

STIMSON

# Seismic Shift:

Understanding Change in the Middle East

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# Preface

The momentous events sweeping the Arab world since late 2010 raise important questions about the art and science of analyzing political and societal events. In an age of information surplus, which creates the illusion that one can easily know what is happening anywhere in the world, big surprises still occur. Societies change, governments make choices that have consequences, and the political life of a country or a region is transformed.

For analysts in and out of governments, the upheaval in the Middle East lends itself to reflections about how regional experts with deep knowledge of the Middle East, and those who use distinct political science or other methodologies to understand processes of change, fared in their assessments of the likelihood of change.

The Stimson Center invited a group of experts who represent distinct, non-governmental institutional perspectives to look back on the work of these sectors, and evaluate how they looked at prospects for change in the Middle East. The sectors include: university scholars, think tanks, democracy and human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs), journalists, social media, and private business. The study addresses in particular these questions:

1. What were the main judgments about prospects for change in the Middle East from 2005 to 2010?
2. Were there underlying theories or models of change that guided the analysis?
3. What were major turning points or “light bulb” moments in the analysis?
4. Will the methods of analyzing the region change as a result of the upheaval?

The result is “Seismic Shift: Understanding Change in the Middle East,” with our title taken from an interesting piece written by Max Rodenbeck, of the *Economist*. In July 2010, he wrote that a “seismic shift” was about to occur in Egypt.

I would like to thank all of our contributing authors, as well as the team who worked on the book at Stimson: April Umminger, Alison Yost, Shawn Woodley, Jim McGurrin, and Kerri West; as well as our interns John Doble, Daniela Manopla, and Peter Klicker.

The Stimson Center is a non-profit, non-partisan think tank dedicated to developing pragmatic approaches to enduring and emerging problems of international security. It is supported by foundations, US and foreign governments, corporations, and private individuals. Its work on the Middle East has been supported in recent years by the US Institute of Peace, the Christopher Reynolds Foundation, The Ploughshares Fund, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Government of Sweden, and the Exxon-Mobil Corporation.

From 2005 to 2010, many experts were drawing important analytic conclusions about growing weakness at the top and rising assertiveness at the bottom of various Arab societies; few were able to net out the shifting power equation.

A selection of key events and insights from diverse experts:

# “Youth ... in much of the Arab world, will remain a ticking time bomb”

—Dina Shehata, *early 2008*

IRAQ | JANUARY 2005

First nationwide election post Saddam Hussein

EGYPT | APRIL 2006

Renewal of emergency laws

EGYPT | MARCH 2007

34 amendments to the constitution outlaw the Muslim Brotherhood

EGYPT | APRIL 2008

Labor activists start using Facebook to coordinate mass strikes

MIDDLE EAST | 2007

War on bloggers

TUNISIA | JANUARY 2008

Revolt of the Gafsa Mining Basin workers and youth

TUNISIA | OCTOBER 2005

“Freedom of Expression in Mourning” Internet campaign starts

EGYPT | FEBRUARY 2005

Mubarak announces multi-candidate presidential elections for September '05

# “A budding culture of change

is ... imaginatively challenging the status quo”

—Robin Wright, *2008*



**“Egypt...is likely  
to produce  
an explosion  
at any moment”**

—Alaa Al Aswany, *May 2010*

**“Seismic  
shift**

about to occur”

—The Economist, *July 2010*

EGYPT | JUNE 2009

Obama speech in Cairo,  
“A New Beginning”

TUNISIA | OCTOBER 2009

Ben Ali and his ruling RCD  
party win re-election

TUNISIA | DECEMBER 2010

Mohamed Bouazizi  
self-immolation

EGYPT | NOVEMBER  
2010

Parliamentary  
elections garner  
low turnout and  
allegations of fraud

**“Tunisia is coming  
apart at the seams”**

—Human Rights Watch, *May 2010*









# Understanding Change in the Middle East: An Overview

*Ellen Laipson*

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## An Explanatory Note about the Communities of Experts

**T**his report is structured around the diverse communities of experts on the Middle East and on political change. We organized our research by looking at distinct institutions and the individual researchers in them, and designated a lead author for each institution or sector. Those institutions included: universities, research institutes in international organizations, the media (traditional and new social media), think tanks, business and risk firms, and democracy and human rights non-governmental organizations. We wanted to examine whether these different expert communities drew different conclusions or used different methodologies in assessing prospects for change in the Middle East.

We found that some of the sectors – the business sector and NGOs in particular – have distinct methods and a defined mission that enabled us to cover their work within clear parameters. Those two sectors also do not have a public record of reports that would capture all of their thinking; therefore, interviews were central to our analysis of those sectors. Another feature distinct to these two sectors is their ability to move resources agilely when circumstances shift: they are attuned to such change as part of their basic business model. In the case of NGOs, there was also value placed on cross-regional learning, with the lessons of democratization successes figuring prominently in their work.

NGOs and social media share the characteristic that their core mission is not research and analysis; rather, they should be seen as two possible vectors for information and insight about societal activities and sentiments that could be analyzed by others to interpret broader political realities.

*All the remaining sectors, we discovered, live in a loosely confederated community of scholars and thinkers, where individuals may have a professional base in one community, but easily and frequently publish in the online and hard-copy outlets of other institutions: university professors are regular bloggers on media outlets; think tanks publish volumes in which academics and journalists, as well as former government officials, offer their analysis; and journalists write books that circulate alongside more formal academic literature. This leads to a blending of the analytic styles and skills, so we note that our sectoral reports inevitably will draw on some of the same public intellectuals in more than one context.*

*Yet these various institutions work in and on different time frames. Media coverage is the most time-sensitive; journalists report quickly on what is happening now, although many of the ones covered in this report also provide longer-term trend analysis. Academics work on a slower time frame, with longer lead times on research and review before publication; they are usually focused on topics that have a medium- to long-term time horizon. Business risk firms cover the spectrum, from immediate decisions about safety of personnel to strategic considerations about large investments in potentially unstable countries. Therefore, our appreciation of what they “got right” would require us to consider their distinct timeframes and temporal horizons.*

*While most of the sectors are concerned about prospects for violent upheaval and terrorism, only a few dedicate research efforts to peaceful change or societal trends. Journalists and democracy/human rights NGOs are most attentive to bottom-up change, while others focus more intensively on centers of power in incumbent governments, decision-makers and elites, and prospects for radical, violent change.*

- *NGOs in particular enjoy a distinct advantage in understanding societal intentions and capacities, and their more limited interaction with government officials may provide them more insight into societal trends. They can also engender trust with their counterparts in civil society in ways not available to government analysts, whose interactions with regional NGOs would be more formal and fraught with political sensitivities, at least during the long period of authoritarian rule.*
- *International NGOs also can be a useful gauge of levels of government repression of local NGOs. Several American NGOs decided to maintain a low-key presence in Cairo, for example, because of regime intimidation, which could be considered a sign of government’s insecurity vis-à-vis civil society. (Such changes in NGO behavior, however, cannot be construed as a reliable indicator of pending change, and, perhaps ironically, the NGO sector could be susceptible to overstating regime strength because of their difficult interactions with the state or, conversely, overstating the prospects for success of their democracy activists through a conscious or unconscious bias.)*
- *Many business enterprises, by contrast, would be concerned about immediate security concerns, and would be more likely to track radical groups than nascent democratic movements. Their concern would be for the safety of installations and plants, or other investment vulnerabilities.*

*We considered whether the various institutional perspectives were more or less susceptible to group-think or consensus views; academics and think tankers are valued as individual experts even if their work is subjected to peer review, and some editorial process. The business risk firms value internal discussion, internal peer review, and the balancing of alternative views, though these tend to be resolved before publication or presentation to clients. Social media, by definition, is unfiltered and spontaneous. We did not make a determination whether these variations affected the quality of the analysis or the accuracy of any forecasts.*

*Lastly, we got hints of some concerns about analysis that was seen as linked to US policy preferences or as having a partisan edge. NGOs aspire to see their work have enduring value independent of a particular US Administration, and are also sensitive to perceptions of being funded by Congress or the executive branch. For journalists, covering democracy movements was viewed by some as following the Bush Administration's agenda, and some were concerned about being seen as promoting that agenda.*

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## Big Analytic Judgments

Most experts we consulted said quite clearly that they did not predict the extent, the timing, the relatively low level of violence at the outset, and the spread of unrest in the region. They would not have expected to foretell the specific trigger, nor that the trigger would be Tunisia. Most felt they were monitoring and warning about widespread demand for change from disaffected social groups across the political and ideological spectrum, and, in the case of Egypt, a deepening of that trend by 2008.

The humility of most experts notwithstanding, we note several strong and prescient judgments from the past two years (see more in Appendix V):

- *“Conditions in Egypt have reached rock bottom...the reality is likely to produce an explosion at any moment...”*  
— Alaa El-Aswany, May 2010
- *“The expectation of a seismic shift is almost tangible in the air...”*  
— Max Rodenbeck, *Economist*, July 17, 2010
- *“...There is, today, a critical mass for substantive change...their own citizens are angry, growing angrier, and – more importantly – doing something about it.”*  
— Shadi Hamid, July 2010
- *“The multiple exclusion of youth, coupled with the insistence of the regime to bloc[k] all avenues of youth participation, threatens to radicalize youth activism... youth in Egypt, as in much of the Arab world, will remain a ticking time bomb.”*  
— Dina Shehata, October 2008

And even on Tunisia:

- *“Tunisia is coming apart at the seams.”*  
— Human Rights Watch, May 2010

And on the region as a whole:

- *“Islamic extremism is no longer the most important, interesting, or dynamic force in the Middle East...in the early twenty-first century, a budding culture of change is instead imaginatively challenging the status quo...”*  
— Robin Wright, 2008

Regional experts over the decades have moved from looking at the region as a unit, to having sub-regional specializations, focusing on countries, rather than the pan-Arab issues. This trend may have dulled an appreciation of possible contagion effects once upheavals began, and may have undervalued the new unifying effect of satellite television and other social media. Experts made distinctions between the North African scene – similar socio-economic profiles, pro-Western foreign policies, and the largely peaceful uprisings that eventually led to leadership changes (if not more) – in contrast to the analysis of Yemen, and more recently Libya, which fit more into a state failure model than a democratizing revolution model. Bahrain, a Gulf monarchy, was treated analytically through the prism of the geopolitics of the Gulf (pulled between the Saudi and Iranian spheres of influence), and by its long-standing sectarian tensions.

Many experts characterized the situation in many states throughout the period as “not sustainable.” Across the sectors, the enduring and evolving socio-economic indicators about disappointing economic development schemes and the toxic mix of large youth cohorts, deeply flawed education systems, and joblessness were widely recognized. But the empirical data and research from international financial institutions and other international organizations might have led analysts to focus on Jordan or Syria, rather than North Africa. The socio-economic indicators alone were not sufficient to rank various Arab states in terms of susceptibility to unrest. Similarly, the state failure models missed the intangible factors of changing youth culture, the possibilities for mass mobilization of youth who would protest non-violently, and the gradual erosion of fear that seems to be a critical part of the story of upheaval.

University-based scholars with deep Middle East expertise focused on the durability of authoritarianism. While they did not believe in Middle Eastern exceptionalism (the notion that the Arab world is somehow uniquely unsuited or uninterested in democratization), they did see incumbent leaders – secular regimes and monarchies alike – as having considerable staying power. The judgment about durability was based on analysis of deeply engrained patterns of political and cultural behavior, which was reinforced by incentives provided by the international community, particularly during the past decade where counter-terrorism cooperation often took priority over declared reformist goals.

Think tanks and NGOs internalized the premise that change from the top was not working (or was reversible), and began to look for other agents of change in a region where the demand for change was rising. Many believed the Islamist opposition was the most credible and coherent alternative to incumbent power, but think tank interest in political Islam seemed to wane after the 2006 Gaza elections. They considered legal secular opposition parties,

but generally concluded that they were co-opted by regimes and complacent with their role in the establishment – unlikely to press for further reforms. Some then considered labor movements, which were holding increasingly frequent and larger demonstrations in several countries during the timeframe considered. Dramatic strikes and protests from diverse sectors – textiles, extractive industries, even tax collectors – were increasingly common in North Africa, Egypt, and Jordan. By the end of the period, NGOs in particular, some academics, and think tanks as well increasingly were interested in informal activists using cyber tools, although few understood (including the activists themselves) that they had the capacity to mobilize significant and diverse parts of society.

In hindsight, analysts acknowledge growing concerns about various issues that they had not addressed in systematic ways. Insufficient attention was given to the erosion within authoritarian regimes, suggesting new areas for analytic work, including:

- The effect of corruption on elites;
- Views of the military regarding ruling families, i.e., signs they are disaggregating their corporate interests from those of rulers;
- Attitudes of regimes to beneficiaries of reform, such as more open press, civil society groups;
- The declining ability of regimes to provide basic services, a social-safety net; and
- Regimes' mistrust, and efforts to undermine outside engagement in reform.

In the case of Egypt, think tankers, business, and some scholars had come to the conclusion that the planned transfer of power to Gamal Mubarak was simply not working, yet none wrote explicitly about the succession issue as an indicator of systemic collapse.

Across the sectors, experts acknowledge not knowing how much weight to give to several slowly evolving trends:

- Quiet cooperation between a younger generation of Islamists and the new youth activists who were more secular in values, but found common cause;
- Generational tensions within the formal political parties;
- The ability of educated youth activists to make common cause with the increasingly frequent labor protests; and
- Most intangible of all, the gradual erosion of fear and the growing spirit of defiance that engulfed wide sectors of society once unrest erupted in Tunisia and Egypt.

One scholar who was exploring this new political culture was Asef Bayat, who focused on the “collective action of noncollective actors” or the “politics of everyday life.” He noted that ordinary people were moving away from tolerance of the regime, and that the oppressive power of the authoritarian regime was actually full of holes. In general, though, even those who focused their work on the bottom-up perspective would not have judged that civil society groups, labor movements, or informal networks would be the catalyst for real change in the time frame considered.

## Broad Analytic Assumptions and “Theories” of Change

Most of the communities of experts considered do not identify a dominant theory of change or methodology that drives their analysis. The scholarly community sees theories as intended to explain, order, and derive meaning from empirical data, not to serve as a predictive tool. Other sectors are open to a range of social science tools and techniques, but most do not rely on a single theory of how change occurs.

Within the business sector, some firms use consistent techniques in evaluating stability in given countries, while others are more eclectic in their methodologies. It is not clear if either approach has a stronger track record of accurate forecasts.

Some authors of this study believe there has been an implicit assumption in many Western analyses of the region that Arab societies would not be able to effect change alone. Many think tanks, for example, provide deep and useful analysis of internal conditions in Arab countries, the standoff between regimes and reformers, and then address whether outside actors – through aid, political pressure, or other means – can generate more momentum for change. Such an assumption is not a judgment about the democratic preferences of Arabs, but it is based on an understanding of the realities of power politics, and the regimes’ ability and willingness to use coercion and force to prevent significant change.

Academic works focused on the durability of authoritarianism seemed to contain several core analytic assumptions which, in hindsight, were flawed: that militaries across the region were so invested in incumbent power that they would remain loyal; that neo-liberal economic reforms were regime-strengthening; or that the spread of new media was unlikely to lead to wide political change.

When polled in early 2011, most analysts were committed to the notion that for political change to be durable and legitimate, it has to be led and initiated locally. This core principle is well embedded in current US policy. For some experts, this principle was validated and strengthened by the Iraq experience of the past decade: when political change is initiated entirely by outside force, it is a more violent and less legitimate process.

In monitoring reform over the past decade, several experts invoked Samuel Huntington’s “King’s Dilemma” theory, which postulates that a regime’s introduction of limited reforms can stimulate greater frustration by the public seeking reform, which raises the prospect of more radical change. In several cases in the Middle East, for example, small- and medium-size businesses were not able to benefit from economic reforms, since all the spoils were taken by the entrenched elite. This line of argument reinforced analysis that reform from the top was not likely to succeed, so that the demand for change would more likely be a bottom-up process.

Those who did get at least part of the story right – those who correctly judged that the demand for change was reaching a breaking point – were generally those who used very broad-gauged and inclusive analytic approaches, and did not rely on a single theory or believe that quantitative data alone would provide a reliable predictor of instability. Journalists with deep regional experience were the most open to notions of change, and

often demonstrated that they were engaging a wide spectrum of views within a country or across the region. Some think tank experts and business risk analysts were drawing important analytic conclusions about growing weakness at the top and rising assertiveness at the bottom of various Arab societies. NGOs knew about the increasing confidence of cyber-activists, but were less able to net out the shifting power equation.

## Big Turning Points

The sectors had different notions of events or trends that changed their institutional thinking, and most of the turning points in analytic thinking occurred gradually and incrementally. We searched for “light bulb” moments but found very few. Some scholars and think tank writers would acknowledge that they internalized various shifts in thinking over time, but did not necessarily write about these shifts in definitive, game-changing terms.

The NGO, media, and social media sectors identified:

- Labor strikes from 2004 on;
- The emergence of Kefaya (2006) in Egypt and its use of street protests;
- The April 6 (2008) labor strikes in Egypt, and the link to the new informal cyber-activists;
- The shift in the activists’ agenda from reform to more ambitious systemic change;
- Willingness to demonstrate in front of government ministry buildings by 2009-2010, suggesting that fear of coercion was weakening;
- Khaled Said Facebook campaign (after June 2010);
- The run-up to the 2010 parliamentary elections in Egypt: “Everyone telling us Egypt is about to explode.”

Think tank experts with a distinct methodology, such as polling or media analysis, identified a different set of changes that caught their attention:

- Polling that showed that Arabs rank their domestic grievances higher than foreign policy concerns (2007);
- Frequency and size of both political and economic protests on the rise;
- Rise of satellite TV, or Twitter use by labor strikers, or spread of Internet access (scholars diverge on which media dynamic was most important);
- Realization Gamal transition in Egypt was not working.

## Plans to Revise Research Methods?

Most analysts and institutions we studied were eager to show that they are rethinking the way in which they cover the Middle East. Those already deeply interested in informal activists and social media would not have to make significant changes, but would hope for more resources to deepen their knowledge. There is some danger that Middle East experts



will over-correct by focusing so intensively on social media and informal political activists that some of the enduring factors that shape political and social life in the region will suffer a new neglect. In the end, the community of experts needs to have complementary and diverse specializations.

Across the sectors, some of the tried and true research skills are as valued as ever: time on the account, language skills, residence in the region, and building relationships of trust with interlocutors in the region. A second tier would include time outside capital cities, and special attention to being more inclusive in defining those who are politically active or relevant (i.e., less narrow focus on elites and more attention to cultivating a wider range of societal players).

One major think tank plans to take a comprehensive look at the Middle East through a multi-authored study before redesigning its research agenda. Others are flagging important institutional issues that now will demand more attention, such as youth unemployment or educational reform.

