence of the Judiciary in Tunisia" (published in the collection "When Judges are Gathered Together," 2009).

Our "chronicle of legislative developments" in the wake of the Tunisian Revolution effectively started on January 15, 2011, within hours of the departure of the ousted president.[1]

It was on the morning of that day that the revolution – which started on December 17, 2010 and came to a head when the former president departed on January 14, 2011 – achieved legal status, as a result of legislation

> A transitional period is invariably a period of economic, social and political turmoil, consequently the challenge during such a period is to find an equilibrium between stability and, on the other hand, the dismantling of institutions, structures, personal fiefdoms and patterns of behavior associated with the former regime.

approved by the Constitutional Council. The new legislation, representing the very first legal, constitutional and political outcome of the revolution, dealt the *coup de grace* to the supreme power in charge of the former regime's hierarchy of authority, opening the door to a series of decisions and measures.

If we refer to the Official Gazette of the Republic of Tunisia, *Al-Ra'ed Al-Rasmi*, we find that the laws, ordinances, decrees and

resolutions issued since January 15, 2011 have all sought (1) to help the revolution succeed and (2) as far as possible, to lay the foundations for a better political future.

1. A Revolution Seeking to Succeed: Making Hard Choices

The transitional period was difficult, especially with regard to choices. A transitional period is invariably a period of economic, social and political turmoil, consequently the challenge during such a period is to find an equilibrium between stability in the broadest sense (in terms of e.g. national security, socio-economic stability, and so on) – which, in Tunisia, meant maintaining continuity with the conditions prevailing prior to January 14, 2011 – and, on the other hand, the dismantling of institutions, structures, personal fiefdoms and patterns of behavior associated with the former regime and decisions made by the latter.

This complex equation is best resolved by (1) implementing immediate structural reforms; (2) initiating an administrative and judicial purge; and (3) initiating a purge of the political scene.

Immediate Structural Reforms: The Economy, the Media and Human Rights

If we peruse the Official Gazette since January 15, 2011, we find the first action that was taken involved the nation's finances and, more specifically, Tunisia's Central Bank. This was followed by a large number of financial and economic measures, as well as other actions relating to the media, communication and personal freedoms. Following the appointment of a new prime minister, the government's

first priority was to stabilize the financial and economic situation, so their first action – on January 17, 2011 – was to appoint a new Governor of the Central Bank of Tunisia. This reflected widespread concern that state funds might be spirited away or misappropriated. But this was not the government's sole concern with respect to financial issues and the associated corruption that had existed previously and which, it was feared, might rear its head again. Their additional concerns were manifested on at least two levels:

First: Dissolution of the Supreme Committee for Major Projects pursuant to Ordinance 148 of January 29, 2011.[3] A committee established under Ordinance 2927 of November 1, 2005, had enabled a number of people who now stand accused of corruption to control several major projects and share the spoils.

Second: Amendment of Decree 1865 of 2004, relating to the Tunisian Financial Analysis Commission, by Ordinance 162 of February 3, 2011. The new ordinance decreed that "the members of the Commission shall exercise their duties within the Commission entirely independently of their original administrative functions."

This amendment, as well as various other measures, gave the impression that the present government prioritizes economic and financial matters at the expense of other issues.

Media and communication: The former regime monopolized and exerted total control over all media and other forms of communication. The Ordinance of February 3, 2011[4] dissolved the Ministry of Communication and effectively liberated the media, thereby responding to one of the key demands of the revolution: for freedom of information. In the absence of an effective role for the Supreme Council of Communication, however, or an influential role played by trade unions or associations of media professionals, the lack of basic controls and of a professional ethical framework meant that this liberalization resulted in a totally unregulated media environment which further fuelled political

tensions. This prompted the establishment of an independent public body for media reform and the appointment of an independent media personality as its head[5].

Establishing civil liberties: This period was also distinguished by the establishment of social and political freedoms, including the freedom of assembly and association. The rapid evolution of this phenomenon is clearly reflected in the proliferation of political parties and associations, and the explosion of political manifestations such as rallies, sit-ins and demonstrations. Nevertheless, we observe that the rules applying to political parties and those pertaining to associations remain somewhat uneven. Under the law regulating political parties, which is currently in force, political parties are subject to a licensing system. New parties are obtaining licenses at greatly increased speeds (as evidenced by the sharp increase in licensed political parties, from less than ten prior to January 14 to more than 40 by March 10, 2011) . Associations, by contrast, are not regulated by a licensing system, but must instead wait for a mandatory three-month period before they are deemed legally valid

> Periods of transition are generally characterized by a tendency to purge former administrations as a whole – including, more specifically, the security apparatus and the senior management of various public utilities – as well as the Department of Justice and the judiciary.

and can become fully active; this requirement dates from before the revolution. In practice, this stipulation is largely ignored: associations generally launch their activities as soon as they have submitted their applications.

Purging the Administration and Judiciary

Periods of transition are generally characterized by a tendency to purge former administrations as a whole – including, more specifically, the security apparatus and the senior management of various public utilities – as well as the Department of Justice and the judiciary. The transitional period after the revolution of January 2011 was no exception. The Official Gazette shows that starting on January 29, 2011, large numbers of letters of dismissal were issued to civil servants occupying administrative and political posts. The first wave of dismissals started at the presidential palace, where all the ministers and advisers attached to the Presidency were relieved of their posts[8] followed by the Director General of the Tunisian Foreign Liaison Agency. This agency, which controlled the media and was responsible for marketing Tunisia's image abroad, was then disbanded.[9] Political appointees in the Prime Minister's Office were also dismissed.[10]

The Ministry of the Interior then dismissed some 40 civil servants from their posts! Next in line were judges and the Ministry of Justice. Dismissals included the State Attorney General in charge of the judiciary, the Director of the Court of Appeals in Tunis, and a number of officials from the Court of First Instance in Tunis, including the Deputy Attorney General and the Investigating Judge.[11] These dismissals reflect the assumption that the dismissed officials either supported or collaborated with the former regime, or were guilty of corruption or collusion with the former regime. But such an assumption does not, in itself, indicate whether these individuals were the only ones involved with the former regime. Would it not have been better to await the decisions of the courts or the findings of the Anti-Corruption and Fact-Finding Commissions in order to establish their complicity?

Furthermore, while it was (legally) possible to dismiss officials in the former regime's civil service using such administrative mechanisms, it did not make sense to dismiss judges in such a manner, especially in view of the fact that judges can only be relieved of their duties under a separate system established by Law 29 of July 14, 1967 relating to the judiciary, the Supreme Council of the Judiciary and the Statute of Judges. According to these

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provisions, judges can only be relieved of their duties within the framework of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary. While perhaps justified by the exceptional circumstances, this breach of protocol nevertheless gave the impression that legitimacy had been compromised by making an assault on an authority which is formally recognized as independent by the Constitution.[12] A better course of action would have been to take precautionary measures (by suspending the judges, for example) until the Supreme Council of the Judiciary had issued final decisions on their cases.

These dismissals were also criticized by the Tunisian Bar Association, which rejected these actions despite the fact that the judges who were dismissed were notoriously corrupt.

Movement to Purge the Political Scene

This movement manifested itself in particular through actions taken against the former ruling party, the "Democratic Constitutional Rally." The party had ruled the country since 1987 as the successor to the "Destourian Socialist Party," which had in turn held the reins of power since 1956! These actions had a special significance since, in addition to the overthrow of the regime, the revolution had specifically demanded the disbanding of the ruling party – a clear, emphatic demand which was regularly

reiterated in the media.[13]

This eventually resulted in the Minister of the Interior's decision, on February 6, 2011, to close down the party headquarters and suspend its activities for a one-month period in order to avoid breaches of public order.[14]

A lawsuit was subsequently filed at the Court of First Instance in Tunis, requesting the dissolution of the party on the grounds that it had violated Articles 6 and 17 of the Political Parties Act, which requires that political parties should renounce violence in their activities. The lawsuit accused the party of collusion in acts of violence and looting which followed the fall of the regime on January 14, 2011. It also accused the party of violating Article 16 of the same law, which requires that political parties should maintain financial accounts and submit annual reports to the Court of Auditors.

The lawsuit – which ended in a decision to dissolve the ruling party – represented the first real test of the judiciary in this new phase, and also revealed its political role. Effectively, this trial was the first trial of the former regime, hence the first legal building block in uncovering the truth. A closer look, however, shows that the decision was compromised, because the trial was politically motivated and the culpability of the former ruling party predetermined. It would have been preferable to put the matter before the Fact-Finding Commission, which was charged with the task of investigating the excesses and abuses witnessed by the country since December 17, 2010 – especially as this task forms part of the country's collective and historical responsibility, and because one of the main tenets of the revolution was to break with the past and build a better future.

2. A Revolution to Build a Better Future: How to Maintain Justice over a Transitional Period

A principal characteristic of revolutions is that they invariably pass through critical periods which may result in their failure, bring them to a premature end, or turn them into dictatorships. So when a revolution aims to establish democratic rule, it must first pass through a transitional phase. This in turn involves what is known as a system of transitional justice, the premises of which are different from those of traditional justice. Unlike the latter, transitional justice seeks to identify collective responsibilities, acknowledge historical facts and prepare for comprehensive reconciliation, thereby paving the way for a political, social and legal future based on principles of justice, freedom, equality and participation. The Tunisian Revolution is currently passing through this phase, as reflected in current efforts to establish a core framework for transitional justice by (1) setting up commissions for the purpose of investigating the past, (2) preparing for a better future, (3) declaring a general legislative amnesty, and (4) ratifying a number of international treaties.

Commissions of Inquiry

The intention to create such commissions had already been announced prior to January 14, 2011. In his last speech on January 13, 2011, the former president promised to establish three commissions: the first as a fact-finding mission

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investigating events since December 17, 2010, the second to investigate bribery and corruption and the third for political reform.

These commissions – the chairs and members of which were appointed on January 19 and 22, 2011, respectively – can be considered as early achievements of the revolution.

Commission for the Investigation of Truth and Abuses

At first sight, this Commission appears to be a "Truth and Reconciliation Commission," similar to those established in other countries that

passed through transitional periods such as South Africa, Rwanda and Sierra Leone, Chile and Morocco. What we find, however, is that the Commission's remit is limited to human rights violations committed since December 17, 2010: it does not cover the entire 23-year period during which the former regime was in power. The initial impression of this finding is that the Commission will not attempt to determine the ultimate responsibility of the regime as a whole – which is the normal remit of Commissions of Truth and Reconciliation – but will instead simply determine individual responsibility and end up recommending financial compensation or other reparations. It would have been better if the Commission's remit covered the investigation of human rights abuses over the entire period of the former regime's tenure in power. Furthermore, there is no indication that the Commission will act as a commission for national reconciliation. It is therefore premature to consider this Commission as a suitable body for achieving transitional justice. Instead, it merely represents a first step toward what we must hope will be an extended remit to investigate a longer time period, i.e. the entire period in power of the former regime or even the entire duration of the Republic since its foundation in 1957. This would enable the Commission to conduct a retrospective investigation and establish collective responsibilities over the period as a whole, and also to evolve into a Commission of Reconciliation – a major element in a transitional justice system. This would enable the Commission to reconcile the Tunisian people with their past, helping them to accept it, turn the page and pass on to the next phase.[15]

Fact-Finding Commission on Bribery and Corruption[16]

The authority of this Commission, while more clearly defined than that of the above-mentioned Commission for the Investigation of Truth and Abuses, raises some fundamental questions, especially in relation to the judiciary. The Commission's remit is restricted to an investigation of financial corruption under the former regime, thereby confining its function to

a very specific area. Nevertheless, the overlap between the work of this Commission and that of the judiciary has been criticized, especially as the judiciary is already examining charges of corruption and bribery brought against the former president, members of his family and many former officials. The most important of these cases is Investigative Case 19592, brought before the Investigative Judge in Tunis in relation to crimes allegedly committed by the former

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President and his wife. The case has been taken in charge by the Dean of Investigating Judges at the Court of First Instance in Tunis. The overlap between the Commission's remit and the work of the judiciary, and the resulting tension, both came to a head when the Commission organized a search of the Presidential Palace in Sidi Bou Said on February 19, 2011. The Commission was subsequently accused of unlawful interference with the work of the judiciary and of disregarding sequestration procedures, thereby jeopardizing the admissibility in court of all the work done to date, as well as destroying the fingerprints of people who handled the money found at the palace. The charges were extremely embarrassing for the Commission!

