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A Heretic's Musings

by Yossef Bodansky

On 17 December 2010, a 45 year old policewoman slapped an agitated vegetable vendor in his early-twenties who was creating a disturbance in a police station after his cart had been confiscated for lack of license. The vendor was a university graduate ensnared in Tunisia's economic catastrophe and thus compelled to seek meager income as an unlicensed street vendor. Now, humiliated by having a female slap him on the face in public - he set himself aflame. The next day, many of his friends and relatives rioted in protest of the police's heavy-handedness that led to the self-immolation. Police stood by and let the aggrieved vent their frustration.

On its own, this incident in remote Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, would have been forgotten within days and ignored by all outside the vendor's immediate circle of family and friends. However, this was not to be. Alerted by the Hizb ul-Tahrir leadership in France, a group of Islamist clerics quickly issued a series Fatwas regarding the incident. The self-immolation was aimed to alert the world about the suppression of Islam in Tunisia, they explained. As such, it was not suicide (which is forbidden by Islam) but an act of self-inflicted martyrdom (which is endorsed and encouraged by the Islamists-Jihadists).

And these widely circulated Fatwas - rather than the incident in Sidi Bouzid - excited the frustrated and despaired - sending a couple of dozen youth from Morocco to Indonesia to self-immolate themselves. Numerous Islamist-affiliated electronic media venues - from the formidable Al-Jazeera to the authoritative Jihadist websites - carried the self-immolation stories with emphasis on the Islamist self-inflicted martyrdom interpretation. It was they - the

Islamist media venues - that both sparked, and created the context for, the grassroots Intifada's that followed. And it would be the established veteran Islamist-Jihadist organizations would since sustain the rage and exploit it for their own political and strategic gains.

Although Western politicians and media remain enamored with the "Jasmine Revolution" - as representing the reincarnation of the "color revolutions" of the middle of the last decade - the Arab and Muslim worlds have a different name for the violence that erupted in Tunisia - The Intifada of the Starved. Theirs is a politically loaded term. Intifada means shaking off alien and harming things - the way a dog shakes off ticks, bugs or water. The starved - like the oppressed or dispossessed - is a term used by the Islamists to describe the grassroots victims of pro-Western regimes. The escalating violence was therefore not a revolution against a government - but an upsurge against a social order and a way of life, albeit ones imposed by governments. Hence, the ensuing wave of violence still sweeping the Arab World was not a revolution - that is, an effort to remove the old and usher in the new - but an Islamist Intifada - that is, getting rid of the current in order to restore the traditional old order represented by the time-honored rallying cry "Islam is the Solution!" Little wonder the Muslim Brothers - the Ikhwan al-Muslimin - and their off-shoots and spin-offs have already emerged as the dominant powers and winners.

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Indeed, a wave of Islamist-oriented Intifada's has since spread throughout the entire Greater Middle East. Because the common denominator of the diverse Intifada's has been the uncompromising grassroots rejection of their respective modern states - their ensuing spread and intensification have transformed them into a regional phenomenon that now dominates the grand dynamics of the Greater Middle East.

The Greater Middle East - from the shores of the Atlantic to the shores of the Persian Gulf - is in a state of unprecedented turmoil. The Greater Middle East is boiling and erupting primarily because of the endemic failure of the Arab state system which has engendered the profound crisis now exploited by the Islamists. The Greater Middle East is divided between the eastern Arabian World - the Mashriq - and the western Arabian World - the Maghreb - with "Egypt" serving as a uniquely explosive lynchpin. It is the growing aggregate impact of the local Islamist-Jihadist movements and their respective Intifada's on these regional mega-trends that makes this wave so historically crucial and threatening for the vital interests of the West.

Historically, the Mashriq was dominated by the socio-political dynamics in the Arab heartland - roughly from the shores of the Arabian Sea to northern Iraq, and from eastern Iraq to the Gaza Strip. This Arab cauldron - predominantly Sunni but includes Shiite Arabs as well - has a tendency to spread roughly from south to north through the instrument of radicalization and jihadization to the detriment of Arab nationalism. This ascent is not only contained, but at times also reversed, by three external powers that seek to advance and

expand into, as well as extend their influence and hegemony onto, these Arab lands. These are Mahdivist Iran, neo-Ottomanist Turkey, and the European Union now on off-shore Cyprus. All three powers have long had hegemonic aspirations - through various means ranging from cultural-economic influence to outright military occupation - over the Mashriq.