NGOs are moving to open offices in previously repressive environments such as Tunisia, and are exploring options for Libya. They are continuing to expand their contacts, reaching deeper into civil society. They are also putting great emphasis on political party training, as countries such as Tunisia and Egypt face new elections, and several sectors likely will be actively engaged in work on new constitutions or other formal governance activities in the still few places embarked upon true democratic transitions.

A new generation of academics will have their work cut out for them: a mere four weeks of Arab history will produce dozens of theses, on topics ranging from the rise of social media as a tool of political mobilization, the place and evolution of political Islam, and the new regional geopolitics, to new theses about the roles of militaries in Middle Eastern politics. Professor Gause tentatively offers a new hypothesis for scholars to test: 1) militaries whose officer corps share minority status with ruling elite will stand by regimes (Syria, Bahrain); 2) militaries in uninstitutionalized regimes will fragment under pressure (Yemen, Libya); and 3) highly institutionalized militaries in relatively homogeneous societies are most likely to assume the role of arbiter in political crisis (Egypt, Tunisia).

Through such investigations, analysts will seek to add value by deep study of mid-term issues, and to develop policy ideas to address structural problems that will help determine whether the recent events will turn out to be, in the words of one of our authors, only an Arab Winter of discontent, or a genuine Arab Spring.







## The Middle East Academic Community and the “Winter of Arab Discontent”: Why Did We Miss It?

*F. Gregory Gause, III*

### Explanatory Note

**T**he academic community is distinct due to its established and formal procedures for reviewing original research before publication. As such, academic studies require a longer timeline than research from other communities. The life cycle from identifying a topic through field research to writing, peer review, and publication could take several years. While many academics interested in public policy also provide analysis for more informal channels, such as blogs or think tank publications, universities vary in the recognition they accord such outside work. For some, it enhances a scholar’s impact and the visibility of the university; for others, it is considered as an outside activity, and not recognized as part of a university scholar’s formal work.

No academic specialist on the Middle East (of whom I am aware) predicted the timing and extent of the region-wide upheavals in the Arab world that began in December 2010 and continue today. This is not because the academic community believed that Arabs liked their governments, or that Arab leaders were popular figures with broad support bases. No one in the academic community made that argument. The academic literature tended to emphasize the problems that the Arab world faced (in many cases working from the extraordinarily detailed critique that Arab researchers put forward in the *Arab Human Development Reports* in the mid-2000s), including the demographic “youth bulge,” economic problems, and sclerotic authoritarian political systems. Nor did the academic community miss it because, as some commentators have implied, it believed that some combination of Islam and Arab cultural traits rendered the populations of the Arab world

less interested in or “prepared for” democracy than people in other world areas.<sup>1</sup> While some scholars who do not specialize on the region have made this kind of argument (Samuel Huntington, David Landes), almost all American Middle East specialists have rejected the “cultural barrier to democracy” argument because it is not grounded in the evidence of the region. Moreover, the vast majority of American scholars who write about the politics of the region are sympathetic to regional democratic reform and to American support for democracy promotion (though differing on the policy details).

Rather, the academic literature missed the 2011 eruption because it was focused (and in many ways rightly so) on explaining the anomalous regime stability that characterized the Arab world in the 40 years leading up to these events. Because the scholarly community knew that this stability was not based on the happiness or the apathy of the ruled, our focus was on the stability of state and regime institutions. It was the “robustness of authoritarianism”<sup>2</sup> in the face of serious problems and popular discontent that explained the lack of change, democratic or otherwise, in the Arab world. Thus, the literature on Middle Eastern politics in the 2000s sought institutional answers to explain regional stability. That focus led us to discount the possibility of mass political mobilization, largely because we had seen previous efforts in this direction fail. It led us to make assumptions about the relationship between regimes and their militaries that turned out, in some cases, not to be true. It led us to overestimate the regime-strengthening effects of neo-liberal economic reform. It led us to discount the regime-threatening effects of demographic change and new social media, not because we did not recognize the fact of demographic change and new social media, but rather because we thought the regimes were strong enough to absorb the pressures generated by them.

In this essay I identify five areas where our literature on the stability of Arab authoritarianism misread or missed important factors: the institutional strength of regime support (armies and ruling parties); the effects of limited political contestation; the economic bases of regime stability (neo-liberal economic reform and oil wealth); the effects of new media; and the regional “contagion” effect that common Arab identity generates. I then look at some representative examples of academic literature on other topics – labor movements, democracy promotion, and subaltern political activity – to see if they had a better sense that the upheaval was coming. While these literatures focused on important elements that have helped to create the “Winter of Arab discontent,” none predicted that the seemingly stable Arab regimes were going to face their greatest crisis in the near future.

Caution is advisable when writing about on-going political events. No Arab state has become a democracy as of May 2011. In only two states have the presidents been overthrown, and in both Tunisia and Egypt there is a distinct possibility that elements of the old regime will retain their power in whatever new political institutions emerge. It is entirely possible that popular revolts elsewhere will be squelched (as they seem to have been in Bahrain), and we will look back in 2012 and remark on how well the “stability

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Kristof. “Unfit for Democracy?” *New York Times*. February 26, 2011; and “Is Islam the Problem?” *New York Times*. March 5, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Eva Bellin. “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (January 2004).

of Arab authoritarianism” literature has held up. But it is certainly time to reassess our understanding of Arab regime stability.

## The Literature on the Stability of Arab Authoritarianism

The literature that has emerged in the last decade on the stability of Arab authoritarianism is very good.<sup>3</sup> It addressed a political phenomenon that was important, set the Arab world apart from other world areas, and investigated a topic that had not been adequately addressed in earlier literature. It avoided the wishful thinking that had characterized the earlier spate of literature on nascent Arab democratization (a literature sparked more by the desire to fit into the political science trend of explaining the “Third Wave” of worldwide democratization than by real democratic reform in the Arab world).<sup>4</sup> It was based on generalizable and testable social science concepts rather than squishy and unprovable notions of the distinctiveness of Arab culture. Though prediction is one standard by which to judge an academic literature, it is hardly the only one. Accurately describing and explaining the past is an equally important standard, and by that standard this literature was very successful. And, depending on how things turn out, it might provide some answers to why some regimes successfully resisted the current regional upheavals. But we can, in a preliminary way, look to gaps and incorrect assumptions in this literature to help us understand why the Middle East specialist academic community failed to predict the upheavals of 2011.

### Institutional Supports For Regime Stability

The stability of Arab authoritarianism literature emphasizes the strength of coercive institutions as a major factor underlying regime stability.<sup>5</sup> This is hardly surprising. Arab regimes faced serious popular uprisings and upheavals in the period between 1970 and 2010, and relied on their militaries and security services to put them down: Oman in the early 1970s; Syria in the late 1970s and early 1980s; Egypt in 1977 and the mid-1990s; Jordan in 1970-71, 1989, and 1996; Algeria during its civil war in the 1990s; Saudi Arabia in 1979-80 and the mid-1990s, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq in 1991. This record of successful regime maintenance through repression led to an assumption that Arab militaries always would

<sup>3</sup> Important examples, aside from Bellin, include Daniel Brumberg. “The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy.” *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 13, No. 4 (October 2002); Steven Heydemann. *Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World*. Saban Center Analysis Paper No. 13. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, October 2007); Stephen J. King. *The New Authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Oliver Schlumberger (ed.). *Debating Arab Authoritarianism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Marsha Pripstein Posusney and Michele Penner Angrist (eds.). *Authoritarianism in the Middle East*. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> On the earlier period of Arab democratization literature, see Michael Hudson. “Democratization and the Problem of Legitimacy in Middle East Politics – Presidential Address 1987” *MESA Bulletin*. Vol. 22, No. 2, 1988; the measured assessments in Ghassan Salame (ed.). *Democracy Without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994); and the somewhat more optimistic take found in many of the articles in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, and Paul Noble (eds.). *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World – Volume 1, Theoretical Perspectives* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> See particularly Bellin, pp. 144-147; and Jason Brownlee. “Political Crisis and Restabilization: Iraq, Libya, Syria and Tunisia” in Posusney and Angrist, *Authoritarianism in the Middle East*.

see their own corporate interests as identical to that of the ruling regime. This assumption further was strengthened by the military and security background of the Egyptian, Tunisian, Algerian, Yemeni, and Syrian ruling regimes. The scholarly community basically assumed that the military and the regime were one, and stopped studying the political role of the military (a very prominent topic in the academic literature on Arab politics in the 1960s and 1970s).

One of the few recent books on the topic, which looked at the role of the Egyptian, Algerian, and Turkish militaries in their politics, reinforced this conclusion in its two Arab cases. It found that the Egyptian and Algerian militaries were so entrenched in their political systems that they could “rule without having to govern,” and that the prospects for political change in such systems were very small: “Under such circumstances it is unlikely that the combination of either political activism or domestic crises could set in motion a transition to democracy.”<sup>6</sup>

The events of 2011 seriously call into question the assumptions made by the stability literature about Arab militaries. The Egyptian case demonstrates that even an army enormously implicated in an authoritarian regime can, in crisis, decide that its own corporate interests are separable from those of the political leadership. The Tunisian case indicates that even a small and seemingly marginalized army can play the arbiter role in a political crisis. The pattern observed so far seems to suggest that: 1) militaries whose officer corps share a minority sectarian or geographic status with the ruling elite will stand by the regimes in times of trouble (Saddam’s Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia); 2) militaries in uninstitutionalized regimes, where personal and family ties determine promotion and leadership of units (Libya, Yemen), will fragment under pressure into loyalist units (headed by relatives of the leader) and those willing to go over to the opposition; and 3) highly institutionalized militaries in relatively homogeneous societies are most likely to assume the arbiter role in political crisis, even if they are tied to the regime (Egypt, Tunisia). This is a very preliminary hypothesis, based on an incomplete understanding of the role the military has played in the various cases of Arab upheaval in 2011.

Another strand of the stability literature highlighted the role that ruling parties can play in preserving regime stability.<sup>7</sup> This argument did not contend that ruling parties were popular or could win fair elections. Rather, such parties like the National Democratic Party (NDP) in Egypt, the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) in Tunisia, the General People’s Congress (GPC) in Yemen, and the Ba’th in Syria could contain and channel political interests, and provide an institutional means to co-opt and control political activism. In many ways, they did for decades. But they proved particularly inept in either channeling or co-opting the popular upheavals of 2011. The two ruling parties that most specialists probably would have identified as most effective in the Arab world were the NDP and RCD, the two regimes that fell. The GPC has not prevented a massive and sustained popular mobilization against Ali Abdallah Salih. The ruling party in Algeria seems safe,

<sup>6</sup> Steven Cook. Ruling But Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007). Quotes from p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Jason Brownlee. Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). One of Brownlee’s major cases in this book is Egypt. See also King. The New Authoritarianism, Ch. 3.

but even the Syrian Ba’thist regime might be in trouble. Ruling parties certainly are no guarantee of regime stability, and we have to rethink the role they play in Arab politics.

## Limited Political Contestation

One important stabilizing element that academic analysts saw as central to “upgraded authoritarianism” was the limited political contestation that Arab regimes permitted in the 1990s and 2000s. In an influential 2002 article Daniel Brumberg described the “trap of liberalized autocracy,” where Arab rulers allowed opposition groups to participate in managed – not completely rigged, not completely free – parliamentary elections. These elections allowed for the release of political tensions, the testing of the popular temperature, and some voice for opposition currents in public life. In exchange, the rulers received a degree of acquiescence, and sometimes even support, from the tolerated opposition movements. Conceptually, the “transitions to democracy” literature originally viewed such hybrid regimes – wherever they might be found – as inherently unstable: either way stations to full democracy or temporary expedients before the swing back to full authoritarianism. However, Brumberg noted that, empirically, liberalized autocracy – specifically in the Arab world – was proving much more durable than the theorists imagined.<sup>8</sup> Other scholars also emphasized the role limited political liberalizations played in authoritarian regimes’ efforts to deal with economic crises and to manipulate opposition sentiment.<sup>9</sup> In a similar vein, Arab authoritarians also opened up more space for non-governmental organizations to receive legal recognition, while hamstringing their independence and effectiveness through those new legal frameworks.<sup>10</sup>

There were certainly a number of Arab countries that, for some time, successfully combined authoritarian stability with limited political contestation. Among the republics Egypt (parliamentary elections in 1984, 1987, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010); Yemen (parliamentary elections in 1993, 1997, 2001, 2003); and Algeria (post-civil war parliamentary elections in 2002, 2007) stand out as the leading examples. These elections differed in the extent of openness, opposition participation, and opposition success. Each country also held even more tightly managed presidential elections.

Elections in the republics sometimes exacerbated tensions more than alleviated them. The Islamic Salvation Front’s victory in the 1991 Algerian elections led to the military coup and the devastating civil war. Yemen’s 1993 election was followed by a brief civil war in 1994. But in each of these cases, the authoritarian regime was able to maintain itself.

There was an argument in this literature that monarchies were better able to manage the game of limited political contestation, opening up the field for parliamentary elections,

<sup>8</sup> Brumberg. “The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy.”

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Ellen Lust-Okar. “Divided They Rule: The Management and Manipulation of Political Opposition.” *Comparative Politics*. Vol. 36, No. 2 (January 2004); Ellen Lust-Okar. “Opposition and Economic Crises in Jordan and Morocco” and Marsha Pripstein Posusney. “Multiparty Elections in the Arab World: Election Rules and Opposition Responses” in Posusney and Angrist (eds.), Authoritarianism in the Middle East; Ellen Lust-Okar. “The Management of Opposition” in Schlumberger (ed.), Debating Arab Authoritarianism; Lisa Blaydes. Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak’s Egypt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); King. The New Authoritarianism. Ch. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Heydemann. Upgrading Authoritarianism. pp. 5-10.



secure in the knowledge that their executive authority, which (unlike in the republics) was not based on even the chimera of popular choice, would not be challenged.<sup>11</sup> Morocco (1993, 1997, 2002, 2007); Jordan (1989, 1993, 1997, 2003, 2007, 2010); Kuwait (regular elections since independence, with two periods of suspension in 1976-81, 1986-1992); and Bahrain (2002, 2006, 2010) all have had contested but managed elections to their parliaments over the past two decades.

The events of 2011 do not completely refute arguments about the stability of “liberalized autocracy,” but they do call them into question. Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, and Morocco largely have been spared the large-scale popular uprisings. How much that can be explained by their semi-competitive political systems is an open question. But a number of the states that were leading examples of liberalized autocracies were the hardest hit by the wave of popular upheaval: Egypt, Yemen, and Bahrain. Likewise, completely closed systems in Tunisia and Syria experienced upheavals, while the Arab state without even a hint of democratic institutions – even sham institutions – at the national level, Saudi Arabia, avoided them. The preliminary evidence is that, while semi-competitive elections might provide some element of stability for certain regimes, they are no guarantee of co-opting and channeling popular discontent. Managed electoral systems are neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for authoritarian stability.

## **Economic Support for Authoritarianism: Neo-Liberal Reform and Oil Wealth**

Steven Heydemann argued that Arab authoritarians had “upgraded” their systems by “capturing the benefits of selective economic reforms” in recent years. Privatizing state-owned enterprises and allowing the lucrative telecommunications market to be dominated by the private sector (a choice few Arab regimes would have made in the 1970s) allowed regimes to “co-opt important segments of the private sector,” secure the privileged position of the all-important militaries (as they have become more important economic actors), and deflect international pressures for more thorough-going economic reform. Heydemann also thought that the opening up of Arab economies to global consumption networks – high-end coffee shops, McDonalds, fancy malls, and cineplexes – could help to vest the interests of upper-class consumers in the stability of the ruling regime. He certainly recognized the fraying of social safety nets in the Arab world, and that employing the “youth bulge” remained an overwhelming challenge for most Arab states. However, his conclusion was that “selective processes of economic liberalization provide enhanced economic opportunities for regime supporters, reinforce the social base of authoritarian regimes, and mitigate pressure for comprehensive economic and social reforms.”<sup>12</sup>

It has been frequently commented that the two countries where popular upheaval brought down presidents – Tunisia and Egypt – were the two Arab countries that had gone the

<sup>11</sup> For an early version of this argument, see Lisa Anderson. “Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East” *Political Science Quarterly*. Vol. 106, No. 1 (Spring 1991); more recently the argument is made most cogently by Michael Herb. “Princes and Parliaments in the Arab World” *Middle East Journal*. Vol. 58, No. 3 (Summer 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Heydemann. *Upgrading Authoritarianism*. pp. 13-18; quotes on p. 13 and p. 14. See also King. *The New Authoritarianism*. pp. 29-30.

furthest in adopting the policy recommendations of the “Washington consensus.” Both had been praised, as late as 2010, by the International Monetary Fund, for taking steps to open markets, privatize state industries, encourage private-sector activity, and integrate their economies into the globalized world.<sup>13</sup> Their economic growth rates were, among the non-oil exporting Arab states, very high. According to the simple logic that underlay much American discourse about democratization, Egypt and Tunisia should have been the best candidates for a gradual transition to democracy. Instead, if democracy comes, it will be through revolution.

It is now clear that “Washington consensus” economic policies, at least the way they have been implemented in the Arab world, are destabilizing for autocratic regimes. These policies exacerbate inequality. They create a politically connected privileged class that excites the hatred of the majority of the population and increases public cynicism about government. They loosen restrictions in the labor market, making it easier for employers to fire workers. They require government to cut the state sector, leading to fewer state jobs and reduced subsidies for consumer goods and utilities. Even while they encourage economic growth, they undercut political stability. This is certainly the lesson taken by the authoritarians who remain in power. As the wave of regional unrest spread, most Arab governments increased state salaries, postponed subsidy cuts (or increased subsidies), and promised more state jobs.

Even the groups that benefit the most from these policies, which might have been expected to back authoritarian economic reform regimes, apparently turned against their political benefactors, or, at a minimum, did not rally to support them in this crisis. The Tunisian bourgeoisie did not take to the streets in support of Ben Ali. Wa’el al-Ghoneim, the face of the Egyptian revolt (at least for the English-language media), epitomized the kind of person who was doing very well in Mubarak’s Egypt (though he was an Egyptian doing well in the Gulf): bi-lingual, well-trained, perfectly at home in the globalized economy. Yet he took great personal and financial risks in mobilizing opposition to the regime because of its denial of political freedoms.

“Washington-consensus” style economic reform (in the particularly political way it has been implemented by some Arab states) has not proven to be a stabilizing element for authoritarian regimes. But that does not mean that a return to more statist policies provides a better long-term bet for Arab authoritarians. Those with substantial hydrocarbon revenues might be able to sustain such a course (as I will discuss), but it seems unlikely that the non-oil Arab states have the resources to deal with their employment and social services crises through the statist economic policies of the past. The tragedy of the half-hearted and politicized economic reform efforts undertaken in the Arab world is that they have diminished the likelihood of more thorough-going reforms in the future.

