

Revolution and Political Transformation in the Middle East



Government Action and Response

Volume II

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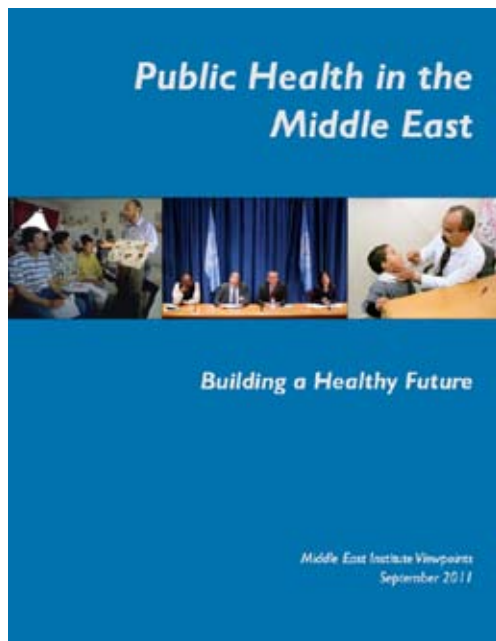
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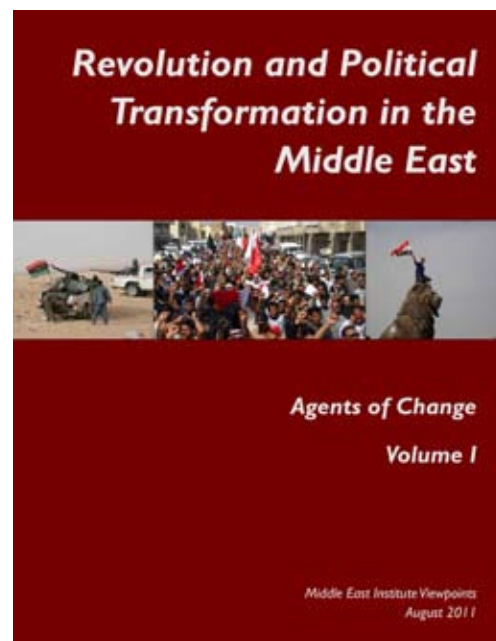
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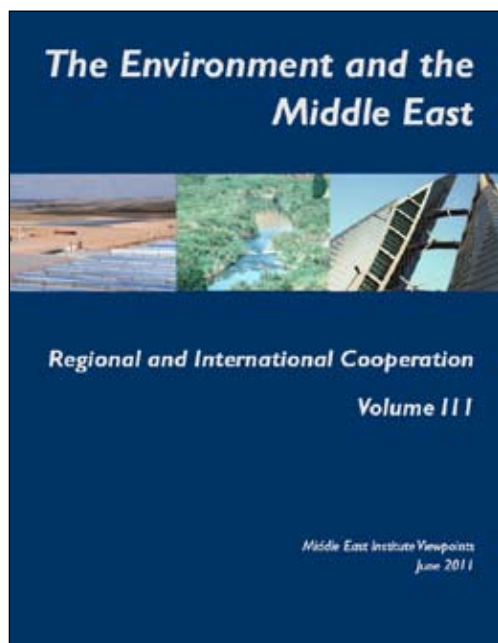
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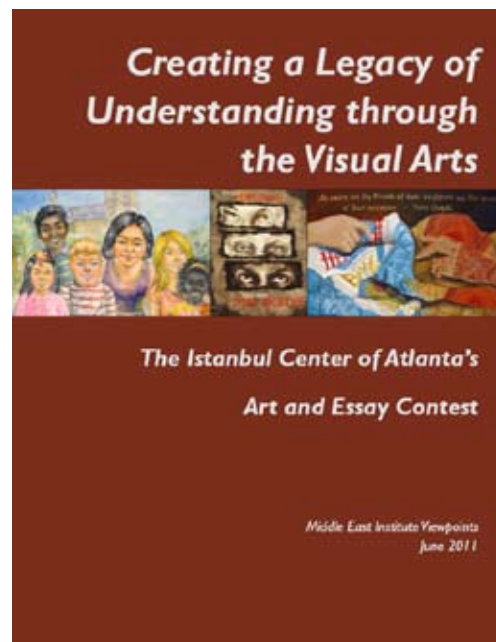
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On August 21, 2011, rebel forces in Libya rolled into the capital Tripoli, seemingly finishing off months of armed combat and foreign intervention and bringing down yet another Arab head of state. At the same time, sporadic but violent repression of protests in Syria continues, while other states remain calm or have seen their protest movements fizzle. We open this second volume of our series, *Revolution and Political Transformation*, at a time of uncertainty and transition for the region.

The events of the “Arab Spring” demonstrate more clearly than anything else the heterogeneous nature of states in the Middle East. Monarchies, republics, and *jamahiriyya* alike have all faced popular protest to one degree or another, yet some have stood and some have crumbled. While the first volume of this compilation of essays examined *Agents of Change*, those people and movements who pushed these revolutions forward, the essays in this volume seek to answer the question of why they succeed or fail by examining regime responses. Why does nonviolence accomplish in Egypt and Tunisia what required armed insurrection to accomplish in Libya, and why does nonviolence fail in Syria and Bahrain? What role does the US play in the success or failure of popular protest? By examining the “re-action” to the “action” of popular mobilization, we hope to provide a more complete picture for future analysis.

This volume comes little more than half a year since the fall of President Husni Mubarak in Egypt, and the ink has not yet dried on the pages being written about the other countries in the region. We intend these pieces to provide an outlet for commentaries, hypotheses, and analysis, but not to serve as the final word. The third and final volume in this series to be released this fall will seek to summarize our contributors’ thoughts on the way forward.

The United States and the Arab Pro-Democracy Insurrections

Stephen Zunes

US diplomatic history is replete with examples of strategic analysts, State Department officers, and other Washington officials engaging in detailed policy planning dealing with almost any conceivable contingency — except for ordinary people mobilizing to create change. This certainly appears to have been the case regarding the pro-democracy insurrections in the Middle East over the past several months, which have caught Washington completely off-guard. Furthermore, the US response to these popular uprisings has largely not endeared many in these largely youthful movements — who will likely eventually find themselves in positions of power — to the United States.

During the first weeks of the Tunisian protests, for example, rather than praise the largely nonviolent pro-democracy movement and condemn the country's repressive regime, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton instead expressed her concern over the impact of the "unrest and instability" on the "very positive aspects of our relationship with Tunisia," insisting that the US was "not taking sides" and that she would "wait and see" before even communicating directly with Tunisian dictator Zine El-Abidine Ben 'Ali or his ministers.¹

Similarly, during the first week of the Egyptian revolution, Clinton insisted that the country was stable and that the government of President Hosni Mubarak was "looking for ways to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people,"² despite the miserable failure of the regime in its nearly 30 years in power to do so. Asked whether the United States still supported Mubarak, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said that Egypt remained a "close and important ally."³ As during the Tunisian protests, the Obama Administration tried to equate the scattered violence of some pro-democracy protesters with the far greater violence of the dictatorship's security forces, with Gibbs saying "We continue to believe first and foremost that all of the parties should refrain from violence."

Even when Clinton finally issued a statement urging "Egyptian authorities not to prevent peaceful protests or block communications including on social media sites,"⁴ the Administration simply called for the regime to reform from within rather than supporting pro-democracy protesters' demand that the dictator step down. As Clinton put it, "We believe strongly that the Egyptian government has an important opportunity at this moment in time to implement political, economic and social reforms to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people."⁵

1. Interview with Taher Barake of Al Arabiya — Hillary Rodham Clinton, Dubai, UAE, January 11, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/01/154295.htm>.

2. "US Urges Restraint in Egypt, Says Government is Stable," Reuters, January 25, 2011, <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJOE70O0KF20110125>.

3. "White House Monitoring Egypt Situation Closely," Reuters, January 26, 2011, <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJOE70P0MC20110126>.

4. "As Arabs Protest, U.S. Speaks Up," *The Washington Post*, January 27, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/26/AR2011012608075.html>.

5. "Egypt has Chance to Make Political Reforms: U.S.," Reuters, January 26, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/26/us-egypt-protest-clinton-idUSTRE70O7RC20110126>.

By the fifth day of the Egyptian demonstrations, however, the Obama Administration, apparently not wanting to be on the wrong side of history, started speaking in terms of an eventual transition to democratic rule and telling the regime that large-scale repression of nonviolent protesters — which would presumably be implemented with US-supplied weaponry — would be unacceptable. By the second week, the Obama Administration began speaking in terms of a speedy transition to democracy, though never explicitly calling on Mubarak to step down.

After scrambling to play catch-up during the dramatic events unfolding in the two allied North African countries, President Obama finally made eloquent statements praising the pro-democracy demonstrators in Tunisia and Egypt — right after those countries' dictators fled.

These shifts illustrate that, despite the longstanding sense of fatalism among Arabs that Washington will ultimately impact what happens on the “Arab street,” the Arab street has proven itself capable of impacting what happens in Washington.

As the most militarized region with the most military-backed dictatorships in the world, the Middle East and North Africa has long exemplified the realist paradigm that power rests with whoever runs the government and whoever has the guns. The dramatic events of the past year, however, have permanently challenged that assumption. Indeed, the largely nonviolent revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and the ongoing challenges to autocratic regimes in Yemen and Syria are a reminder that even if a government has a monopoly of military force, and even in cases where a government has the support of the world's one remaining superpower, it is still ultimately powerless if the people refuse to recognize its authority. When faced with general strikes, filling the streets, mass refusal to obey official orders, and other forms of nonviolent resistance, even the most autocratic regime cannot survive.

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Indeed, one of the most significant aspects of the unarmed pro-democracy insurrections in the Arab world is that they are indicative of the fact that — however outside powers may choose to respond — the United States and other foreign governments are less relevant in determining the future of the region than they have been in more than century.

Even in Libya, the final collapse of the Qadhafi regime came not as a result of NATO air power, but rather the civil insurrections in working class districts which made Tripoli ungovernable and collapsed the final pillars of support for the 42-year dictatorship. Rather than a bloody and protracted battle by advancing rebels to conquer the city from loyalist troops as many predicted, the armored columns of the anti-Qadhafi forces entered the Libyan capital essentially unchallenged, limiting the fighting to mop-up operations at Qadhafi's compound and a few other small installations. Indeed, the initial phase of the anti-Qadhafi uprising was also overwhelmingly nonviolent and initially succeeded in liberating

much of the country from regime control prior to the launching of the armed struggle, the subsequent setbacks, and the NATO-backed military campaign that slowly regained the territory that had been first liberated back in February.