The fault lines between the Sunni Arab cauldron and the surrounding great powers are characterized by a thin line of minorities that, together, constitute the core of the Fertile Crescent. These minorities are, from east to west, the Ahwazi Arabs of southwestern Iran, the Kurds, the Alavis/Allawites, the Druze, the Maronites and the Jews, as well as smaller minorities such as the Armenians and Cherkess/Circassians. This Fertile Crescent of minorities has provided the stabilizing buffer regulating the spread of influence of Iran, Turkey and Europe. Throughout history, these minorities have been discriminated against and oppressed by the various Arab and Ottoman rulers of the Mashriq, while the Western powers relied on them to bring modernity and Westernization. As a rule, whenever the Fertile Crescent of minorities was strong and viable - it constituted the key to regional stability and purveyor of modernity and growth.

In the Maghreb, the prevalence of pre-Islamic tribal traditions, particularly of the non-Arab nations such as the Berbers and the Tuaregs, has made the entire tribal milieu the harbinger of conservative stability. In contrast, the Maghreb's urban north on the shores of the Mediterranean has been modernized, empowered and radicalized by outside invaders - first the Ottomans and then the Europeans. Consequently, the family-based urban population has traditionally refused to accept both status-quo and tribal preeminence. This restiveness was first manifested in anti-colonial struggles, and when, through the security apparatus, the tribal establishment took over the new modern states, through urban struggle which has become Islamist-Jihadist and challenging the state's legitimacy. The bulk of the population of the Maghreb - both urban and tribal - is concentrated along the shores of the Mediterranean pressed against mountains and the Sahara. The pressure and influence from across the Mediterranean to the north is complex and contradictory - the mixture of European modernization and Westernization, and the backlash of the radicalization and jihadization of the Maghrebi ex-pat population in Western Europe. And the urban population is increasingly challenging the Tribal-engendered status-quo and stability.

The most profound and explosive facet of the current era of Intifada's is the struggle over the soul and definition of "Egypt" - the lynchpin between the Mashriq and the Maghreb. "Egypt" is torn between the traditional (pre-Islamic) concept of the Nile Valley as a distinct socio-political entity - Misr - and the pan-Islamic, now Islamist, concept of the southern parts of (today's) Israel and Jordan, the Sinai Peninsula and the Nile Valley as a single socio-political entity - Bilad al-Kanana - signifying the western-most boundary of the Arabian World of the Mashriq. Egypt's Islamists have supported the Bilad al-Kanana approach. Indeed, Egypt's Islamists have long persecuted the Copts and other non-Muslim people of Egypt's previously cosmopolitan great cities in the Mashriq's tradition. The military has been torn between the crucial importance of the legacy of statehood and institutions as represented by Misr and

Cairo's political aspirations in the Arab World. This still unresolved contradiction has led to the official naming of the modern state as The United Arab Republic rather than having to choose between Misr and Bilad al-Kanana. Given Egypt's singular importance in the Greater Middle East - the enduring failure to resolve the quest for the soul of "Egypt" will keep exacerbating and destabilizing the already explosive posture region-wide.

Thus, from a strategic point-of-view, the two most important manifestations of the Islamist-Jihadist Intifada's - the erosion of the Arab States and the distinct anti-minority persecution - undermine the overall regional status-quo and stability. This means the escalation and exacerbation of the direct friction between the radicalized Arab cauldron and the three external great powers - Iran, Turkey and Europe/West - and the ensuing creation of opportunities for these powers to further destabilize, intervene and seek hegemony.

Tehran is convinced that any radicalization and undermining of predominantly-Sunni Arab nationalism is in its favor. Toward this end, Tehran has been going over governments' heads and reaching out directly to the grassroots. Tehran's primary instrument has been emphasizing the Palestinian issue, urging Jihadist action while blaming the Arab governments of betraying the cause. Concurrently, Iran is sponsoring the escalation of Gaza-based terrorism not only as a reminder of the enduring relevance of the Arab-Israeli war (which was all but ignored as indigenous local issues burst to the surface throughout the Intifada's), but also in order to refocus the EU attention away from Iranian machinations.

Iran's most audacious surge is in the Persian Gulf, starting with Bahrain. Iranian officials and clerics, as well as their counterparts in Eastern Arabia, have never concealed their commitment to a unified region-wide Shiite up-surge rather than a series of local crises in pursuit of localized grievances. Tehran committed significant resources to the incitement and exploitation of the Shiite revolt in Bahrain as the beginning of the ascent of the Islamic Republic of Eastern Arabia. For their part, Bahraini Shiite leaders stressed that their Intifada was indeed in pursuit of the all-Shiite Mahdivist theology-strategy. This distinction was clearly articulated on March 18 by the (still unidentified) Imam delivering the public Friday sermon in Manama Bahrain. He stated that the Saudi-led military intervention "is the only thing that separates us from the state of the Imam. Allah willing, following these events, we will all be under the banner of the justice of the Mahdi."