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, “Arab Republic of Egypt – 2010 Article IV Consultation Mission, Concluding Statement” February 16, 2010. <http://www.imf.org/external/np/ms/2010/021610.htm>; and “Tunisia: Preliminary Conclusions of the 2010 Article IV Mission” June 15, 2010. <http://www.imf.org/external/np/ms/2010/061510a.htm>

The other economic factor identified by the authoritarian stability literature as central to explaining the longevity of Arab regimes was hydrocarbon wealth.<sup>14</sup> It is clear that having oil and gas money is no absolute guarantee of authoritarian regime stability. The fate of the Shah of Iran is testimony to that. But of the major Arab oil and gas producers, only Libya has faced substantial popular upheaval during the Winter of Arab discontent. With oil prices as high as they are, the oil producers have ample resources to placate citizen dissatisfaction and maintain their patronage networks. Saudi Arabia, the uber-rentier Arab authoritarian, made promises to spend more than \$100 billion on its citizens as popular protests gripped its neighbors.<sup>15</sup> Kuwait, despite a long history of political activism, has been relatively quiet during this period, as have Qatar and the UAE. Algeria, though not in the same league in terms of rent per capita as the Gulf oil monarchies, has not experienced the kinds of upheavals as other Arab states.

Libya is the oil rentier outlier in 2011. It demonstrates the wisdom of Gwenn Okruhlik's pithy observation that "money does not spend itself."<sup>16</sup> Like the other Arab oil authoritarians, the Qaddafi regime had plenty of revenue at its disposal since the upturn in oil prices in 2003. It does not appear to have used it to maintain its patronage networks or to mollify potential opposition. The Libya case demonstrates, once again, that oil wealth alone is not enough to guarantee regime stability. However, oil wealth (when prices are high) can provide an important cushion for authoritarians who know how to use it during times of crisis. The increasingly erratic "Brother Leader" obviously did not know how.

## New Media

A number of analysts of Middle East politics recognized that new social media and new manifestations of traditional media, particularly Arabic language satellite television channels, were having important effects on the politics of the Arab states.<sup>17</sup> They argued that Arabs were being liberated from the government media monopolies of old, that new audiences and new "public spheres" were developing around these new media, and that this information revolution would put new pressures on Arab governments. However, all hedged their analyses appropriately, given the evidence that they had at the time of publication about the overall impact of the new information environment on the stability of Arab regimes. None said that the new technologies would in short order bring down

<sup>14</sup> Bellin, "Robustness of Authoritarianism" in particular highlights access to rents – both hydrocarbon and "strategic" rents – as a major factor in allowing Arab authoritarians to avoid the kinds of fiscal crises that have created political crises for authoritarians elsewhere, pp. 147-48. I have emphasized the role of rents in the stability of the Arab monarchies of the Gulf. See "The Persistence of Monarchy in the Arabian Peninsula: A Comparative Analysis." in Joseph Kostiner (ed.), *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> "Amid Protests, Saudi King Raises Benefits but Strengthens Security" *New York Times*, March 18, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/19/world/middleeast/19saudi.html>

<sup>16</sup> Gwenn Okruhlik, "Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States" *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (April 1999), p. 297.

<sup>17</sup> See for example: Jon Alterman, *New Media, New Politics? From Satellite Television to the Internet in the Arab World* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998); Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson (eds.), *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

authoritarian regimes or lead to democracy in the Arab world. Marc Lynch, one of the leaders in analyzing how the information revolution was affecting Arab politics, captured that caution in a 2007 article on Arab blogs, where he wrote that “it is highly unlikely that blogging will induce wide political change in the Middle East.”<sup>18</sup>

The skepticism with which some academic analysts (including myself) viewed the political effects of the information revolution tended to be confirmed by the failure of the “Kefaya movement” in Egypt in the mid-2000s to bring about political change in Egypt at that time. “Kefaya” in Arabic means “enough” (with emphasis, as in “I have had enough!”), and the Egyptian activists behind the movement (whose formal name was “The Egyptian Movement for Change,” but was more widely known by its slogan) meant that they had had enough of Hosni Mubarak, his plan to make his son Gamal president after him, the sclerotic political system, corruption, the entire system. The movement, largely based in Cairo and characterized by an educated, upper class and secular membership, used the Internet to gain support for its petition calling for political reforms and used social networking technologies to organize non-violent demonstrations against the regime.<sup>19</sup> It became the darling of the Western reporters in Cairo, garnering extensive coverage.<sup>20</sup> However, it was unable to prevent the Mubarak regime from pushing through constitutional amendments in 2005 meant to consolidate its rule, and from controlling the parliamentary elections of that year (even though they were the freest since the 1952 revolution). The movement fizzled out by 2007, suppressed by the regime and beset with internal rifts.

In retrospect, Kefaya set the stage for subsequent Egyptian campaigns using Facebook and other social media that escalated in the last years of the 2000s, eventually culminating in the January 25, 2011 revolt that brought down Hosni Mubarak. But it seemed at the time that the promise of social mobilization that Kefaya held out was limited to a narrow strand of elite urbanites.

Steven Heydemann, in his analysis of “upgraded authoritarianism” in 2007, emphasized the steps that Arab governments had taken to police the new information spheres: “[V]irtually every Arab regime has built up extensive systems of regulation, surveillance, oversight, and coercion that vastly limit the autonomy and privacy of users.”<sup>21</sup> The apparent failure of Kefaya could have led analysts to ignore the exponential growth in Internet penetration that occurred in Egypt between 2003, when Kefaya began, and 2011, and thus discount the effects of new media on the ability of Arab opposition movements to mobilize support.

It is still early in terms of understanding the role that social media played in the Arab mobilizations of 2011. The notion that Iranian protests in 2009 were a “Twitter revolution” has been challenged by reports that many of the “tweets” outsiders followed about the Iranian events actually originated from outside the country. We certainly know that

<sup>18</sup> Marc Lynch. “Blogging the New Arab Public,” *Arab Media and Society*. Vol. 1 (Spring 2007). <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=10>

<sup>19</sup> For a brief account of the movement, see Sherif Mansour. “Enough is Not Enough: Achievements and Shortcomings of the Egyptian Movement for Change” in Maria J. Stephan (ed.), *Civilian Jihad: Nonviolent Struggle, Democratization, and Governance in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> See for example Michael Slackman. “Anti-Mubarak Protestors Clash with Police in Cairo” *New York Times*. July 31, 2005; and the editorial “Kefaya in Egypt” *The Washington Post*. March 25, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Heydemann. *Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World*. p. 21.

extensive Internet penetration was not a necessary condition for popular mobilization or we would not have seen Yemen follow Tunisia, Egypt, and Bahrain in the train of Arab popular revolts. But clearly the academic community, for the most part, underestimated how social media could be used to mobilize resistance to authoritarian rule.

## Contagion Effects and Arab Identity

No analyst predicted the startling contagion effect that the Arab protest movements had across state boundaries in the Arab world. While the Tunisian uprising emerged from indigenous sources, in every subsequent Arab mobilization at least some causal weight has to be given to the demonstration effect of the protests that came before. It is an object lesson in the continued relevance of a cross-border Arab identity. That fact, while widely acknowledged in the academic community, was not given much analytical focus in recent scholarship. Since the decline of the Pan-Arab movement that dominated Arab politics in the 1950s and 1960s, the academic community has tended to focus on country studies, or studies that compare Arab countries. The idea that popular movements could sweep across borders, as they did in the 1950s, seemed to be a relic of a former time, when states were less institutionalized, and Arab politics were driven more by the emotions of conflict with Israel and dreams of unity.<sup>22</sup>

These assumptions about the declining salience of Arab identity and the ability of states to fend off external ideological pressures seemed to be borne out by regional events. While the Iranian Revolution shook a number of states in the Arab world, no Arab government succumbed to an Islamist revolution in its aftermath. The two wars fought by the United States against Iraq in 1990-91 and 2003 excited opposition throughout the Arab world, but did not destabilize the Arab governments that supported Washington in those efforts. Egypt and Jordan signed peace treaties with Israel, and the regimes remained in power.

So, what made 2011 different from 1979, 1991, or 2003? This clearly is in the realm of speculation, given how close we are to these events, but perhaps both the locations and the nature of the events themselves are important. Iranian uprisings in 1978-79 and 2009 were noted by intellectuals and activists in the Arab world, but did not generate regime-shaking mobilizations there (though the contagion effects of the Iranian Revolution in Iraq and some of the Gulf states were notable). Arabs do seem to pay more attention to what other Arabs are doing. Efforts by governments, whether by the Islamic Revolutionary regime in Tehran or by Saddam Hussein, to mobilize opposition in other countries were largely unsuccessful (with the notable exception of Hizballah in Lebanon, created by Iran in the wake of the Israeli invasion of 1982). The events of 2011 were not directed by any government; rather, they were directed against Arab governments in general, which might have given them their cross-border power.

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<sup>22</sup> I wrote two articles that argued that the growing strength of the Arab state made the cross-border contagion of political movements much less likely than it was in the past. "Revolutionary Fevers and Regional Contagion: Domestic Structures and the 'Export' of Revolution in the Middle East" *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 14, No. 3 (Spring 1991); and "Sovereignty, Statecraft, and Stability in the Middle East" *Journal of International Affairs*. Vol. 45, No. 2 (Winter 1992).

This is where an old technology, television, comes into play. While Arabic language satellite stations are not a new phenomenon (*Al-Jazeera* was launched 15 years ago), they provided the perfect vehicle for citizens across the Arab world to watch, in real time and in their own language, uprisings against authoritarian Arab governments.<sup>23</sup> More generally, the region-wide nature of the events of 2011 indicates that Arabness, as a political identity that crosses borders, remains a very salient political factor in the Middle East. It might not challenge the existence of states themselves as it did in the 1950s (through unity plans). Arabs are focusing their demands within the borders of their own state, seeking change in their own domestic politics.<sup>24</sup> But they are watching and learning from what happens in other Arab countries.

## Other Literatures: Democracy Promotion and Subaltern Studies

Not everyone in the Middle East academic community spent the past 10 years writing about the stability of Arab authoritarianism. Other strands in the literature on Arab politics might be thought of as more likely to have noticed the decay of the ruling regimes and the likelihood of upheaval: the literature on democracy promotion in the region and the literature on “subalterns” – political actors outside the elites. Two prominent subjects of this latter academic focus are labor movements, and the “politics of everyday life” approach championed by political sociologist Asef Bayat. These two categories yielded some very interesting insights about politics in the Arab world, and provide some guidelines for how the current Arab transitions might work out. I found only one author working in the democracy promotion area, and none in the subaltern areas, who predicted the upheavals the Arab world is now seeing. Rather, in each area analysts tended to emphasize the difficulties democrats, labor activists, and the poor faced in dealing with oppressive and seemingly omnipresent states.

### Democracy Promotion

If there was one community of scholars that should have been alive to the possibilities of political change in the Arab world, it was those who focused on democratization and on Western policies of democracy promotion. While chronicling the hesitant and reversible political openings in Arab states over the past two decades and encouraging Washington and other Western capitals to promote democratic change more effectively, almost all of these analysts were as convinced as those writing about the stability of authoritarianism that major political change was unlikely to come about in the near future. In the conclusion to an edited volume on the topic published just last year, Nathan Brown and Emad El-Din Shahin wrote: “[T]here is no dissent in this volume from the view that the existing regimes

<sup>23</sup> Jon Alterman recently has observed that “good old-fashioned television is probably more important [than the Internet] in turning political protests into mass movements.” “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” *Middle East Notes and Comments*. Center for Strategic and International Studies. March 2011. [http://csis.org/files/publication/0311\\_MENC2.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/0311_MENC2.pdf). This also is the assumption underlying Marc Lynch’s contention that *Al-Jazeera* and other pan-Arab media have created a new Arab “public sphere.” *Voices of the New Arab Public*.

<sup>24</sup> With one notable exception during the upheaval of 2011: The crushing of the Bahraini uprising led to demonstrations in support of the Bahraini opposition among Shia communities in Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

are deeply entrenched and that tentative steps toward liberalization hardly amount to a move toward democratization.”

While their authors noted some “pockets of liberalization” in more critical local media, a young generation of Internet activists, increasingly experienced NGOs, and a few protest movements in general saw a “weak, fragmented, and passive civil society” and “very low political participation and public apathy” as major obstacles to democratic change.<sup>25</sup> Nicola Pratt argued that many civil society organizations in the Arab world, while advocating democracy as a goal, are often willing to accommodate what she calls the “hegemonic consensus” underpinning Arab authoritarianism: hierarchical notions of social relations based on gender, class, sect, and ethnicity, and a willingness to work within corporatist structures created by the authoritarian regimes themselves.<sup>26</sup>

Neither Pratt nor the authors in the Brown and Shahin volume thought that the cause was hopeless. They all wrote from a position of encouraging change and promoting democracy. Their policy preference was clear,<sup>27</sup> and they did detect elements of change bubbling beneath the surface of seemingly placid Arab authoritarian regimes. But they did not see the explosion coming anytime soon. One of the few scholars who did was Tamara Cofman Wittes, who identified a “real and growing crisis in Middle East governance.” She attributed that crisis to the declining efficacy of what she called the “three R’s” underpinning Arab authoritarianism – rents, repression, and ideological rhetoric – and the growing demand for democracy in the region.<sup>28</sup> She, among the democracy-promotion advocates, was the most insistent that the United States had to get out in front in terms of democracy promotion to prevent looming regional upheaval. She was critical of some Bush Administration democracy-promotion initiatives (and can put her ideas into practice now as deputy assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs in the Obama Administration), but forthright in asserting that a crisis was coming and only democratic reform could stave it off.

Wittes was right when many others were wrong, but it is difficult to see from her analysis why she was right. She identified the same problems that many others, who were much more sanguine about authoritarian stability, also identified. It was not that she located indicators that others had missed. It appears that she overemphasized the issue of rents in her analysis, given that the uprising occurred at a time of historically high oil prices in which only one major oil exporter, Libya, has experienced regime crisis. Her prescience seems more a result of judgment rather than a unique analytical framework.

<sup>25</sup> Nathan J. Brown and Emad El-Din Shahin. “Conclusion” in Brown and Shahin (eds.), *The Struggle Over Democracy in the Middle East* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 186-87.

<sup>26</sup> Nicola Pratt. *Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Arab World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2007). See Ch. 5 and pp. 191-93.

<sup>27</sup> Very few Middle East scholars argued that the United States should not promote democracy in the Arab world, as critical as they might have been of specific American policies. I was one of the few dissenters on this score. I contended that the United States should rely on friendly Arab autocrats to advance its interests, because they were stable (a spectacularly wrong judgment) and because Arab democracies would produce governments unwilling to cooperate with American strategic policies (still an open question). See my “Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?” *Foreign Affairs*. Vol. 84, No. 5 (September/October 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Tamara Cofman Wittes. *Freedom’s Unsteady March: America’s Role in Building Arab Democracy* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2007). Quote from p. 5; see Ch.3 for her argument that the status quo was unsustainable.

Did the democracy promotion efforts of the United States and European countries contribute to the changes we are witnessing in the Arab world now? It is far too early to tell, of course. In the debate in the literature before the events of 2011, Wittes was the most direct in her belief that the United States could and should make democracy promotion a priority, and that it could achieve real progress toward democratization. Others were much more critical of American democracy promotion policies in the Arab world. (One could argue that the Iraq War was a major democracy promotion initiative, explicitly intended by its proponents to exercise a “demonstration effect.” Yet the academic community was almost unanimously opposed to it, and in any case, neither accepted this “spill-over” theory nor saw any empirical evidence to support it.) Sheila Carapico detailed the development of what she saw as a “democracy-brokers” industry in the West, which created as many problems as it solved for Arab democracy advocates and whose efforts were relatively easily co-opted, subsumed, or repressed by the authoritarian states.<sup>29</sup> Mustapha Kemal Sayyid saw Western democracy promotion efforts in the Arab world as “halfhearted and disorganized,” easily deflected by Arab autocrats.<sup>30</sup> Eberhard Kienle went even further in the same volume, saying that “the only conclusion that can safely be drawn is that standard recipes for democracy engineering contribute to the reconfiguration of authoritarian rule rather than to democratization.”<sup>31</sup>

### “Subalterns”: Labor Movements and “Everyday Life as Politics”

The Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), which publishes the journal *Middle East Report* and online articles, provides analysis by academics, journalists, and other researchers of current Middle Eastern events. MERIP takes a self-consciously “oppositional” view of the region – in opposition to authoritarian regimes, neo-liberal economic policies, American policy, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Its leftist origins makes MERIP the natural place to look for news of labor movements in the region, and for coverage of women’s issues and powerless minorities, such as migrant workers, and sectarian and ethnic minorities.

MERIP did not disappoint in its coverage of Egypt. It provided excellent accounts of the growing labor unrest in the country in the lead-up to the events of 2011.<sup>32</sup> Its coverage of growing sectarian tensions between Copts and Muslims, and of the interesting parliamentary elections of 2005 and the sham parliamentary elections of 2010 were ahead of the curve, providing a depth of analysis unavailable in the press, but with the immediacy, if not of a daily newspaper, at least of a news weekly or monthly.<sup>33</sup> Those following MERIP were not

<sup>29</sup> Sheila Carapico. “Foreign Aid for Promoting Democracy in the Arab World” *Middle East Journal*. Vol. 56, No. 3 (Summer 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Mustapha K. Sayyid. “International Dimensions of Middle Eastern Authoritarianism” in Schlumberger (ed.), *Debating Arab Authoritarianism*. Quote from p. 228.

<sup>31</sup> Eberhard Kienle. “Democracy Promotion and the Renewal of Authoritarian Rule” in Schlumberger (ed.), *Debating Arab Authoritarianism*. Quote from p. 247.

<sup>32</sup> See in particular the reports by Joel Benin, sometimes joined by co-author Hossam El-Hamalawy, during 2007; eg., “The Militancy of Mahalla al-Kubra” *Middle East Report*. September 29, 2007. <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero092907>

<sup>33</sup> For a representative sample, see the following: On sectarian tensions, Issander El Amrani. “The Emergence of a ‘Coptic Question’ in Egypt” *Middle East Report*. April 28, 2006. <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero042806>. On the 2005 elections, Samer Shehata and Joshua Stacher. “The Brotherhood Goes to



surprised at the anger of Egyptians toward their government. But the MERIP authors, while documenting that anger and the failures of the Mubarak regime to deal effectively with it, did not specifically predict regime crisis or collapse. Joel Benin, in his account of the Mahalla al-Kubra strike in 2007, said that Mubarak was “embattled on many fronts,” and talked about “the actual emergence [of democracy] on the ground,” but did not go so far as to predict the downfall of the regime.<sup>34</sup> I could not find other MERIP authors who made such a prediction. This should not be surprising; these authors were not trying to explain regime stability or predict its end. We should also note that MERIP accounts of Egypt stressed opposition and problems for the regime during the entire decade of the 2000s. It is hard to point to a time in this period when MERIP’s coverage of Egypt became gloomier about the regime’s prospects or more insistent upon the severity of the internal crisis.