Much has been written as to how the uprisings of the “Arab Spring” have discredited the radical Islamist narrative that pro-Western dictatorships could only be toppled by subscribing to their reactionary interpretations of Islam and supporting violence and even terror. Indeed, Salafi extremists and allied groups have never come close to threatening US-backed autocratic regimes and, if anything, have strengthened them by providing a justification for further militarization and repression.

In addition, though, the pro-democracy struggles in the Arab world have also challenged radical ideologues on the other extreme: the neo-conservatives and other supporters of the Iraq War who insisted that only by Western invasion and occupation could Arab dictators be toppled and democracy take hold. Even putting aside how the repressive and corrupt US-backed regime in Baghdad has fallen well short of virtually any reasonable standard of democracy, it is now clear that there are more effective and far less destructive means of bringing down autocratic regimes.

Defenders of US policy toward Egypt during Mubarak’s autocratic rule note that there had been some quiet US government support for dissident groups. Some US Embassy staffers had had sporadic contacts with pro-democracy activists and, through such Congressionally-funded foundations as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), there was limited financial assistance to a number of civil society organizations. This small amount of US “democracy assistance” did not include any support for training in strategic nonviolent action or other kinds of grassroots mobilization that proved decisive in the anti-Mubarak struggle, however, and the key groups that organized the protests refused US funding on principle. In any case, the amount of US funding for NED and related programs in Egypt paled in comparison with the billions of dollars worth of military and economic assistance to the Mubarak regime and the close and regular interaction among US officials and leading Egyptian political and military leaders. In addition, most of this limited “pro-democracy” funding was eliminated altogether in early 2009 following Obama’s inauguration.

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The lack of enthusiasm by the United States towards popular indigenous pro-democracy struggles could not be better illustrated than in the case of Bahrain, which brutally suppressed the overwhelmingly nonviolent challenge to the autocratic monarchy on that island nation earlier this year.

In the aftermath of the nonviolent overthrow of Mubarak, President Obama warned other Middle Eastern leaders that they should “get out ahead of change” by quickly moving toward democracy. Even though the February 15 press con-

ference in which he made this statement took place during some of the worst repression in Bahrain, he chose not to mention the country by name. In the face of Bahraini security forces unleashing violence on peaceful protesters, Obama insisted that “each country is different, each country has its own traditions; America can’t dictate how they run their societies.”⁶ Though he publicly criticized the regime’s mass imprisonment of opposition leaders and its refusal to enter into meaningful negotiations with them a couple months later, this ambivalent statement contrasts with the Obama Administration’s willingness to play such a major role in the NATO intervention in Libya, even though that opposition movement ended up taking up arms and the democratic credentials of some leaders of the rebel movement were highly suspect.

At the height of the protests in Bahrain, US Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, came to Bahrain to meet King Hamad and Crown Prince Salman, who serves as commander-in-chief for the Bahraini armed forces, where the admiral “reaffirmed our strong commitment to our military relationship with the Bahraini defense forces.” And, despite the massacres of the previous week, he thanked the Bahraini leaders “for the very measured way they have been handling the

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popular crisis here.”⁷ Indeed, the February 25 *New York Times* reported how the Obama Administration had “sent out senior diplomats in recent days to offer the monarchs reassurance and advice — even those who lead the most stifling governments.”⁸ Also telling was a speech given in April at the annual meeting of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy in Washington, DC in which Obama’s special Middle East advisor Dennis Ross condemned alleged Iranian support for Bahrain’s pro-democracy movement while saying nothing about the military intervention by US-backed Saudi and Emirati forces in Bahrain to help crush the pro-democracy struggle.

The United States has been only somewhat more open to the pro-democracy forces in Yemen. Between the time when Obama came to office in January 2009 and when aid was suspended earlier this year, US security assistance to the Yemeni regime went up five-fold. Despite diplomatic cables going back as far as 2005⁹ indicating that Yemeni’s autocratic President ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Salih could potentially face a popular pro-democracy uprising, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates acknowledged that Washington had not planned for an era without him. As one former ambassador to Yemen put it in March 2011, “For right now, he’s our guy.”¹⁰

6. “Press Conference by the President,” The White House, February 15, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/15/press-conference-president>

7. “Mullen Reaffirms American-Bahraini Alliance,” American Forces Press Service, February 25, 2011, <http://www.militaryavenue.com/Articles/Mullen+Reaffirms+American-Bahraini+Alliance-36429.aspx>.

8. “U.S. Trying to Pick Winners in New Mideast,” *The New York Times*, February 24, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/25/world/middleeast/25diplomacy.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all.

9. “Yemen Unrest — Monday 21 March 2011,” *The Guardian*, March 21, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/blog/2011/mar/21/yemen-army-commanders-defect>.

10. Judith S. Yaphe, “Post-Revolutionary Transitions: A Conference Report,” Event Report, Institute for National Strategic Studies, Center for Strategic Research, March 31, 2011, http://www.ndu.edu/inss/docUploaded/YAPHE_REVOLUTION_Event_Report.pdf.

Since then, the Obama administration has belatedly joined its European allies in encouraging Salih to step aside. At the same time, the United States has not been very supportive of the pro-democracy protests, either. For example, following government attacks on peaceful pro-democracy protesters in April, which killed a dozen protesters and injured hundreds of others, the US embassy called on the Yemenis to cooperate with the Saudi-led initiatives for a transition of power — which Salih ultimately rejected — by “avoiding all provocative demonstrations, marches and speeches.”¹¹

In recent decades, American human rights activists have engaged in protests, civil disobedience, and other actions challenging US support for repressive regimes in Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere, campaigns which have enjoyed varying degrees of success. Seeing images in recent months from various Arab countries of tear gas canisters, rubber bullets, and other instruments of repression with “Made in USA” written on them has raised awareness of the role the United States plays in propping up dictatorial regimes and suppressing pro-democracy struggles in the region. However, no comparable movement has gotten much traction thus far regarding US support for Middle Eastern dictatorships.

One cannot help but admire the Egyptians, Tunisians, Yemenis, Syrians, and Bahrainis who — like the Chileans, Serbians, Filipinos, Poles, Czechs, South Africans, and many others before them — have nonviolently faced down the tear gas, water cannons, truncheons, and bullets for their freedom. However, as long as the United States remains the world’s number one supplier of security assistance to repressive governments in the Middle East and elsewhere, the need for massive nonviolent action in support of freedom and democracy may be no greater than here.

For, ultimately, freedom will come to the Middle East not from foreign intervention or sanctimonious statements from Washington, but from Arab peoples themselves. Perhaps, then, the best thing the United States can do at this point to support democracy is to end its backing of autocratic regimes and leave it to the people to chart their own future.

11. “US Embassy Statement on April 27 Events,” Embassy of the United States, Sana’a, Yemen, April 28, 2011, <http://yemen.usembassy.gov/ues.html>.

Ties that Bind: The Social Pillars of Arab Authoritarian Regimes

Barak Barfi

Since the beginning of the political upheavals that have gripped the Arab world, Middle East scholars have struggled to understand the revolutions transpiring there.¹ Regimes in Egypt and Tunisia fell swiftly while Libya was able to withstand a NATO bombing campaign for months. Others such as Syria have endured the political turmoil, sacrificing little to protesters. Examining the ideas of the 14th century Islamic thinker ‘Abd al-Rahman bin Muhammad Ibn Khaldun and his modern interpreter, the French sociologist Michel Seurat, places the current revolutions in a broader perspective. Seurat argues that intra-group bonds rather than formal ties to state institutions are the building blocs of loyalty in the Middle East. Such links have allowed several Arab leaders to withstand pressures against their regimes today.

Ibn Khaldun explained the rise and fall of civilizations by focusing on the social aspects of the groups that established them.² He argued that desert tribes, bound by an *esprit de corps* he termed *‘asabiyya*, banded together to overthrow sedentary empires.³ The ties between them, and the solidarity they engendered, created strong social bonds, which led to powerful armies that toppled civilizations that were past their prime. However, as they acclimated themselves to their urban environment, the strength of their social ties deteriorated, allowing new groups with a stronger *‘asabiyya* to overthrow them.

Seurat applies Ibn Khaldun’s theories to modern Middle Eastern states. He hypothesizes that minority groups bound by *‘asabiyya* take power and transform the state into their own fiefdoms. He argues that they exploit the social cleavages in society to marginalize their opponents and enhance their power. This process leads “to the negation of the state;” in other words, a situation in which state institutions no longer provide the functions necessary to society.⁴

IRAQ

A classic example illustrating Seurat’s ideas is the Iraqi regime of President Saddam Husayn. Washington analysts expected the embattled leader to fall after the country was decimated by two wars and devastated by United Nations sanctions. But Husayn held onto power by relying on a web of family and tribal alliances that supported his rule, even

1. This article grew out of lengthy discussions with Professor Richard Bulliet of Columbia University. Professor Bulliet offers an alternative view to the one argued here. He posits an *‘asabiyya* or *esprit de corps* which binds the military castes that rule Arab republican regimes. He terms these countries neo-Mamluk societies, based on the slave soldiers that ruled Egypt from 1250–1517. See Richard Bulliet, “Egypt’s Neo-Mamluk Endgame,” *Agence Global*, February 3, 2011. The author wishes to thank Professor Bulliet for years of sharing his insights into Arab and Islamic societies.

2. Much has been written about Ibn Khaldun’s political theories. See, for example, E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 84–113. For a critique of Ibn Khaldun’s ideas, see Gabriel Martinez-Gross and Lucette Valensi, *L’Islam En Dissidence [Islam Against Itself]* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004).

3. The term *‘asabiyya* defies translation. For its various renderings into European languages, see Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun’s Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 196, nt. 1.

4. Michel Seurat, *L’État de Barbarie [The Barbarian State]* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1989), p. 18.

as state institutions withered. The Iraqi President's security apparatus drew heavily on his own 'Abd al-Majid clan and his larger Al-Bu Nasir tribe to staff senior positions.⁵ When forced to go outside this circle of support, he relied on two additional groups: the Jubbur tribe, which constituted up to 50% of the Republican Guard, and the Dulaymi clan, which comprised another third.⁶ These four tightly-linked groups effectively ensured the survival of Husayn's republic of fear. Their *'asabiyya* lay with Husayn himself, rather than with an Iraqi state that existed in name only. He effectively replaced the state with a narrow ruling faction that perpetuated his rule. By exploiting these bonds, Husayn baffled the analysts who consistently predicted his demise.