Turkey is also extending its neo-Ottomanist influence throughout the region. Ankara is focusing on its self-anointed role as the mediator of disputes, usually in favor of the Muslim Brothers and other Islamist causes. The extent of the close relations between Turkey and the international Muslim Brothers was clearly demonstrated in mid-March when the "Who's Who" of the Global Muslim Brothers showed up in Istanbul for the funeral of Necmettin Erbakan - the founder of the Turkish Islamist movement. Ankara's role in pushing Mubarak to resign was the first clear indicator of the new assertive policy. A mid-March editorial in the UAE daily *Al-Bayan* warned of these regional ramifications. "The fall of Hosni Mubarak's regime is a beginning to the consolidation of Muslim Brotherhood influence in Egypt, and

consequently, in Palestine as well. This is a trump card for the exertion of [Turkish] pressure - a trump card that may be exploited by Turkey in its dealings with Israel and the West. Turkey knows that its role as a key player in the region will not be fruitful without its bargaining chips in the region.”

The dramatic zigzag of Ankara’s policy toward Qadhafi’s Libya serves as the best indicator of Turkey’s ultimate objectives. Initially, Erdogan offered Obama that Turkey would perform a central role in a NATO intervention in Libya, including the dispatch of a massive ground force, in return for the US facilitation of Turkey’s speedy accession to the EU. Sarkozy, however, vetoed the idea and personally traveled to Ankara in order to personally break the EU position to Erdogan. Overnight, Ankara reversed its policy and committed to seeking a negotiated settlement favorable to Muammar Qadhafi. In the March 18 issue of *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, Editor Tariq Alhomayed stressed the real motives behind Ankara’s policies. “Erdogan is defending Al-Qadhafi despite all the crimes that the Libyan leader has committed against his own people, whereas previously he was one of the first world leaders to criticize the Hosni Mubarak regime during the January 25 revolution in Egypt. ... Erdogan has responded in a different manner to the events in Libya and Egypt because he is searching for leadership for his country, namely a neo-Ottoman leadership. ... Therefore, all Erdogan wants to do is to strengthen Turkey’s role, in search of a neo-Ottoman role [in the region], and this is something that can be described as political opportunism.” Indeed, since the beginning of the US-led military intervention in Libya, Ankara has been at the forefront of pushing all-Islamic mediation and crisis resolution. This role comes on top of Turkey’s self-anointed role as the mediator of all inter-Arab and Arab-Israeli conflicts - including the brewing Intifada in Syria.

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The unfolding of the various Intifada’s must be examined in this context in order to comprehend their overall course and long-term impact on the Greater Middle East.

In Tunisia, the Intifada sought to overthrow a regime that purveyed westernization and secularization reforms that included equal rights and empowerment for women, and separation between mosque and state. Ben Ali’s was the most drastic effort to secularize and westernize a Muslim country since the days of Kemal Ataturk. Alas, only the harsh authoritarian reign of Ben Ali made the imposition and sustenance of his drastic reforms possible. The Islamist opposition - led by Rached Ghannouchi and the al-Nahdah Party, and the Ikhwani adherents of Hizb ul-Tahrir - fled the country for safe exile in Western Europe. There, protected by the infidels’ democracy and sustained by their generous state welfare - the Islamists plotted and prepared for the inevitable grassroots eruption. They patiently organized underground cells and networks, recruited activists and operatives, and cultivated Western progressive-liberal media outlets. Thus, when the riots first broke - clean-shaven jeans-wearing youth were put in the front lines facing the media’s cameras. But the tanks were stopped by mass street-prayers that blocked all the main streets (a practice that was forbidden under Ben Ali). The military’s subsequent effort to remove large numbers of youth from the

streets by calling up all reserves was immediately reversed once the extent of their Islamicization and adverse impact on the secularized professional troops became apparent to the high command.

In Egypt, the Ikhwan al-Muslimin tacitly but firmly controlled the grassroots in al-Thahrir Square and throughout the country during the entire Intifada. The Ikhwan were responsible for all the advance preparations (including preparing and disseminating the guidebooks), to sustaining the crowd with food, drinks, instructions (by kids waving placards with instructions), to delivering localized alliances with the military that prevented bloodshed (which were negotiated and reached in Ikhwani mosques), to running a field-hospital, to activating the fall-back sat-phone communication system. The extent of the Ikhwani dominance was flagrantly displayed during Sheikh Yussuf al-Qaradawi's sermon at al-Thahrir Square and the humiliating banishment of Google's executive Wael Ghonim - in Western eyes the "symbol" of the techno-savvy new Egypt. The mere fact that the return of the octogenarian Sheikh al-Qaradawi symbolizes the enduring success of the Intifada attests to the extent of the significance of youth and vigor in its message.