This overlap between the work of the two above-mentioned Commissions and the judiciary, and the fact that the latter does not accept the necessity to establish Commissions (which it does not consider legitimate in that they are effectively competing with the judiciary in investigating an area for which, after all, the

judiciary is responsible, thereby wasting time and potentially also obstructing justice) all point to a lack of clarity regarding the concept of transitional justice and a lack of awareness of the relevant techniques and methods. The Commissions started work immediately after January 20, 2011, despite an absence of any legislation to regulate them or define their remits, frames of reference and working methods, or indeed to define their relationships with the government and the judiciary. This effectively weakened the Commissions, attracting harsh criticism and prompting many calls for their dissolution.[17] As a result, a summary court ruling was passed on March 3, 2011, stipulating that the Fact-Finding Commission's work should be suspended. The ruling was upheld on Thursday, March 10, 2011 by the First Circuit Court of Appeals in Tunis, which rejected the Commission's request for an injunction pending completion of legal procedures relating to the composition and functioning of the Commission, and insisted that its members should hand over all documents in their possession to the public prosecutor.

Reform Commissions

Two reform commissions were created: the Commission for Political Reform and the National Commission for the Reform of the Media.

The Commission for Political Reform: As in the case of the two commissions mentioned above, the Chairman of this Commission was appointed on January 19, 2011, and three days later the Commission started work as an independent advisory committee of experts. Its role was to make recommendations to the government with the aim of reforming the basic legislation which governs and regulates public life, including the Electoral Code and the Political Parties Act, as well as the law regulating associations and other legal provisions up to and including the Constitution, if requested to do so. Given the enormity of this Commission's work and its potential impact on the country's future, it was bound to face harsh

criticism from political forces and influential players on the political scene as the latter start to appear, assume their political roles and call for participation in shaping the country's political future. A number of such players have been involved in setting up the "Council for the Protection of the Revolution", which includes numerous influential members of political parties, trade unions and professional associations such as the Tunisian General Labor Union, Renaissance Movement and Bar Association.

This Council has vested itself with a set of powers which it has vigorously defended and reasserted, the most important of which is participating in the formulation of legislation, overseeing the government's work, and remunerating the Commission for Political Reform, which has already submitted a number of proposals for constitutional reforms and other scenarios.[18] The emergence of the Council for the Protection of the Revolution on the political scene has galvanized a trend to add new powers to the existing powers of the Commission for Political Reform, such that it

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should become a "Commission for Attaining the Goals of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition." The purpose of this name change is to make it clear that political reform is deep-rooted in the principles of the revolution, and that its ultimate aim is to achieve a transition to democracy. And it will probably

also result in a merger of the Commission with a new body which the government wants to christen the "Supreme Authority for the Protection of the Revolution and Democratic Transition," effectively causing the Council for the Protection of the Revolution to evolve into a higher authority which will participate directly in decision-making and governance.

The National Commission for Media Reform: The creation of this organization and appointment of its chairman and members pursuant to the Decree of March 2, 2011 was the first practical step towards a reform of the media sector. The latter had been corrupted by the former regime and left without any ethical or professional standards – a state of affairs reflected by the media mayhem even after January 14!

The organization has been entrusted with, "assessing the status of the media at the regulatory and structural levels, and providing recommendations for upgrading media institutions so that they communicate to the standards envisaged by the Revolution." It is also expected to: "make recommendations regarding applications to set up new radio and television stations pending the establishment of a specialist authority competent to deal with such applications…"

The Commission, acting as an advisory body, will play the role of the Supreme Council for Media and Communication until a new version of this council is set up. Meanwhile the Commission's chairman has promised to publish its recommendations and views on various proposals so that they are entirely transparent.

Setting up such independent commissions could also bring about reform in a number of other sectors. The number of such commissions is sure to multiply, eventually including sectors such as the prison service, national security, education, the judiciary, the financial industry, agriculture, the environment and so on.

The role of these commissions, however, remains subject to political pressures and the acceptability of their recommendations to all political parties. Hence it would be better to involve political parties, trade unions and professional associations in the work of these commissions from the outset, both in order to ensure a degree of pragmatism in their recommendations, and to ensure that it is feasible to implement the latter.

General Amnesty

The General Amnesty Decree was issued on February 19, 2011; it was the first decree to be adopted by the interim president after obtaining parliamentary authorization on February 9, 2011.[19] The decree has a number of political and social implications.

General amnesty had been a political demand for decades. Decree No. 1 of 2011 introduced such an amnesty in Tunisia for the first time ever. The amnesty reflects a clear trend toward the reinstatement of human rights and the release of political detainees and prisoners of conscience. It represents an attempt to correct previous injustices. And yet, from the perspective of transitional justice, it remains incomplete and limited in context for several reasons, most notably the following:

- The list of crimes covered by the amnesty, the majority of which represent "crimes of conscience." These include political crimes such as attacks on state security personnel; violation of anti-terrorism laws; breaches of the Press Code; breaches of provisions applying to public meetings, processions, demonstrations and other large gatherings; breaches of the law governing political parties and associations as well as strikes, sit-ins and civil disobedience in the workplace; and publication, distribution or simply possession of banned writings and books… Furthermore, it is common knowledge that a number of these breaches of the above-mentioned provisions occurred in the period after January 14. However, granting amnesty for crimes listed in Articles 131-135 of the Penal Code – namely those relating to

troublemakers – raises certain legal complications, because while those Articles have been used to prosecute individuals and groups on the grounds of their political or organizational affiliations, they have also been used as the basis for prosecuting common criminals. This may allow those who have been convicted under the above-mentioned Articles for reasons having nothing to do with politics to benefit from the general amnesty.

- The General Amnesty only applies to a specific time period, covering "crimes" committed prior to January 14, 2011. Indeed, the first section of the Decree stipulates that, "all those who were sentenced or convicted by the courts at any level prior to January 14, 2011, shall benefit from the general amnesty." This time limit means that the amnesty is only applicable to past events; it does not cover any violations committed during the period between January 14 and the date on which the Amnesty Decree was issued: February 19, 2011.

- The Amnesty Decree does not provide a basis for transitional justice. It excludes acts committed after January 14, 2011 – a period that witnessed many abuses, arrests, investigations and the beginnings of trials for acts of public disorder, looting and attacks on individuals and property. These abuses were purely punitive in nature, and took place in exceptional circumstances which the country as a whole had to endure. The exclusion of these abuses from the General Amnesty may be due to the difficulty of deciding which of these acts should or should not be pardoned.

- It is also clear that the Decree does not include any perpetrators or individuals involved in the activities of the former regime, whether in the previous era or during the time of the uprising. This confirms the impression that the amnesty does not represent a genuine effort to achieve a comprehensive reconciliation with the era which preceded January 14, 2011, and supports the notion that the idea of "reconciliation with the past" has not yet gained any real traction at the present time.

This impression is further strengthened if we consider the "decree confiscating the assets of the former president, his family and his in-laws." In addition to its questionable constitutional legitimacy, this decree also violates the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), and once again raises the issue of incompatibility with any efforts at national reconciliation. With respect to the international Convention against Corruption, it should be noted that the latter confines the authority to confiscate assets to the judiciary, except in cases where perpetrators cannot be prosecuted, either because they are dead, absent or have fled the country. If, by virtue of this decree, the government was able to directly confiscate assets owned by members of the president's family who fled abroad, then surely it should be legally possible to confiscate the property of those who remained in Tunis through the courts? In the interests of national reconciliation and with a view to establishing a degree of transitional justice, property should not be confiscated until the Fact-Finding Commission on Bribery and Corruption has completed its work.[20]

Ratifying International Treaties

A number of international treaties and conventions were ratified immediately after the General Amnesty Decree was issued. These included:

- The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.[21]

- Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.[22]

- Rome Statute of the International Criminal

Court and Agreement on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Criminal Court.[23]

- Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.[24]

These ratifications had two main objectives: a principal one and a conditional one. The latter was achieved by signing up to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which means that Tunisian officials could be prosecuted before this international tribunal if it should prove impractical to try them before Tunisian courts.

The principal goal, however, was to fulfill the charter of human rights in Tunisia, hitherto incomplete. The ratification of these conventions means that the Tunisian justice system is now complete, and also represents an appropriate response to legal demands for the validation of human rights.

Concluding Remarks

Since January 14, 2011 – the date marking the start of what is now known as the Tunisian Revolution – developments in Tunisia may genuinely be described as revolutionary at all levels, but especially at the level of politics, civil society and the media. The revolution was accompanied by a number of new legal enactments that could form the basis for a period of "transitional justice." They include in particular the establishment of fact-finding and

> What is missing at this stage is the pursuit of a clear path which would effectively and systematically establish a system of transitional justice.

anti-corruption commissions, the creation of the Commission for Attaining the Goals of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition in preparation for a new political era,

and finally the liberation of the media sector – accompanied by new standards of ethical professionalism – through the establishment of a National Commission for Media Reform.

What is missing at this stage is the pursuit of a clear path which would effectively and systematically establish a system of transitional justice: a clear strategy in this respect has thus far been lacking. The resulting improvisation has had an impact on a wide range of issues and decisions:

- Commissions, while representing an important step along the road to transitional justice, were established in haste and subsequently made a number of mistakes which drew fierce criticism and, in the case of one commission at least, legal scrutiny.

- Furthermore, while acceptance of the principle of compensation for victims represents an important premise for transitional justice, once again there is an absence of clear vision in this respect. On January 28, 2011, the government began paying compensation to the families of victims killed since December 17, 2010, despite the fact that the investigation by the Fact-Finding Commission was still in progress and the judiciary had not yet finished processing the relevant lawsuits.

- Despite the fact that economic and social rights were among the principal goals of the Tunisian Revolution, these have yet to find their way into relevant legislation! This does not necessarily imply a lack of official awareness, since a number of social and economic demands have already been incorporated into certain decisions and programs – in particular decisions to pay out unemployment benefits to unemployed university graduates, accept many demands for social concessions and trade unions, and prepare for the initiation of social negotiations, while at the same time recognizing the importance of development. It would have been

logical to form commissions – similar to the four commissions mentioned above – responsible for investigating these requirements and recommending a social, economic and sector-specific plan.

The salient feature of the period which has elapsed since the start of the revolution is vigorous political activity, accompanied by preliminary thoughts about certain aspects of economic and social development. While this phase had laid the foundations for a system of transitional justice, official decisions have been significantly affected by a number of difficulties, including security issues and economic problems, as well as a degree of chaos on the political scene and in the media. These difficulties include the fall of the first government (on February 27, 2011); the formation of a new government on March 7, 2011, and the declaration of a new roadmap on March 3, 2011. The latter includes a series of new proposals: first, to suspend the Constitution; second, to maintain the interim president and government in office until the National Constitutional Assembly starts to function, by issuing a decree for regulating public authorities during the transitional period. Third and finally, to organize elections for the National Constitutional Assembly on July 24, 2011…

… and thus the Chronicle of Revolutionary Legislative Developments continues!