The rulers discussed below repeat this paradigm. Distrustful of traditional state institutions after losing their political legitimacy, they either created parallel structures or simply favored certain military units that were staffed by family members whose loyalty was unwavering. The regimes they created embody the *'asabiyya* model suggested by Seurat.

EGYPT

Many Middle East scholars note that the concept of the nation-state has not taken root in the region, claiming that a number of Arab countries are merely tribes with a flag. Of the region's countries, only Egypt can claim to be a true nation-state. Its uniform geography, insignificant tribes, historic civilization, and homogenous population — 90% of its citizens are Sunni Muslims — has endowed its people with a strong sense of nationalism. Its leaders created strong state institutions crowned by a professional army unblemished by factionalism.

When unrest overtook the country in January 2011, President Husni Mubarak quickly discovered that the state he presided over was not his fiefdom. When his security services were unable to quell the unrest, he learned that the army would not. The generals abandoned him, unwilling to sacrifice the welfare of 82 million for one man. Mubarak thought his *'asabiyya* lay with the armed forces from

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which he himself sprang. A life-long soldier who capped his career as Air Force Chief of Staff, he was a hero of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. But he failed to understand that the loyalty of the generals whom he appointed lay with the state, not with him. With his rule in jeopardy, Mubarak had to hire armed thugs to disperse the protesters bent on his defeat. But with their fealty only to their wages, they disappeared into the crowds they were hired to disperse within two days.

Mubarak viewed himself as a son of Egypt. He relied on the country's state institutions rather than cultivate a narrow *'asabi-*

5. Amatzia Baram, *Building Towards Crisis* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), pp. 7–36. For Husayn's reliance on his family, see Hosham Dawood, "The 'State-ization' of the Tribe and the Tribalization of the State: The Case of Iraq," in Faleh Jabar and Hosham Dawod, eds., *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East* (London: Saqi, 2001), pp. 110–135. Like Ibn Khaldun and Seurat, Dawood terms the ties that bind Iraqi tribes *asabiyya*.

6. Baram, *Building Towards Crisis*, p. 28.

yya that would fragment society. He did not employ the “divide and conquer” tactics of other regional leaders, nor did he favor specific regions for economic and social development. Rather, he viewed politics as a professional statesman. In his final days, the man who ruled as a pharaoh was forced to rely on a circle of advisers that did not reach far beyond his immediate family. As he resigned in ignominy, his *‘asabiyya* was restricted to his wife and two sons whose fates were linked to his.

YEMEN

Yemen provides an equally powerful example of Ibn Khaldun’s model, but without the desert exodus. In its northern areas, a minor Shi‘i sect called Zaydism has historically ruled the country. Zaydi pretenders often took power violently by relying on disgruntled tribes to overthrow existing regimes.⁷

In lieu of a modern state, President ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Salih has relied on tribes to sustain his regime.

Today, these tribes still dominate Yemen, in part because the country never developed strong state institutions. Whereas Egypt began to build a modern bureaucracy in the early 19th century under Muhammad ‘Ali, Yemeni reforms only started after a 1962 republican revolution. In lieu of a modern state, President ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Salih has relied on tribes to sustain his regime. Chief among them are his own clan, the Sanhan. Salih has placed its members in key military and political positions, while his brother, son, and nephews control important army units.⁸ Much like Husayn, Salih has bypassed state institutions, relying instead on his narrow tribal base for support. In doing so, he has transformed the Sanhan tribe into the Yemeni state, exemplifying Seurat’s ideas.

The bonds of *‘asabiyya* between these clansmen have allowed Salih to weather the protests against him. These men know that their fate is tied to Salih’s — when he falls, so do they. The contrast between Yemen and Egypt could not be clearer: Sanhani support has enabled Salih to endure the tempestuous protests in Yemen for seven months and counting, whereas Mubarak was forced to resign after only 18 days of demonstrations.

LIBYA

Much like Yemen, Libya lacks strong institutions. The concept of the state has never developed, leaving it weak and ineffective. When he first came to power, Colonel Mu‘ammar al-Qadhafi sought to build a modern state and reform the country. To this end, he condemned the tribalism that had shaped the country and dictated its policies, noting that it “damages nationalism because tribal allegiance weakens national loyalty and flourishes at its expense.”⁹

7. For these rebellions in Yemeni history, see Husayn b. ‘Abdallah al-Amri, *Tarikh al-Yaman al-Hadith w’al-Mu‘asir* [Modern and Contemporary Yemeni History] (Beirut, Dar al-Fikr al-Mu‘asir, 2001).

8. Hackers broke into Yemeni news sites in mid-March and published a list of Sanhanis in senior government positions. For an excellent discussion of the Sanhani elite, see Sarah Phillips, “Who Tried to Kill Ali Abdullah Saleh?,” *Foreign Policy*, June 13, 2011.

9. Mu‘ammar al-Qadhafi, *The Green Book* (Tripoli, Public Establishment for Printing, 1980), p. 85. Husayn’s Ba‘th party in Iraq adopted the same policies when it took power only to strengthen tribalism as well. See Amatzia Baram, “Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein’s Tribal Policies 1991–96,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (February 1997), pp. 1–31.

But after a coup attempt in 1975 led by some of his closest confidants, Qadhafi reoriented his regime. He looked to the tribes, the core element of traditional Libyan society, to buttress his rule.¹⁰ Like Husayn and Salih, Qadhafi relied chiefly on his native clan, the Qadhadhfa. But because the clan was so small, he was forced to seek larger ones such as the Warfalla and Maghraha to shore up his regime.¹¹ In October 1975, Qadhafi traveled to the Warfalla stronghold of Bani Walid to accept an oath of allegiance from the tribe's shaykhs. The pact, however, was not novel. The Warfalla had historically protected Qadhafi's small tribe. The tribal code linked these two clans against outside aggressors. Qadhafi merely transformed these ties into modern bonds of *'asabiyya* as Seurat understands them.

The Qadhadhfa, Warfalla, and Maghraha largely staffed the senior and middle ranks of his military and intelligence services.¹² In a country where loyalty to the state was non-existent, Qadhafi substituted fealty to the leader instead. He cultivated personal social ties — an *'asabiyya* — that bound these three tribes to him. He favored areas where these tribes resided by allocating state resources for their development. In doing so, Qadhafi further marginalized the state and other societal groups that could mobilize against him.

In Ibn Khaldun's model, the luxuries of power corrupt the bonds that catapult desert tribes into the king's palace. It was no different in Qadhafi's Libya. Over time, some Warfalla began to despise the economic privileges of the Qadhadhfa and Maghraha tribes.¹³ In 1993, Warfalla members in the military were caught plotting a coup against Qadhafi. Feeling threatened, he looked to those with whom he shared the tightest *'asabiyya* — his immediate kin. He narrowed his target to the most intimate level. No longer relying on a group as large even as his small tribe of Qadhadhfa, he now elevated members of his al-Qahus subclan to senior positions at the expense of the other two tribes.¹⁴

In a country where loyalty to the state was non-existent, Qadhafi substituted fealty to the leader instead.

During the seven-month Libyan revolution, Qadhafi faced the wrath of the international community. NATO fighter jets bombed his forces and destroyed his command and control centers. The alliance's cruise ships patrolled his coasts, enforcing an embargo on his oil sales. Qadhafi lost half his country in weeks. But though the whole world was mobilized against him, he endured the most devastating military campaign since the war against Husayn in 2003. He accomplished this by relying on the ties of *'asabiyya* that bound the three tribes he patronized.¹⁵ Having been favored by Qadhafi for so long, these clans felt no empathy with the rebels fighting against the Libyan leader. Even after Qadhafi lost his capital of

10. Moncef Ouannes, *Militaires, Élités et Modernisation dans la Libye Contemporain* [Soldiers, Elites and Modernization in Contemporary Libya] (Paris, L'Harmattan, 2009), pp. 302–303.

11. Ouannes employs Ibn Khaldun's concept of *'asabiyya* to explain the bonds prevailing among the Warfalla tribe. Ouannes, *Militaires, Élités et Modernisation dans la Libye Contemporain*, p. 303.

12. Mansour El-Kikhia, *Libya's Qaddafi: The Politics of Contradiction* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1997), p. 91.

13. Yehudit Ronen, "Libya," *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Vol. xvii (1993), p. 537.

14. El-Kikhia, *Libya's Qaddafi: The Politics of Contradiction*, pp. 90, 151. For a list of Qadhadhfa members in key security positions during the current revolution that circulated on web sites, see <http://www.otaibah.net/m/showthread.php?t=122562>.

15. For Qadhafi's reliance on these tribes during the conflict, see David Kirkpatrick and Kareem Fahim, "Allies Count on Defiant Streak in Libya to Drive Out Qaddafi," *The New York Times*, March 29, 2011.

Tripoli, and was clearly at the end of his rule, forces from these three tribes remained loyal to him. Qadhafha members from his hometown of Sirte have not embraced the revolution. Maghraha tribesman told this writer that until they left the town of Sebha in August, he still retained the support of residents there, despite power and fuel shortages. Warfalla members from Bani Walid refused to surrender to rebels, even when it was clear that their victory was inevitable. In the city of Brega where Qadhafi fighters fended off the rebels for months, this writer saw the graffiti they left behind. “We love no one but you, O leader” and “We are with you O leader of Islam and the Arab nation,” they scrawled on walls. These were not the paid African mercenaries and child soldiers described by the media as waging the war against the rebels. These were true believers.

By creating a security apparatus built largely on three tribes, Qadhafi bypassed a state that never got off the ground. The *‘asabiyya* he cultivated for 42 years helped him endure a six-month NATO bombing campaign that almost no one expected to last more than a few weeks.

SYRIA

Seurat based his theories of *‘asabiyya* on the Syrian state created by former leader Hafiz al-Asad.¹⁶ Asad belonged to an obscure Islamic sect known as the ‘Alawis, which comprise only 12% of the Syrian population. An offshoot of the heterodox Shi‘a, they are not Muslims. Islamic scholars have declared them heretics and their religious practices have almost nothing in common with other Middle Eastern Shi‘i communities, such as those in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon.¹⁷

The ‘asabiyya that binds Syria’s ruling caste is not only the strongest of the countries discussed here, but it is also the most pervasive. Today, the Asad regime can mobilize an entire community against the citizens clamoring for its fall.