And the Egyptian military also underwent their own profound Intifada. Ever since the late-1940's - the aftermath of the defeat in the Naqba (or Israel's War of Independence) - the Egyptian Military has rallied behind a small group, or council, of dynamic officers who jointly made decisions and who nominated one of them to front for their group policy and interest. This group took over Egypt in 1953. They made their front-man - first Nagib, and then Nasser - Egypt's President, and rallied behind as the source of power and legitimacy for the regime. The officers' council has continued to function over the years and held Egypt together through the subsequent military defeats, social and economic crises, and traumatic changes of presidents (the sudden death of Nasser and the assassination of Sadat). In both cases (the death of Nasser and Sadat), the officers' council nominated the replacements (Sadat and Mubarak, respectively), consolidated their hold onto power, and sustained their leadership. Adopting Pharaohic leadership style - Mubarak sought to profoundly break this age-old crux of power by sidelining Field Marshal Tantawi (the military's choice for successor) and instead nominating his own son Gamal as his successor. **THIS** was the real revolution in Egypt. It failed.

Capitalizing on the first opportunity that came their way - the Intifada - the military council recaptured power and nominated their original front-man - Tantawi - as the de-facto president. It was the threat of a military coup and arrest made by the supreme military council - not the street riots - that made Mubarak resign and leave Cairo a couple of hours after making a defiant speech on TV. Now, the military won't let go of their power. These officers are not stupid or oblivious to reality in Egypt - that is, the dominant grassroots influence of the Ikhwan al-Muslimin. Therefore, the officers' council will make deals with the Ikhwan. But, at the end of the day, elections or no elections, the group, or council, of dynamic military officers is back in power as they have been for nearly sixty years now. Hence the new government will reach a compromise with the Ikhwan over the character of society where the

Ikhwan will continue to dominate. But the policy and strategy issues vis-a-vis the rest of the world will remain in military hands. As was the case since the 1950's - this will be a tenuous mistrustful relationship, where both sides will continue to kill the other side's leaders when they feel threatened. But modern Egyptian society knows no better alternative.

The same general principles guide and dominate the less-dramatic Intifada's in Jordan, Yemen, Algeria, and Iraq. In all these countries, the traditional social structures - dominated by tribes, nationalities, the Ikhwan and segments of the military - join hands in tenuous alliances to answer the demands of the grassroots to restore traditional and Islamic social order at the expense of the modern state. In Jordan and Yemen, the essence of their Intifada's is the ascent of a coalition of Islamist-Jihadist organs and the key tribes at the expense of other segments of the population. Significantly, the Intifada in northern Jordan is interlinked with the Syrian Intifada in Daraa just north of the border - a clear demonstration of the regional character of the Islamist-Jihadist trend. In Algeria, it is the ascent of the hitherto disenfranchised Islamist youth of the urban slums and remote villages against the military-dominated government. And Iraq keeps fracturing into Iran-dominated regional entities - at times through immense violence and fratricidal terrorism with sectarian and religious character.

In Bahrain, the Intifada is a direct outcome of the rapidly evolving population tapestry. Most striking is the fact that 54% of the 1.25m population of Bahrain are non-nationals - mainly Iranians and South Asians. About 81% of the entire population are Muslims. Of these, two-thirds are Shiites and one-third are Sunnis. However, most of the Sunnis are non-nationals from South Asia. Among Bahrain's Muslim nationals - the Shiites constitute an 80-85% majority. And the majority of these Shiite nationals have family roots in Iran. The Bahraini Shiites want to get rid of the Sunni al-Khalifa monarchy (although the al-Khalifa dynasty has ruled Bahrain in one form or another since 1783). Tehran has always wanted to return Bahrain to the Iranian fold, and since the Islamic Revolution Iranian intelligence has invested huge efforts and inordinate amounts of cash in gradually consolidating vast networks of supporters. Once upheaval started spreading in the Middle East, the Iranians activated their networks under the guise of an indigenous Intifada. Indeed, the Bahraini security services discovered major support effort from Iranian Intelligence and the HizbAllah Special Operations (with the latter operatives arriving from Damascus and carrying Syrian passports).