Endnotes

[1] This chronicle was kept until the end of March 2011 and will be continued at a later stage.

[2] Ordinance 121 dated 17 January 2011 in *Al-Ra'ed Al-Rasmi* issue 6, 21 January 2011: p. 139.

[3] *Al-Ra'ed Al-Rasmi* issue 8, 1 February 2011: p. 163.

[4] *Al-Ra'ed Al-Rasmi* issue 9, 4 February 2011: p. 171.

[5] Decree establishing the National Independent Commission for the Reform of Media and Communication, Decree No. 10 of 2011 dated 2 March2011, *Al-Ra'ed Al-Rasmi* issue 14, 4 March 2011: p. 225.

[6] Act 32 of 1988 dated 3 May 1988 relating to the Regulation of Political Parties, *Al-Ra'ed Al-Rasmi* issue 31, 6 May 1988: p. 715.

[7] Cf. the first decision issued by the Minister of the Interior on January 22, licensing a political party named the Ba'ath (Rebirth) Movement; also the decision of the Minister of the Interior on 2 March 2011 licensing the Al-Nahda (Renaissance) Movement Party.

[8] Cf. Ordinances 149-157 dated 29 January 2011, *Al-Ra'ed Al-Rasmi* issue 8, 1 February 2011: pp. 163-164.

[9] Ordinance 163 of 2011 dated 3 February 2011, *Al-Ra'ed Al-Rasmi* issue 9, 4 February 2011: p. 172.

[10] Ordinances 177-180 dated 14 February 2011, *Al-Ra'ed Al-Rasmi* issue 12, 22 February 2011: p. 186.

[11] Ordinances 167-173 dated 10 February 2011, *Al-Ra'ed Al-Rasmi* issue 11, 15 February 2011: pp. 180-179.

[12] Article 65 of the Tunisian Constitution.

[13] Cf. Moncef Ksibi, "Le R.C.D peut-il survivre ?" [Can the Democratic Constitutional Rally survive?], *La Presse de Tunisie*, 30 January 2011, or Sadak Belaid, "Il faut dissoudre immédiatement le R.C.D" [The Democratic Constitutional Rally should be dissolved immediately], *La Presse*, 6 February 2011: p. 10.

[14] In accordance with Article 18 of the Political Parties Act of 1988.

[15] Decree No. 8 of 2011 dated 18 February 2011 refers to the creation of the National Commission for the Investigation of Truth and Abuses committed since 17 December 2010 and until the need for it ceases, *Al-Ra'ed Al-Rasmi* issue 13 of 2011: p. 203.

[16] Decree No. 7 of 2011 dated 18 February 2011 refers to the creation of the National Commission for the Investigation of Bribery and Corruption, *Al-Ra'ed Al-Rasmi* issue 13 of 2011: p. 201.

[17] Cf. "Judges Call for the Dissolution of the Two Fact-Finding Commissions" *Al-Sabah*, 1 March 2011: p. 7. Also "The Fact-Finding Committee on Bribery and Corruption in Legal Trouble" *Al-Sabah*, 1 March 2011: p. 4.

[18] Cf. related article on the Council for the Protection of the Revolution, "From Protection to Political Mandate" *Al-Sabah*, 3 March 2011: p.11.

[19] *Al-Raed Al-Rasmi* issue 12, 22 February 2011: pp. 183 and 184.

[20] Decree No. 7 of 2011 dated 15 February 2011; *Al-Raed Al-Rasmi* issue 13, 1 March 2011: pp. 201-202.

[21] Decree No. 2 of 2011, dated 19 February 2011; *Al-Raed Al-Rasmi* issue 12, 22 February 2011, p. 184.

[22] Decree No. 3 of 2011, dated 19 February 2011.

[23] Decree No. 4 of 2011, dated 19 February 2011.

[24] Decree No. 5 of 2011, dated 19 February 2011.

Nothing Was Ever Brought to Trial

Interview with Magda Adly

Magda Adly

Magda Adly is a medical doctor and activist promoting human rights and women's issues. She was a member of the Egyptian students' movement in the 1970s and spent most of her time as a student in detention. She is manager at the El-Nadeem Center for the Treatment and Psychological Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence in Cairo, coordinates a support program for women victims of violence, and trains others in resistance to torture and in women's rights. While attending the trial of a torture victim, she was attacked by a member of the security forces and beaten so severely that she now suffers a permanent disability.

Perspectives: Dr. Magda, you are a leading member of the Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence in Cairo. Much has been said about the authoritarian character of the Mubarak regime. Can you describe the scope of torture in Egypt?

ADLY: Horrific tortures were perpetrated by the state security apparatus, but no security officer was ever brought to trial during Mubarak's rule. It was enough for a citizen to be close to – or the neighbor of – somebody engaged in political activity opposed to the regime: That was

> We stated that torture was a systematic policy – they claimed it was a result of excesses perpetrated by individuals.

sufficient grounds for a citizen to be tortured. At the Nadeem Center, the issue of torture was the main area of contention with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Government. We stated that torture was a systematic policy – they claimed it was a result of excesses perpetrated by individuals. We published reports on many individuals, including medical and forensic reports that backed up these claims.

People were dying in prison cells without anybody ever knowing about it. In the Beheira Province, a mass grave was found behind a prison. There is a burial site underneath the State Security building inside the prison fence; people accidentally discovered a secret room where human bones were found, and when the incident was investigated by Amnesty International, they discovered the burial site. The news spread on Facebook, about where the burial site was concealed. But many people in Beheira Province either saw or knew about the site – it became a place of pilgrimage for people in the province, along with other notorious sites in Lazoghly, Nasr City and Gaber ibn Hayyan.

Perspectives: Have people been tortured in State Security prison cells after the fall of Mubarak?

ADLY: Yes, there was torture: People arrested in the most recent demonstrations were tortured in State Security detention centers.

Perspectives: What about police stations?

ADLY: Police stations are an issue we need to look at. Over the past few years, the insolence of police officers reached its peak, when they started to use individuals' own mobile phones to record them being tortured, with the aim of humiliating and terrorizing them. And some people did indeed become afraid of being arrested and disappearing, but this behavior also brought popular anger to the boiling point.

Perspectives: Was torture in police stations carried out on the orders of officials?

ADLY: Of course! When you're talking about state policy, this means that the President of the Republic, the Prime Minster, the Interior Minister all knew about and approved of these things. Much of the equipment was purchased out of the State budget – a military secret which hasn't yet seen the light of day.

Perspectives: After the revolution was there a resolution prohibiting the use of torture in police stations?
ADLY: There was an verbal undertaking, but I neither trust it, nor feel confident about it.

Perspectives: Is torture continuing in the same scope as before?
ADLY: Not yet. They have started to replace ministers and senior leaders, such as the security chief in Cairo and his assistant. Up to now this is a mere reshuffle, these senior figures have not even been forced to retire. Throughout this period, television and other media have been broadcasting propaganda stating that we are a tolerant people, that we should forget these issues, that the police force now understand they are at fault and will treat people better.

Previously, a citizen would be tortured and imprisoned just for stealing a loaf of bread. How can I forgive those who killed both before and during the revolution? Personally, I do not believe we can turn a new page until all those who have committed crimes against this nation are brought to trial and dismissed from the security services, in compliance with the International Convention Against Torture. Only this will enable the new generation to forgive,

> The nation rejected the police, welcomed the army, and was happy with the solution – but then we discovered that civilians were being tortured in military police stations and military prisons.

so we can all turn over a new page. Everybody, from the lowest-ranking officer to the most senior police officer and Interior Minister – even Hosni Mubarak and all the ministers who were aware of these reports and made statements about them in the media – they should all be brought to trial. There can be no forgiveness until this happens!

Unfortunately, a new torture dossier needs to be opened – on the torture of civilian detainees by army officers. This is a sensitive, dangerous issue. One of the motives behind the revolution was the rejection of torture. So is the army now exchanging roles with the police? The nation rejected the police, welcomed the army, and was happy with the solution – but then we discovered that civilians were being tortured in military police stations and military prisons, as well as in various illegal places of detention before they were handed over to the military police. There are suspicions that legal cases have been fabricated, that demonstrators have been accused of being thugs. The military tribunals do not meet the minimum standards for a fair trial. This issue poses an extreme risk to the future of our nation at this critical juncture, when members of the former regime are still attempting to crack down on the revolution.

Perspectives: On another note, the Nadeem Center strongly supports the increased participation of women in political process. In the events leading to change and revolution, what role did women play in conjunction with young people, and with movements and political parties?
ADLY: During the events of 2004 and 2005 – when the last presidential election took place and the constitution was amended allowing the president to stay in power for unlimited consecutive terms – an unprecedented number of women were actively involved in opposition protests. I'm using here my own definition of political participation, because I do not consider that the mere representation of women in parliament in any way reflects active political participation; women who represent the National Democratic Party and adopt an even more patriarchal way of thinking than men are not a valid benchmark. The rise in women's participation started with popular movements aimed at change, the best known of which are Kifaya, the Egyptian Movement for Change, and the National Front for Change, which paved the way for a large number of social movements.

Between 2006 and 2010 the percentage of women who took part in demonstrations and sit-ins – lasting anything up to thirty days – was greater than the percentage of men.

The opposition movement has put an end to the myth that women should just stay in the kitchen and look after their children – those same women, together with their children, took part in demonstrations in the streets. By participating, women encouraged men to

> Between 2006 and 2010 the percentage of women who took part in demonstrations and sit-ins – lasting anything up to thirty days – was greater than the percentage of men.

overcome the barrier of fear and join in the economic protests. This paved the way for the youth movement. It gives you an idea of the number of women who were actually involved in the demonstrations during the revolution – women not only from the elite classes. Veiled women took part in the demonstrations in public squares and slept there overnight, including volunteer medical doctors working in field hospitals. Many young women volunteered to be doctors and nurses, then male doctors from the major hospitals joined them in Tahrir Square, accompanied by female nurses and women volunteers. Women journalists working for Egyptian newspapers and press agencies in other Arab and non-Arab countries were there, taking photographs and filming while under fire and during tear-gas attacks.

There has been a quantum leap in understanding – we thought that young women in their twenties were wasting their time on Facebook! Instead they formed a united front of like-minded individuals; they understood one another's language, they trusted one another: "We are all Khaled Said."[1] Nobody knew who the Facebook Administrators were, but by daring to write, women learned to trust in and respond to each other. On January 25, the so-called Police Day[2] when the protest started, the Nadeem Center had planned to hold a special conference on the subject of torture. But then there was a call for protests by young people and everything began. We don't have a monopoly on ideas and knowledge – these are very inspiring, intelligent young people.

We in the older generation talk a lot – we like to discuss which came first, the chicken or the egg – but the young people can convey what they want in a couple of lines. So the young people are teaching us. But this is a reason for indescribable happiness – the world is moving forward in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Yemen, Jordan, Algeria and Palestine; it is essential that the future should be better.

Interview by Joachim Paul, 21 February 2011

Translation from Arabic by Word Gym Ltd.

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[1] The Facebook group which emerged in protest against the murder of Khaled Said by the police in Alexandria.

[2] January 25 was declared as an official holiday in 2009 by Mubarak to underline the importance of the police for the Egyptian regime. It symbolizes today the successful Egyptian protest movement.

International and Security Politics

American Policies:
Debating National Interests

Raed Fakeeh

Raed Fakeeh is a Lebanese journalist who spent much of his life in Kuwait. He studied law at the Beirut Arab University. He was a reporter for a number of Lebanese and Arab media, including "Sawt ash-Shaab," Kuwait TV and NileSat. For the past seven years, he has been based in Washington DC. He is specializing on questions of democracy in the Arab world and carried out extensive field coverage in most Arab countries, as well as Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's remarks to the Human Rights Council at the United Nations European headquarters in Geneva, on February 28, 2011, described the first clear features of the United States' policy concerning the protests that have occurred in many Arab countries. Clinton's statement settled a long debate within Washington about how to best deal with the unexpected changes in the Arab world. It reconciled conflicting internal motions, and classified Washington's support for political transition in the Arab world as a strategic imperative, assuring that American values and interests converge on the issue. Clinton asserted that it was necessary to protect these transitional operations from anti-democratic influences. Which influences did she mean?