Labor unrest in Egypt was not a missed indicator here – it was well covered by MERIP and other academics knew about it because of the MERIP coverage, as well as their own research. It was, perhaps, a neglected indicator in Egypt because academics did not think it would contribute to mass upheaval and regime downfall.

While MERIP’s coverage of Egypt was exceptionally good, the same can not be said of its treatment of Tunisia, where the Winter of Arab discontent began. While the MERIP index lists 78 articles published on Egypt since 2000, it lists only eight on Tunisia, and six of them were posted since January 2011.

This is no criticism of MERIP. Access to Tunisia for serious research was much more difficult than to Egypt, and Egypt in general attracts many more American scholars than Tunisia (or Yemen, with 14 articles in the same period, though they are a very good collection, which detail the increase in problems that the Salih regime faced). While not predicted, the Egyptian upheavals were well understood by those who followed the MERIP output. For the MERIP reader, the Tunisian upheaval would have been more surprising.

Another very useful, and in some ways prescient, perspective on Arab (and Iranian) politics is offered by Asef Bayat. Bayat makes two large arguments in his recent works that bear on the 2011 Arab upheavals. His first relates to what he calls “non-movements,” which he describes as “the collective actions of non-collective actors; they embody shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change.”<sup>35</sup> In retrospect, it now seems clear that on a number of fronts that analysts did not recognize at the time, ordinary people were moving away from their acceptance/toleration of these regimes: in their online activities, in their non-participation in regime-sponsored activities (like fixed elections), in their efforts to make a living outside the formal economy at a time when many of the non-oil Arab states were reducing their social safety nets. It is not that Bayat predicted that these non-movements would coalesce into mass-based social action aimed at bringing down regimes. He saw the oppressive power of the authoritarian state as a considerable obstacle to political movements, but he also

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Parliament” *Middle East Report*. No. 240 (Fall 2006). On the 2010 elections, Mona El Ghobashy, “The Dynamics of Egypt’s Elections” *Middle East Report*. September 29, 2010. <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero092910>

<sup>34</sup> Benin. “The Militancy of Mahalla al-Kubra.”

<sup>35</sup> Asef Bayat. *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). p. 14.

saw that it was full of holes and gaps and inconsistencies in which non-movements could function. Non-movements could adopt, and were adopting on the ground, a Gramscian strategy of “the art of presence,” and through such a strategy win everyday battles that over time would change politics from below. When the opportunity presents itself, such non-movements could be mobilized for larger collective action.<sup>36</sup>

That seems to be what happened across the Arab world in 2011. Commentators have noted that existing political parties and well-organized groups like the Muslim Brotherhood were not in the lead as the public protests against Arab leaders began. These were “leaderless movements,” which puzzled many, but those who had read Bayat might not have been so surprised. Bayat certainly did not predict the events of 2011, nor would reading his work on everyday life as politics provide analysts with clear indicators of mounting challenges to regimes or regime decay. But his framework does direct our attention to how – at the level of the street – people express, through their seemingly uncoordinated actions, either their acceptance or their rejection of the social, political, and economic status-quo. The second argument found in Bayat’s work is his contention that Islamist political ideologies have run their course and the region is seeing a “post-Islamist” turn.<sup>37</sup> While the Iranian case is central to Bayat’s argument here, he makes a more sweeping case that “conservative Islamism,” in which he includes the Muslim Brotherhood, is losing both its ideological *raison d’être* and its popular appeal across the Middle East as a whole. In its place he sees the development of a more democratic and inclusive set of ideas about politics.<sup>38</sup> In many ways, at least some of the sentiments that have characterized the Tunisian, Egyptian, Bahraini, and Yemeni demonstrations seem to fit into Bayat’s “post-Islamist” notion. The contention that “conservative Islamism,” whether as an organizational force or as an ideology, has run its course in the Arab world is an open question. Elections in Tunisia and Egypt (and perhaps elsewhere) will be a test. But Bayat seems to have captured the spirit animating at least elements of the “non-movements” that have brought down two Arab presidents so far.

The perspective “from below” represented by the scholars publishing in MERIP and by Asef Bayat’s work provides an extremely useful set of lenses for understanding the politics of the region. They did not predict the upheavals of 2011, nor do they propose a set of indicators that can predict when regime-threatening instability will emerge. They were not setting out to make such predictions. But they captured political dynamics whose importance was not sufficiently appreciated by those working out of more “top-down” paradigms like the stability of Arab authoritarianism authors. They capture elements of regional politics that others miss.

<sup>36</sup> Bayat. *Life as Politics*. pp. 24-25.

<sup>37</sup> Asef Bayat. *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); see also chapters on this topic in his *Life as Politics*. A similar argument was made earlier by French scholar Olivier Roy. *The Failure of Political Islam*, translated by Carol Volk (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> See, in particular, on Egypt, *Making Islam Democratic*, Ch.5, and more generally *Life as Politics*, Chs. 12 and 13.

## Conclusion

The literature on the stability of Arab authoritarianism missed the Winter of Arab discontent because the scholars working in that paradigm, myself included, were describing and explaining the past, and assuming that it would continue into the future. Explanation is as important for academics as prediction, and it fits better with our role. It is what we are good at. We did not assume that Arab regimes were popular or minimize the problems facing them. We just assumed that the survival strategies that had worked so well for four decades, which were being constantly updated by the authoritarian rulers, would continue to work. Because of that assumption, we did not investigate sufficiently the changing nature of ties between the regimes and the military/security establishments that had been their most important bases. We overestimated the success of strategies meant to deflect popular opinion (limited electoral openings) and build bases of support (neo-liberalism). We failed to appreciate the importance of new and not-so-new technologies for political mobilization in authoritarian regimes, and forgot that Arabs still see themselves as a political community, even if they are divided into different states.

Scholars of the Middle East working from other approaches appreciated many of these changes more accurately. However, it is hard to point to anyone in the scholarly community that predicted the upheavals of 2011 – their timing, their direction, their trans-border nature. If prediction is the test of social science, the scholarly community on Middle East politics failed. That is a very exacting standard to hold scholars to, particularly when the Arab autocrats themselves, who had the most at stake in the issue, also failed to predict it.

What the academic community can do now is to take the events of 2011 (which are hardly over) and go back to our theories, examining what we missed and what we under appreciated. The different ways the Arab militaries have reacted to the popular mobilizations against the rulers call for a new concentration by the academic community on the military's role in Arab politics. The subject begs for more research, for both academic and policy reasons. Similarly, we know that the new media were important in mobilizing protest in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere. We just do not know how important. That remains to be seen, and should be the subject of new research. Future research also will be necessary to ascertain just how vehicles, such as the images carried by *Al-Jazeera* and the other Arabic-language networks, both constituted and conveyed a sense of Arabness that facilitated the mobilization of dissent in 2011, and permitted the contagion effect of unrest to spread across the region. And, given the interest in Washington to encourage democratic development in the wake of the upheavals of 2011, a crash effort is called for in the policy and academic communities to assess just what has worked in the past (and what “worked” means) in terms of Western democracy-promotion efforts, and how might new policy initiatives effectively deal with the new Arab circumstances. Through doing honest evaluations of what we got wrong and why, academics can begin again the task of explanation that leads to understanding.







## Socioeconomic Studies

Richard Cincotta

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### Explanatory Note

**T**he following section covers a range of socio-economic studies produced by international organizations or academic research institutes that may have held the potential to pre-indicate, to some degree, the pro-democracy demonstrations and regime changes that began in December 2010 in North Africa. These studies cover research on: food insecurity; youth unemployment; state vulnerability; popular opinion in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (gathered in formal, social surveys); and the social history of dissent in the MENA region. The section's sample studies, which will be identified in the following sub-sections, were drawn from published sources, and located by keyword searches on the web and on disciplinary literature databases, or by recommendations of scholars in the field.

*The conditions investigated by these fields of research have been identified, either theoretically or empirically, by sub-disciplines within political science, as predictors of political conflict. For example, upward surges in international food prices have been statistically associated with the popular uprisings in some low-income countries, while other studies have concluded that indications of high levels of institutional capacity or effective governance – the focus of state vulnerability analyses – tend to dampen these risks.<sup>1</sup>*

*The academic studies reviewed in this section were funded largely through foundation and government-supported grants. The studies obtained from international organizations (the Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Labour Organization), and agencies with international mandates (USDA/Economic Research Service) were produced as part of their public reporting mandate, and relied on internal sources of funding.*

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<sup>1</sup> Rabah Arezki and Markus Brückner. *Food Prices and Political Instability*. IMF Working Paper WP/11/62. (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2011); World Bank. *Conflict, Security and Development World Development Report, 2011* (Washington, DC: IBRD, 2011).

## Summary

- No author or publication explicitly predicted the likelihood of a regime change or pro-democracy transition in either Tunisia or Egypt during the 2010 to 2015 period.
- None of the four vulnerability indices (also known as state fragility indices) that were reviewed provided a pre-indication of the December 2010 events. Two broader analyses of regime types, however, suggested that current regime types were a general source of instability in the North African region. One analysis (*African Futures 2050*) identified an unusual gap between a model's expectations for democracy among North African regimes and existing regime types.<sup>2</sup> This glaring anomaly was nevertheless insufficient, by itself, to lead the authors to further examine the prospects for democratic transformations over the next 40 years.
- Two types of sociological research focused on the Middle East and North African region – the historical sociology of dissent, and social survey research – could have suggested a trend toward reduced regime control over media in Egypt, starting in 2006.<sup>3</sup> A 2006 Arab Barometer study called attention to similar preferences for democracy expressed by both secular and Islamic groups polled in Morocco and Algeria (Tunisia and Egypt were not surveyed).<sup>4</sup> However, the means by which analysts might have integrated these cues to produce an accurate forecast of the nature and timing of the North African events is not apparent.
- Published analyses of food prices and youth unemployment did not produce unusual signals that were likely to have alerted analysts in the months preceding the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. While high international prices of wheat helped boost Egyptian market prices in 2008, monthly Food and Agriculture Organization price reports suggest that staple prices held relatively steady in Tunisia and Egypt during the late months of 2010. Similarly, though the International Labour Organization (ILO) found youth unemployment to be well above 20 percent in North Africa, it reported that levels had remained fairly constant in the region since the late 1990s (the ILO study groups Egypt in North Africa, rather than in the Middle East). Meanwhile, youth unemployment in the Middle East has risen by about 25 percent over the same period. If anything, such evidence would have drawn analysts' attention to the Middle East, rather than North Africa, as the potential ignition point for popular protest.

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<sup>2</sup> Jakkie Cilliers, Barry Hughes, and Jonathan Moyer. *African Futures 2050: The Next Forty Years*. Institute for Security Studies and the Pardee Center for International Futures. 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Shaazka Beyerle and Arwa Hassan. "Popular Resistance Against Corruption in Turkey and Egypt" in Maria J. Stephan, (ed.) *Civilian Jihad: Nonviolent Struggle, Democratization, and Governance in the Middle East*. (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2009.) pp. 265-279.

<sup>4</sup> Amaney A. Jamal and Mark A. Tessler. "Attitudes in the Arab World" *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 19, No. 1 (January 2008). pp. 97-110.

## Food Insecurity

While there is substantial evidence that international food price volatility can transmit volatility to local food prices, providing a grievance that helps instigate anti-regime demonstrations and political violence in low-income countries (particularly in sub-Saharan Africa),<sup>5</sup> evidence for its involvement in recent North African events is lacking.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) produces periodic country reports and the monthly *Global Food Price Monitor*, a comprehensive web-available assessment of international food prices and highlights of local prices.<sup>6</sup> A retrospective analysis of these publications suggests that increases in the international food price index during late 2010 had relatively minor effects on local staple food prices in North Africa.

During the two months before the demonstrations, the FAO reported that in Tunisia high international food prices did not translate into a high inflation rate for food at the national level.<sup>7</sup> For Egypt, the world's largest importer of wheat, the picture is more complex. Government subsidies for bread production shielded most consumers. However, the price of other wheat products and non-wheat food products were allowed to rise.<sup>8</sup>

By the end of 2010, the FAO's food price (aggregate) index had nearly reached the record levels that had been attained in 2008. International wheat prices, the most critical food-price consideration for North African populations, began their rise in July 2010 at about USD \$210 per tonne, and increased by 70 percent by the end of the first week of December. Nonetheless, the international price of wheat in December 2010, USD \$327 per tonne, was still far from its March 2008 level of USD \$482 per tonne.

Neither of the most credible medium-range assessments of food insecurity, FAO's *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* (2009), nor the USDA Economic Research Service's *Food Security Assessment 2010-2020* indicated that any of the Mediterranean North African countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, or Egypt) was at risk.<sup>9</sup> Although they are all importers of wheat, they have adequate foreign exchange to purchase grain on the market, and most are self-sufficient (or exporters) of oils and fats.

<sup>5</sup> Rabah Arezki and Markus Brückner. *Food Prices and Political Instability* IMF Working Paper WP/11/62. (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2011); World Bank. *Conflict, Security and Development World Development Report, 2011*. (Washington, DC, IBRD, 2011). Ch. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization. *Global Food Price Monitor* (Issues: July-December). (Rome: FAO, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> The FAO country report on Tunisia is available at: <http://www.fao.org/giews/countrybrief/country.jsp?code=TUN>

<sup>8</sup> The FAO country report on Egypt is available at: <http://www.fao.org/giews/countrybrief/country.jsp?code=EGY>

<sup>9</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization. *State of Food Insecurity in the World*. (FAO: Rome, 2009); USDA/ERS. *Food Security Assessment, 2010-2020*. GFA-12, July 2010.



## Youth Unemployment

High youth unemployment has been identified as a factor in political instability, via increased recruitment into insurgencies and criminal gangs, for example.<sup>10</sup> The ILO special report on *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, published in 2010,<sup>11</sup> reveals that more than 20 percent of the youth labor force (ages 15 to 24) across the MENA region was unable to find jobs in 2008. High rates of youth unemployment have been persistent in this region, however, making them difficult to associate with any particular event, and rates by themselves do not necessarily signal political change. Indeed, a close reading of the ILO report paints a rather mixed picture at the sub-regional level, and likely would have turned analysts' concern toward the states in the Middle East, rather than North Africa.

The ILO analysis also examines North Africa separately from the Middle East, and places Egypt within North Africa. Consequently, because Egypt's youth represents 50 percent of North Africa's youth population, Egyptian employment and population dynamics are responsible for much of the dynamics in the region that the ILO labels "North Africa." With this caveat in mind, the ILO reports that during the 1998 to 2008 period (focusing on impacts from the global recession), total numbers of unemployed youth in the Middle East increased by 25 percent. For North Africa, in contrast, the numbers of unemployed youth declined by 1.5 percent during the same period.

During the recent recession in particular, youth unemployment in the Middle East increased well above that in North Africa. Even so, given the chronic nature of youth unemployment in the Middle East, the number of young adults without jobs increased by only 0.5 percent as a proportion of the total youth population since 1998. In North Africa, youth unemployment as a proportion of the youth population actually declined slightly. In addition, young women's employment in the MENA region has been negatively impacted much more during the recent recession than that of young men, who are the youth group typically thought more likely to participate in political insurgencies or illegal activities. This suggests that, despite high youth unemployment in Egypt and Tunisia and long wait times until employment, an analyst trying to predict unrest from ILO reports may have looked more toward the Middle East, and away from North Africa, to discern a turning point after which youth might more readily mobilize.

## State Vulnerability Indices

Four state vulnerability indices (state fragility indices) were reviewed.<sup>12</sup> None of these four provided particular insights that would have aided in predicting the December 2010 events. Neither Tunisia's nor Egypt's rating in any of the indices, nor their trends over the past several years, suggested impending regime change. To be fair, three of the four

<sup>10</sup> World Bank. "Conflict, Security, and Development" *World Development Report, 2011* (Washington, DC: IBRD, 2010), Ch. 2.

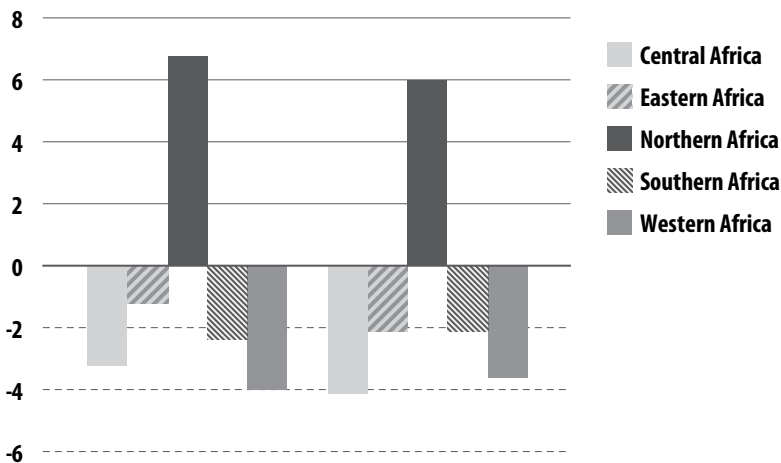
<sup>11</sup> International Labour Organization. *Global Employment Trends for Youth, August 2010* (Geneva: ILO, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> For each index, the country vulnerability scores and recent trends in those scores were compared. Each index's vulnerability score reflects the results of a multi-variable analysis that statistically predicts a type of destabilizing event. Each index has its own criterion for an event, each uses its own method of analysis, and each employs its own choice of variables.

indices considered were not designed to reflect the risk of a very low-intensity conflict, or regime changes trending toward democracy, which characterize the pro-democracy demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt. The single index that was constructed to pick up the risk of a popular uprising was generated by the Economist Intelligence Unit. That index rated Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya at lower risk levels than the remaining three indices (see Table 1).

Two reports that separately categorized countries on governance, economics, and stability were also reviewed. *African Futures 2050*<sup>13</sup> identified a large inconsistency between their model's expectations for democracy in the North Africa region and the existing regimes. Even so, the authors did not conclude that this gap predicted coming regime change, instead anticipating that this disparity would continue.<sup>14</sup> In *Global Report 2009*, the authors' made no specific reference to potential turmoil in North Africa or the threat of popular uprising. Their analysis did identify Egypt and Tunisia as two of 44 regimes worldwide deemed "anocracies," a category between democracy and autocracy. Yet though it labeled anocracies typically unstable, the report did not provide any judgments or methodologies for forecasting the timing or direction – toward democracy or toward autocracy – any of political changes these regimes might experience.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 1: Democratic Deficit in African Regions**



*The model employed by the authors of African Futures 2050 (Cilliers et al. 2011, p. 69) expected much more democracy than North African regimes exhibited. Yet the analysts forecast that this tension would continue.*

<sup>13</sup> Jakkie Cilliers, Barry Hughes, and Jonathan Moyer. *African Futures 2050: The Next Forty Years*. Institute for Security Studies and the Pardee Center for International Futures, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Cilliers, Hughes and Moyer wrote that "both extensive democratic deficits and 'surpluses' may give rise to episodes of sociopolitical disruption and change."