Presently, the Bahraini Intifada's leadership is calling for the overthrow of the al-Khalifa dynasty and the establishment of a Shiite-dominated state in their stead as the first step toward the attainment of genuine self-determination - an indication of possible closer ties with Iran. It took a major military intervention by Saudi-led GCC armed forces to suppress the first wave of Shiite insurrection. Significantly, Obama personally warned the top-most Saudi leaders NOT to help Bahrain. The Saudi forces crossed the Fahd Bridge into Bahrain in full daylight. While chaos subsided in the aftermath of an intense crackdown, the Shiite underground has remained largely intact. The huge stockpiles of weapons and explosives, as well as the hundreds of highly trained operatives, smuggled by the Iranians into Bahrain remain intact

and ready to resume and escalate the Shiite Intifada on Tehran's orders. The Saudi-Iranian proxy war over Bahrain and Eastern Arabia is a major issue for both countries. There is already one big loser - the US.

In Syria, after nearly three decades of suppression, the Muslim Brothers and Jihadists (led by certain Sunni tribes) have assumed the courage to violently challenge the Allawite-Druze dominated regime. One of the key organizers of the Intifada on the ground is Feda Tarif al-Sayed who is the son of Tarif al-Sayed - one of the senior Jihadist leaders of the Hama revolt in 1982. The sectarian character of the Intifada was clearly manifested in the anti-Druze riots in Daraa and anti-Allawite riots in Latakia. As well, Muslim Brothers members and Jihadist elements attacked government facilities throughout the traditionally Islamist northern Syria. Politically, the Syrian Intifada is driven largely by the Muslim Brothers. They have an office in Al-Azhar University, Cairo, under the auspices of their Egyptian brethren, from where they negotiate with the US State Department. On April 1, the Martyrs' Day declared by the Intifada's leaders, a new wave of violent protests erupted after Friday prayers in Damascus, Baniyas and Latakia. The extremely violent reaction by the security services leaves no doubt that fierce government repression will continue. There is more slaughter and carnage on the horizon.

Bashar al-Assad made things far worse with his speech March 30 which avoided confronting the unfolding challenges and instead went back to Ba'atist rhetoric of the 1960's and 1970's. He stressed that his government would not fall like a domino in the string of Arab Intifada's. On the contrary, Syria had already kicked the dominos of the "conspirators" and it was they who had fallen instead. Assad blamed unrest on "enemies" led by Israel who were "working daily and scientifically to undermine the stability of Syria." He also criticized the social networking web-sites and pan-Arab satellite television news channels. He emphasized that these "conspirators" and "enemies" were "stupid in choosing to target Syria." Assad then addressed the rioters' demands for reforms. "Staying without reforms is destructive to the country," he acknowledged. However, Assad added, these will only happen in the distant future. Assad carefully stopped short of offering the widely anticipated reform package, and he also made no mention of lifting the state of emergency that exists since 1963 despite earlier promises. The harshness of the speech led Washington to commit to a policy of regime change in Syria.

After four decades under the repressive and chaotic "Jamahiriya" - Libyan population was supposed to be docile and passive. However, it took the heavy-handed crackdown of a single youth demonstration to have the accumulating frustration and hostility to burst into the open. Libya is an amalgam of three distinct tribal zones - Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Fezzan. Initially, the grassroots Intifada quickly evolved into a tribal and regional war that soon crystalized into the traditional Cyrenaica-vs-Tripolitania power struggle. Behind the Cyrenaica-based Sanussiyah movement there existed the clamor for the restoration of the traditional Sanussi Constitution as clearly seen by the widespread hoisting of the pre-revolution tri-color flag of Libya. Meanwhile, Muammar Qadhafi ordered the release from jail

of all the Jihadists - in order to gain their cooperation, as well as increase the fratricidal violence against the tribes in Cyrenaica who, as devout followers of the Sanussiyah, are implacable nemeses of the neo-Salafite Jihadists. But this move backfired for the Jihadists aligned themselves with the Benghazi leadership and became the quality core of the rebel forces.

Ultimately, the Intifada failed to gain traction throughout Libya, particularly among the al-Magariha, the al-Warfalla and the other key tribes of the Libyan interior who constitute more than half the population and control most of the territory. Over time, these tribes have shifted toward tacit support of Tripoli. Throughout, the Libyan Intifada remained limited to a 50-70 kms wide strip between the shores of the Mediterranean and the northern slopes of the mountains. By late March, the tribal leaders in western Cyrenaica started withdrawing their armed elements from the "rebel forces". This left the Benghazi Council with a significantly smaller force comprised mainly of a mix of urban youth from the greater Benghazi area and Islamists-Jihadists from the Baida-Dernah area. Hardly the representation of a grassroots popular movement...