Experts say that revolutions go through three stages: the first consists of sloganeering, the second of developing the tools for protest, while the third consists of establishing alternatives. While acknowledging the potential risk of any revolution to run amok, the American administration expressed its concern about the third stage of Arab revolts as it sought to formulate policies regarding the countries that have witnessed – or are still witnessing – protests. There was the fear of seeing the Somali experience repeated: a country plunged into chaos when the political transition failed. In face of the fear that these countries could become safe havens for Al-Qaeda, such an outcome is considered highly undesirable.

But the American administration is also worried about the possibility of any of the revolts ending in a one-time election that would replace one tyrannical regime by another – the latter more likely to be Islamist, as many Arab liberals and the data available to the administration seem to suggest. It is worth noting that Clinton, in her remarks, did not oppose the (potentially

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problematic) participation of Islamic groups in the creation of new governments, provided that they reject violence, and respect participation, equality and democratic values.

The American administration thus appears to have a better understanding of the Arab street, and to be more responsive to its demands, but within a framework that preserves its effective role, and that does not jeopardize its national interests. In its effort to reach a happy compromise, the United States will attempt, in the foreseeable future, to ensure the formation of "moderate and pragmatic" representative councils, or to keep former "accepted" powers in place, thus forestalling any transitional void and enabling dealings with clear political systems. Washington's political positions in the changing countries will be analyzed in light of that equation.

Events in Tunisia caught Washington politicians and the international community unaware. The events even surprised inhabitants of the country itself, which was often described

as one of the Arab countries with the "smartest and quietest" suppression of its citizens. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali had successfully crafted a set of regional and international equations that satisfied interests and silenced concerns: Foreign investments with excellent terms, and the total suppression of any Islamic activity, whether moderate or radical. This governance formula allowed Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's regime tom remain in place for many years. However, in the decisive hour, the removal of the president became easy because of this same formula, which was built on the knowledge that reactions would be insufficient, and that the structure of those parts of the system that were guarantor against any concerns, mainly the military institution, would be maintained.

Washington's Response to Egypt – A Balancing Act

Protests in Tunisia did not ignite discussions in Washington, and even less in the media. From day one, the events met American standards for a peaceful transition of power. Discussions, however, were directly unleashed at the first spark of protest in Egypt, the second largest recipient of U.S. economic and military aid. During the first few days, the White House was forced to juggle, trying to balance sensitive core issues. The administration attempted to uphold

> American President Barack Obama's personality, and the behavior of Mubarak's regime toward the demonstrators, altered the course of the negotiations.

so-called "American" values such as freedom of expression and the support for the peaceful demonstrations, which called for democracy, while at the same time distancing itself from the events, bearing in mind the U.S.' considerable vested interests in Egypt, a country of vital political and strategic importance in the region.

Alarm bells rang out quickly from the conservative and neo-conservative blocs, with warnings and analyses by Henry Kissinger and John Bolton cautioning against abandoning Hosni Mubarak's regime. An influential movement within the White House agreed about the risk inherent in upsetting Egypt's role in the region. Some evoked the unsuccessful attempts at dialogue with the Muslim Brotherhood years earlier. Warnings accumulated against offering Egypt, the most politically active Arab country, up to Islamic currents, opening it up to Iranian interventions (Tehran supported the opposition movements), or creating a fertile environment for Al-Qaeda activity in the region.

However, American President Barack Obama's personality, and the behavior of Mubarak's regime towards the demonstrators, altered the course of the negotiations that were taking place at the time with (then) Egyptian Minister of Defense Field Marshal Mohamad Hussain Tantawi, current leader of Egypt's ruling Higher Military Council. He was heading a military delegation to Washington at the height of the protests in Cairo. The White House's position, which gradually shifted in favor of Mubarak's resignation, sparked a wave of internal objections from supporters of Israel inside the U.S. Congress, and from other advocates of more stable options (meanwhile Egyptian activists were unhappy with the lack of American pressure on Mubarak during the first days of the revolution).

The current defending Mubarak was strongly opposed by proponents of his resignation, who called attention to the degree of overlap between American and Egyptian interests, regardless of the shape of government: starting with the annual economic aid, the American factories in Egypt and their effect on the Egyptian economy, and ending with what is perhaps the main factor, namely, the special relationship with the Egyptian military establishment. Would the new Egyptian ruler forsake all mutual economic interests? And would the military establishment forego special American aid and training?

While these questions were being debated, objections within the administration gradually tapered off, aided by the news from across the Atlantic – even if some signals still caused some concern. The first piece of good news was delivered by the Egyptian Military Council, on the day it assumed power: it guaranteed that it would preserve Egypt's regional accords and maintain its moderate politics. The Muslim Brotherhood also sent a message, internally to the Military Council and externally to the West, and Washington in particular, assuring that the Brotherhood would not attempt to ascend to the presidency nor would it dramatically increase its participation in parliament. But worries grew, as people tried to comprehend what Egypt would be like after Mubarak's departure - especially with the release of Abboud and Tarek al-Zumur, both convicted for the assassination of former Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat, after thirty years spent in jail.

Their actual release did not cause as much concern as the special welcome they received, complete with official national television coverage. This worried not only those who sought a civilian (non-religious) state, but also, and more specifically, the Coptic community, who had been the target of surprising sectarian attacks after the "January 25 revolution," and of a deadly attack on a church in Alexandria a few weeks earlier. The Copts were also particularly distressed by the Military Council's decision to keep intact the Second Article of the Egyptian Constitution, which they had hoped to alter, and which states that Sharia law is the principal source for legislation.

In Washington, however, and in light of Arab and Egyptian mobilization, some Republicans took advantage of the internal political confusion and attributed the uprisings to the success of former President George W. Bush's initiatives that promoted democracy in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

In summary, the Egyptian revolution appeared as a peaceful transition that avoided crossing political red lines, or creating a political void. The revolution was carried out with "eyes wide open," and as such, was given free reign to complete the transition by changing the government, terminating the symbols of the Mubarak era and putting away its leaders.

Alarmed Arab Leaders

Most of the events and developments appeared ideal for American politicians, except for one point rarely covered by American media: the message sent by the United States to its Arab allies regarding their stance on the revolts. Doubtless, some Arab countries are now eyeing their greatest ally with dread. After all, Mubarak's last meeting with Obama was only a few months old. Jordanians and Saudis are certainly wondering what their relationship with the United States really guarantees. The Saudis expressed some concern, albeit reservedly,

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when the Americans did not comply with King Abdullah's requests to protect the Mubarak regime. However, the United States' position on events in Bahrain, and their clear disapproval of the Gulf countries' decision to restore order in Manama by sending in troops, aggravated Arab leaders' anger.

Many in American political circles recognize the discontent of Arab governments, but they also realize that there are lines both American and "moderate" Arab parties will not cross, in the foreseeable future, in order to curb Iranian influence to grow in the region. But many also see the Arab uprisings as a perfect occasion to pressure America's allies into implementing the reforms to combat radicalism that Washington had been calling for since the events of

September 11. Some experts in Washington admit that Arab regimes have had pressures eased on them during the last few years of former President Bush's era, due to an increase

> The closer one gets to the countries of the oil-rich Gulf, the balance tips in favor of interests at the expense of reforms.

in stability, but it is that same stability that requires even wider implementations of reforms to guarantee it.

Within that context, a senior advisor in the State Department stated that Washington's policies in the region do not involve U.S. controlling past, present or future events. On the contrary, developments demonstrate an advanced model of dispassionate political work based on mutual interests, removed from the emotion that characterizes the readings of most Arab political activists. The advisor added that Washington defines its degree of support according to the dictates of popular movements, which also define the shape of American policy: "If people were to mobilize, would we stand in their face? Quite to the contrary, we would adapt our policies to the developments." Building on that, the advisor recommended, Arab leaders should completely review policies within their countries, and put reforms and amendments into effect.

While the steps announced by Saudi King Abdullah ben Abdel Aziz to improve economic and social affairs have been hailed by some as reforms, and despite the afore-mentioned tension between Washington and Gulf Cooperation Council, some politicians, who describe themselves as realists, point to the fact that the closer one gets to the countries of the oil-rich Gulf, the balance tips in favor of interests at the expense of reforms. They also note the activity of Al-Qaeda, in a region adjacent to Iran and with various links to Pakistan. And so, any American role or call to reform must be preceded by clearly identifying the demonstrators, or opposition forces, and their vision about the three afore-mentioned factors, especially concerning political alternatives. This explains why some figures have described the American position on developments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria as cautious, and its stance on Bahrain as concerned.

The Stance Toward Libya

Returning to the Secretary of State's outline of the American position on current events, few were surprised by the slow decision process regarding developments in Libya. A country with a strong radical Islamist movement, largely unknown to Americans – despite Colonel Gaddafi's exaggerated portrayal of it – it is also a country lacking a strong, clearly organized army, a cabinet or a parliament that could safely guide the country through parliamentary elections following a transition period. In Libya, there is only the ghost of Colonel Gaddafi, who claims he is an honorific ruler of the country. The American administration is concerned that all these factors would bring about a new Somalia: a country divided among tribes, becoming a fertile ground for fundamentalism, this time on the Northern shores of Africa.

Realizing this, the Libyan opposition hastened to form transitional councils to lead the revolution, oversee affairs in the eastern part of the country, (which it controls from Benghazi), and to prevent a potential void of leadership. The formation of these councils mended what the international community had previously perceived as a weak point in the West's support of the revolution. The Libyan opposition also understood the importance of resuming oil exports to bring an end to the price increase, which was negatively affecting many countries. One day before the events in Libya began, the United States had recorded its best unemployment rate in two years – a rate that would suffer should oil prices continue climbing, due to Libya's inability to export its oil. While Gaddafi's forces may have managed to disrupt oil export by bombing ports and

facilities only for a short period of time, the (clear) message has been sent.

Along with the lack of "alternatives" in Libya due to the absence of governmental establishments, another source of concern for Washington and the West was the constant focus on inciting figures closest to Gaddafi to abandon him. These figures were offered future positions and roles, in the hopes that they could prevent Al-Qaeda from infiltrating the country and radical Islamist organizations from gaining control of the country after Gaddafi's ouster. That is how the West is marking the defection of various prominent figures from Gaddafi regime's, including the "black box" Musa Kusa, former Foreign Minister, and Abdel Rahman Shalgham, former Libyan Ambassador to the United Nations and a close advisor to Gaddafi for 40 years. Symbolic figures from the Libyan opposition outside of the country also notably participated in the London conference on Libya,

> The United States exhibited caution about any military involvement in an Islamic country after the Iraqi experiment, and the effect another war could have on the two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

carrying a clear message to the West: Al-Qaeda is not part of the opposition, and the new Libya will be a civilian democracy.

The American administration acknowledged that it officially had delayed declaring its position on the events in Libya during the first ten days of protests, and President Obama also avoided any exact mention of Colonel Gaddafi by name in his first speeches, for fear of sparking a hostage crisis. But all indicators unanimously pointed toward the need for a military intervention, which called for more deliberation among allies to find the best plan to successfully complete the mission.