Unlike Iraq, Libya, and Yemen, Syria’s leaders did not have to establish ties with outside groups to ensure their rule. The Asads instead relied exclusively on their own sect. When Asad seized power, he gradually transformed Syria into an ‘Alawi bastion. Seurat states, “since his ascension to power in 1970, all of Hafiz al-Asad’s policies consist of linking the destiny of the community to his personal future.”¹⁸ Today, 90% of military commanders serving under his son Bashar are ‘Alawis.¹⁹

The Asad family never created paramilitary units like those of Husayn and Qadhafi because the loyalty of the senior armed forces was never in doubt. The *‘asabiyya* that binds Syria’s ruling caste is not only the strongest of the countries discussed here, but it is also the most pervasive. Today, the Asad regime can mobilize an entire community against the citizens clamoring for its fall.

16. Seurat, *L’État de Barbarie*, pp. 84–99. Like Bulliet, Seurat terms the ‘Alawi elite neo-Mamluks. Seurat, *L’État de Barbarie*, p. 86.

17. For the religious edict by Ahmad ibn Taymiyya declaring them infidels, see M. St. Guyard, “Le Fetwa d’Ibn Taimiyyah sur les Nosairis,” *Journal Asiatique*, Vol. 18 (1871), pp. 158–198. For their doctrines, see René Dussaud, *Histoire et Religion des Nosairis* (Paris: É. Bouillon, 1900); and Meir Bar Asher and Aryeh Kofsky, *The Nusayrī-‘Alawī Religion: An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

18. Seurat, *L’État de Barbarie*, p. 87.

19. Eyal Zisser, *Asad’s Legacy: Syria in Transition* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), p. 26.

The loyalty of 'Alawi military commanders lies with their sect, and thus with Asad, not the Syrian state. Viewed as heretics by the Sunnis that form the majority of the Syrian population, they know that Asad's demise would, at best, return them to the discrimination they have historically experienced at the hands of Sunni rulers, and at worst, to their slaughter. For this reason, Syrian military units have shown no mercy in unleashing tanks against unarmed civilians. The strength of the 'Alawi *'asabiyya* explains why the regime has not been shaken, despite the six months of violent protests throughout the country.

The leaders of Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Syria clung to power long after they lost the support of their population. Weak states with even weaker state institutions, they were forced to look outside traditional state structures to buttress their regimes. They did so by fostering tribal support and an *'asabiyya* that linked clans to the leader, rather than cultivating loyalty to the state and its president, as in the West.

The leaders of Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Syria clung to power long after they lost the support of their population. Weak states with even weaker state institutions, they were forced to look outside traditional state structures to buttress their regimes.

The larger the base of this support, the longer they were able to hold onto power against increasingly difficult odds. Yemen's President relied chiefly on family members from his own Sanhan clan, who have successfully delayed his inevitable resignation. In Libya, Qadhafi leaned on a wider alliance of three tribes. They helped him fend off a particularly vicious NATO campaign, in which the coalition had to steadily increase the intensity of its efforts. Originally planned as a simple bombing campaign, the failure to dislodge Qadhafi compelled NATO members to first arm the rebels, and later to place special forces on the ground to prosecute the war. A regime without a functioning army proved remarkably resilient in withstanding an assault by the world's leading militaries. Syria's leaders have relied on a sect to ensure their longevity. For this reason violent protests have hardly affected their regime. At this point, no important leaders have even defected.

These leaders looked to tribes to maintain their rule. Other Arab leaders have used different methods to achieve the same results. The monarchs of Jordan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia draw their legitimacy from their religious pedigree. The Jordanian and Moroccan sovereigns emphasize their descent from the Prophet Muhammad.²⁰ Saudi rulers highlight their custodianship of Islam's two holiest shrines. In doing so, they are able to ensure the personal loyalty of their citizens.

The Arab Spring has led some Middle East analysts to predict that Western-style democracies will take root in countries that overthrew long-ruling authoritarian regimes. But it will be difficult for nations that experienced decades of factionalism to shift immediately to inclusive, pluralistic states. At the same time, other Arab authoritarian leaders are bound to note the fall of their fellow leaders. They are likely to conclude that creating modern states with strong state institutions is the best way to ensure their demise.

20. For the Moroccan monarchy's use of religious symbols to maintain the loyalty of its citizens, see Mohamed Tozy, *Monarchie Et Islam Politique Au Maroc [Monarchy and Political Islam in Morocco]* (Paris: Presses De Science Po, 1999).

Egypt and Tunisia: Regime Failure and the “Gymnasiums” of Civic Empowerment

Larbi Sadiki

FOCUS

This short expose’ considers the dimension of space in explaining the inability of the regimes in Egypt and Tunisia to respond or to act during the protests of 2011. The only action the ousted regimes could take was inaction, mostly brittle violence against the people, dooming both to the dustbin of history.

Without Tunisia and Egypt, the term “Arab Spring” would have been non-existent or hollow. The former launched it through a spectacular, infectious, and pioneering exercise in people’s power. The latter massively consolidated it, boosting popular confidence that Arab autocrats may be no more than men of straw whose power is a façade kept together by secular and religious propaganda. Fear tactics and coercion by police and military bureaucracies eroded the loyalty of the people to the state.

Seven months after the ouster of dictator Zine El-‘Abidine Ben ‘Ali on January 14, 2011 and six months after the ouster of his Egyptian counterpart Muhammad Husni Mubarak on the February 11, 2011, Libyan rebels overran Tripoli and entered Qadhafi’s den in the massive Bab al-Aziziya compound from which the “brother-leader” singularly controlled Libya for 42 years. Even with Qadhafi at large, three neighboring Arab states with populations totalling 100 million people and a combined surface area of more than 3 million square kilometers are free of authoritarian rule. Indeed, this is the moment when students of Middle East politics can truly talk about the birth of a “New Arab Middle East” (NAME).

Integral to the emerging NAME is the proliferation of the “gymnasiums” of civic action, which have crippled regimes’ action and response in the face of rising popular protest and creative exercise of mass disobedience against authoritarian rule. What follows is a brief analysis of how this has unfolded in Egypt and Tunisia, focusing on how societal civic action rendered regime responses as inadequate “in-action” doomed to failure and regime change. The analysis begins with a brief description of the action-inaction dynamic, as a functional framework for understanding the authoritarian state’s inability to act. Secondly, a single example of civic action is given in order to illustrate how the action-inaction dynamic unfolded in the “gymnasiums” of popular struggle in both Egypt and Tunisia. Therein lies the secret success of the protesters that produced “clean” ousters in Egypt and Tunisia: the ability of societal action to incapacitate state reaction through the most typical devices used historically to de-mobilize protest. This is where there is a huge difference between the action-reaction of the bread riots of the 1970s and 1980s and the protests of 2011.¹¹ Then the state always managed to respond with pork-barrelling when coercion failed. In the “Arab Spring,” as illustrated by the cases of Egypt and Tunisia, neither bribing nor coercing the populace were available as devices of control in the inventory of statist resources.

1. Larbi Sadiki, “Popular Uprisings and Arab Democratisation,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 32 (2000), pp. 71–95.

ACTION-INACTION: BLUNTING AUTHORITARIAN RULE

Winston Churchill's famous saying "I never worry about action, but only about inaction" springs to mind when reflecting on the state techniques of demobilizing civic struggle and societal instruments for civic engagement in their quest to resist authoritarianism. It is not the action of the authoritarian structures in Egypt and Tunisia that matter in the context of the "Arab Spring;" rather, it is their inaction. One can talk about an action-reaction-inaction spiral of responses and counter responses. The type of action invoked here specifically refers to civic resistance — that is, in the case of Egypt and Tunisia, action making use of a range of civic acts, including performing disobedience, protest, boycott, strikes, marches, and sustained occupation of public space. All of these techniques describe peaceful or nonviolent activities all of which, however, are confrontational. Their confrontational nature stems from the protesters' ability to transcend all fear of state coercion. This is the same fear which had been relied upon by the regimes in Egypt and Tunisia to produce a "bystander-effect," whereby harm to an individual, a group of citizens, a region, or a cluster of interests speaking on behalf of an ideology or a cause isolates and renders anti-regime mobilization ineffective in creating communal solidarity. In the 2011 protests, the formerly inactive but potentially mobilizable reservoir of rebellious energy (mass protest, public disobedience, and widespread nonviolent resistance) were visibly and palpably activated or mobilized as a source of civic resistance against the Ben 'Ali and Mubarak regimes. It is the reclamation of this energy and its subsequent use by society that have blunted authoritarian rule. Thus, societal action succeeded in yielding both a critical mass and a tipping point, with the two regimes failing to successfully employ:

- coercion (owing to unprecedented fearlessness);
- bribing (due to the fact that Tunisians reached a critical mass that made them aware that no bribe would be equivalent to Ben 'Ali's ouster; for the Egyptians, the Tunisian precedent made them adamant from the moment of the launching of the January 25 revolution that they would not be happy with anything less than *raheel*, that is, Mubarak's departure from power); and
- former tactics of "divide and rule" as protests in both Egypt and Tunisia spread in provincial towns then shifted to metropolitan centers as a marker of solidarity and unity in resistance and the pursuit of a common goal: ousting the dictators.

Thus, the reaction of both regimes was rendered ineffective, as if it were inaction, by its failure to measure up to the high expectations of the civic action mobilized and invested into the process of critical-mass build-up. The song of "degage" launched in the Habib Bourguiba Boulevard in Tunis became too potent to suppress, eventually positively infecting the masses from Cairo to Sana'a, and crippling regimes with an incurable virus, signalling the end of the long-ill body-politic. The agency enacted to blunt authoritarianism in popular revolts may be, tentatively at least, analyzed by looking at one dimension visible in the Egyptian and Tunisian "gymnasiums" of civic struggle: public space.