<sup>15</sup> Monty G. Marshall, and Benjamin R. Cole. *Global Report 2009: Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility*. Center for Systemic Peace and Center for Global Policy. (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University, 2009). Marshall and Cole classified Libya as an autocracy, a regime type typically more stable than anocracies.

**Table 1: Comparison of the Ratings of Tunisia and Egypt by Four Published State Vulnerability Indices**

Index	State Fragility Index <sup>16</sup>	Failed States Index <sup>17</sup>	Index of State Weakness <sup>18</sup>	Political Instability Index <sup>19</sup>
Year	2009	2010	2008	2009/10
<b>Tunisia</b>	Rank: 96 of 163* states (*least fragile)	Rank: 118 of 177* states (*most stable)  Trend: Virtually unchanged from 2009 to 2010; Risk declines significantly from 2005 to 2010	Rank: 112 of 141* states (*least weak)	Rank: 134 of 165* states (*least threatened by social protest)  Trend: Unchanged from 2007 to 2009/10
<b>Egypt</b>	Rank: 48 of 163* states (*least fragile)	Rank: 49 of 177* states (*most stable)  Trend: Risk declines slightly from 2005 to 2010;	Rank: 78 of 141* states (*least weak)	Rank: 106 of 165* states (*least threatened by social protest)  Trend: Risk increases from 2007 to 2009/10

*Comparison of the ratings of Tunisia and Egypt by four published state vulnerability indices.*

<sup>16</sup> Monty G. Marshall, Jack A. Goldstone, and Benjamin R. Cole. *State Fragility Index and Matrix*. Center for Systemic Peace and Center for Global Policy. (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University, 2009). The State Fragility Index and Matrix (SFI) rates state effectiveness and legitimacy across four dimensions: security, governance, economic development, and social development. The SFI places states into six fragility categories: extreme (8 states in this category), high (20 states), serious (30), moderate (31), low (29), little or no (43). Tunisia's fragility rating is "low", as is Libya's. Egypt is rated "serious".

<sup>17</sup> Fund for Peace. *The Failed State Index*. 2010. [http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=452&Itemid=900](http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=452&Itemid=900). (versions from 2005 to 2010 are available on the Fund for Peace website). The Failed States Index (FSI) uses the Fund for Peace's Conflict Assessment System Tool to generate its index from twelve social, economic, and political indicators. In the 2010 FSI (Fund for Peace website version), both Tunisia and Egypt are placed into "warning", the second of four categories: alert, the most likely to experience an internal conflict (37 states in this category); warning, the next conflict-likely group (92 states); moderate (35); and sustainable (13).

<sup>18</sup> Susan Rice and Stewart Patrick. *Index of State Weakness in the Developing World*. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2008). [http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/02\\_weak\\_states\\_index.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/02_weak_states_index.aspx). The Index of State Weakness assesses 141 developing states according to measures of their performance on economic, political, security, and social welfare criteria, establishing composite scores on a scale from 0 (worst) to 10 (best). Egypt scored 6.50, ranking in the 3rd quintile with marks higher than India (6.28) or China (6.41). Tunisia (7.61) ranked in the 4th quintile, together with countries such as Brazil (7.22) and Turkey (7.18).

<sup>19</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit. *Political Instability Index*. (London: *The Economist*, 2009). [http://viewswire.eiu.com/site\\_info.asp?info\\_name=social\\_unrest\\_table&page=noads&rf=0](http://viewswire.eiu.com/site_info.asp?info_name=social_unrest_table&page=noads&rf=0). The Political Instability Index combines three measures of economic distress - GDP growth, GDP per capita, and unemployment - together with a dozen indicators of underlying vulnerability such as corruption and ethnic fragmentation, to score countries on a scale from 8.8 (most risk) to 1.2 (least risk), and classify each state as very high, high, moderate, or low risk. In 2009, Egypt scored 5.4, slightly safer than Spain (5.5) in the "moderate" risk category. Tunisia, also in the "moderate" risk category, scored 4.6, the same as Ireland, and just above Singapore (4.7).

## Public Opinion Surveys

The Arab Barometer Survey (ABS) produced reports showing consistent support for democracy across the Arab world. Data underlying the series of ABS reports<sup>20</sup> and published papers<sup>21</sup> focus on questions from surveys using the World Value Surveys instruments, principally in five Arab countries: Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and the Palestinian Authority. The data make it clear that there is broad support for democracy in the Arab world – although, the authors admit, support may be bolstered by the allure of a political system of which the Arab populace lacks experience. Responses in the ABS suggest that those who favor democracy would prefer to have it replace the current autocracy gradually, rather than abruptly.

The authors noted that prior surveys also showed broad support for democracy, and that such preferences existed in the absence of signs of democratic reform. Thus, the survey offered no perspective on the timing and probability of regime change. Further, the absence of three North African countries (Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt) from the survey limited the possibility of comparisons. The ABS highlighted the lack of differences between religious and secular citizens in their preference for democracy. Thus, the Arab populace, though divided by religiosity, was not divided over democracy along this fracture line.

## Historical Sociology: Dissent in the Middle East – North Africa Region

The search for an appropriate sample of research on Arab dissent sought research on youth movements, as well as the more high-profile cases of labor dissent. Among the sample reviewed, there were no direct predictions or sudden shifts that alone would suggest impending pro-democracy demonstrations and regime change in North Africa. Nonetheless, some experts did identify breakthroughs in strategies by small, woman-run protest organizations, labor groups, and social media activists in Egypt that had successfully undermined the monopoly on power held by Mubarak's National Democratic Party.

Shorbagy's chronicle of the Kefaya Movement's evolution in Egypt and its ability to draw Leftists and Islamists together to oppose succession leadership is suggestive of the crucial convergence of Islamist and secular goals that was later witnessed in Cairo's Tahrir Square. However, Shorbagy concedes that the movement had been weakened by 2006.<sup>22</sup> That weakening is not the case for the Egyptian Labor Movement, which grew as Kefaya faded from the scene. While studies portray the growth of the Egyptian Labor Movement as ongoing and open-ended, the analysis does not suggest a short timeline that ends in popular demonstrations and regime change.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.arabbarometer.org/reports/reports.html>

<sup>21</sup> Amaney Jamal and Mark Tessler. "Attitudes in the Arab World" *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 19, No. 1 (January, 2008). pp 97-110.

<sup>22</sup> Manar Shorbagy. "The Egyptian Movement for Change — Kefaya: Redefining Politics in Egypt" *Public Culture*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2006)..

<sup>23</sup> Solidarity Center. *Justice for All: The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt*. (Washington, DC: Solidarity Center, 2010).

Indications of ascending youth-led political organizations can be drawn from an essay by Shaazka Beyerle and Arwa Hassan in a volume entitled Civilian Jihad, edited by Maria Stephan (2009).<sup>24</sup> The authors chronicled the activities of two small Egyptian protest organizations: Shayfeen.com, an informal election-monitoring organization founded by three Egyptian women in 2005; and Egyptians Against Corruption (EAC), also founded by women. The essay describes these organizations' use of logos, new media (including YouTube), text messaging, and cell phones to disseminate their messages and mobilize supporters. The narrative notes the inclusive nature of EAC, its ability to sidestep regime censorship, and even its success to recruit supporters from the ruling National Democratic Party.

An article by Rudy Jaafar and Maria Stephan (in the same volume) suggested an even longer history of Arab youth organization that connects to protest strategies tested during the Lebanese Cedar Revolution. Jaafar and Stephan chronicled the activities of the Lebanese "March 14 Coalition," which used cell phones and email-distribution lists to mobilize nonviolent demonstrations and counter-demonstrations that ultimately pressured Syria to withdraw its troops.<sup>25</sup>

The March 14 Coalition was also able to unite disparate Lebanese political and religious factions by banning flags other than the national flag – a strategy that was followed in Tunisia and Egypt.

This literature follows a progression of strategies and tactics that organizations involved in popular, political protest have been developing in the MENA region. However, these studies do not explicitly suggest likely future political outcomes or a timeline for their political objectives.

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<sup>24</sup> Shaazka Beyerle and Arwa Hassan. "Popular Resistance Against Corruption in Turkey and Egypt" in Maria J. Stephan (ed.) Civilian Jihad: Nonviolent Struggle, Democratization, and Governance in the Middle East. (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2009). pp. 265-279.

<sup>25</sup> Rudy Jaafar and Maria J. Stephan. "Lebanon's Independence Intifada: How an Unarmed Insurrection Expelled Syrian Forces." In Maria J. Stephan (ed.) Civilian Jihad: Nonviolent Struggle, Democratization, and Governance in the Middle East. (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2009). pp. 169-182.

## Political Demography

The countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) display a distinctive demographic profile in the age structure of their populations. Like many developing nations, they exhibit a high fraction of young adults (defined as ages 15 to 29, although sometimes the 15 to 24 bracket is used) as a proportion of the total working-age population (ages 15 to 64). For a country with 35-million young adults in a working-age population of 100 million, for example, the young adult fraction is 0.35. In 2009, the world's most youthful populations showed youth proportions of 0.5 and above in countries such as Afghanistan (0.53) and Zimbabwe (0.62), while the youth fraction stood below 0.3 in demographically mature countries, such as Japan (0.24).

Students of political demography frequently argue that particularly sizable youth cohorts relative to the adult population, so-called “youth bulges,” render countries more vulnerable to political instability.<sup>1</sup> Youth bulges, they suggest, increase both the motives and the means for political violence. Large youth cohorts exacerbate competition for resources, especially employment; and youth bulges expand the supply of young adults available to be recruited into rebel groups, criminal gangs, etc.

While no demographic analysis deemed the MENA region bound for imminent civil strife, some experts did delve into the potential political repercussions of the youth bulge pressures confronting autocratic Arab states. As early as 2002, Winckler asserted that alleviating rising youth unemployment would demand economic reforms to promote higher growth, but that implementing such reforms would also increase democratization that could threaten the existing power structures of many Arab regimes. The Center for International Private Enterprise – an affiliate of the US Chamber of Commerce – similarly maintained that the challenges of creating 100 million positions for new entrants into the MENA job markets only could be met by democratic reforms, without which political violence could erupt. So too, the 2009 *Arab Human Development Report* worried that youth unemployment rates in the Arab region – double those of the world average – could contribute to an “alienation of jobless youth that can translate rapidly into protest, and in some cases may lead to radicalization.”<sup>2</sup>

Less remarked, however, some MENA countries have begun a demographic transition that is seeing their youth bulges diminish as their young adult populations mature and are followed by smaller youth cohorts. Work done by demographer Richard Cincotta suggests that this shift may hold significant political ramifications. Cincotta argues that the politics

<sup>1</sup> Jack A. Goldstone. “Demography, Environment, and Security” in Paul F. Diehl and Nils Petter Gleditsch (eds). *Environmental Conflict*. (Boulder: Westview, 2001); Henrik Urdal, “A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence” *International Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 50, No. 3 (2006); Elizabeth Leahy et al. *The Shape of Things to Come: Why Age Structure Matters to a Safer, More Equitable World* (Washington, DC: Population Action International, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Onn Winckler. “The Demographic Dilemma of the Arab World: The Employment Aspect” *Journal of Contemporary History*. Vol. 37, No. 4 (2002); Center for International Private Enterprise. *Middle East and North Africa Reform: Rooted in Economic and Political Ground*. Issue Paper No. 0804 (Washington, DC: CIPE, February 2008); UNDP. *Arab Human Development Report 2009: Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries* (New York: UNDP, 2009). p.111.

of authoritarian regimes in youth bulge states rest on a “Hobbesian bargain.” Citizens will exchange liberties for security when their lives and property face the threats of violence and instability associated with large youth bulges. As these youth bulges ultimately shrink, however, so too do the risks they pose to political order. Citizens (particularly economic elites) then find the authoritarian regime’s controls on communication, commerce, civil society, etc., both more oppressive and less necessary. At this stage, the possibilities for political reform and potential democratic transition rise.

Cincotta and colleagues developed this analysis to identify a demographic turning point at which nations with youthful age structures hit a “half-a-chance” benchmark for becoming a stable liberal democracy. By examining the demographic and political trajectories of countries worldwide since 1975, they found that a given country has a 50 percent chance of becoming a liberal democracy within 10 years (plus or minus) of the time at which the young adult proportion of its population reaches about 0.40. Based on this approach, Cincotta noted that several countries in the MENA region – Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia – were projected to cross the 0.40 threshold by 2020, judging that “analysts should expect one or more liberal democracies arising in [this region] by 2020 or before.”<sup>3</sup>

The conclusions advanced by Cincotta and company are probabilistic; they do not pretend to predict precisely when individual countries will experience political reform. Nor do they specify the nature or course of any democratic transition – whether it will be elite initiated or broad-based, peaceful or turbulent, rapid or gradual. Other analysts have argued that, even as youth bulges fade, democratization and development processes themselves may give rise to new conflict risks, undermining demographic “peace dividends.”<sup>4</sup> Demography, needless to say, is not destiny. It can, however, furnish important indicators that may turn analysts’ attention in fruitful new directions.

—David Michel

<sup>3</sup> Richard P. Cincotta. “Half a Chance: Youth Bulges and Transitions to Liberal Democracy” *Environmental Change and Security Report 13* (2008-2009). p.15. For a fuller discussion and explication of the methodology, see Richard P. Cincotta and John Doces. “The Age-structural Maturity Thesis: The Impact of the Youth Bulge Proportion on the Advent and Stability of Liberal Democracy” in J.A. Goldstone, Eric Kaufman, and Monica Duffy Toft (eds.) Political Demography: Identity, Conflict, and Institutions. (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> Neil Howe and Richard Jackson. “Battle of the (Youth) Bulge” *The National Interest*. July/August 2008.









## Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO)

Mona Yacoubian

### Explanatory Note

**T**he non-governmental organizations (NGO) sectoral report comprises nine organizations, focusing particularly on their work in Tunisia and Egypt during the 2005-2010 timeframe.<sup>1</sup> Organizations included in this section fall into two broad categories: democracy promotion NGOs, and human rights groups. Beyond these two types of organizations, two groups included in the study are considered “hybrid” organizations, melding characteristics of democracy promotion NGOs and more traditional think tanks. The study concentrates on democracy promotion NGOs and human rights groups since their work focuses specifically on the prospects for democratic change, and identifying strategic entry points in Arab societies. As such, these organizations, rather than more traditional development-oriented NGOs, are best placed to gauge the potential for significant, bottom-up change. Since Tunisia and Egypt were the launching points for more widespread popular unrest in the Arab world, the study centered largely on the organizations’ activities, planning, and strategy in these two countries. Given the significant regime repression in Tunisia and correspondingly low levels of NGO involvement there, this report primarily reflects NGO work in Egypt.

In many ways, this sector is an anomaly in the broader study. As such, an “apples and oranges” issue must be addressed. Unlike think-tanks, media, or other groups, these NGOs do not produce analytic products or forecasting. In interviews, organization representatives often emphasized that their mission was not analytic or forecast oriented. Most organizations did not employ specific methodologies for obtaining and analyzing information. Instead, their work aims to promote democratic change by working with local partners or to document human rights abuses for broader advocacy purposes.

While these groups produce some publications, ranging from press releases to longer reports, the work is not necessarily analytic in nature. Lengthier human rights reports

<sup>1</sup> For a complete list of organizations and their mission statements, see Appendix III.

*constitute an important exception, albeit one focused largely on documentation of human rights abuses rather than on prospects for change. More broadly, in both public and private documents, these organizations documented in detail the deterioration of basic freedoms, civil liberties, and socioeconomic conditions fueling popular revolts across the region.*

*Nonetheless, the NGOs' strategic planning and resource allocation decisions implicitly, if not explicitly, reflected their analysis of the prospects for democratic change. They necessarily made analytic judgments on the timeframe, key change agents, and broader environment for democratic reform. Moreover, the nature of their projects – whether working with tech-savvy youth, human rights dissidents, or independent labor groups – provided an often unique vantage point from which to view change taking form at the grassroots.*

*Given the limited utility of written products, this chapter extensively relied on personal interviews conducted with representatives of the various organizations studied. Specifically, the author interviewed 14 representatives from both democracy promotion NGOs and human rights groups.<sup>2</sup> In some instances, internal planning and strategy documents were made available to help understand how the organization viewed the prospects for change. In the absence of analytic products assessing prospects for change, an organization's funding and resource decisions were an important proxy for its assessment of where and how democratic change might occur. Indeed, for any sector, resource allocation decisions are perhaps the best possible indicator of how an organization viewed the prospects for change – literally by investing scarce funds in people and organizations considered to be genuine “change agents.”*

*Some additional caveats bear mention. In some instances, organizations might be captive to a structural bias that favors seeking funding for projects in response to programmatic priorities defined by US government initiatives. However, in most instances, projects and ideas were internally generated by groups as they sought to work around mounting government repression in pursuit of their objectives. Organizations often “ran up against walls” when working in the field, which forced them to try new ideas in order to circumvent the numerous obstacles on the strategy. These difficulties led organizations to “fall-back” options, which paradoxically opened venues to interesting new actors promoting democratic change.*

*A bent toward advocacy by some of the groups in this study constitutes an additional bias. In at least one instance, an organization appeared to have exaggerated prospects for instability to bolster their advocacy efforts. As one human rights organization representative noted, “We may have issued warnings about potential unrest [in Tunisia or Egypt], but this was more to get the attention of policy makers, rather than believing it from the heart. The warnings were instrumental, and used as part of an advocacy strategy. They were not reflective of long-range analysis that forecast the possibility of unrest.”<sup>3</sup> Others acknowledged communicating these warnings to governments in the region as a means of pushing them to implement reforms, but also felt that the warnings were realistic.*

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<sup>2</sup> For a complete list of representatives interviewed, see Appendix II.

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous interview. April 6, 2011.