The discussion of the military intervention abounded with concerns that were successively examined. The United States exhibited caution about any military involvement in an Islamic country after the Iraqi experiment, and the effect another war could have on the two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq – an opinion shared by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and a number of generals. The only way to resolve the issue was to invite Arab and Islamic countries to adopt the intervention, and to take part in some of its military missions (as long as they did not involve ground invasions). The deal was secured by Secretary of State Clinton, who was greatly committed to quickly resolving the Libyan matter, she first obtained the cooperation of the Gulf countries, and then of the Arab League, despite Syria's and Algeria's reservations. According to experts, these steps were designed to avoid Washington any embarrassment should the need for military intervention arise in another country to save its civilians from a despotic leader. This elucidates Clinton's declaration that Washington would not intervene in Syria as it had in Libya, when protests erupted in the Syrian town of Daraa. Her statement dealt with a major concern that kept emerging in the discussion about military intervention: What if a unilateral American intervention in Libya set a precedent that would then challenge American values, should Saudi-Arabia start actively suppressing its people or the Shiites in Bahrain (which is what occurred later)? And the – unconfirmed – answer was: If Arab or international cover is provided, the United States will intervene.

Observers were not surprised by the divergence in opinion among the allies, which surfaced after the first day of fighting. The alliance had at least two distinct projects. The first was clarified by Obama in a speech on the second day of the war, and explained in more detail at the end of March: America would like to see Gaddafi removed. As far as American relations with Gaddafi go, experts say that Gaddafi never achieved any real harmony with the West. And although it had re-established

relations with him, the West had never quite forgotten Gaddafi's role in terrorist operations across the world. The prospect of the Colonel remaining in power after the intervention is regarded as detrimental to the region and the West. Thus, Obama showed no compunction in the CIA carrying out covert missions in Libya, which were likely to involve arming rebels. Meanwhile, the official position of the military

> Arab uprisings are driving the American administration to follow them, while conceding that no movement would reach its goals without the administration's support.

intervention does not clearly state that ousting Gaddafi is not one of its goals. The United States, however, does not want to send any negative message to the people, or a positive message to the regimes of countries expected to witness demonstrations in the near future. The concerns expressed by conservatives and those who opposed military intervention vary, German reasons diverge from Russian ones, but they meet in their stand against the intervention, with the mildest refusal issued by the Germans and the harshest criticism by the Russians, who likened the intervention to a "Holy Crusade on Libya."

The regimes surrounding Libya, whether near or far, reacted to the intervention by adopting different measures. The Algerian regime immediately repealed its emergency law, while the Syrian regime is maneuvering around it. Meanwhile, the Yemeni President is fighting his last wars to stay in power, despite divisions that have hit his own family. Observers note that repealing the emergency law in Algeria does not signal the end of events, and that the country's complex military-tribal structure and cultural problems will soon emerge, pushed to the surface by the burden of Algeria's economic crisis. In Syria, observers predict

that the president's maneuvering around reforms – based on the principle of "speed, but not haste"– will fail to extinguish the people's anger, particularly as he steers clear of his own regime's promise to revoke the emergency law, and with the continuing daily arrests of political activists. These events might push Washington to take a stronger position against the Syrian regime, but the American administration will not threaten with military options.

In Yemen, American observers point out that Ali Abdullah Saleh is no longer able to use the Al-Qaeda card to hold the Americans in check. The number of people demanding his resignation has grown to a degree that suggests he will not be staying in power much longer.[1] Thus, observers conclude, Arab uprisings are driving the American administration to follow them, while conceding that no movement would reach its goals without the administration's support.

Dealing with Islamic Currents: Watching and Learning

Concurrently, in the hallways of the White House, a discussion is taking place to figure out the American relation to Islamic currents, and more specifically toward the Muslim Brotherhood. Reports point to a study dated February 16 that gauges the mood in the White House. The study draws a comparison between Muslim Brotherhood and Al-Qaeda, regarding issues such as the worldwide Jihad, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, attitudes toward the United States, Islam and politics, democracy and nationalism, and ends with the radical differences between the two organizations.

While reports did not fully disclose the conclusions of the study, some of what was leaked suggests that the study generally regards the Muslim Brotherhood and its work in the Arab world positively, while it views Al-Qaeda and its ambition to spread Islam across the world negatively. An assessment of the political positions of the Muslim Brotherhood revealed

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[1] This article was written before Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh left Yemen on June 4, 2011. [Editor's Note]

that while they differ from American positions on politics, they agree on values. A statement from a high placed official in the White House to *The*

> Changes in the relations with Islamic organizations do not entail direct U.S. support in the short term for any member of these groups seeking positions of power.

Washington Post on March 4, 2011, recently assured that the U.S. boycott of Hamas did not stem from its Islamic character, but from the organization's adamant refusal to acknowledge Israeli-Palestinian agreements or to recognize the state of Israel. The new American policy toward the region will not be influenced by fear, said the official. But experts point out that changes in the relations with Islamic organizations do not entail direct U.S. support in the short term for any member of these groups seeking positions of power. The coming period will be one of watching and learning how to interact with these organizations.

And in Washington, there are those who hold up the Turkish model of government as a successful example of change, a model of which Turkey itself is a guarantor of. But the success of the model will also depend on the role that Turkey will play in the current mobilization.

Translation from Arabic by Joumana Seikaly

EU-Libya Agreements on Refugees and Asylum Seekers:
The Need for a Reassessment

Outsourcing Responsibilities

The recent revolts and subsequent political changes in North Africa led many to applaud a long awaited "Arab Spring." The revolutionary spark of the Egyptian and Tunisian street has ignited uprisings in Bahrain, Jordan, Syria and Yemen, as well as Libya. But as supporters of anti-Gaddafi forces are cheering the rebels, not everybody is celebrating: Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, especially from Sub-Saharan Africa, are bearing the brunt of the insecurity in Tripoli, Benghazi and other major cities. Foreigners who make it across the border to neighboring countries tell stories of rape, beatings and other gross human rights violations. During the first few days of the anti-

> In this war, African migrant workers are perceived as representatives of the hated regime, which allegedly buys ruthless African mercenaries with its oil billions.

Gaddafi revolt alone, at least five Somalis and four Eritreans were killed by angry mobs. In this war, African migrant workers are perceived as representatives of the hated regime, which allegedly buys ruthless African mercenaries with its oil billions. Stories told by the fleeing refugees are shedding new light on the human rights situation in Libya, and are highlighting the shortcomings of the European Union's migration policy.

Migrants Stranded in Libya

Even though these figures are likely to be overestimated, Libyan authorities state that between one and two million foreigners were in the country before the outbreak of the crisis. At least 360,000 people fled Libya during the first six weeks after fighting broke out. Male migrant workers, mainly from neighboring Tunisia and Egypt, as well as from West Africa and South Asia, constitute the major group. Tens of thousands have already been repatriated with the assistance of the UN, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and various governments.

Another group, however, consists of genuine refugees and asylum seekers. They have fled Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia or Darfur due to war, forced military conscription or political persecution. Given the situations in their countries, this group will not be able to return home in the foreseeable future. Before the outbreak of fighting, the UN agency working on refugee affairs (UNHCR) had registered about 9,000 refugees and 3,700 asylum seekers in Libya. The real numbers, however, are likely to be higher, as many are in transit to Europe, and for various reasons decided not to seek assistance from the UNHCR.

With recent reports of "African mercenaries" supporting Gaddafi's army, migrants are coming under increasing threat. The fighting has only deteriorated their situation. While about 1,700 Somali and 900 Eritreans had fled Libya by the end of March, many refugees are still trapped in their homes, unable to leave to Egypt or Tunisia. In addition, prisons have been bombed and burnt, including a detention center in Misrata, where a large number of refugees who were

Urs Fruehauf

Urs Fruehauf is currently working for the Norwegian Refugee Council in Somaliland. Prior to that, he worked for the Delegation of the European Union to Syria on Crisis Prevention and Conflict Management. He has also been a Consultant for the European Commission on refugee and migration affairs.

returned by Italian authorities are being held in miserable conditions.

Migration as a Libyan Foreign Policy Tool

Historically, Libya has used migration as a foreign policy tool, both on the regional and the international levels. In order to meet labor demands in the education and agricultural sectors, Libya opened its doors to migrants from mainly neighboring Arab countries up until the late 1980s. This policy changed in the 1990s, when Arab governments backed a UN arms and air embargo against Libya. In return, Gaddafi expelled most Arab foreigners and welcomed Sub-Saharan migrant workers, in line with his approach of shifting from pan-Arab to pan-African policies. Starting in 2000, the Libyan government once again changed its outlook and responded to growing resentments against immigrants and increasing racism by deporting large numbers of migrant workers back to their respective countries. These deportations also need to be seen in the context of the EU exerting increased pressure on Libya to halt migration flows toward the North, and initial Italian-Libyan agreements on fighting terrorism, organized crime and undocumented immigration. Estimates suggest that tens, even hundreds of thousands of workers were sent back to their respective home countries – often against their will. Thousands of these forceful deportations were financed by the Italian government.

The Berlusconi-Gaddafi Handshake

Trying to leave behind its image as a regional spoiler and "rogue state," Libya from the early 2000s onwards started to cooperate more closely with European countries. Italy, especially, was at the forefront of embracing the Gaddafi regime. In 2008 the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi signed with Muammar Gaddafi the "Treaty of Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation Between the Italian Republic and the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamhariyya." Through this treaty, Italy committed to make funding of US$5 billion available over the next 20 years for key infrastructure projects, in order to compensate Libya for the harm done by colonial rule. The treaty can be best understood in the light of mutual interests. Through this agreement, Gaddafi was able to present himself as having achieved moral victory over the country's former colonizer. For Italy, the treaty brought clear strategic and economic benefits: Not only were the entire promised infrastructure projects to be carried out by Italian contractors, but, as Berlusconi himself stated, the purpose of the agreement was, "less illegal immigrants and more oil."

Prior to the Friendship Treaty, Libya and Italy had signed several other agreements under Berlusconi's watch. Italy financed

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programs of charter flights to forcibly remove undocumented migrants from Libya to their home countries. It further provided Gaddafi's regime with technical equipment and training programs to better control the Libyan border. Italy also built several camps for undocumented migrants across Libya. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have documented the appalling human rights conditions in these prisons. "Libyan authorities practice incommunicado detention of political opponents, migrants and possible asylum seekers, torture while in detention, unfair trials leading to long-term prison sentences or the death penalty, and 'disappearance' and death of political prisoners in custody. Migrants and asylum seekers in particular are often victims of arbitrary detention, inexistent or unfair trials, killings, and disappearances and torture in the detention camps."[1]

Many of these agreements have been reached in secrecy and without knowledge of the general public. They conveniently ignore the dreadful human rights situation in Libya, and do not aim at improving the situation and rights of refugees in Libya. Libya is not a signatory of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or its Protocol and does not officially recognize the presence of refugees on its soil. Human Rights Watch quotes an official in 2005 at the Libyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs saying that, "if Libya offered asylum, asylum seekers would come like a plague of locusts".

Given the lack of protection, living conditions for Sub-Saharan refugees and asylum seekers in Libya are very poor. Refugees live in constant fear of being arrested by the Libyan police and returned back to their home countries

> Many of these agreements have been reached in secrecy and without knowledge of the general public.

against their will. Racist rhetoric against African migrants on behalf of authorities and members of society has led many to leave their houses only when absolutely necessary. They generally live "under cover."[2]

Despite this, Italy has forcibly removed thousands of migrants from Lampedusa to Libya since 2004, often - according to the European Parliament and numerous NGOs – violating the fundamental rights of these asylum seekers. Not only has Italy breached the principle of non-refoulement,[3] it has also ignored warnings that deporting migrants and incarcerating them in closed detention centers in Libya puts them at substantial risk of human rights violations. As Amnesty International has indicated, there is a direct connection between Italian-Libyan bilateral agreements and the rising number of migrants in detention in Libya. Refugees have repeatedly reported that they feel threatened and "trapped"[4] in Libya.