THE DIMENSION OF SPACE

It can be said that all space under Arab authoritarian rule claimed by the rulers is state space, not public space. There is nothing earth-shattering about this statement. From Cairo through Libya to Tunis, the central squares developed by the postcolonial authoritarian states' urban planners and named after political icons or iconic historical events were part and parcel of a form of socio-political engineering aimed at defining the territory of power and, largely, of state-holders. Tahrir [Liberation] Square, with the adjacent *mugamma'* edifice, stood as powerful reminders and symbols of the Egyptian state's authoritarian-bureaucratic clout. Tahrir as liberation is a powerful idiom conveying messages of historicity as well as legitimacy. The *mugamma'* is the one inevitability the majority of the Egyptian citizenry cannot avoid where sat the huge bureaucracy producing their legal personas and paperwork for the construction of their identities. Under the control of autocrats, the *mugamma'* had effectively, as its name in Arabic denotes, been the collective unifying repository through which Egyptian citizenry was filtered, as if the very conception of Egyptian-ness could not be imagined outside the Interior Ministry's labyrinth of windows and clerks forming the bureaucratic mill inside the *mugamma'*. That link to the Interior Ministry was a thread that "shackled" the collective psyche to fear of state power and of the over-bureaucratization that served as an additional device of control over the citizenry and the construction of millions of identities since the time of the Free Officers' takeover of the state in 1952.

In Tunisia, the capital's Boulevard, at the end of which stood the Interior Ministry's massive building, was named after the country's postcolonial leader and national mentor, the late Habib Bourguiba. Like him, the Boulevard that his urban planners named after him

The Tunisian and Egyptian protesters contested regime monopoly over control, use, manipulation of, and claim over space — squares.

was an example of how the politics of space was never innocent. Bourguiba and the space — squares, gardens, memorials, libraries, and streets — all represented value-laden signifiers of power.²² They stood in the case of Tunisia as an Atatürk-like brand of nation- and state-building inspired by the former colonial metropolis, Paris. So the first thing his successor did following the bloodless coup of November 1987 was to rename the squares, often deleting "Habib Bourguiba" to cede to the new administration's politico-social engineering label "7th of November," supposedly a symbol and idiom of the ousted dictator's "New Deal" — a deal that never was. The Habib Bourguiba Boulevard survived the architectural purge of the public space redesigning. As in Cairo's Tahrir Square, the Interior Ministry stood as an eyesore in the Bourguiba Boulevard, a powerful reminder of the police state Ben 'Ali and his henchmen built over 23 years of authoritarian rule. Like the *mugamma'*, it evoked fear as well as indignation, and it is this indignation that proved resourceful and momentous in both countries' protests in the January–February 2011 period.

So what is the relevance of the dimension of space in the politics of civic resistance in Cairo and Tunis in 2011?

The Tunisian and Egyptian protesters contested regime monopoly over control, use, manipulation of, and claim over

2. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (New York: Beacon Press, 1994).

space — squares. When the Tunisian protesters began their build-up of a critical mass they had first to take back the space the state claimed as its own, hub of its centrality, as a physical edifice and politico-moral authority. The critical mass needed to reoccupy the geography of the authoritarian state and the terrain from which it organized the lives of the citizenry. Just as the authoritarian state purged the citizenry from the terrain on which it pitched, designed, diffused, and sustained the reproduction of its authority, the citizenry had to recover that terrain and redesign it as its own as it navigate the unknown territory of mass resistance against state hegemony. Just as the state purged the citizenry from its geography of power, the protesters had to purge the state from that very space. That space is thus converted into forums for mass organization and mobilization. It is within the precincts of that space that a new reimagining of community and democratic politics was made possible by the protesters in both Egypt and Tunisia. Literally, the space was turned from authoritarian space into popular space. This space is reorganized into forums for democratic articulation, displays of solidarity, and the communication of universal messages of rejection of authoritarianism — designed and redesigned through the use of all kinds of techniques ranging from music of national hymns to communal prayers or marches. It is the ability of society to turn the central space — squares for instance — into “gymnasiums” of civic activism whereby the citizenry sharpens not only its skills of anti-systemic protest, but also the people’s appetite for democratic politics through sustained and creative mass protest. In this way societies in Egypt and Tunisia were able to reinvent themselves by contesting the authoritarian state’s politics and programs openly. Ultimately, this is what led to the repurposing of former places of state authority into public space for re-enacting popular sovereignty and collective re-ownership of the state. In these reclaimed places — Tahrir Square in Cairo, and the Habib Bourguiba Boulevard and the Kasbah in Tunis — the fight against authoritarianism was concretized, built into a critical mass, and defiantly sustained to eventually lead to the tipping point that brought down the authoritarian structure.

The transferable value of the above angle on the “Arab Spring,” through exploration of the dimension of space, is today evident in Syria. Thus far, in neither Damascus nor Aleppo has a public space developed where mass protesters can directly display solidarity and resist hegemony. They are yet unable to express themselves through collective, direct participatory action that renders the state unable to act or to offer acceptable responses as the public resolve, once focused in a space it claims as its own, shifts from the former politics of accommodation with the state to total defiance and rejection of authoritarianism. The Libyan rebels themselves felt the need to occupy Qadhafi’s compounds and “Green Square,” renaming it “Martyrs’ Square,” in order to claim possession of their revolt and realize some kind of political closure against the overthrown political order. Thus, it can be said that in the “Arab Spring,” the authoritarian states in Egypt and Tunisia were left with only one course of action: to exit history as their final act of self-cancellation.

Backfire in the Arab Spring

Erica Chenoweth

Governments in the Middle East and North Africa have long relied on repression to intimidate, harass, and punish political opponents. During the Arab uprisings, dictators under threat have all ordered and used violence against peaceful protestors as a way to maintain power. But this repression has had widely divergent effects on the course of the different conflicts.

In Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria, government repression has not destroyed the movements and, indeed, may have breathed new life into them. In Libya and Yemen, government repression led people to more or less abandon nonviolent resistance, opting to take up arms instead. And in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and elsewhere, repression seems to have slowed or ended the uprisings there. What explains these divergent outcomes?

In this article, I describe how the Tunisian, Egyptian, Libyan, and Bahraini governments during the Arab Spring resorted to deadly force to quell dissent. I use preliminary evidence from these cases to pull out three major lessons for why repression sometimes backfired and other times did not: the importance of nonviolent discipline, publicity, and the invasion of foreign troops.

TUNISIA

Ben 'Ali's dictatorship in Tunisia was the first to fall. The weeks-long protests, demonstrations, strikes, and rallies that began in mid-December 2010 have inspired similar uprisings throughout the Middle East and North Africa, as well as in Europe, Latin America, and East Asia.

In many ways, the Tunisian uprising was also the swiftest and most decisive of the Arab Spring revolts. Lasting just over three weeks, the uprising dislodged Ben 'Ali's regime as if it had always been fragile, although just three years before, the regime had crushed a coal miner's strike in Gafsa in 2008.

Why was the "Jasmine Revolution" of 2011 different? Many observers have claimed that the uprising was swift and successful because security forces sided with the protestors. While true in the end, mass defections among the security forces only took place *after* security forces attempted to break the back of the uprising through brutal repression. Over 200 civilians died during the campaign in various incidents, and hundreds more were critically wounded. An especially high proportion of deaths occurred in the relatively small town of Ezzouhour, where security forces opened fire on a large crowd of peaceful demonstrators demanding that Ben 'Ali step down.¹

1. "Ben Ali Ordered Air Strikes on Tunisia, Says Probe," Agence France Press, April 13, 2011, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5i51vnCo_4tGcsofh4Nl67nw_4wNQ?docId=CNG.7e0554b2bf89d7acd100b75548bac138.861.

Although security forces had relied mostly on water cannons, rubber bullets, beatings, and arrests during the first several weeks of the uprising, they began to use live ammunition on January 8. During the next five days, snipers from an elite unit shot and killed 21 protesters in Kasserine and Thala. Reports vary as to why the regime ordered the switch to lethal force, but it appears that the snipers were attempting to either force people to return to their homes, or to provoke a violent response from protestors to justify even heavier crackdowns.²

Instead of achieving either of these outcomes, these killings backfired, provoking such outrage in Tunisia that fresh demonstrations erupted throughout the entire country.³ Huge numbers of people joined the opposition, launching symbolic funeral marches, protests, rallies, and sit-ins.

Unwilling to surrender, Ben 'Ali ordered air strikes against dissidents, including in Ezzouhour, two days before he stepped down. This time, however, the order was not obeyed. Seeing the endgame draw near, the security forces refused to implement his orders and put pressure on him to step aside. Having lost this crucial pillar of support, Ben 'Ali had no choice but to flee the country, effectively ending his 23-year rule. This was not a case of a reluctant oppressor falling easily to a mass uprising. It was a case of a dictator who had lost legitimacy among civilians and authority over his own security forces because of mass mobilization.

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EGYPT

The Egyptian revolution displays a similar pattern to Tunisia. The uprising began in earnest on January 25, after years of frustrated attempts by pro-democracy activists to mobilize the masses against President Husni Mubarak's rule. After weeks of dramatic sit-ins, clashes with security forces, and resistance against agents provocateurs, the largely nonviolent revolution succeeded in forcing Mubarak to leave, although the military's transitional administration has continued to face pressure from pro-democracy demonstrators to implement swift and meaningful reforms.

While some observers claim that the Egyptian army was neutral during the conflict, members of the Interior Ministry, the feared *mukhabarhat*, were certainly not. Over 800 people died and many thousands suffered serious injuries at the hands of Husni Mubarak's security forces before he left office on February 11.⁴ Moreover, the army's ruling government has continued to repress protestors even after Mubarak's departure. Thus, it is clear that from the beginning, the security

2. Yasmine Ryan, "The Massacre Behind the Revolution," *Al-Jazeera English*, February 16, 2011, <http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/features/2011/02/2011215123229922898.html>.

3. "Timeline: Tunisia's Uprising," *Al-Jazeera English*, January 23, 2011, <http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/spotlight/tunisia/2011/01/201114142223827361.html>.

4. "Egypt: Cairo's Tahrir Square Fills with Protestors," *BBC News*, July 8, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14075493>.

forces have been (and remain) willing and able to use violence against unarmed demonstrators.

When the uprising began on January 25, protestors were met with force from the state security apparatus. Home videos taken during the conflict show police beating and shooting protestors. Videos of security forces torturing activists in detention centers surfaced and were shared using the internet.

Mubarak's regime was able to shut down the internet on January 26, presumably to reduce activists' ability to communicate with one another about how events were unfolding. But this action backfired, as tens of thousands of people, no longer glued to their computers, went outside and joined the demonstrations. For the next several days, the crowd gathered at Cairo's Tahrir Square swelled to include millions of people, who set up tents, refreshment stations, and even portable latrines, to give the gathering staying power. Meanwhile, Egypt's other major cities, including Alexandria, saw mobilization increasing despite deadly repression by security forces.