## Summary of Key Points

- While none of the NGO sector actors predicted the timing, pace, or breadth of Arab world turmoil, many expressed a sense that the status quo was untenable, particularly in Egypt. They described in detail a confluence of mounting regime repression and growing popular agitation over a variety of political and socioeconomic issues. While the “dots were not connected” to suggest a social explosion was imminent, numerous references highlighted the developing “explosive mix.”
- In an increasingly repressive environment, organizations identified the nexus of youth and emerging social media as a potentially successful arena for promoting change. Numerous groups emphasized that the Internet, particularly the blogosphere and Facebook, served as an important “free space.” However, they underscored that mobilization – translating online activism into offline actions – remained a key challenge. Many shifted their programming to fill this perceived void by offering training to youth activists in using social media for political mobilization.
- An inverse relationship appears to exist between the extent of contact with formal structures – both government and opposition – and the degree of understanding of societal dynamics and the potential for change. Only by moving away from work within the traditional establishment, either by default or design, were NGOs able to gain a sense of germinating grassroots change. Organizations that worked on the periphery of society, for example in the informal sector or with young, unaffiliated cyber-activists, had a keener sense of the level of popular disaffection, and the possibility for change emanating from the grassroots. Similarly, those groups that operated outside Cairo or Tunis appeared to have greater insight into the popular mood in the country, and the extent of popular frustration.
- The cultivation of a longstanding network of trusted contacts served as a critical source of information to better gauge dynamics on the ground and prospects for change. Nearly every organization deemed some level of Arabic language proficiency, if not by US then by local staff, as an essential component. Moreover, building deep relationships of trust over time, and having staff that understood the local environment and culture was also considered a critical element to gain insight.
- NGOs interviewed for this study often identified three important “turning points” that they connected to greater prospects for change in Egypt: mounting labor unrest in 2007-2010; the online campaign in remembrance of torture victim Khaled Said; and fraudulent legislative elections in November 2010.
  - Labor strikes began occurring with regularity in 2004 and gained momentum over the following years, growing both in frequency and size, and spanning numerous sectors. Many NGOs identified this shift as unprecedented and indicative of the potential for greater popular mobilization.
  - The Facebook campaign mounted in remembrance of torture victim Khaled Said marked another milestone in the ability to translate online activism to

“offline” mobilization, with the NGOs noting that the campaign attracted “regular, everyday” Egyptians to the street with greater frequency.

- The 2010 legislative elections – notable for widespread fraud and manipulation – were deemed “the straw that broke the camel’s back.” Democracy promotion organizations in particular noted that popular expectations for the elections were high, with significant “Get Out the Vote” (GOTV) campaigns. The fraudulent election elicited a palpable sense of disappointment and frustration.

## Background on Operating Environment of NGO Sector

The human rights groups and democracy promotion NGOs reviewed for this section operated in a variety of ways in Tunisia and Egypt, as they did across the Arab region, reflecting the differing contexts obtained in individual countries. Some nations, such as Bahrain, actually offered considerably more hospitable operating environments for democracy promotion and human rights groups than did the countries considered here. Few NGOs, if any, had an extensive field presence in Tunisia, where the environment was extremely repressive. Neither of the political party institutes, for example, operated field offices in Tunisia because of government restrictions. Other groups operated quietly “under the radar,” undertaking periodic trips to Tunisia, or maintaining an extremely low-key presence in country.

Work in Egypt also proved extremely difficult, and the period 2005-2010 was marked by increasing government repression. Democracy promotion NGOs, for example, uniformly noted an increase in repressive regime tactics, including harassment of their staff and withholding of their operating licenses. As one democracy promoter noted, “I had just arrived in Cairo having worked in our Ukraine office five years prior, and Egyptian officials, referring to the ‘color revolutions,’ told me, ‘We know what happened in Ukraine, and it won’t happen here.’”<sup>4</sup>

These difficulties had the double-edged effect of curtailing their ability to undertake programming, while impelling them to make connections with less established opposition groups. Paradoxically, these new contacts exposed democracy promotion and human rights NGOs to many of the unaffiliated elements, who ended up forming the leading edge of the uprising.

Democracy promotion NGOs employed a variety of strategies to deal with increased government repression. The International Republican Institute (IRI) opted to maintain a low-level presence in Egypt, but conduct all of its training of Egyptian activists outside the country to deflect government pressure. In this manner, they managed to train 1,200 Egyptians via programs in the region or in the United States. Similarly, Freedom House, citing the difficulties that other organizations encountered, operated from a regional office

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Tom Garrett. International Republican Institute. April 15, 2011.

in Jordan, while maintaining a “presence” in Egypt. As a result, “The Egyptian regime couldn’t really go after us because we didn’t have a formal presence on the ground.”<sup>5</sup>

Not all organizations maintained a field presence in Egypt. Some, such as the Solidarity Center, made an explicit decision *not* to operate a field office in order to preempt attempts at cooptation and to avoid Egyptian government harassment, underscoring that an in-country presence can be distracting and bring unwanted government scrutiny. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) does not maintain field offices, and noted that as a result it had greater degrees of maneuver. Those organizations without a field presence in Egypt make regular visits several times a year and maintain regular contact with partner organizations.

## Broad Assessments on the Prospects for Change

None of the NGOs studied predicted the specifics of the Tunisian or Egyptian uprisings. However, nearly all of the groups noted growing popular frustrations and few outlets for expression. The NGOs documented and often experienced firsthand sharpening regime repression. They also noted that the government crackdown coincided with increasing popular frustrations over a variety of issues including widespread corruption, the systematic use of torture, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, and lessening political freedoms. Taken together, this confluence was deemed an untenable “explosive mix” by some groups.

In a piece for the Arab Reform Initiative, a hybrid democracy promotion think tank, Egyptian researcher Dina Shehata noted, “while marginalized as a social group, they [youth] continue to entertain high expectations due to urban exposure and education, and are, therefore, amongst the most politically mobilized groups in Egypt.”<sup>6</sup> She continues to document the qualities that came to characterize those propelling the Arab uprisings: non-ideological, inclusive, internally diverse, and operating outside traditional party structures. She concludes the paper on a prophetic note, “The challenge during the coming period for both the ruling party and opposition parties and movements is to make room for the emergence of new groups that are better able to represent youth and articulate their needs. Absent such a development, youth in Egypt, as in much of the Arab world, will remain a ticking time bomb.”<sup>7</sup>

Another organization framed the issue in terms of the fraying social contract governing relations between ruling regimes and their populations. “It was clear that the social contract between regimes and the people was not tenable. Either they needed to reform or there would be an explosion. Something had to give.”<sup>8</sup>

Specifically, in a February 2008 report called *Middle East and North Africa Reform: Rooted in Economic and Political Ground*, the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) stated, “An intensifying demographic transition in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) calls for creating as many as 100-million new jobs in the next decade in order to

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Daniel Calingaert. Freedom House. April 13, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Dina Shehata. “Youth Activism in Egypt” *Arab Reform Brief* 23. (October 2008). p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Abdulwahab Alkebsi. Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE). April 8, 2011.

accommodate the increasing number of entrants into the labor force. The shortcomings of past economic reforms foreshadow a massive labor crisis and potential social instability as the rising wave of youth unemployment sweeps through the region.”<sup>9</sup> The paper notes that the MENA governments “can no longer ensure sufficient public sector employment levels to manage social expectations.”<sup>10</sup> It continues, “If the urgent employment challenge is not met, dark scenarios of intensified social conflict or even internal violence may follow.”<sup>11</sup> Terming the situation an “explosive mix,” the paper concludes, “MENA is currently facing a threat of the deepest socioeconomic crisis in its history.”<sup>12</sup>

Referencing their on-the-ground experiences, other democracy promotion NGOs also emphasized the untenable nature of growing popular frustrations. As noted by one democracy promotion activist, “In Egypt, there was a huge build-up that took place over 10-15 years. It was a slow incremental movement of groups organizing themselves and reaching out. It was obvious that frustration was on the rise. Everybody was telling us the country is going to explode. But there was also the sense that little could be done to stop it. Instead the thought was let it explode and then pick up the pieces.”<sup>13</sup> His concerns were echoed by another democracy promotion activist describing her feelings after the fraudulent 2010 legislative elections, “I remember feeling very concerned about Egypt. I had a sense of a deteriorating country, and I felt this country is going to explode. I just didn’t think it would be so soon because of popular apathy.”<sup>14</sup>

While most organizations underscored the potential for change in Egypt, many did not foresee the possibility of significant change in Tunisia. “A number of Tunisians used the language of revolt and uprising, and I didn’t really believe them. We were told by our Tunisian contacts that ‘we are at a breaking point,’ but the analysis seemed rigid and self-serving. We didn’t see it coming. The best proof of this is that on January 6-7, in the midst of the Tunisian uprising, we all met in Washington to finalize our plan for the year. We had no inkling that anything significant was going to happen. A key project for the year was going to be on Moroccan child labor abuse. We were already two to three weeks into the Tunisian uprising and didn’t see it coming.”<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, a researcher for Human Rights Watch visiting Tunisia in May 2010 noted, “Despite Ben Ali’s best efforts to conceal his government’s dishonest methods to silence and quash dissent, the carefully crafted façade of ‘modern, democratic, and moderate’ Tunisia is coming apart at the seams.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Center for International Private Enterprise. *Middle East and North Africa Reform: Rooted in Economic and Political Ground*. Economic Reform Issue Paper No. 0804. (February 2008). p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.13.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Laith Kubba. National Endowment for Democracy. March 24, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Lila Jaafar. National Democratic Institute. March 24, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Eric Goldstein. Human Rights Watch. April 6, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Rasha Moumneh. “The Myth of Moderate Tunisia” *Foreign Policy*. May 6, 2010.

## Assessing Strategic Entry Points for Change

### Social Media and Youth –The Power of Facebook

As repression mounted following a brief opening in 2005, human rights organizations extensively documented autocratic regime tactics, in particular the systematic use of torture, suppression of popular protests, press censorship, and harassment of opposition figures. Numerous press releases and reports by Human Rights Watch and Freedom House detail widespread abuses by the Tunisian and Egyptian governments. At the same time, these groups identified new media as an important “free space.”

In a 2005 report, Human Rights Watch documents Egyptian government efforts to expand computer and Internet access across the country in the hopes that it would spur investment and present Egypt as a modern, forward-looking nation. Instead, local human rights groups exploited this new opening to both document abuses and mobilize support. “Egyptian human rights activists have argued that the spread of ICTs (information, communication, technology) appreciably has strengthened the human rights movement in Egypt.” The report quoted an activist terming the Internet “a paradise” for activism, explaining that “human rights organizations can send out calls for help” and “launch online campaigns.”<sup>17</sup> The report continues by describing numerous examples of online activism and subsequent mobilization, but also details regime efforts to censor and block access to the Internet.

In its 2007 *Freedom of the Press*, Freedom House noted the growing significance of new media. A press release underscored that “newer media forms – such as satellite television and Internet-based newspapers, blogs, and social-networking sites – had emerged as an important force for openness in restricted media environments, as well as a key area of contestation.”<sup>18</sup> This point was underscored in a recent interview. “Five years ago, it started to become apparent that the Internet space was more open. If you wanted to support cutting-edge activists, that’s where they were.”<sup>19</sup>

With the profusion of social networking sites, many NGOs singled out Facebook as a powerful tool for mobilization. A number of groups cited the success of the April 6, 2008 strikes in solidarity with the labor movement as an important turning point, marking the use of social media for mobilization.

Freedom House emphasized the use of Facebook in “mobilizing 80,000 supporters to protest rising food prices” and “playing a crucial role in broadening support and turnout for the April 6 textile workers’ strike.” The group underscored the significance of the “Facebook movement,” noting that it “challenges the perception that there is no prospect for independent, secular opposition in the country” and “offers a safe political space” where “every member in the 100,000-strong online community could be, at any given moment, a leader of the movement.”<sup>20</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI) came to a similar conclusion, also citing the April 6 movement while highlighting the fact that “the government had its eye primarily

<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Watch. *False Freedom: Online Censorship in the Middle East and North Africa*. Vol. 17, No. 10 (November 2005). p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Freedom House. *Press Freedom in New Media, 2007*. [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org).

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Daniel Calingaert. Freedom House. April 13, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Sherif Mansour. “Egypt’s Facebook Showdown” June 2, 2008. [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org).



on bloggers, not on Facebook users.” By its nature, Facebook was more difficult to monitor when there are millions of Facebook pages. Facebook also had a multiplier effect by allowing “friends” to view links and other items on each other’s pages.<sup>21</sup>

During this period, democracy promotion NGOs regrouped, re-assessing their strategies and revising their understanding of the most propitious areas for promoting democratic change. As one democracy promoter noted, “by 2007, we were in a funk and we asked ourselves whether we should be re-orienting our activities because we felt we had reached a dead end with our traditional work.”<sup>22</sup>

A number of democracy promotion NGOs identified the convergence of online activism with an increasingly politicized youth sector as a critical catalyst for promoting democratic change, and began to allocate funding and design programming focused on “seeking to transition from online activism to offline capabilities. Beginning in 2005-06, we realized there was great potential for online activism.”<sup>23</sup> In pursuit of this objective, NDI developed “Aswat” a virtual space accessible by membership that allows for online collaboration, sharing of best practices, etc. The organization invested \$1 million in the project, which connects online activists to one another and develops their capacity to mobilize.

In 2009, NDI developed a program to strengthen youth political participation by engaging them with social media. As an NDI staffer noted, “Capacity on the ground was no match for what was happening online.” NDI also partnered with organizations such as Google to hold three new media conferences that brought together activists across the region to help them learn how to leverage new media tools for mobilization. The conferences elicited important insights into key focal points for change. For example, informal notes from the September 2010 new media conference remarked that “Facebook is quickly supplanting forums as a communications platform,” while also highlighting the increased use of “multiplatform techniques” [for example combining video, photos, and links] as a more effective tool for mobilization.<sup>24</sup> The group also brought Obama campaign experts to Egypt in response to a surge of interest in Egypt on how to use social media for political mobilization.

By the same token, Freedom House launched a New Generation program in 2007 that aimed to “inject new blood and dynamism into programming by working closely with ‘up and coming’ activists, training them in the region and Europe, and bringing them on advocacy tours to the US.”<sup>25</sup> Egyptian blogger Wael Abbas was one of the first fellows, and his work underscored the potential for new media to document human rights abuses and mobilize for action. The organization worked closely with activists who were mobilizing around the Khaled Said issue, including Wael Ghonim, who played a critical role in organizing the Egyptian uprising.

Similarly, the NED – urged by a board member to find new ways to bring about change in Egypt – developed a new strategic plan for Egypt in 2009. The plan emerged following a fact-finding trip to Egypt in which NED staff met with 50 Egyptians across numerous sectors, connecting with a number of youth activists in particular. “The trip was a key

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Lila Jaafar. National Democratic Institute. March 24, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Les Campbell. National Democratic Institute. March 21, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> “Notes from MENA Africa Bloggers Network Meeting.” Budapest, Hungary. September 23, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Daniel Calingaert. Freedom House. April 13, 2011.

instance in which NED sought out and met with digital activists who were playing an increasingly important role. The April 6, 2008 strike was a key example of the power of digital activism.”<sup>26</sup> The meetings, conducted solely in Arabic, informed NED’s new strategy, which focused on empowering civil society, particularly human rights and labor organizations. The plan cited digital media as promising, noting 160,000 bloggers and 40 million cell phone users in Egypt. “Such space is yet to be fully utilized to its full potential.”<sup>27</sup> The plan also pinpointed youth empowerment by “civic engagement through the use of new technologies” as another potential source for promoting change.

## **Informal Sector – Unaffiliated Cyber-Activists, Laborers, and Entrepreneurs as Key Change Agents**

NGOs identified the informal political and economic sector as another key strategic entry point for promoting democratic change. In some cases, the groups “backed” into this sector as other, more established sectors were not penetrable due to government cooption or repression. “Meeting with young, unaffiliated activists in Egypt became a strategy available to us by default. We ended up talking to human rights and youth activists because we couldn’t penetrate more conventional political circles.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, IRI noted a shift in their policies, “reaching beyond political parties into civil society. It had become clear that there was no real opportunity for reform within political parties or formal structures. As a result, we reached out to youth groups and NGOs.”<sup>29</sup>

Freedom House also pursued a similar strategy: “The decision to focus on [unaffiliated] individuals was demanded by the nature of the operating environment. Working with individuals was an access point to avoid oppressive governments in the region who control registration and operation of organizations. We also fostered networks of activists, rather than formal organizations, because networks were less vulnerable to crackdown by the regime and reflected the flexibility that today’s activists prefer.”<sup>30</sup> Moreover, they focused on finding creative and innovative activists whom they identified as “up and coming.”

For its part, NED – based on its strategy planning trip to Egypt – opted to steer its funding towards a younger generation. “They were small, scattered, undeterred, and committed to their cause.”<sup>31</sup> By exploring these contacts, NED expanded its grants from 17 to 42 organizations with a particular focus on vibrant, young organizations – a majority of which were located outside Cairo.

Focusing on the informal economic sector, CIPE staff noted the “tremendous gap in reality between statistics on paper and what goes on in the street. Many economic indicators only reflect what’s happening in the formal sector, but their accuracy is diminished since 60 to 70 percent of Egypt exists in the informal sector. Remember, the Tunisian fruit seller is the perfect example of an informal sector actor and entrepreneur.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Amira Maty. National Endowment for Democracy. March 28, 2011.

<sup>27</sup> “The National Endowment for Democracy’s Strategic Plan for Egypt.” July 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Les Campbell. National Democratic Institute. March 21, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Tom Garrett. International Republican Institute. April 15, 2011.

<sup>30</sup> E-mail correspondence with Sherif Mansour. Freedom House. April 18, 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Laith Kubba. National Endowment for Democracy. March 24, 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Abdulwahab Alkebsi. Center for International Private Enterprise. April 8, 2011.

Likewise, the Solidarity Center noted its emphasis on working in the informal sector. “We didn’t work with professional syndicates, but focused on workers. We cultivated contacts with people on the fringes of society who lived in the ‘gray’ areas. As a result of these contacts, we learned that there was a tremendous amount of discontent. The degree to which basic needs were not being met was significant, as we learned by getting inside many small-scale and large-scale factories through our Egyptian partners.”<sup>33</sup> The organization also maintained contact with large, “decrepit” public-sector enterprises where government privatization efforts were exerting a significant toll on workers’ living conditions.

## Cultivating Trusted Networks – A Key Source of Information

Coalition building is an essential element of democracy promotion work. As such, the NGOs surveyed uniformly emphasized the critical role played by building trusted networks of contacts on the ground over an extended period of time. These local contacts served as crucial sources of information both in terms of understanding societal dynamics and identifying where the best prospects for democratic change resided. The groups stressed the importance of talking to “real people across the country, not just government or party officials.”<sup>34</sup> Others emphasized the importance of engaging with a broad spectrum of society: lawyers, journalists, human rights activists, and others.

Many cited their local partners as important “windows” on society. “Our partners reside in different strata of Egyptian society, from very small business owners that live on the fringe of the formal sector, to larger, family-owned businesses based in Cairo or Alexandria.”<sup>35</sup> Often, leveraging contacts with local NGOs facilitated an organization’s ability to reach literally thousands of people or small organizations who are their members, providing even deeper inroads into society. Democracy promotion organizations often used focus groups, roundtables, and polling (when able) to gain insight into popular sentiment on a variety of issues.