Once a migrant has been deported from an EU member state to Libya, s/he might be subjected to a chain-refoulement, possibly ending up in the very country from which they fled in fear of persecution. Gaddafi's officials made it very clear that, "Libya's goal is to repatriate all illegal migrants we receive from Italy."[5] With Libya aiming at stemming the flow of migrants across the Mediterranean, migrants feel ever more cornered and will try ever riskier ways to move from Libya to Italy. With a warming of EU-Libya relations, the situation for migrants in Libya has certainly not improved.

…the EU Next in Line

Even if most agreements are made between Libya and individual EU member states, such as Italy, Malta or France, the EU is not a mere bystander: While the European Commission is negotiating a re-admission agreement with Libya it is – like Italy – accepting to put refugees at a significant risk of detention and refoulement. Within its current National Indicative Programme (NIP), migration and border control remain top priorities of the EU's cooperation with Libya. In 2005, the European Commission had already criticized detention conditions in Libya and noted the absence of a functioning asylum system. Despite this criticism, the Commission recommended cooperation with the Gaddafi regime in order to change its refugee policy. This cooperation was supposed to be conditioned on the full respect for human rights, the principle of non-refoulement and the recognition of UNHCR. This conditionality, however, turned out to be a mere fig-leaf: In July 2010, Human Rights Watch highlighted the plight of 245 Eritrean refugees who were detained in the Italian-financed detention center in Misrata. Not only were these refugees severely abused, they were also facing deportation – a clear violation of the aforementioned principle of non-refoulement. In addition, there have been little improvements in terms of UNHCR's recognition. Its role in providing protection in the country continues to be severely obstructed, even after its offices were re-opened after they were forced to close

in 2010. While the EU is very keen on catching-up with Libyan cooperation agreements, it must realize that Gaddafi's Jamahiriya might be much less receptive for European influence than other countries in the region and that European standards are being compromised, instead of improving the human rights situation on the ground.

Despite the absence of a formal Framework Agreement, the European Border Agency, Frontex, is pushing for expanding bilateral Italian-Libyan agreements to a European level. A recurrent tendency of the EU's and Frontex's policy has been the securitization of migration and the outsourcing of border controls, also referred to as "managing migration flows." This must be understood as a euphemism for keeping migrants out of Europe. This strategy is clearly not in line with the UN supported "global approach" to migration, that emphasizes the need to link migration and development, in addition to building a strong cooperation between countries of origin and destination. The real aim of "border controls" is to intercept

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migrants and to return them to Libya without prior assessment of their protection needs, depriving asylum-seekers of their right to access European asylum determination procedures.[6] Without proper democratic supervision, the danger of exporting border control regimes to Libya without setting European standards for human rights and refugee protection is very high: In September 2010, Libyan coast guards fired life ammunition at suspected boat migrants in order to prevent them from heading to Italy. All this happened under the eyes of the Italian Guardia die Finanza (the police force responsible for smuggling) who

were on board of the Libyan patrol boat, which was one of six vessels provided by Italy in 2009. If the EU is interested in credibly promoting freedom and democracy, it needs to adhere to its responsibilities that it agreed to when signing international refugee and human rights conventions. These obligations do not stop at the EU's borders. These responsibilities cannot be exported.

Time for a Re-assessment of European Migration Policy

The recent refugee crisis emerging from Libya and hundreds of asylum seekers drowning off the Italian coast has highlighted the lack of a common and holistic approach toward migration that goes beyond erecting fences and increasing border patrols. With state institutions collapsing in Libya, Europe has to be prepared for more refugees arriving at its Mediterranean shores.

Hence, it is time for the EU to re-asses its migration policies. As an immediate measure, the EU must keep escape routes for refugees fleeing violence in Libya open. The EU has a legitimate right to secure its borders, but it should not prevent refugees from seeking asylum in Europe. Secondly, it should resettle stranded refugees and asylum seekers who are unable to return home. In addition, the EU should suspend its treaties with Libya and revise its migration and re-admission agreements with other North African states. These agreements have to be subject to tangible improvements in human rights conditions and human rights monitoring. It is also time to re-discuss the Dublin regulations, to halt deportations of migrants back the country where the asylum seeker first entered the EU, without considering the border state's protection capacity. Finally, and as a sign of solidarity among member states, the EU should make use of its Temporary Protection Directive designed to harmonize temporary protection for displaced people in times of a "mass influx."

In the 1980s and 1990s, countless East Germans were desperate to leave their homes

for a better future in the West. Some were politically persecuted, or suffered because of their religious beliefs, while others could not obtain life-saving medication without the right political connections. Many were simply looking

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for a better life. They set out in tiny dinghies to cross the Baltic Sea for Sweden and Denmark, were hiding in trucks to be smuggled into West Germany, or risked their lives trying to escape in air balloons. Each of these crossings was dangerous and many did not survive. Those who made it across the border were celebrated as heroes. One cannot help but wonder why Africans, trying to escape with similar desperation, are seen as a "security threat," "flooding Europe" in "biblical dimensions." Within the first few days of April 2011 alone, nearly 500 Eritrean, Somali and other migrants drowned, trying to reach European shores. What sort of threat analysis is a migration policy based on that regards humanitarian disasters as an acceptable risk?

Endnotes

[1] Andrijasevic, Rutvica (2006), *How to Balance Rights and Responsibilities on Asylum at the EU's Southern Border of Italy and Libya*, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, Working Paper No. 27, University of Oxford.

[2] See Sara Hamood (2008), EU–Libya Cooperation on Migration: A Raw Deal for Refugees and Migrants? *Journal of Refugee Studies 21(1): 19-42* first published online January 23, 2008 doi:10.1093/jrs/fem040

[3] The principle of non-refoulement in international law forbids the expulsion of a refugee into an area where the person might be subjected to persecution.

[4] Klepp, Silja (2010), *Italy And Its Libyan Cooperation Program: Pioneer of the European Union's Refugee Policy?* In: Jean-Pierre Cassarino (Hg.), Unbalanced Reciprocities: Cooperation on Readmission in the Euro-Mediterranean Area. Washington D.C.: Middle East Institute.

[5] Human Rights Watch, *European Union: Managing Migration Means Potential EU Complicity in Neighboring States' Abuse of Migrants and Refugees*, 17 October 2006

[6] Klepp (2010)

Goodbye Free Libya?
A Report from Benghazi

To the average American, Libya looks another Iraq: another American adventure against a totalitarian Muslim state with lots of oil and sand. The topography is similar, too. The land is flat and parched, and the architecture dun and unloved. Even the terminology sounds the same, as no-fly zones mission creep rapidly into regime-change.

U.S. war-mongering under Obama has seemed far smarter. Even though, of all the belligerent parties, its action has been the most

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punishing, (it fired 100 Tomahawk missiles), and its demands the most uncompromising, (Susan Rice, America's representative at the US, added the clause in UN Security Council Resolution 1973 sanctioning "all necessary measures"), the U.S. has hidden its bombing behind a bushel, and let others claim the credit. France launched the first bombs, and within days of the start of the campaign, the U.S. quickly ceded responsibility for the action to NATO, declaring that Libya was primarily an Arab and European responsibility, since Europe consumed most of Libya's oil. Above all, rather than force a new order from the outside, as the Bush administration did in Iraq, Libyans were

seen acting within, and America as merely responding to their clamor for help. American demands for regime change in Libya have been no less emphatic than their previous ones in Iraq. But while Bush brashly led from the front, Obama leads from the back.

Certainly, the coalition has provided Libya's rebel movement significant support. It has beaten back Colonel Gaddafi's assaults on rebel towns and sent material support. Britain has provided the rebel's representative body, the National Council, with a secure communications network, and Qatar an Ericsson satellite so the Libyans in the rebel-held East will at last be able to receive international calls and reconnect to the Internet. Thanks also to Qatar, the rebels now have their own satellite station based in Qatar; and not content with al-Jazeera's near saturation on television, you can now tune in on FM radio in Benghazi as well. Qatar, UAE and Italy have all offered to sell Libyan oil from the rebel-held fields to keep the East solvent, and Britain and the U.S. are both considering the release to the rebels of some of Libyan funds they froze. And thanks to Qatar's supply of petrol, you can still fill a tank for US$4 – cars park with their engines running.

Dealing with Institutional Chaos

The largesse has partially helped the rebels fill the vacuum left by the departure of Colonel Gaddafi's managed chaos. Politically, the National Council acts as a sort of loose legislature, and the Crisis Management Committee as its executive body. A few courts have begun functioning, primarily for divorce hearings, with the same judges applying the same laws. The police, too, are venturing back

Nicolas Pelham

Nicolas Pelham is *The Economist*'s correspondent in Jerusalem, a writer on the Arab world for the *New York Review of Books*, and a former senior analyst for International Crisis Group, reporting on Iraq, Lebanon and Israel/Palestine. He is the author of "A New Muslim Order" (2008), which maps Shia resurgence in the Arab world, and co-author of "A History of the Middle East" (2004).

to the streets, and though many are identified with the colonel's crimes, their strictures are largely obeyed. The night-time percussion of machine guns has subsided, after the National

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Council erected billboards banning celebratory fire. Conforming with public notices on the roads, colleagues restrict friends who open fire. Banks have opened their doors, albeit with long queues, since bureaucracy and limits on withdrawals are intended to prevent a run on the bank. And despite the no-flight zone, Benghazi's airport is now receiving international flights – almost a rarity under Gaddafi, whose animus against the East meant that international flights were routed through Tripoli ten hours away.

We Want Guns, Not Food

Largely because the past was so bad, the popular consent for and participation in the new order can seem overwhelming. At twilight, scores of volunteers for the front clamber aboard pickups assembled outside the 7 April barracks, named with Gaddafi's macabre sense of humor after the day in 1977 when he publicly strung treacherous students from gallows erected in Tripoli's and Benghazi's universities. The less intrepid make do with carting cauldrons of food to the front. Naji Quwaida has offered his tugboat, the Shahhat, to ferry ammunition and penicillin the 240 nautical miles across the Gulf of Sitra between Benghazi and Misrata, the last rebel-held city in western Libya. Facing a deficit of launchers for a profusion of Grads looted from the Colonel's abandoned arsenals, car-mechanics have begun manufacturing their own.

But their internal and external support notwithstanding, the challenge facing the rebels is immense. The solitary nails and faded patches on the walls of empty government offices testify to the National Council's limited success in establishing a new authority. More worryingly, a gap is emerging between the youth who led the uprising, and the elite who appointed themselves leaders and claim to speak in their name. For the most part, the ranks of the latter appear drawn from the scions of old Ottoman grandees and the crony capitalists who returned from exile last decade tempted by promises of economic liberalization made by Saif al-Islam, Gaddafi's fourth-eldest son.

With international recognition and sanction to sell oil giving the rebel authority weight, positions on the National Council have become something worth fighting for. While Libya's oil fields burn, appointees inside the country squabble over who among them should be chief fireman. Easterners have a sense of their extra entitlement, given their victimization under Gaddafi and their heroic escape from it. Suspicion of Tripolitanians and more recent returnees abounds, as if they were upstarts and freeloaders seeking a share of the cake. There's a knee-jerk reaction against anything that smacks of government by family-business. Outside the courthouse, which the National Council has made its principal seat, disgruntled students circulate a family tree mapping the multiple posts to which the Bugaighis and Gheriani families have appointed themselves. "They exercise power and control without transparency," says a disappointed Tripolitanian recently arrived from decades of exile in Europe. "Each brings his relations because they are the only ones they trust. It's beginning to feel like Gaddafi all over again."