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In a dramatic turn, on February 2, pro-Mubarak demonstrators began to attack peaceful protestors in Cairo, riding into the Square on camels and horses, swinging sticks, swords, and clubs through the crowd. Many were suspected of being plain-clothes policeman. The army stood by while mayhem ensued. Hundreds were hurt, and for a rattling 24 hours, the fate of the uprising hung in the balance.

But many immediately sensed that Mubarak was relying on agents provocateurs, whose violence was meant to sow divisions within the opposition and cause some to retaliate with violence, giving the army a good excuse to surround and attack the demonstrators. Mubarak's strategy backfired. Instead of intimidating the crowd and dividing the opposition, on February 4, hundreds of thousands of people descended on Tahrir Square to show their unity and solidarity with those who had been attacked. Indeed, their unity was well-represented by a mammoth multifaith Sunday mass on February 6, followed by even greater protests on February 10 after Mubarak announced that he would not resign. As it turned out, he did not have a choice. In the months and years leading to the uprising, few experts would have guessed that the Egyptian army would have remained "neutral" in such a fight, or that Mubarak would have left his position without bloodshed. But the actions of millions of unarmed protestors demonstrated to the army that Mubarak's days were numbered. After his defiant speech on February 10, the army informed him that he must leave his post. On February 11, the army announced Mubarak's departure.

LIBYA

In contrast to the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, the Libyan conflict has a much different trajectory. Inspired by events in Tunisia and Egypt, people in Libya's western city of Benghazi began to protest Colonel Mu'ammār al-Qadhafi's grip on power on February 15. The protests were fairly spontaneous, and as such, were not prepared for the level of violence that Qadhafi unleashed on them. On February 17, security forces killed 14 protestors in Benghazi. The next day during a funeral procession for one of the victims, clashes between the funeral marchers and the security forces began, with police killing 24 protestors and protestors killing two policemen.

After that, violence quickly escalated on both sides of the struggle. Police and army defectors joined the resistance in nearby Al Bayda and Darnah and attacked Qadhafi's security forces, forcing them to surrender the city to the opposition. But the next day, Qadhafi solicited the help of foreign mercenaries, whom he airlifted into contested zones in Benghazi and Al Bayda. Opposition forces engaged the mercenaries with arms, resulting in hundreds of deaths on both sides. By February 20, the conflict had spread to the city of Misrata as well as to other cities throughout the country. Qadhafi's Interior Minister, General 'Abdul Fatah Yunis, defected to the opposition and began to command the opposition forces against Qadhafi. Misrata Airport fell under his control, and opposition force began to arm themselves with weapons abandoned by fleeing soldiers.

Qadhafi responded to these developments with still worse violence. On February 22, he broadcast a speech over television, in which he threatened to go house to house to find and kill those using arms against his regime. Although this speech was often interpreted as a threat to peaceful civilian protestors, the text of the speech makes clear that Qadhafi was referring to those who were killing his security forces, remarking that "peaceful protest is one thing, but armed rebellion is something else."

Although this [February 22] speech was often interpreted as a threat to peaceful civilian protestors, the text of the speech makes clear that Qadhafi was referring to those who were killing his security forces, remarking that "peaceful protest is one thing, but armed rebellion is something else."

Indeed, he immediately took action on his threat, attacking armed and unarmed oppositionists and civilians alike with heavy artillery, air strikes, raids, and automatic gunfire.

But by this time, civil resistance actions, like nonviolent protests and demonstrations, had largely ceased, with the campaign now falling to armed rebels. They were at a major force disadvantage, and after heavy bombing, Qadhafi's forces launched a counteroffensive beginning March 6, retaking a number of cities and flattening others. On March 17, to avoid the anticipated humanitarian crisis about to unfold in Libya, the UN Security Council authorized a no-fly zone over Libya to prevent Qadhafi's relentless air strikes from continuing and opening the door for a NATO intervention. French warplanes began attacking loyalist positions on March 19, marking the beginning of a months-long multilateral military intervention involving most major NATO players.

However, it was not until over five months later, in late August 2011, that the Libyan uprising came to a head. During weeks of major offensives, the rebels succeeded in retaking strategic towns and cities along the Libyan coast, making a steady advance over Qadhafi's stronghold in Tripoli. On August 22, the rebels advanced on Tripoli, overtaking it easily after a mass nonviolent uprising there the day before, which had shaken off the regime and forced Qadhafi to retreat. Although Qadhafi remains at large, the rebels declared victory, and the difficult tasks of stabilizing the country, re-establishing the monopoly on force, and rebuilding their government has begun.

BAHRAIN

Inspired by the uprisings sweeping across the Arab world, Bahraini civilians began to mobilize against the ruling Al Khalifa family, a decades-old Sunni monarchy widely perceived as corrupt and unjust by the country's majority Shi'a population. The uprising, which lasted about a month, began with considerable optimism, as Bahraini police appeared unwilling to repress the people collecting in the Pearl Roundabout, a national symbol of solidarity. However, in the early morning hours on February 17, Bahraini police followed the typical pattern of attacking unarmed protesters gathered there, killing multiple people. This initial wave of protest followed the pattern of Tunisia and Egypt: more Bahrainis, not less, began to rise up against the government.

Repression only backfired when the movements remained nonviolent in spite of regime provocations.

Although the Al Khalifa regime offered some partial concessions, including the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with opposition leaders, protestors continued their standoff with increasing vehemence. But on March 15, Al Khalifa declared martial law, imposing emergency curfews, banning public gatherings and demonstrations, and ordering people to disperse from the Pearl Roundabout. Instead of relying on police to implement these orders, Bahrain called on troops and police from neighboring Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to enforce the emergency law. Such troops had far less hesitation in cracking down on protestors, particularly motivated by the fact that many of those leading the pro-democracy movement were Shi'a. The regime also began to target and harass medical workers, identifying them as aiding the enemy and arresting them for sedition. These actions shocked and terrified those participating in the movement, and opposition activities ground to a near halt. In the case of Bahrain, instead of giving the movement the upper hand, Bahraini repression effectively terminated the movement's momentum and drove opposition leaders underground.

LESSONS LEARNED: WHEN DOES REGIME REPRESSION BACKFIRE?

Although in-depth research is needed, a cursory look at these cases reveals a few patterns.

Importance of Remaining Nonviolent. Repression only backfired when the movements remained nonviolent in spite of regime provocations. In Egypt and Tunisia, the vast majority of activists refused to respond to violence with violence, even though the regimes deliberately attempted to provoke them into taking up arms. Because the protesters avoided

violence, they did not physically threaten the police and military, allowing the military to remain neutral. Moreover, they were able to maintain the moral high ground domestically and internationally. In addition, Egyptian and Tunisian people were outraged when the regimes cracked down violently against unarmed civilians. People who had been “on the fence” about the movements soon saw that the regime was out of bounds and began to support the uprisings. If the movements in Egypt and Tunisia had been violent, on the other hand, the people may have seen this repression as self-defense, even if they had sympathized with the movements’ cause. This is why both Ben ‘Ali and Mubarak tried to blame the unrest on small, armed bands — a claim also repeated by Qadhafi in Libya, Bashar al-Asad in Syria, and Hamad Al Khalifa in Bahrain. What happens when movements do not remain nonviolent? One needs only look to Libya to find the answer. In this case, Qadhafi’s repression during the first three days of the peaceful uprisings led the people to take up arms. Notably, however, this development also forced many oppositionists back into their homes, no longer willing to risk exposure to violent battles in the streets. Although many people argue that Qadhafi would have continued to mow down unarmed protestors even if they had not turned to violence, the major gains achieved prior to the NATO intervention (such as high-level defections and the largely nonviolent overtaking of Benghazi) occurred before the rebels took up arms. And once they did take up arms, Qadhafi’s repression became a literal battle to the death — a battle in which Qadhafi’s capabilities clearly outnumbered the rebels’. In fact, the divergent cases in the Arab Spring follow a familiar pattern. Maria J. Stephan and I recently completed a study that shows that out of over 100 major nonviolent uprisings between 1900 and 2006, almost 90% of these campaigns experienced violent repression. Among those, many experienced repression at a similar level to that currently occurring in Syria, yet 50% of these campaigns ultimately prevailed because the government’s repression ultimately backfired. This is compared with violent uprisings, which only succeeded against dictators about 25% of the time. These movements, which have to fight force with force, are typically at a serious force disadvantage and must rely on external support, such as NATO air power in the case of Libya, to stand a chance. Paradoxically, as the Libyan case shows us, it is easier for dictators to deal with armed movements. They simply crush them with force with little risk of backfire. But nonviolent movements are much more disconcerting for them, because their normal methods of confrontation are at risk of backfiring. That said, we know that nonviolent discipline is not enough. The Bahraini movement did not respond with violence, yet repression crushed this movement anyway.

Importance of Publicity. Repression can only backfire when people are aware of — and disgusted by — the regime’s abuses. If repression is not documented in some way, it is very easy for the regime to deny its involvement. This is why the various regimes, including Syria, have gone to great pains to

Repression can only backfire when people are aware of — and disgusted by — the regime’s abuses.

harass domestic journalists, expel foreign journalists, shut down electricity and internet service, and repress people with cell phones and other mobile technologies. In Syria, this has been fairly successful, as some people in Damascus allegedly continued to deny that a national uprising was even occurring until six months into the uprising when protests and demonstrations began in the capital city. Although social media has provided an alternative venue through which to publicize atrocities, internet communications are also vulnerable to regime manipulation. In Egypt and Syria, the regimes have actually disabled cellular and internet services. However, in both cases, activists had alternative ways to

communicate abuses to alert domestic audiences — arguably the most important constituency — such as flyers, leaflets, and hand-outs with pictures. Activists in Syria continue to videotape grisly cases and share them by showing them to others on computers. The lesson learned here is that backfire occurs only when repression is widely known, and when ordinary people become unwilling to tolerate it anymore. And for that to occur, movements need to be creative about how to gain publicity, even when normal channels of communication are closed off.