Building trust was cited as an essential ingredient for relationships to be effective. “We developed a good relationship of trust with our partners who open up a lot to us.”<sup>36</sup> Some organizations noted that by being subjected to the same type of government harassment as their local partners, “it gave us a sense of ‘street cred’ with our contacts.”<sup>37</sup>

Most groups suggested that Arabic language skills – either by US or local staff – are essential for forging these new contacts. As one democracy promoter explained, “It’s necessary to be able to sit down and break bread together. This is crucial for cultivating relationships.”<sup>38</sup> Other groups added that along with Arabic language skills, employing staff with a deep cultural understanding, ideally from the country, was equally important. While language and regional expertise were deemed significant factors for interpreting dynamics on the ground, one organization also raised the need to include staff with cross-regional experience. It was noted that at times country experts fall back on pre-conceived notions, lack fresh perspective, and view change as linear. By contrast, a non-regional

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Heba el-Shazli. The Solidarity Center. March 30, 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Lorne Craner. International Republican Institute. April 15, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Abdulwahab AlKebsi. Center for International Private Enterprise. April 8, 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Lila Jaafar. National Democratic Institute. March 24, 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Tom Garrett. International Republican Institute. April 15, 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

expert with experience in diverse regions can “see possibilities for change where others may not. They are able to see commonalities across regions. It is important to have a combination of both types on staff.”<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, organizations routinely cited the need to get out of Cairo and travel to the governorates as a means of understanding country dynamics. Several noted decisions to take “road trips” to various provinces in order to delve deeper into Egyptian society and gain greater insights into popular sentiments.

Additional sources of information included local newspapers and satellite television channels, as well as Facebook pages. One contact underscored the importance of Facebook, noting that she is “friends” with hundreds of Egyptian activists, and able to learn more about key issues by reading the numerous articles, videos, and other links posted on various Facebook pages. Another organization noted the importance, in particular, of local satellite stations, such as Dream TV, which featured call-in shows where people aired their grievances about corruption or deteriorating living conditions.

### Three Key Turning Points: Labor Unrest, Khaled Said, and Fraudulent Elections

Throughout the course of numerous interviews, three key events emerged as important turning points in the thinking of NGOs surveyed regarding prospects for change. Mounting labor unrest in 2006-2010 emerged as a critical benchmark for popular mobilization. The Solidarity Center noted, “The current wave of protests is erupting from the largest social movement Egypt has witnessed in more than half a century.”<sup>40</sup> The report documented the spread of labor strikes across numerous sectors, and economic classes broadening to include white-collar workers and civil servants. Referencing a 2007 strike of real estate tax collectors, the report noted that the strike “involved the largest number of workers in the entire wave of protests since 2004, and was the first coordinated mobilization of civil servants across Egypt.”<sup>41</sup> The Mahalla al-Kubra textile factory strike was also noted as key event, with 26,000 people mobilized on strike for one week. The April 6 solidarity movement was established in solidarity with the Mahalla strikers and denoted an important instance of civil society coordinating with the labor sector. Moreover, “throughout 2007, ‘08, and ‘09, we saw mounting strikes, sit-ins, and work stoppages taking place on a weekly, if not daily, basis.”<sup>42</sup>

This observation was echoed by other organizations. “The labor unrest grew into something much broader. People began coming together when they realized they had no other options.”<sup>43</sup>

“In particular, labor strikes caught my attention. They were increasing in frequency and in the numbers of people being mobilized. They were able to bring out tens of thousands of people. The strikes weren’t suppressed by the government, so they inspired others to come

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Lorne Craner. International Republican Institute. April 14, 2011.

<sup>40</sup> The Solidarity Center. *Justice for All: The Struggle for Workers’ Rights in Egypt*. February 2010. p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Heba el-Shazli. Solidarity Center. March 30, 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Scott Mastic. International Republican Institute. April 15, 2011.

out. There was a sense that the country was starting to fall apart. The government was aware that economic grievances signaled a deeper deterioration. They knew if they cracked down on massive labor protests, it would cause an uproar. It was a mass movement.”<sup>44</sup>

As with Egypt, labor unrest served as a precursor to broad, popular uprising in Tunisia, whose trade union movement has a 78-year history. While President Ben Ali fully controlled the political parties, he did not have full control over the local branches of the labor unions. Before the uprising, labor unrest took place sporadically outside the capital, driven by the more independent local affiliates. When political unrest began in Tunisia, these local labor activists broke away from their Tunis-based leadership and joined the protestors.

Mobilization around the torture and killing Khaled Said in Alexandria in June 2010 marked another turning point. NGOs noted that the Facebook page established in his memory attracted hundreds of thousands of “friends.” For the first time, “non-political Egyptians demonstrated in the streets against torture and government brutality. It wasn’t just activists in the street, but regular people – mothers, fathers, children. Everyone watching the scene was struck by it.”<sup>45</sup> Others underscored that “after Khaled Said, people really got organized. We saw a number of very well-organized protests in Cairo, Alex, and elsewhere.”<sup>46</sup> Still others emphasized that the tactics employed in the Khaled Said protests were precursors to the uprising. “The Friday of Rage on January 28 was not the first one. The *first* Friday of Rage took place on October 29, just before the elections, in honor of Khaled Said. There were also continuing episodes of ‘silent mobs’ spontaneously gathering at random to protest the death of Khaled Said. They were organized by Facebook and happening all over Egypt.”<sup>47</sup>

Finally, many of the NGOs studied indicated that the fraudulent legislative elections in November 2010 were also a significant factor, suggesting that popular frustrations had reached critical mass. “We saw increasing frustrations particularly after the November 2010 elections, which were blatantly fraudulent. The elections galvanized a sense of anger in the people. While the international community did not pay as close attention to the elections, the vote was front and center for Egyptians. It was clear that frustration levels reached a tipping point. Rather than giving up, people just got more angry.”<sup>48</sup>

Others made similar observations. “The elections were blatantly stolen. This pushed people over the edge. There may have been some sense of lethargy and depression, then Tunisia happened.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Lila Jaafar. National Democratic Institute. March 24, 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Amira Maty. National Endowment for Democracy. March 28, 2011.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Sherif Mansour. Freedom House. April 13, 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Scott Mastic. International Republican Institute. April 15, 2011.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Amira Maty. National Endowment for Democracy. March 28, 2011.





المساق

مصر لتكسب الفوضى

خطاب تاريخي للأمة:

# الترشح في الانتخابات الرئاسية الجديدة



مسئوليتي الأولى الآن هي استعادة أمن واستقرار الوطن لتحقيق الانتقال السلمي للسلطة

إزالة السلطات الرقابية والقضائية بملاحقة الفاسدين والتحقيق مع المتسببين في الانقلاب الأمني

تعزيز الديمقراطية والعدالة في المجتمع وحقوق الإنسان



## Media

James C. Clad<sup>1</sup>

### Explanatory Note

**T**his report primarily examines reportage and commentary about the Middle East during 2005-2010 by traditional print media and writers of trade (i.e., general market) books about the region. This explanatory note seeks to comment on two issues: one about changes in field journalism, and the other about gauging journalists' insights into unfolding Middle Eastern events.

*For a variety of reasons, the upscale market for analytic, in-depth journalism has declined sharply since the 1990s. This has caused a drop in the number, age, seniority, and experience of foreign press residing abroad. Local contacts, and local context, aren't as easily obtained by 'parachute' journalists arriving in country, who lack an understanding of deeper realities behind surface turbulence. Indeed, some media we examined had changed or reduced coverage of Egypt in the year leading up to the events of 2011.*

*Analytic journalism needs a minimum word length, in articles or in broadcast and/or recording time to develop its material. In the past, resident correspondents submitted longer pieces to head office editors – who invariably had earlier experience in the same locations. For example, the Middle East Economic Digest provided regular, in-depth, and region-wide coverage to complement information gleaned from more narrowly focused risk assessment firms. Some of those publications that might have been included in a survey five years ago – such as US News and World Report – have gone, others like Newsweek have been drastically reshaped, and those that remain are under pressure to provide shorter, quicker, “buzzer” hits. But we found that a surprising amount of analytical journalism still exists in the Middle East, and that it often found its mark.*

*In what circumstances may we decide that some writers (in webcast, newsprint, or in books) or some broadcasters (on radio or television) can fairly claim predictive success,*

<sup>1</sup> With special thanks to Andrew Marshall for his contributions to this chapter



*or at least a shrewd prescience, with respect to Middle Eastern events unfolding after January 2011? In general, the media are not in the business of prediction, though they do express views about the world and where it is going. They are fortunate, compared to the other sectors in this report, in that they are rarely held to account for their forecasts, so this is an unusual exercise. The test applied here is recurrent, reasoned reporting, and analysis over time, in this case during 2005-2010, from a developing view based on evidence, not advocacy. Lucky prognostications or superficially prescient passages aren't enough.*

*This report searched both US-UK and continental European media covering the Middle East, as well as regional media. All have journalists (and quasi-journalistic academics) whose published and circulated work deserves mention. For anyone seriously following the region, extending the purview beyond Anglo-American media becomes essential. Even so, this report's main focus falls on the US and UK media, and within this focus, primarily on print journalism and on trade books published during the decade preceding 2010.*

*It was impossible to assess all of the many thousands of articles written about the Middle East in the time available for this study, or with the resources available. We limited ourselves to reviewing a selection of books with notable authors, interviewing leading journalistic figures, and assessing a slice of the English-speaking media (Time, the Washington Post, NPR, the Financial Times, the New York Times, and the Economist) in greater detail.*

*At the same time, the report also considers writers whose work may extend beyond the bounds of the traditional press as historically conceived. As press professionalization consolidated last century, so did various divisions of labor. These have now become archaic, as market pressures and technology obliterate distinctions between 'journalist,' 'stringer,' 'photo-journalist,' 'editor,' and 'commentator' in an age of immediate access by anyone to the entire world, and authors move from publishing in newspapers and journals, to perching in think tanks or academia, and back again.*

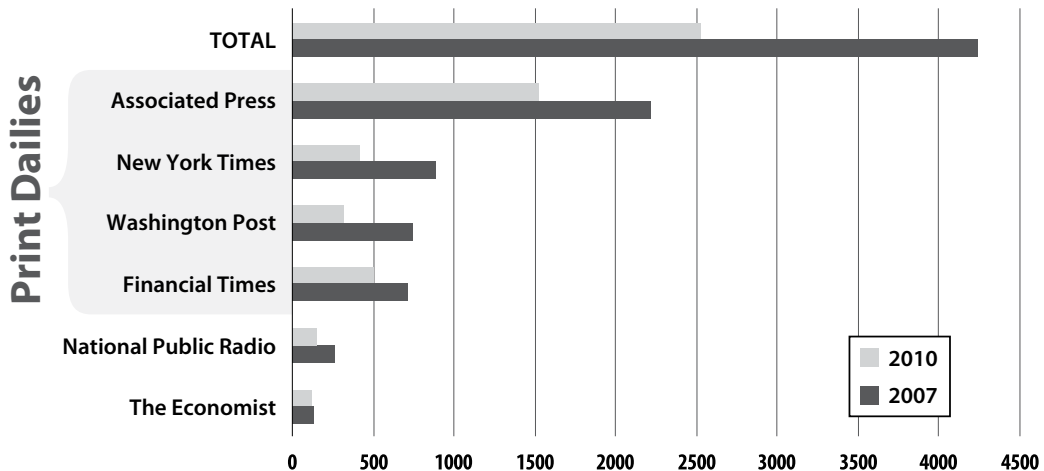
*Two other observations about contemporary journalism should be noted that could well affect the profession's capacity to provide useful knowledge about the changes afoot in the Middle East:*

*First, and as a globally applicable proposition, the traditional print media now hold a smaller slice of the public domain. In market terms, print struggles while radio holds its own (indeed, privately owned radio may thrive in the Middle East in coming years). The region's television business has fragmented as cable, satellite, and internet streaming make continuing inroads. The resident foreign print and broadcast media of an earlier era provided a foundation of authority – in clips, recent analysis, or direct briefings to journalistic newcomers – but largely has disappeared. To some degree this has been supplemented by local coverage through new media, but there is a gap in authority and depth that is only being gradually filled.*

*Second, the earlier professional tenets for the craft of journalism no longer reflect reality. Owner-provided iPhones enable the industry to work on a shoestring, downloading no-cost digital pictures showing drama or uproar, but devoid of context. When anyone with a hand phone can play reporter, and editors have little background or experience, the ethics taught at journalism schools (fact-checking, multiple sourcing) take a back seat or*

disappear altogether. The priority, instead, is rapid – almost instantaneous – turnaround, a flood of facts that can be exciting and inspiring, as it was during the Arab revolutions, but which can also drown out context. “Old media” also has a role to play.

**Figure 1: Article Volume by Source**



Number of articles searchable by LexisNexis containing the word “Egypt” or “Tunisia”  
 \* 2010 results from January 1<sup>st</sup> to November 1<sup>st</sup>

## Analysis

Editors at leading American newspapers agreed that their daily reportage missed the recent events in any predictive sense. One prominent editor said, “no one, whether here, in the region, or in outer space, foresaw events working the way they did, pushing Tunisia’s Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak, Libya’s Muammar el-Qaddafi, Yemen’s Ali Abdullah Saleh and, soon perhaps, Syria’s Bashar al-Assad, into the dustbin of history.”

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With far fewer resident correspondents, and much less space devoted to foreign news than just a decade ago, major US newspapers and newspaper chains do what they can to follow major daily issues (Iran crisis, Arab-Israel, Palestine, Iraq, and Turkey), giving episodic attention to stories set in a region-wide context. None of the media we assessed in detail had regular correspondents in Tunis; most had correspondents in Cairo, but some had changed staffing in 2010.

A handful of US reporters and columnists identified the consequences for Middle East regimes if they continued to resist change. The *Washington Post*’s David Ignatius said he repeatedly had written about the Arabs needing to “write their own future” and he had done so by writing

about the region as a whole. Jackson Diehl, also of the *Washington Post*, had commented on both the Bush and Obama Administration's failure to support change, and about the growing role of independent media and activists. Others had written on similar themes. Yet neither they nor other columnists and writers saw the specific spark, or specific country disturbance, which might ignite epochal change. Beyond this hardly surprising factor, the storyline (i.e., 'the inevitability of democratic revolution') figured far less frequently than story-driven attention to the post-2001 news agenda. Egypt and Tunisia had both been seen through the prism of terrorism and counter-terrorism, which accounted for some of the coverage, and the peace process, which accounted for much of the reporting on Egypt especially. Local politics were reported and analyzed, but often were seen in these contexts.

Editors also said that the close identification of democracy advocacy with the former George W. Bush Administration had the effect of making coverage of Arab democratic change something of a partisan effort. Journalism about social change in the Middle East used this US policy bias as a foil when writing stories 'about the dog that didn't bark' – in this case, about the absence of democratic change in the region despite US rhetoric in favor.

## Prospects for Political Change Seen by the Anglo-American Media

In the July 17, 2010 edition of the *Economist*, senior writer Max Rodenbeck wrote a highly prescient survey about political and social paralysis in Egypt. He said, "A new bitterness has crept in," defined by a "contrast between rising aspirations and enduring hardships; by a growing sense of alienation from the state; and by the unease of anticipation as the end of an era inevitably looms ever closer..."<sup>2</sup>

"The expectation of a seismic shift is almost tangible in the air," he wrote, "...the rising generation is very different from previous ones. It is better educated, highly urbanized, far more exposed to the outside world, and much less patient."<sup>3</sup>

"For some time," he continued, "Egyptian commentators have been noting resemblances between now and the years before Egypt's previous seismic shift. That happened in 1952..."

On this side of the Atlantic, Robin Wright also has regional reach, long experience, elite-level access, and knowledge of the local situation. Formerly with the *Washington Post* and now a fellow at the United States Institute of Peace and the Wilson Center, Wright also ranks at the top of those journalists managing to convey – in newspaper reportage or in books such as *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East* (2008) – a conviction that democratic change had become the principal item on the region's agenda. Her work in this vein covered a spectrum of "defiant judges in Cairo, rebel clerics in Tehran, satellite television station owners in Dubai, imaginative feminists in Rabat and the first female candidates in Kuwait, young techies in Jeddah, daring journalists in Beirut and Casablanca, and brave writers and businessmen in Damascus."

<sup>2</sup> Max Rodenbeck. "The Long Wait" *The Economist*. July 15, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

In addition, Ms. Wright juxtaposed this impending change to other Middle East narratives, especially to the influence of Islamic jihadism, while also including other apparently overarching trends, such as the youth culture or consumerism. Her writing contrasted this yearning for and advocacy of an impending big change to a supposed US policy preferring ‘stability’ over real reform. [See Appendix V for more text from this book.]

In her reportage from Egypt, she also identified how, among the three ‘crats’ – theocrats, autocrats, and democrats – the latter were easily the weakest, but had been organizing quickly during the 21<sup>st</sup>-century’s first decade. In surveys of Morocco, she concentrated on the steady progress of popular representation while, in Syria, she noted that the prerequisite for any change, democratic or non-democratic, was the collapse of the Baathist regime. Throughout she posits democratic transformation as a continuum along which the region was already moving.

Journalist John Bradley’s Inside Egypt: the Land of the Pharaohs on the Brink of a Revolution (2008) predicted that a revolutionary uprising would happen in Egypt by describing a perfect storm strikingly similar to what has happened in Egypt today.

Bradley, who is fluent in Egyptian Arabic and resided in Egypt during the last decade, made a categorical prediction of imminent revolution. In addition to documenting torture and corruption, the book says a revolution would be sparked by a random event that no one could foresee, but that it would not come from the traditional Egyptian opposition political parties.

The book also says that the uprising would coincide with the final perceived push to transfer power from President Hosni Mubarak to his son, Gamal. Bradley also said that the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt’s largest and most disciplined opposition group, would never instigate such a revolution, but would try to ride the wave of popular anger once it got underway.

David Gardner for the London-based *Financial Times* had written in editorials and a book about the long-term crisis of political legitimacy in the region and Egypt specifically. “Unless the Arab countries and the broader Middle East can find a way out of this pit of autocracy,” he asserted in Last Chance: The Middle East in the Balance (2009), “their people will be condemned to bleak lives of despair, humiliation and rage for a generation, adding fuel to a roaring fire in what is already the most combustible region in the world.” But he was more pessimistic than hopeful for change.

Columnist and National Defense University professor Walid Phares comes close to meeting the report’s test of prescience even though his advocate’s role is never far away. In his 2010 book, The Coming Revolution: Struggle for Freedom in the Middle East, he writes that, in policy debate, “the real antidote to extreme Islamist ideologies was ignored: sound democratic cultures.”<sup>4</sup> Phares didn’t sense the imminence of change, however, writing (at p. 343) that “the forces of change can eventually, decades from now, reach their goals by their own means.”<sup>5</sup> [See Appendix V for text.]