They are backtracking, too, on their democratic promises. Initially, the National Council pledged that anyone working for its institutions would be barred from running for election. Spokesmen subsequently rowed back to say the ban applied only to the National Council's 30 members, not the Crisis Management Committee, including its current

head Mahmoud Jibreel, a former Saif al-Islam acolyte. Election date has been pushed back, pending Tripoli's capture. "If there is no final liberation, then the management committee will remain in charge," says Essam Gheriani, who sits on one of the new committees.

Meanwhile, the obstacles are mounting. Some of Benghazi's 3,000 revolutionary committee members, who hitherto served as the Colonel's local facade, create havoc. A thousand are reportedly behind bars in the 7 April barracks, but others rampage through public institutions thwarting the national council's efforts to fill the vacuum. In a former revolutionary committee building turned police operations room, Mohammed al-Mdeghari mans a hotline, answering frantic calls detailing attacks. They quickly exhaust his patience. "It's not a real emergency," he says, replacing the receiver on a housewife claiming arsonists were inside a school. "And besides, we have no forces available." After a caller reported a case full of grenades had been abandoned in a public square, he had to beg the assistance of the Special Guard.

The health service is similarly malfunctioning under the weight of years of neglect, the flight of nurses, who were mostly foreign, and mounting casualties from the front. It will take years to recover. In Gadaffi's Libya, doctors won their sinecures more for displays of loyalty than professionalism. Parents recount horror stories of children hospitalized with asthma attacks, only to inflate like balloons after injections.

Compounding the internal disarray is the bedraggled state of eastern defenses. The few thousand professional soldiers who did not flee with Colonel Gaddafi are as over-stretched as the police. No sooner had the National Council established a new National Oil Corporation, empowered to sell oil from rebel-held fields, then its new head, Wahid Bugaighis, shut down production following raids by the colonel's men. "We have shut down operations until military forces are deployed to protect the fields," he said. Army liaison officers estimated 50 men were required to defend each of the east's

14 major fields, most of which lie deep in the desert, but there is no manpower to spare. "We're afraid to go back to the oil fields without protection," says Mustafa Mohammed, an engineer who fled the raid on Misleh. "We don't have an army, and we have no assistance from NATO." Anti-aircraft batteries dotted across the

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east in preparation for the Colonel's advance are also unmanned.

Microbuses haul volunteers to Benina's airbase for onward passage to the front bereft of boots and uniforms, let alone guns. In the distance a decrepit Soviet helicopter struggles to lift off (despite the no-fly zone) before resigning itself to the ground. (When it finally succeeded, Gaddafi's forces claim they shot it down). "The Gaddafis said we were heading to a civil war which would divide Libya, leaving us a third," says Colonel Ahmed Bani, a rebel military spokesman, as if describing an optimistic scenario. "But our situation is so bad. We have no weapons to equal Gaddafi's brigades."

Easterners have gone too far to go back. Libyans fleeing the east recount horror stories from the mountainous rebel redoubts near the Tunisia border, detailing what happens when the Colonel strikes back. Water tanks have been shelled and wells poisoned with petrol. In Misrata, the only western city still under rebel control, loyalist forces are reported to have blocked sewage pipes, sending waste water spewing into people's homes. Wherever Colonel Gaddafi's forces have prowled, scores have reportedly disappeared, and husbands forced to watch while wives are raped.

But with the rebels increasingly dependent on external support for their survival, the uprising has become less Libyan and home-grown. And with machinations on the global

stage beyond their control, easterners have fallen victim to ever wilder changes in mood.

Sometimes they are exuberant. Outside the courthouse where the rebels have their headquarters, marquees have sprouted like a medieval fair, testifying to the plethora of new guilds and protest groups that have sprung up. Libyan Airline pilots have a tent of their own, inscribed with a placard thanking the UN for the no-fly zone. Women march, chanting: "It's our revolution, not al-Qaeda's" and "We're Muslims, not terrorists." Amateur poets recite samizdat literature, often allegories stored in their heads, where they hoped the Colonel would not gain access. Jamal al-Barbour, a 29-year-old air-steward, performs his collection entitled Mr. Wolf, dressed in shades and a black-and-white kifaya, as if still in hiding. "Who's sleeping with his wife without my permission?" he recites. In a corner, youths play cards daubed with the names of Gaddafi's henchmen: Saif al-Islam, the financial liberalizer, is ace of diamonds; Saadi, who overturned his father's ban on football and runs his own team, is the ace of clubs. Gaddafi, of course, is the joker.

But when reports of the Colonel's advance ripple back to Benghazi, the mood rapidly sours. In the search for scapegoats, foreigners take the blame. Those that oppose NATO action bear the brunt: Rebels captured a Chinese tanker which arrived to collect oil, and vowed to cancel the Colonel's copious Chinese contracts. On 4 April, gun-toting anarchic youths still off school chased a Turkish ship away, before it could off-load its cargo of medicine and ambulances. "We want guns, not food," they chanted, denouncing Prime Minister Racep Tayib Erdogan for sending baubles while protecting Gaddafi inside NATO. Crowds pelted the first heads of state to visit the rebel government with abuse, and there were no red carpets. Desperate for all the friends it can get, the National Council looked on powerless. "In Tripoli, the people speak in the name of the government; in Benghazi, the government speaks in the name of the people," apologized Gheriani, before rushing off to the

Turkish Consulate to keep the rabble from torching it. "Don't harm the consul," pleaded a colleague.

Who to Blame?

Weaker foreigners are also targeted. Libyans, abused by the Colonel for four decades, have turned on sub-Saharan African workers, whom Gaddafi treated as loyal dhimmis. The human detritus from past xenophobic bouts litters Egypt's border crossing at Salloum, now a dumping ground for those Libyans cast out. Sodden bundles shiver in the midnight rain as I drive by in a heated Mercedes microbus. Egypt's immigration hall has turned into a dormitory, carpeted with sleeping bodies, many there for over a month. Beneath arc lights, the floor quivers with restless babes and worried mothers, representatives of states whose governments – from Niger, Mali, Chad and Bangladesh – have neither time nor means for their discards. In a corner an Egyptian government clinic offers treatments for bronchitis and infectious diseases. As they run out of foreign targets, Libyans have begun blaming each other as well. Arguments over money are more common; and the volunteer spirit seems strained. The National Council covers hotel bills of favorites, while leaving others to battle proprietors alone. As nerves fray, a squabble in the market degenerates into brawls.

Which Way Will the Battle Go?

Which way will the battle go? Three times after NATO bombardments on Gaddafi's forces, the rebels have rushed west towards Sirte, Gaddafi's home-town, only to be repeatedly repulsed. In the tug-of-war across the Sitra Gulf, the frontlines have sometimes shifted 200-kilometres a day. More recently, they have lines have stabilized around Ajdabiya, the gateway to the rebel-held east.

NATO, for the most part, has acted as heavenly arbiter, preventing either side from delivering a decisive blow. Both sides appear to be largely reliant on equipment four-

decades-old. Despite rebel claims of fresh supplies reaching Tripoli from Algeria, the most sophisticated ordinance a UN-affiliated team found in the desert was a spigot – a Russian-made wire-guided missile some two decades old. Of late, Human Rights Watch has claimed Gaddafi's forces have also used more modern cluster bombs in Misrata.

But since the U.S. ceded responsibility for operations to NATO in late March, the intensity of the attacks has declined. "It's obvious that NATO commanders have a different

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interpretation of UNSC to that of the U.S. when it was leading the bombing. They take protecting civilians literally, and do nothing to protect the rebels," complains a fighter. With regime-change the declared goal, a diplomat still in Benghazi acknowledges that, "airstrikes [are] not enough." Compounding NATO's indecision are the fractures that dog the alliance between the most gung-ho, such as France, and the most force-resistant, Turkey and Germany.

Moreover, despite the posturing of its commanders, the rebels have struggled to inject discipline, military initiative or tactical planning into their warfare. A western security expert in Benghazi describes how during World War II, small British units fighting on the same terrain used amphibious lands and small desert raids to attack German supply routes traversing the narrow strip between the salt marshes and the sea on the Sirte to Brega road. A sense of rebel command often seems absent. One commander, Khalifa Haftar, spends much of his day holed up at lodgings in Benghazi's oil company, which offers free dinners. His rival, General Abdel Fatah Younis, a loyal interior minister until he defected following the uprising, spends time with the media – a hazardous business, given that bereft of his planes,

Gaddafi depends on live satellite coverage to divine rebel positions. Shepherding an Al-Jazeera crew to the front last week, General Younis' car was hit by a mortar, injuring one of his guards.

Amid increasingly setbacks, rebel commanders have looked for outsiders to blame. In a press conference, General Younis accused NATO of hampering, rather than facilitating, the rebel effort. NATO, he said, had ignored the coordinates rebels had sent of Gaddafi's attacks of civilians, denied the rebels, few fighter jets permission to fly to defend the oil fields, and boarded a fishing boat taking arms and medicines to Misrata. "If NATO does not act, I'll ask the government to request the UN Security Council hand the mandate to someone else. They are allowing Gaddafi to kill our people," he said. In mid-tirade, a protester claimed that the general had raped and pillaged his family, which spoiled the dramatic effect. He was dragged away and silenced by the ex-interior minister's guards, whose methods did little to reassure observers that the new Libya had entirely dispensed with the old.

Devoid of leadership, rebels look to the skies – either for NATO or God – for guidance, not the ground. Volunteers scarper when the first mortar lands, depriving the remnant army's efforts on the front-line of their rear defense. "When they retreat, we retreat," says a son of one of the colonel's economy ministers, who joined the soldiers at the front.

In contrast to the rebels' muddled rush, Gaddafi's forces have looked far more disciplined and innovative, mustering coordinated operations by land and sea and even air. On April 7, patrol boats arriving from Ras Lanuf opened fire on rebel positions from the sea while infantry units shot from the south. (In the chaos, Gaddafi's forces had a helping hand from NATO, which mistakenly destroyed the rebel's token tank force.) Gaddafi's forces, too, have adapted quickly to coalition bombing of their ranks, ditching tanks and motorized armor for pick-up trucks used by rebels. They have also swapped uniforms for civilian

clothes, making it hard to distinguish between fleeing rebels and those chasing after them. As successfully, they have adopted the mobile desert infantry tactics of Britain's desert rats during the Second World War, on occasion slipping among rebel lines waving rebel flags and opening fire. His forces have further fought

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to deny the rebels the comparative advantage of marketing their oil production. The Gulf of Sitra's oil installation, and particularly its jetties, have been badly damaged in the fighting, and light infantry units have conducted raids deep into the desert targeting at least four oil installations. Dodging NATO bombers by hiding their weapons and supplies in civilian container trucks, they have reached Misleh, one of Libya's highest quality fields and one of the few that had been operating, near the Egyptian border. "Only vultures control the desert," says a Council spokesman.

Over time, as the momentum of NATO drags and the Colonel digs in his position and draws up fresh supplies around Adjabiya, his ability to threaten the east will likely increase. An expeditionary force might take advantage of the coming sandstorm season to escape NATO's detection and move on rebel population centers. The use of sandstorms, after all, was a favored tactic of the Zaghawa tribe which aided by Gaddafi, brought Chadian President Idriss Deby to power, and who may now be repaying the favor.

Easterners who had only just begun reconciling themselves to a temporary separation and shoring up defensive lines are already trembling at the prospect of the Colonel's return. Such a scenario would spell disaster not only for them, but for opposition groups across the region seeking to spring-clean their autocratic regimes. Generals elsewhere might adopt the Colonel's model, and the authorities ruling Libya's neighbors, Tunisia and Egypt, whose peoples have swept their leaders but not yet their regimes from power, might yet take heart to stage a military comeback. Libyan revolutionaries, like Arabs, generally like to compare their uprising to that of Eastern Europe following the collapse of the iron curtain. A more frightening scenario is that Libya's Arab Spring resembles more that of Prague in 1968, before the Soviets returned in their tanks.