Importance of Security Force Loyalties. Repression backfired when the soldiers and police enforcing regime brutality can relate to the protestors in some way. In Tunisia and Egypt, security forces were unwilling to indefinitely repress their fellow countrymen, although they were willing to repress them for a while. In Bahrain and Libya, the Al Khalifa and Qadhafi regimes brought in outside forces (including mercenaries) to quell dissent, perhaps recognizing that loyalty shifts were far less likely to occur among those than among local troops, who may have loyalties to family, neighborhood, and tribe. Does this mean that civil resistance campaigns that face foreign armies are doomed to fail? Not necessarily. Over the past century, there are many cases of successful resistance against foreign occupations (such as Gandhi's independence movement in India and the East Timorese liberation struggle against Indonesia), although in these cases provoking security force defections was difficult. In general, nonviolent campaigns should avoid confronting foreign security forces by shifting to more dispersed methods, like strikes, that remove the opportunity for the imported troops to crack down, or by focusing on creating cracks within the civilian bureaucracy and among economic elites. In Bahrain, for instance, although expatriates from Asia make up the majority of the labor workforce, Bahraini nationals make up 43% of the workforce, which is largely concentrated in the public sector and in the petroleum industry. As in the Iranian Revolution of 1977–1979, if oil workers or civilian bureaucrats withdraw their support from the regime through a general strike, it could be crippling to the state. The other option is to simply retreat, wait, regroup, and when the foreign troops go home, relaunch. Foreign powers like Saudi Arabia might be willing to take decisive action like this occasionally, but probably not regularly. And in Libya, Qadhafi's reliance on mercenaries did not end up working for him either. Mercenaries are expensive and, in this case, their repression of the Libyan people deeply offended many in that country and around the world.

In sum, despite failures in Libya and Bahrain, the Tunisian and Egyptian cases show that, paradoxically, a ruler's reliance on repression may also be the source of the regime's greatest weakness. Repression is costly. Regimes must pay police and soldiers to do their jobs — and as the risk of the job goes up, the pay must also increase to keep these workers coming back. Politically, repression can undermine the legitimacy of the government, while simultaneously creating even more grievances against the government — grievances that, if widely shared, can cost a dictator his throne.

But opposition leaders must bear in mind the importance of maintaining nonviolent discipline, publicizing regime abuses, and evading direct confrontations with foreign troops in order to elicit the backfire that can dislodge these leaders.

The Lesson from Morocco and Jordan: Reform or Perish

Anouar Boukhars

The basic legitimization of political authority and the specific logics of domination that have for decades regulated Arabs' behavior and subjugated their life patterns are under siege in much of the Arab world. Only those regimes that still enjoy the historical prestige of traditional authority have so far managed to weather the assaults on the legitimacy of their rule. But even there, the "habitual orientation to conform," is gradually vanishing.¹ "Prestige," as the great Tunisian thinker Ibn Khaldun stated, "decays inevitably."² Unless supplemented with legality — that third form of rational and just authority that Max Weber identifies as necessary for the governed to obey their governors — the lifespan of a regime gets dramatically shortened. This is exactly what is happening to the sclerotic dictatorships in the Arab world. The Egyptian "pharaoh" quickly fell to a historic revolution, as he could no longer summon the "authority of the eternal yesterday" that served him quite well in putting down previous challenges to his rule.³ The former war hero became especially imperious and deaf to the cries of a frustrated society that grew increasingly disaffected with his rule. When reality finally set in, the octogenarian Mubarak was surprised by how isolated and reviled he has become. A similar fate probably awaits the Syrian self-proclaimed "protector" of Arab resistance against Israeli occupation. The rigidity and contempt with which President Bashar al-Asad has treated the democracy protesters have lost him any good will he could still have generated from his leading role in regional politics. With the legitimacy of his political leadership, authority, and domination totally spent, it is only a matter of time before the 'Alawite Ba'athist is relegated to the dustbin of deposed despots.

The citizens' revolt in the Arab world is thus a direct response to the erosion of the legitimacy of political authority.⁴ In Weber's paradigm, the two regimes that have been hitherto overthrown and those that are on the ropes have had no saving graces left to salvage their decadent regimes from the unprecedented wave of popular revolts against corrupt power. The "good autocrats" of the Arab world have by contrast fared better at containing the regional democratic "contagion."⁵ Unlike the "bad autocrats," they have skillfully managed popular ambivalence about their authority by cultivating the belief in "the ethical goodness" of their rule and compassion of their character. Such benevolence might not propel their societies into prosperity or get them closer to real democracy, but it does distinguish their rule from the sterile and repressive security regimes of the bad tyrants. It is such a distinction that has so far spared some countries from the flames of internal rebellion.

Morocco and Jordan are examples of two smart regimes that have skillfully used the authority of the "eternal yesterday"

1. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1946), p. 78.

2. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. by Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ: Bollingen Series, 1969), p.105.

3. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber*, p. 78.

4. See Michael Hudson, "Awakening, Cataclysm, or Just a Series of Events? Reflections on the Current Wave of Protest in the Arab World," *Jadaliyya*, May 16, 2011.

5. Robert Kaplan, "The Good Autocrat," *The National Interest*, June 21, 2011.

and that of their “personal gift of grace” to preserve the basic legitimizations of their rule.⁶ Both King ‘Abdullah II (49 years old) and Muhammad VI (48) have been confronted since February with elevated levels of social contention and street demonstrations. Jordan saw sporadic street protests, demanding an overhaul of the country’s security apparatus, an end to endemic corruption, and immediate accountability from the King’s entourage, including Queen Rania and her brother.⁷ In Morocco, the protest movement has also been diffuse, clamoring for political and economic change, and targeting the King’s men, Fou’ad El-Himma and Munir Majidi.⁸ But in both kingdoms, the protest gatherings have been relatively small compared to the mass and persistent outpourings that roiled the disgraced regimes of Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria. Hobbled from the start by internal discord over strategy and ideology, the contestation in the streets never took hold.

A FRACTURED PROTEST MOVEMENT

In Morocco as in Jordan, the protest movement finds itself unable to agree on tactics and goals to bring real democratic change. In a way, the movements’ divisiveness mirrors the significant fault lines that polarize both societies. The majority of Moroccans and Jordanians agree that political and economic change is desperately needed, but there is little consensus on how fast and deep the reforms should go. The disagreements run the gamut between the incrementalists who are afraid to “rock the boat” and advocates of immediate democratization. Tensions have emerged over political and economic policies. Within regime circles, the struggle is between those who want to reform the deformed economic model of their era of crony capitalism and those who see economic reforms as an assault on their privileges. In the streets, there is also a rift between those who demand a retrenchment of the neoliberal state and those that want to streamline the capitalist system and alter its unsustainable and corrupt practices.

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But neither group is sure how to accomplish its goals or how hard to push for them. One camp believes that street pressure and mobilization of workers is the only means to force further concessions from the regime; a bigger camp, however,

6. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber*, p. 79.

7. François Soudan, “Mohammed VI et Abdallah II : deux rois dans la révolution” [“Mohammed VI and Abdullah II : Two Kings in Revolution”], *Jeune Afrique*, July 4, 2011.

8. Fou’ad El-Himma, a former powerful delegate minister at the interior and a close friend of the monarch, entered politics in 2007. His goal was to shake up a moribund political system and erect a solid front against the Islamists. The unintended consequence of this move, however, was to alienate huge swaths of the political class, including the monarchy’s staunch loyalists. As it turns out, the public also resented this direct incursion in the political realm, as the street protests showed. Protesters denounced El-Himma as a counterfeit politician who uses his proximity to the monarch to foster more political patronage and clientelism. Munir Majidi, the personal secretary of the king, is one of the main captains of the palace’s expanding business ventures. His idea was to build up national companies (dominated by the monarchy) through mergers and consolidations that are able to compete internationally and fend off foreign takeovers. This big business revolution, as the Majidi saw it, was justified in patriotic terms (economic patriotism) and out of dire necessity (monarchical intervention and control of the economy is good for the global competitiveness of the country). As with El-Himma’s hegemonic designs, the regime underestimated the resentment of the business class and private sector as well as peoples’ growing frustration with crony capitalism.

concedes that pressure is necessary but worries that uncontrolled protests could hurt the economy and destabilize both kingdoms. In another piece, I wrote how a growing number of Moroccans are becoming frustrated with the recent proliferation of volatile strikes and protests.⁹ The sprouting of illegally-constructed structures in several cities and the exponential growth of street vendors who occupy whole neighborhoods of the busiest streets have sparked fears about growing lawlessness in the country. The April 28 terrorist attack in Marrakesh¹⁰ further heightened anxiety that social contestation and political agitation could end up undermining stability and order. This tense environment, exacerbated by the turbulent post-transitional period in Egypt and Tunisia as well as the protracted bloody revolts in Syria, Yemen, and until very recently, Libya, have weighed heavily in favor of the incrementalists and the monarchy's measured approach to political reforms.

In Jordan, "the fault lines are plentiful," warns Tobias Buck of the *Financial Times*.¹¹ The divide is deep between the East Bank Transjordanians and the so called West Bankers of Palestinian origin. Each constitutes about half the population and is deeply distrustful of the other. The East Bankers fear that the politically marginalized West Bankers would be the main beneficiaries of a weakening of the monarchy, even though a number of Transjordanian tribes have grown disenchanted with the regime, and some have participated in the current protests. Such contestation, as that which recently unfolded

in the neglected tribal areas of the south, must be of great concern to the monarchy. For weeks, protesters took to the streets of Tafileh, 111 miles south of Amman, to demand political reforms and an end to corruption and state marginalization. The speed of the King's response to this development is revealing. Unlike his slow response to the protests in Amman, King 'Abdullah moved quickly to calm dissent in this traditional bastion of monarchical support. In June, he visited the Southern Governorate where he launched several development projects worth \$21.1 million. The monarchy is extremely nervous lest contentious action in the Transjordanian towns of the south intensify, lending weight to contentious politics in Amman and efforts to build a broad social movement that transcends societal rifts.

For now, however, the fear of turmoil and chaos, evident in Syria and Yemen, still acts as a strong deterrent against directly challenging the monarchy. The violence in Amman last March when East Bank "monarchists" attacked a protest camp they claimed was led by Palestinians was another reminder of the risk of conflagration. As Tobias Buck aptly put it, "The events of Black September in 1970, when Palestinian militants challenged the rule of King Husayn, 'Abdullah's father, sparking a brief but bloody civil war, are etched deeply into political consciousness."¹²

9. Anouar Boukhars, "Popular Upsurge and Political Pacts in Morocco," *Jadaliyya*, August 3, 2011.

10. "Moroccan Tourist Café Terrorist Attack Leaves at least 15 Dead," *The Guardian*, April 28, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/28/marrakech-tourist-cafe-terrorist-attack>.