The crucial failure of the Libyan Intifada was the failure to present a discernable legitimate leadership capable of offering interim governance and laying the foundations for the lengthy and complex rebuilding of a democratic constitutional monarchy ruling over a federated Libya where the three tribal groupings can realize their quest for self-determination. Alas, one of the primary outcomes of the four decades of Qadhafi's rule has been the emaciation of the indigenous elites so that the Intifada remains spontaneous, determined and brave - but leaderless. It will take a coalition of military senior officers and officials in both Tripoli and Benghazi, as well as tribal leaders, to formulate such interim leadership. Under the current conditions of escalating and spreading fratricidal fighting and repression - such gathering is simply inconceivable. The US-led Western military intervention only made things worse. And this enduring chaos thus provides the Qadhafi clan with the possibility of ultimately remaining in power.

More than anything, Morocco is the exception that proves the rule. Morocco has been ruled by the Alaouite Dynasty since the early-17th century. Being a direct descendant of both Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali, the King of Morocco has unassailable legitimacy under the most traditionalist and Islamic terms. As is the case in all Western democracies, free and fair parliamentary and local/regional elections give the public venues to express their political opinions and affect both national and local issues. Moreover, the emergence of fringe groups and interests as a result of the accelerated modernization and urbanization - some legitimate and some burning nonetheless - led King Muhammad VI to order the organization of the Economic and Social Council. On February 21, Chakib Benmoussa, who as Interior Minister oversaw the beginning of the implementation of the King's regionalization and democratization reforms, was nominated by the King Chairman of the Council.

Hence, the vast majority of Moroccans have no reason to take to the streets, and the few that did on February 20 - rushed to precede the establishment of the Council that in effect addresses their concerns. Moreover, the original organizing committee of the February 20 movement withdrew their participation from the demonstrations once the extreme political character of some of the participating entities became clear. Simply put, Morocco has a combination of a traditionally-legitimate form of government with individual and political freedoms enabling all citizens to express their regional and localized traditions. Hence, there is no grassroots interest in launching an Intifada in Morocco. Indeed, the ongoing incitement of Al-Jazeera and other pan-Arab media could only bring minuscule crowds to the streets.

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The historic dynamics of the Greater Middle East was jolted on March 17 when the US-led West pushed through the UNSC a resolution authorizing the use of force against Libya. The US-led Kosovo-inspired military intervention in Libya is aimed, in the words of a very senior NSC official, to prevent “another Srebrenica in Benghazi”. In reality, as was the case in Kosovo twelve years beforehand, the US-led bombing campaign is aimed to empower a populist rebellion of dubious credentials and appeal despite its failure to attract the widespread grassroots support that would have delivered true victory. This US-led military intervention - even if it remains limited to Libya - will have a devastating effect on the entire Greater Middle East as the grassroots Intifada’s keep spreading.

The main difference between the 1999 intervention in Kosovo and the 2011 intervention in Libya is that in March 2003 the US invaded Iraq in order to rid that country, and the rest of the region, of a dictator bent on destabilizing the region’s tenuous status-quo and correlation of forces. However, the promises of “freedom” and “democracy” that followed the occupation of Baghdad led to widespread grassroots demands for the de-facto abolishment of the centralized state in favor of local ethno-centric entities. And when these demands failed to materialize and a Shiite-dominated centralized state was established in Baghdad, there ensued a fratricidal carnage led by both Sunni and Shiite Jihadists that, toward the end of the decade, the ensuing US “surge” suppressed to a degree but failed to resolve. Presently, an Iran-sponsored Shiite-dominated government reigns in a segregated Baghdad as the US forces are near completion of their withdrawal from Iraq and, effectively, the Middle East. While US military might toppled the most Arab-Nationalist regime of its time - the US has failed to fill the socio-political vacuum it had created with an alternate form of modern governance that would be legitimized and recognized by the grassroots. Instead, the US opted to sustain by force a state-based status-quo throughout the region.

Alas, these Western calls for “freedom” and “democracy” fell on fertile grounds not only in Iraq but throughout the entire Arab world. Prostrate and oppressed grassroots simmered in frustration for almost a decade fearful of challenging their respective authoritarian regimes while dreading a US military intervention in order to sustain the state-based status-quo.

In 2004/5, Ayman al-Zawahiri and the clairvoyant leaders of the Jihadist movement recognized this trend and launched a profound reform of the Islamist world - replacing the erstwhile centralized monolithic Islamism with a myriad of localized Islamist movements that both adhere to a joint grand-strategy while preserving and celebrating the unique character of their respective societies. Significantly, these new Jihadist groups are identified by the traditional population-defined Islamic regions - Greater Syria (Bilad al-Sham), Greater Egypt (Bilad al-Kanana), Mesopotamia (Bilad al-Rafidayn), Arabian Peninsula (Bilad al-Jazeera) and the Islamic Maghreb (which includes the parts of Western Europe once ruled by Islam) - rather than the modern Arab states they operate in and against.