The Securitization of Political Rule:
Security Domination of Arab Regimes and the Prospects for Democratization

Among the more interesting features of the current wave of uprisings and protests sweeping the Arab world is the general absence of the armed forces from regime efforts to defeat popular challenges to autocratic rule. Even in Libya, where the

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revolt has taken an unambiguously military character and the Qaddafi regime is additionally confronted with foreign intervention, the regular army has not emerged as a prominent actor.

Where senior officers have played a significant role, such as in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen, they have acted to remove, rather than preserve, the rulers who appointed them. Not because they have come to reject the politics and interests of existing leaders, but – in a classic act of regime preservation – rather in spite of sharing the same worldview and remaining part and parcel of extensive patronage networks established over many decades.

There is no single or simple explanation for this reality. To the extent we can generalize about a collection of disparate entities, however, it has much to do with the development trajectory shared by many Arab states since achieving independence in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Military Coups d'État

From the 1950s until the 1970s, actual or attempted regime change was a fairly common phenomenon throughout much of the Arab world – certainly if compared with the decades since. In sharp contrast to the mass movements of 2011, the primary agents tended to be armed revolutionaries leading national liberation movements and military officers seizing power through coups d'état. Over time, this created a reality where military establishments were either in effective control of the state, or gained enormous power and influence on account of their role in combating foreign adversaries and domestic insurgents. In the context of the Cold War, furthermore, both the United States and Soviet Union sought to bolster the militaries – and favored officers – in their respective client states, which further contributed to their enhanced role in governance and decision-making.

Thus, when monarchs were overthrown in Egypt, Iraq, Yemen and Libya they were invariably replaced by military rulers. It is equally telling that the Ba'ath Party's assumption of power in Syria in 1963 was consummated by its Military Committee rather than the civilian wing, and produced a succession of military strongmen. The Ba'ath's ascension in Iraq – first in 1963 and then again in 1968 – was similarly led by a general, Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr.

As the dust of the post-independence transformations began to settle, the role of the military underwent significant changes. By the end of the 1970s, virtually every Arab state was either ruled by an officer, or a monarch weighed down by medals who had survived

Mouin Rabbani

Mouin Rabbani is an independent Middle East analyst and specialist in Palestinian affairs and the Arab-Israeli conflict currently based in Amman, Jordan. From 2002-2008 he was Senior Middle East Analyst and Special Advisor on Palestine with the International Crisis Group. He was previously Palestine Director of the Palestinian American Research Institute. He is a Contributing Editor of *Middle East Report* and Senior Fellow with the Institute for Palestine Studies.

a succession of coup attempts and/or armed rebellions. Acutely aware – often on account of personal experience – that a military career provides excellent positioning for political leadership, rulers engaged in determined and largely successful efforts to neutralize their armed forces, particularly the officer corps and elites among them, such as the air force. Thus political activity by parties within the military

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was banned, officers were prohibited from maintaining (unauthorized) party affiliations, and the senior ranks were filled by trusted associates, rather than proven professionals.

Simultaneously, Arab regimes became increasingly autocratic and narrowly based, with political hegemony in many cases exercised to an ever greater degree on a tribal, familial, sectarian and/or geographic basis. While it would be overly simplistic to characterize Syria under the Asads as an Alawite regime or Saddam's Iraq as a Tikriti one, in both cases the Ba'ath Party was reduced to little more than an ornamental patronage network, shorn of a meaningful role in political life.

For such rulers, conscript armies that reflected the demographic realities of society, rather than that of ruling elites, were as much a threat as an instrument of unfettered control, and considered particularly unreliable when it came to confronting widespread domestic opposition. In this sense, these regimes were fundamentally different than either the archetypical Latin American military junta, or the one-part states of the Soviet bloc. For Arab autocrats, furthermore, the drive for unchallenged authority became particularly acute as they entered into their twilight years

and began preparing succession plans that made an absolute mockery of any constitutional or informal restraints – including death – on their powers.

National Security, Regime Security

Although population control had always been a priority for Arab regimes, the above developments – as well as growing socio-economic hardship and disparities resulting from the introduction of neo-liberal policies – served to consistently reduce tolerance levels for dissent and opposition. National security became indistinguishable from regime security, particularly with the end of the Cold War and beginnings of Arab-Israeli normalization. The establishment of praetorian guards recruited from primary regime constituencies, and of intelligence and police forces with widespread powers, was of course nothing new, but reached levels that were entirely unprecedented even in comparison with previous standards.

Indeed, during the past several decades, it was above all the intelligence agencies (*mukhabarat*) that became the arbiters of political life, in turn enforced by special police units, such as the recently disbanded State Security Division in Tunisia and Egypt's State Security Investigation Service. In effect, there has been a perceptible shift in power from the Ministry of Defense to the Interior Ministry.

Military establishments, to be sure, retain significant – particularly economic – influence and remain at the nexus of state patronage networks. But their role in governance and decision-making has clearly declined in relation to that of the domestic security apparatus. If in 1970 it was the Defense Minister and Chief of Staff who tended to be the most familiar figures, by 2010 their visibility and public presence had largely been appropriated by the Minister of Interior and head of intelligence.

The influence of the traditional high command has additionally suffered a relative decline within the armed forces, this time at the hands of various national, presidential, republican and royal guards. Such formations

typically comprise cohesive units recruited from the leader's core constituency, are often commanded by his sons or other close relatives,

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and enjoy massive advantages in terms of resources, equipment, training and privileges. It is these units that often form the only serious fighting forces in various Arab states.

The primary beneficiaries of these shifts have been the domestic security establishments and multiple agencies they have spawned. As their manpower and resources have mushroomed to unprecedented levels, they have come to pervade virtually every aspect of national, civic and, in many cases, even personal life. They have also had a deeply corrupting impact on society as a whole.

On the one hand, they operate entirely outside the law, with a free hand to do whatever they please, whenever, however and to whomever they choose, and do so without even a semblance – or pretense – of transparency or accountability. With maintaining law and order their ostensible *raison d'être*, domestic security agencies derive their power precisely on account of their license for lawlessness.

The Police State: Security Agencies as Political Actors

While justifiably notorious for torture, disappearances and the violation of virtually every right that has ever been codified, the activities of security agencies are hardly limited to rounding up dissidents and rolling up opposition networks. With loyalty and obedience, rather than professionalism and integrity, as their criteria, they also vet judges and generals, appoint editors and university deans, fix

elections and determine legislation, control the media in all but name, regulate political parties and unions and non-governmental associations, and even compose Friday sermons. If in some states they exercise heavy-handed and visible influence over seemingly trivial aspects of public life, in others they are comparatively unobtrusive but no less in control, functioning just as powerfully as the ultimate arbiters of the permissible and the forbidden. In practice, the *mukhabarat* is also the chief justice, speaker of parliament, prime minister, mayor, university president, editor-in-chief and even chief cleric. At the end of the day, none of the latter are able to contradict the domestic security establishment's recommendations and remain in function, while even seasoned autocrats neglect the considered opinions of their security chiefs at their own peril. It is seemingly in the very nature of the national security state that nation, state and citizens become the playthings of the security establishment – its functions not unlike that of the electorate in democratic entities.

Domestic security agencies also exercise a deeply corrupting influence at a more fundamental level. Rather than limiting their activities to monitoring, infiltrating and neutralizing real or perceived threats to their definition of security, they – as a matter of policy – seek to recruit every living being within their realm, the primary purpose being domestication, rather than operational support. In a region where certificates of good conduct and security clearances are typically required for even the most innocuous bureaucratic procedures – such as obtaining a passport or business license, joining the civil service or entering university – the opportunities for recruitment are pervasive and exploited to the maximum. Producing more (generally genuinely worthless) information on colleagues, friends, family and strangers than could be processed by a bank of supercomputers, the practice serves to inform the public that it is being constantly monitored – and informed upon – at close quarters. So far as the *mukhabarat* is

concerned, only a citizenry that fears betrayal at the hands of the closest of relatives, friends and colleagues is sufficiently trustworthy.

Thus the Arab national security state in the Arab world is – quite literally – a police state. Even where elected parliaments and other manifestations of democratic practice exist, these remain subordinate to the writ of the security establishment. Rather than operating under government or parliamentary oversight, it is such agencies that exercise oversight over the executive, legislative and judicial authorities. Accountability is provided to, not by, the *mukhabarat*.

Reconfiguring Arab Security Regimes: Foreign and Domestic Priorities

As with so many other features of the contemporary Arab state, the rise of the domestic security establishment reflects foreign as much as indigenous priorities. Indeed, the West has as a rule preferred Arab states with robust internal security forces to those with strong militaries – and acted accordingly. With "renditions" just one case in point, its closest and most symbiotic relationships are typically with the *mukhabarat*; if in the 20th century air force generals were the men to cultivate, in the

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21st it is the Omar Suleimans and Muhammad Dahlans of the region who are the favored partners, interlocutors and political successors. Ian Henderson, better known as the Butcher of Bahrain, is in this broader context no more than a particularly pernicious and visible case study.

The reconfiguration of Arab security regimes in recent decades has ironically also emerged as a point of weakness in recent events. While intelligence agencies can be very adept at

bludgeon and blackmail, and play a key role in neutralizing cells and even networks, they are simply not equipped to defeat mass rebellion. In Tunisia and later Egypt, they were basically overwhelmed by a sea of humanity and lacked the resources to turn the entire country into a prison. In both cases, furthermore, the regular army – rightfully concerned that its institutional coherence could not survive the required bloodbath should it come to the aid of the beleaguered ruler – refused to deploy.

Although more difficult to demonstrate, the inflexibility of domestic security agencies and their extreme aversion to reform of any kind also helped set their subjects on a more revolutionary path. Domestic rebellions have a way of strengthening the role of security forces in decision-making, and (at least initially) of bolstering the authority of their most hard-line elements. To Ben Ali and Mubarak's misfortunes, Tunisia and Egypt appear to have been no exception in this regard.

New Civil-Military Relations or Military Domincance?

The military's pivotal role in enabling the transition, (and in Egypt of controlling it), while motivated by regime preservation rather than transformation, may nevertheless inaugurate a new era of military dominance. At the very least, the combination of military influence and popular agitation has dealt the domestic security establishment a massive body blow from which it is unlikely to recover any time soon.

Similarly, in Yemen and Libya, the role of defending the right of perennial leaders to serve until eternity fell to elite units, while the regular military was plagued with mass defections. But like all patterns, it would be simplistic to see it as a rule or law of nature that will necessarily be replicated throughout the Arab world.

Arguably, deposing dictators is the easy part. The months and years ahead will see perhaps even more monumental struggles to ensure that one autocrat is not replaced with another. In this equation, the litmus test is not going to be free and fair elections,

because these can be held under any variety of constitutional arrangements. Instead, it will be in the realm of the security sector that the

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future of the region and its individual states will be decided. Key questions are whether forces such as the Egyptian *mabahith* (State Security Investigation Service) are not only disbanded, but also not resurrected in a new guise; whether domestic security doctrines are revised to emphasize national security rather than regime maintenance; and whether the relevant agencies are transformed into genuinely accountable organs on the basis of parliamentary and judicial oversight.

The most important battle is, however, likely to involve civil-military relations. Will the armed forces be able to instrumentalize their new-found power and prestige to once again take control of the ship of state, or will they successfully be transformed into instruments controlled by and answerable to democratically chosen or otherwise representative leaderships? While it is far too early to intelligently speculate on this matter, the Egyptian case – of indisputable strategic significance for the entire region – suggests that those who overthrew Mubarak are keenly aware of what is at stake and determined to press their case. Only if they succeed will the slogan, "The People and the Army are One," make the transition from ambition to reality.