11. Tobias Buck, "Jordan: Rifts in the Valley," *Financial Times*, August 15, 2011.

12. Buck, "Jordan: Rifts in the Valley."

The hitherto failure of the protest movement in Morocco and Jordan to develop into mass movements capable of hastening the transformation of their kingdoms into constitutional monarchies is in part self-inflicted. Both movements are too fragmented and lack charismatic leadership.

The failure of the protest movements in Morocco and Jordan to develop into mass movements capable of hastening the transformation of their kingdoms into constitutional monarchies is in part self-inflicted. Both movements are too fragmented and lack charismatic leadership. The fact that they are dominated by Islamists, especially in Morocco, does not help allay public concerns about their motives. In Jordan, for example, “a coalition that includes young people, leftists and workers stopped marching with the Muslim Brotherhood, accusing it of trying to hijack the movement and secretly collaborating with the government.”¹³

But regardless of their composition and collective purpose, the protesters have always faced long odds against two young and flexible monarchs. Unlike the rigid dictators of Tunisia, Egypt, and now Syria who equated flexibility with weakness, the two sovereigns quickly understood that flexibility does not project nervousness but rather constitutes an important element of regime survival. Lacking the substantial financial wherewithal of the wealthy rentier states to buy off dissent, the Jordanian and Moroccan sovereigns therefore quickly moved to nip in the bud the first major crisis of their reign by initiating a measured reform process that, though falling short of the democratic ideal of a constitutional monarchy, still offers some tantalizing possibilities for political change.

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The King of Morocco has moved fastest and farthest in the reform process. Unlike King ‘Abdullah who waited until June to deliver a major speech outlining his vision for political reforms, Muhammad VI gave his in early March. In a show of self-confidence, he committed to a referendum as a test on his political legitimacy. In the Hashemite Kingdom, no popular referendum is envisaged on the recently proposed constitutional amendments. The King must be unsure of the outcome of any popular consultation on his constitution, as he does not enjoy the high popularity and respect that are granted to Muhammad VI by his people. He also lacks “the same respect and devotion” that were “accorded” to his father. According to Tobias Buck, he lacks “King Hussein’s ability to charm and manipulate leaders of the East Bank tribes, the Hashemite dynasty’s traditional power base.”¹⁴ This does not mean that King ‘Abdullah has lost his legitimacy and hold on the country. It just means that his rule is fragile and must be buttressed by serious political and economic reforms. The reform process he just initiated is important in as much as it is only a start and not an end in itself.

THE KINGS’ RESPONSE

As early as January, both monarchs responded to moderate-sized protests with a series of initiatives. To help defuse social tensions, they boosted food and energy subsidies, raised public sector salaries, and increased the minimum

13. Kareem Fahim, “Jordan’s Protesters Ask Little, and Receive Less,” *The New York Times*, July 19, 2011.

14. Buck, “Jordan: Rifts in the Valley.”

wage. In February, the King of Jordan fired his unpopular prime minister and dissolved the cabinet. He then formed a National Dialogue Committee (NDC) to revise the political party and electoral law and a constitutional reform panel in April to reinforce the separation of powers. In June, the NDC unveiled modest changes to the election law. In mid-August, the King's appointed panel of "constitutional experts" finally revealed the much anticipated amendments to the constitution. The proposed reforms provide for the establishment of a constitutional court that monitors and reviews the constitutionality of laws and regulations, creation of an independent election oversight committee, limitation of the extensive powers of secretive state security courts, and enhancement of civil liberties protections. They also make it harder for the government to dissolve parliament or issue laws during its absence.

Most Jordanians have greeted these constitutional amendments with guarded optimism. As in Morocco, however, the protesters, who refused to take part in consultations leading to the reform process, dismissed the changes as insufficient. The Islamic Action Front, the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, criticized the amendments for ignoring the peoples' demands to elect their prime minister, failing to curb the powers of the country's powerful intelligence apparatus, and instituting the separation of powers and systems of checks and balances.

In Morocco, immediately after the outbreak of the protests in February, Muhammad VI endowed the newly created National Human Rights Council (CNDH) with a greater scope of action, including the powers of self-referral and investigation of human rights abuses. The Competition Council, the Central Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, and the Court of Auditors were also empowered to enforce fair competition, transparency, and accountability. On March 9, the King stole the opposition's momentum by surprising the nation with a television address where he promised wide-ranging constitutional reforms, including an elected government and independent judiciary. On July 1, Moroccans overwhelmingly supported the referendum on the new reforms which constitutionalized the principles of cultural and linguistic pluralism, individual rights and the equality of citizens, enhanced legislative capacity and access to the policy realm, and desacralized the sovereign's acts and power.

By the end of the summer, the Moroccan monarchy seems to have navigated quite successfully the treacherous times of the Arab Spring. Muhammad VI placed himself at the center of the reform debates, quickly claiming the mantle of the political change the protesters demanded and positioning himself as the leading driver of the reform process. In this, he walked in his late father's shoes. The Moroccan monarchy has always distinguished itself by its flexibility and ability to reinvent itself. When under pressure, it reshaped its discourse and reorganized its governance practices. When in the early 1990s then-President Zine El-'Abidine Ben 'Ali of Tunisia was brutalizing the Islamist movement and pulverizing the political landscape, and the Algerian generals hijacked the

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democratic process, King Hassan II responded to the real prospects of domestic unrest arising from an economy in crisis and popular resentment against his support for the American-led Gulf War (1991) by initiating a controlled process of liberalization. Unlike his neighbors, he relaxed restrictive controls on civil society activism and redesigned the political rules of the game. In 1998, that process culminated in what was then described as a historic alternation of power where a long opponent of the King, ‘Abderrahmane Youssoufi, was tasked with heading an opposition-led government. That same year, an Islamist party was also integrated into parliament. At his death, King Hassan was transformed from being a dictator into a visionary reformer, who cleverly fended off threats to his throne, prepared a safe dynastical transition to his son, and set the country on a liberalizing trajectory.

Then as now, the monarchy used institutional reforms and promotion of human rights to blunt challenges to its dominance and calm dissent. The difference this time, however, is that the reforms did not gain the acquiescence of the protest movement. “For the first time,” wrote Emanuela Dalmasso and Francesco Cavatorta, “there is today a movement of citizens coming together from different ideological currents that all refuse to accept such (democratic) gradualism even after the regime has met some of its demands.”¹⁵ To be sure, the movement is fractured, disorganized, and lacks popular support. Nevertheless, the monarchy would be advised to take it seriously by addressing its demands, especially those dealing with corruption, rule of law, and public accountability.

Both King Abdullah and Mohammed VI’s flexible responses to the protests have so far given them the upper hand in shaping the debate over political reform.

THE WAY FORWARD

Both King ‘Abdullah and Muhammad VI’s flexible responses to the protests have so far given them the upper hand in shaping the debate over political reform. Unlike the win or lose political games of other Arab states facing turmoil, both regimes skillfully portrayed the promise of top-down reform as a win-win compromise between their old authoritarian constitutions and the parliamentary monarchy model for which the demonstrators have been calling. In both kingdoms, majorities want their sovereign to lead the reform process. But, as Marwan Mu’asher, former Deputy Prime Minister of Jordan (2004–2005), wrote recently, “they [Jordanians] expect the process to be more serious and lead to concrete results, rather than go through another experience where promises are left largely unfulfilled.”¹⁶ The same observation applies to Moroccans. During my recent field research in the country, I found broad support for the King’s reform effort, but only on condition that it leads to accountable and responsible governance and a low level of economic inequality. The public expects the introduction of remedial measures to prevent corruption in the public sphere and to redress the glaring social and economic disparities.

15. Emanuela Dalmasso and Francesco Cavatorta, “The Never Ending Story: Protests and Constitutions in Morocco,” *Jadaliyya*, August 12, 2011.

16. Marwan Mu’asher, “Jordan’s Proposed Constitutional Reform — A First Step in the Right Direction,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Commentary*, August 17, 2011.

Both monarchs are smart enough to realize the high level of social discontent in their realm. The explosions of rage and frustration that set neighboring Tunisia and Egypt ablaze have been building in Morocco and Jordan over time.¹⁷ The blend of technocratic rule and centralization of economic policy-making has not led to equal economic development. Instead, it contributed to the rise of new elites that flaunt their wealth and creep into political positions of power, while failing to absorb the increasing numbers of the unemployed. Large-scale investment projects have not significantly reduced the huge economic disparities between and within regions.¹⁸ These economic shortcomings, compounded by a deepening crisis of legitimacy in elected institutions, major social transformations, and mounting anger at the intensification of corruption and malfeasance of senior officials and palace proteges, have left Morocco and Jordan vulnerable to social tensions. Neither kingdom is stranger to social protests. Protest movements, driven mainly by unemployed associations, have become ubiquitous, sometimes degenerating into dangerous violence, like those that gripped the town of Sefrou in Morocco in 2007 and Sidi Ifni in 2008. Luckily, these locally-based protests did not find immediate echo in other areas of the country.

“The life span of a dynasty corresponds to the life span of an individual,” wrote Ibn Khaldun in his celebrated book *al-Muqaddimah*. It eventually “grows up and passes into an age of stagnation and thence into retrogression.”¹⁹ To avoid such political decay and broadening of societal resistance, both sovereigns need to get serious about power-sharing, tackling corruption within their midst and in the public sphere, and redressing economic disparities.

17. “Révoltes sociales : après l’Algérie et la Tunisie, le Maroc?” [Social Revolts: Is Morocco Next after Algeria and Tunisia?], *Jeune Afrique*, January 20, 2011.

18. In Morocco, for example, Marrakesh and Agadir have received substantial amounts of tourism investments, but both rank near the bottom of the poverty scales. Out of 16 regions, Marrakesh ranks 12th and Agadir 11th, leading many to question the economic impacts of tourism and the failure of the benefits of investments to trickle down to the majority of people. In Fez, which also attracted significant investments, the rate of urban and rural poverty is higher than the national average. Even in the major metropolitan city of Casablanca, there are significant pockets of poverty. These pockets are usually juxtaposed with rich areas. Bachir Thiam, “Cartographie de la pauvreté: La fracture régionale” [“Poverty Mapping: The Regional Divide”], *L’Economiste*, March 1, 2011.

19. Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 138.



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