In mid-2009, Tehran joined the trend, promoting the establishment of the independent Islamic Republic of Eastern Arabia as the instrument for unifying the peninsula's Shiites under Iranian influence. "The decision of the proclamation of the Republic was based on the demands of the people of the region," explained a statement posted on an opposition website. Since then, Iran has invested huge resources in training, organizing and arming the IRGC-controlled Jihadist cadres that will lead the inevitable independence war of the Islamic Republic of Eastern Arabia.

In early 2011, Osama bin Laden personally launched a new initiative jointly with the Muslim Brothers to "establish a new nexus for a joint struggle against Western interests in the Muslim world." At the core of the new cooperation are teams of highly trained Jihadist operatives called "the Sons of the Soil". These teams will deploy to the countries where Intifada's are already taking place or being prepared in order to assist the various Muslim Brothers movements and other Islamist groups in their struggles against the local security authorities, Western intelligence services, and all other enemies of Islam and Islamism-Jihadism.

Meanwhile, under the vague Islamist rallying cry "Islam is the Solution" there solidified in mid-2010 a widespread delegitimization of modern statehood based on territorial frameworks in favor of a return to vague localized entities based on the grassroots common religious-ethnic-tribal identity and loyalty. Left to their own devices by wars or absence of centralized governance, complete regions of Arab states increasingly break up into small entities based on homogeneous ethno-tribal groups where the traditional leaderships are the legitimate rulers. Ultimately, only two things were required to exacerbate the situation and transform this trend into a region-wide irreversible phenomenon: the removal of the grassroots fear of a US intervention - delivered by the accelerated withdrawal from Iraq and the Persian Gulf - and an Islamist-sanctioned spark - which was the Islamist exploitation of the self-immolation in Tunisia.

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The lingering impact of the US-led Western intervention in the Intifada's throughout the Middle East - and not just the military intervention in Libya - should therefore be examined in the context of these regional dynamics and mega-trends. On their own, the Arab States were

able to hold their own against these tidal waves even when leaders abdicated. In both Egypt and Tunisia the military, security services and bureaucracy were sufficiently institutionalized to hold the state together. However, it was the delegitimization and undermining of these institutions by the US-led West that led to their self-weakening and the ensuing ascent of the Muslim Brothers.

The US-led Western intervention has so-far been multi-faceted. Washington first focused on the undermining and toppling pro-Western leaders - most notably Hosni Mubarak of Egypt - and subsequently on leading military campaign effectively against Arab leaders who would not heed the US call to abdicate - most notably Muammar Qadhafi of Libya. Moreover, the US-led interventionism, both political and military, supported and sought to empower the most destabilizing elements in the targeted countries - Muslim Brothers and other Islamists in Tunisia, the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, a loose coalition of urban radicals, Muslim Brothers and Jihadists in Libya, Muslim Brothers and Jihadists in Syria, etc. Washington's repeated urgings of restraints have only served to weaken staunch American allies such in Bahrain, Oman, Jordan, and Yemen.

The Obama White House insists that the US intervenes in these Intifada's in order to save, support and empower the genuine grassroots irrespective of their policies. The new Obama Doctrine is called the "Responsibility to Protect." This doctrine is the invention of senior NSC official Samantha Power and George Soros who defines the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine:

"If governments abuse the authority entrusted to them and citizens have no opportunity to correct such abuses, outside interference is justified. By specifying that sovereignty is based on the people, the international community can penetrate nation-states' borders to protect the rights of citizens."

By this definition, the primacy and sanctity of the Westphalian State no-longer exist. This "Responsibility to Protect" supersedes any other consideration - specifically including US alliance with the state whose sovereignty the intervention will violate.

Little wonder, therefore that the US-led Western intervention has brought down the Arab Nationalism's last lines of defense against the ascent of Islamism-Jihadism. In the name of populist grassroots politics, the US-led West exposes the region to the up-surge of the regionally-focused Islamism-Jihadism and the ensuing imposition of non-democratic Islamic regimes. Moreover, the empowered Islamic-Jihadist movements will escalate their assault on minorities - as already seen in the escalation of violence against the Copts and Egypt, and the Syrian Sunni-Islamist rioters' focus on Allawite and Druze civilians. Concurrently, Shiite Baghdad is intensifying its campaign against the Kurds of Iraq as the US accelerate the disengagement and withdrawal from Iraq. And the US continue to weaken Israel in the context of an impractical and futile peace-process with a moribund Palestinian Authority dreading the rise of the Jihadists in their midst. Thus, the aggregate erosion of the minorities'

posture, coupled with the fracturing of the Arab states, opens the door to unprecedented strategic ascent and surge of both Mahdivist Iran and neo-Ottomanist Turkey - both implacable foes of the West. Hence, the Obama Administration has only succeeded in undermining the status-quo and driving the strategically crucial Greater Middle East to an eruption that will be horrific and will serve nobody's interests - least of all the US-led West that is making it happen.

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Ultimately, the dominant characteristic of the US-led Western handling of the historic changes wrought by the Intifada's is profound ignorance of the convulsion happening in the Greater Middle East. The Western elites' and media's infatuation with the electronic social media aspects of the "revolution" aptly demonstrates just how little the West comprehends the historic drama unfolding in front of their eyes.

These media reports must be put in context. The very disparaging and despairing picture of the real posture of the Arab World can be found in the UN annual reports about the Arab World. The UN's *Arab Human Development Report* of 2009 (the latest) observes that "the most evident and challenging aspect of the region's demographic profile is its 'youth bulge'. Young people are the fastest growing segment of Arab countries' populations. Some 60 per cent of the population is under 25 years old, making this one of the most youthful regions in the world, with a median age of 22 years compared to a global average of 28."

However, the Arab World has failed to either educate or employ these youth. The high unemployment rates in the Arab World are twice the West's average. This state of affairs contributes to the persisting poverty that further slows down regional development and progress. The UN's *Arab Knowledge Report* of 2009 (also the latest) warns of the growing backwardness of "an Arab world most of which still suffers from knowledge and digital illiteracy." This comes on top the fact that in virtually all Arab countries "universal education is yet to be achieved" and "illiteracy rates for adults, children, and young people remain a challenge."

Thus, the high illiteracy rates and immense poverty make owning and using of laptops and smart-phones near impossibility. Hence, their impact on society at large is a marginal phenomenon at best. People do talk on mobile phones - but these are monitored by the Mukhabarat's and thus are useless for conspiracies and organizing. Young people do frequent Internet Cafes - but the most visited sites are Islamist-Jihadist sites, match-making and pornography. And these have nothing to do with the agitation and organizational power claimed by the Western media. Alas, most plans were hatched in the mosques and underground prayer and study halls - all of which are dominated by the Ikhwan al-Muslimin. And most instructions were delivered by kids holding cardboard signs, and activists shouting into bullhorns - frequently using the minarets of mosques.

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Presently, the Arab World is experiencing the beginning of a wave of Intifada's that constitute grassroots rejection of the Arab modern state - that is, the education, modernity and oppression the state purveys - in favor of return to the confidence in the traditional ways of the Muslim Brothers, tribal and ethno-centric structures. Since these dynamics cannot coexist within the framework of a Westernized state and cannot cope with the modernity necessitating economic development - these Intifada's and the grassroots sentiments behind them do not bode well for the West. At best, the mounting crises will encourage militaries and security forces to crackdown and revive militant dictatorial regimes. At worse, sooner or later, the Ikhwan-affiliated populist regimes will vent their growing frustration and despair by sponsoring Jihadist terrorism against both their own peoples and the hated West.

The crisis that is still escalating and spreading throughout in the Muslim World is not new. This crisis has been intensifying for a quarter of a millennium now as Islamdom's isolation turned into subjugation when the West penetrated the Hub of Islam - the area between Morocco in the west and India in the east, between Central Asia in the north and Central Africa in the south - where Muslims not only constitute the overwhelming majority of the population but also determine the socio-political and civilizational way of life. The process began with Napoleon's arrival in Egypt in 1798. Then came, in the nineteenth century, the Russian wars with Turkey and Iran and the conquest of Central Asia, and the concurrent British and French occupation of vast Muslim lands in south Asia, north and central Africa. This surge was followed by the defeat and collapse of the Turkish Caliphate, the occupation of its Arab domains by Great Britain in World War I, and the ensuing artificial redrawing of the Middle East's map by the imperialist powers. None of the Middle Eastern states that emerged from this partition is yet to gain grassroots legitimacy and function properly. The aggregate experience has been a trauma from which the Muslim world, particularly the Hub of Islam, is yet to emerge. The still spreading and escalating wave of grassroots Intifada's is the most indigenous and desperate outburst in this quest to rid Islamdom from the vestiges of Western political structures and the civilizational values that come with them. The earth is shaking in Islamdom, the Tsunami is yet to come.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.



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