The Oxford-based analyst Jeremy Jones’ 2007 book, Negotiating Change: the New Politics of the Middle East, offers a treatise favoring the notion that democracy can flourish in the Middle East, even though “there is no homogenous regional political space.” Completed

<sup>4</sup> Walid Phares. The Coming Revolution: Struggle for Freedom in the Middle East (Threshold Editions, 2010). p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 343.

by the middle of 2006, the book makes a country-by-country survey (Tunisia is omitted). It sees a process of societal ‘negotiation’ for more pluralism under way in most countries. But nowhere in the book does he identify the next few years as pivotal.

Few of the writers or broadcasters we addressed had paid much attention to Tunisia, with one exception: *Time* magazine had sent Vivienne Walt there in 2007, and she had written of the pressure for change under the heading “Tunisia: The Price of Prosperity.” Without coverage or understanding of this, it would have been hard to see the sparks that created the wider conflagration. There is a lesson here about the coverage of small, non-Anglosphere countries.

## Pressures for Social Change Seen by the Anglo-American Media

Washington, DC journalist Mark Perry, who writes for *Foreign Policy* magazine, says his writing (and that of others) relied predictively on the 2002 UNDP *Arab Human Development Report*. “The uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and now in Syria correlate precisely to the 2002 UN report’s indices,” he said with deliberate emphasis. “Those states with effective governance for the most part have weathered the storm – Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.”

“In each, the ruling elites accommodated reform by providing a mix of economic and political compromises...the first demonstrations, in both [Tunisia and Egypt], were comprised of students, teachers, scholars, lawyers, office workers, young professionals, and the unemployed,” Perry continued. “In neither Tunisia nor Egypt were initial protesters recruited from the very poor, or the mosques. Both revolutions were secular, nationalistic, democratic, and organized by under-40 activists seeking a political voice.”

Jared Cohen’s 2007 book, *Children of Jihad*, is a good travelogue but its merit, for this report, comes from insights into the mindset and feelings of Arab and Middle Eastern youth. The text doesn’t focus on predictions of fundamental change in political systems, but stresses instead the ‘reachable-ness’ of the region’s huge under-30 generation, a group in tune with “a common set of norms and values characteristic of young people around the world regardless of religion, nationality, or ethnicity... they all want to feel as though they belong [and] have a purpose in this world, and can have a better life.”<sup>6</sup>

Prominent among those writers following labor activism in Egypt is Stanford University Middle East history professor Joel Beinin, the lead author of *The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt* (Washington, DC: Solidarity Center, 2010). Speaking at a February 17, 2010 Carnegie Endowment panel about the book, Beinin said that Egypt already had experienced more than 3,000 labor protests since 2004, the movement growing steadily as the result of “increased citizen access to a variety of independent media, which allow easier communication and disseminates information rapidly to potential protestors and supporters.” He said the labor movement, already in 2010, had “achieved concessions from the government unthinkable only decades ago,” describing it as the “the largest social

<sup>6</sup> Jared Cohen. *Children of Jihad: A Young American’s Travels Among the Youth of the Middle East* (Gotham, 2007). p. 274-275.

movement in the Arab world since World War II.” Beinlin, however, did not forecast that this movement would coalesce in the very near term with other strands of social protest to evict the regime and usher in a democracy.

The phenomenon of Arab satellite news services, apparent before 9/11, prompted books focused on the topic, the best by many accounts being Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera and Middle East Politics Today (2006), by Marc Lynch.

Lynch delves into what he calls a “new Arab public,” which he sees as “palpably transforming Arab political culture [and] already conclusively shatter[ing] the state’s monopoly over the flow of information, rendering obsolete the ministries of information and the oppressive state censorship smothering public discourse well into the 1990s.”<sup>7</sup> Writing five years ago, Lynch defined Arab satellite TV as dismantling in rapid order the region’s ossified “Arab identity discourse,” a sense of being Arab which produced “an identity-bounded enclave, internally open but externally opaque.”<sup>8</sup>

Written prior to a redoubled intrusion into that sphere by social media, the book describes a world in which, “by 2005, political talk shows had become an entirely normal and indispensable part of Arab political life, with dozens of such programs broadcast by a bewildering array of satellite television stations. Virtually any political trend or position could be found by channel-surfing Arab viewers.”<sup>9</sup>

And yet, “for all its newfound prominence, the Arab public sphere remains almost completely detached from any formal political institution.”<sup>10</sup> More tellingly, “ultimately the Arab public sphere lacked any mechanisms for translating its energy, its consensus, and its symbolic power into concrete political outcomes.”<sup>11</sup>

The book doesn’t venture any definitive projections about the impact of satellite TV on regime durability, but the new satellite media’s disorienting effect on traditional structures seems obvious and, now in 2011, so does the implicit suggestion that satellite TV had, to some extent, paved the way for open challenges to the region’s regimes.

Books reflecting targeted polling efforts seeking to identify social trends missed the impending change altogether. In James Zogby’s Arab Voices: What They are Saying to Us and Why It Matters (2010), one searches in vain in this a compendium of extensive polling within the Arab world for explicit forewarning of the change to come. (Zogby is founder and president of the Arab American Institute in Washington, DC.)

Some of the closest analysis of the emerging issues that would come together to ignite a revolt came in the regular month-by-month journalism of resident correspondents working for daily or weekly publications. Magazines, in particular, lend themselves to the look backwards over the shoulder and forwards into the future, achieved through analysis and its extension. Rodenbeck fits into this category; so does Abigail Hauslohner

<sup>7</sup> Marc Lynch, Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today (Columbia University Press, 2005) p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 25

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 28

of *Time*, who in a series of dispatches looked at different aspects of the opposition – the Muslim Brotherhood, succession, technology, labor unrest – and how they fitted together in often unpredictable ways. For the dailies, the *New York Times* correspondent, Michael Slackman, also provided insightful analysis on the roots of the Egyptian crisis, though he left Cairo in 2010.

On the radio side of US journalism, *National Public Radio* broadcast reports by correspondents Deborah Amos (in 2005) and Peter Kenyon (in 2008), which explicitly mentioned the prospect of major social change. In 2008, *NPR* also interviewed a remarkably prescient Egyptian economist (Ahmed Galal), who accurately identified the progress of a scarcely noticed phenomenon, the democratic opposition. [See Appendix V for text.] (Kenyon, a veteran correspondent in Cairo, moved to Istanbul in 2010.)

A few comparatively unknown American journalists did prove prescient in linking larger, regional social unrest to specific grievances. During 2008, for example, the *Asia Times* online correspondent David Goldman predicted political unrest arising from food price increases, citing reporting from *Reuters* and the *New York Times* about that year’s drought having exacerbated other water crises stemming from Syria’s loss of the Golan Heights and Turkey’s Anatolia Project (which diverts water from the Euphrates and Tigris). Major social unrest, coming “soon,” also would result from rapid population growth and urbanization.

## Views of European and Regional Media

Still within the Western world but much closer to the region, approaches to editorial staff in Italy and France, for the purpose of this report, identified a few journalists and commentators with prescience, including prominent Bologna University professor Marcella Emiliani, *Corriere della Sera*, journalist Guido Olimpio, and *Le Monde* correspondents Guillaume Perrier and Patrick Cazinboth.

On close examination, none of their printed analyses and reportage observations after 2005 amounted to an unambiguous forecast of revolutionary change. Their specific insights, especially into Libya and the Maghreb, were impressive, however, while Guido Olimpio’s forecast (in June 2008) of impending social turbulence throughout the Middle East was prophetic. Similarly, Karim Mezran, an Italian-Libyan columnist (and Director of the Centro Studi Americani in Rome), for many years has also published views forecasting major social changes in the Maghreb.

Approaches via colleagues at *Haaretz* and other newspaper editors in Israel sought the names of journalists from that country, who in earlier years might have seen imminent, very large political change looming in their neighborhood. The prognostications coming closest to the mark appeared in several columns in *Haaretz* during 2010, by the venerable peace activist Uri Avneri.

In November of last year he wrote that “any young Egyptian, Jordanian, Saudi, or Bahraini . . . must be acutely aware that his country is led by a small group for whom the preservation of their personal power and privileges is vastly more important than the holy cause of Palestine.”

“This is a deeply humiliating insight,” he continued. “When hundreds of millions of people feel humiliated, the effects are foreseeable. The older generation may be used to this situation. But for young people, especially proud Arabs, it is intolerable...” In another column, Avneri wrote that “sooner or later, the situation will explode – first in one country, then in many....” Again, no special foresight emerged beyond the expectation of an explosion, “sooner or later.”

*Jerusalem Post* journalist Barry Rubin’s *The Long War for Freedom: The Arab Struggle for Democracy in the Middle East* (2006) examined the composition of the Middle East’s liberal reform movement. He described an uphill struggle for democratic reform, saying “only Arab reformers [themselves] can win this battle and transform their own countries, [but] they still stand a distant third in their competition with Islamists and nationalist regimes.” He had few thoughts of rapid change: “ultimate victory” for reformers is a “process that will probably take an entire historical era.”<sup>12</sup>

## Arab Media Insights

Within the Middle East itself, Egyptian novelist Alaa El-Aswany must count as having come close to predicting the imminence of the event itself, although neither he nor anyone else foresaw the Tunisian catalyst. El-Aswany wrote a stream of newspaper columns after the 2005 publication of his novel *The Yacoubian Building*. In 50 Arabic-language articles in the *Al-Dustur* and *Al-Shorouk* newspapers, he unequivocally and repeatedly predicted “revolution.” [See Appendix V for text.]

Egypt’s labor strife in April 2008 elicited unequivocal predictions of revolution from a few local journalists, and by people effectively ‘doubling’ as journalists. For example, labor activist Hossan El-Hamalawy routinely spoke on *Al-Jazeera* in terms of class struggle, and sequenced a middle class uprising following ‘working-class’ efforts. *Al-Jazeera* also made extensive use of Saad el-din Ibrahim, Director of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies, who wrote for publication predicting sweeping social change and the collapse of the regime. Saad’s Ibn Khaldun colleague, Ayat Abul-Futtouhm, did the same.

Among the most insistent Arab proponents of democratic change, Ayat combined advocacy with analysis over the last decade, setting out a view that that change was inevitable. Still, neither he nor his colleagues expected change to be so imminent. Written in 2010 and full of foreboding, Tarek Osman’s book, *Egypt on the Brink*, only appeared on January 21, 2011, after the Tunisian follow-on effect had begun.

Ayat’s most recent monograph in English (2008) hit a somber tone: “The long period of authoritarian rule has created a feeling of general apathy and cynicism demonstrated by extremely low voter turnout (18 percent) in the last [Egyptian] parliamentary elections. ...However, ‘Kefaya’ and similar fledgling movements indicate there is still considerable vitality in Egypt’s civil society.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Barry M. Rubin. *The long war for freedom : The Arab struggle for democracy in the Middle East* (Wiley, 2005). p. 3

<sup>13</sup> Ayat M. Abul-Futtouh. “Challenges to Democratization” *Dissent and Reform in the Arab World: Empowering Democrats*. (American Enterprise Institute, 2008). p. 25.



These slender examples aside, telephoned requests to the region elicited the same answer: Internal constraints and strictures had prevented Arab journalists from attempting reportage that analyzed the underlying unrest while linking it to the prospect for near-term, systemic change.

Hussein Amin chairs the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications at the American University of Cairo. He replied to an email question, saying that “no one predicted the events – neither the ‘hungry,’ nor those under the line of poverty, or frustrated. I’m not aware of any journalists, writers, or thinkers who predicted what happened.” In Tunisia, Mohamed Ali Kembi presides over the *Institute de Presse et des Sciences de l’Information* (IPSI). He agreed. “No one saw it coming – not the Americans, and not even me... in Tunisia, there was no one who predicted this.”

Elsewhere in the region, informal approaches to prominent thinkers and writers revealed little correlation between pro-reform prominence, and published or broadcast beliefs that “big change” was coming soon. For example, Shafeeq Ghabra writes weekly columns for the Kuwaiti daily *Al Ra’y al Am*. Already in 2004, he wrote that Arabs were “looking for a third path, [and] are willing to defend their beliefs, take risks, and stand up for what is right.” Yet he foresaw a “long, violent, and complex [process], taking at least a decade.”

## Conclusions

The journalism and books surveyed for this report revealed no instances of outright prediction that regimes would topple one after the other in early 2011, although John Bradley’s book and Max Rodenbeck’s *Economist* articles came closest to describing a set of circumstances that might ignite revolution in Cairo. Vivienne Walt for *Time* came close to predicting change in Tunisia, probably a tougher call, and she did so in 2007 (though as *Time*’s subsequent coverage of Tunisia was scant, this may not fit the test of recurrent, reasoned reporting and analysis over time). The best of the rest identified the democratic opposition as the unknown but growing presence, an analysis best fleshed out by Robin Wright, who added up the factors combining to form a comprehensive challenge to the status quo, and by David Gardner’s *Financial Times* editorials and book. *Time*’s Abigail Hauslohner followed events closely and assessed them correctly as they unfolded throughout 2010, linking the social, political, economic, and technological strands of a revolution in the making.

Other books or reportage cited above captured one or more of these factors – Jared Cohen’s views on the under-30 generation, Marc Lynch’s fine depiction of the transformative impact of satellite TV, Walid Phares’s documentation of the strength of democratic opposition, or David Ignatius’s frequent accounts of long-ruling elites under stress.

If there is an analytic take-away from this survey, it lies in the need to aggregate a clutch of seemingly disparate factors, all of which cannot be found in one source. The people best trained to aggregate are journalists, although the nature of the business is trending against the type of contemplative, in-depth analysis that print journalism used to provide.

In interviews and extended discussions with journalists, editors, academics, and press institute personnel, the conversation turned repeatedly to broader questions about trend identification, and the need to do this in ways that didn't succumb to the special agendas of advocates and advocacy groups, no matter how appealing their message might be.

In this regard, they stressed the interrelationship between well-rounded coverage and continuity of coverage, best achieved in resident journalists' regular dispatches or in visits to the region over many years (as with Robin Wright's and David Ignatius's careers). They stressed the vital need to get outside capital cities, mix with different social classes, acquire language fluency, and ask counter-intuitive questions (such as whether abrupt democratic freedoms will imperil social order). Several mentioned the rocky democratic transitions that Spain and Portugal experienced in the 1970s, and when each witnessed domestic conservative reaction and even revulsion against what was perceived as 'excessive freedom.' Those coming closest to predicting the general outline of the changes churning throughout the Middle East (though, again, no one predicted either the immediate cause or the progression of the changes after January), used arguments turning on the question of the direction towards which the aggregated unrest was heading. After all, labor strife, urban poverty, impatience at static political establishments, and the suffocating ubiquity of secret police have been 'givens' in repeated accounts of dissatisfaction in the Middle East.

The analytic string that drew them together was the impatience of youth or the rising generations, plus the politically sensitized nature of the urban middle class and educated unemployed, and their awareness of a wider world with wider liberties. In this regard, the outcome of the impending changes anticipated by Brandon, Wright, and El-Ansary was in a sense 'conventional' – i.e., a turn away from autocracy towards genuine, democratic choice and a climate of freedom, and not toward an Islamist alternative.

Those concentrating on social consequences of labor unrest in Egypt discerned an irreversible empowerment of hitherto voiceless or passive segments of society, and not an unfolding Marxist tableau; they couldn't quite see the movement as springboard for near-term, comprehensive, systemic change involving other segments of society. Finally, no one connected all the dots between increasingly mobilized factory labor, popular unrest over rising prices, or pan-Arab satellite TV, and the largely bloodless, non-ideological, and non-sectarian eviction of old regimes that loomed just around the corner. They guessed it was coming, but had no idea it would happen so soon, and so quickly. Even the *Economist*, which came close, was equivocal in its July 2010 articles, and afterwards (including during the early days of the protests in Cairo).

Finally, and despite exceptional prescience by Arabs such as the Egyptian columnist El-Aswany, regional and nearby European journalism seems to have had no special advantage in foreseeing the systemic, copycat changes rolling through the region after January 2011. The European advantage came after the movement had begun, in the provision of details more readily perceived by an ex-colonial perspective (France, Italy, or Britain), or as academics sensing unavoidable change, but without guessing at its near-term manifestation.



Dear Ben ALI, send MUBARAK a friend request?

MUBARAK (criminal arab dictator) will have to confirm your request. Please only send this request if you know him personally.

☰ Add to list ▼

Send request

Cancel

✍ Add a personal message...



## Blogosphere and Social Media

Courtney C. Radsch

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### Explanatory Note

**O**ur treatment of blogs and social media is distinct from the other sectors because it is intended to describe and assess the rise of this sector as a new medium for communication and political mobilization. The chapter provides deep background and context for the recent and dramatic use of social media in the Arab revolts, and broadly summarizes the messages in the media. It does not, however, purport to provide extensive content analysis of the messaging, and we did not consider this sector as providing strategic analysis of prospects for political change comparable to the other sectors. Over time, the capacity to interpret and analyze social media and its impact will grow, and its implications for the politics of the region will be studied in depth.

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Blogs and social media in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region between 2005 and the end of 2010 revealed deep-seated discontent with the political status quo. Both Egypt and Tunisia had an activist blogosphere that made political demands and called for their leaders to step down (unlike the other Arab states), but it was only in Egypt that they revealed a concerted effort to develop a movement that would revolutionize the political system. There was little indication that Tunisia would be the first successful uprising, but when Egyptians saw their neighbors oust President Ben Ali it provided the spark needed to set off the revolution that had been building, to offer hope, and stamp out the fear that had kept people from taking to the streets on such a scale. And when the region saw that Egypt, the leader of the Arab world and in many ways identity, could overthrow Mubarak in a mere 18 days, it sparked a regional wave of protests aimed at expelling authoritarian regimes, as in Bahrain, Libya, and Yemen, or demanding massive reforms in more accommodating ones, like Jordan and Morocco.

The reason for focusing on these virtual venues is because, as Egyptian blogger Hossam el-Hamalawy noted, “In a dictatorship, independent journalism by default becomes a form of

activism, and the spread of information is essentially an act of agitation.”<sup>1</sup> Social media and blogs were the forums where this agitation occurred. From 2005 onward, cyber-activism became a defining characteristic of political contestation by the younger generation, who made up a third of the region’s population and faced severe levels of unemployment and stunted opportunities. And as Gillmor aptly observed in his book *We the Media*, “In country after country where free speech is not given, the blogosphere matters in far more serious ways. This is the stuff of actual revolutions.”<sup>2</sup>

The social media analysis focuses on influential and/or popular blogs and social network sites, with a focus on Egypt because of its overrepresentation in the blogosphere, and the fact that this was where the most political foment occurred. A 2009 quantitative and qualitative analysis of Arab blogs found the Egyptian blogosphere to be the largest, accounting for about a third of the blogs studied,<sup>3</sup> with a significant portion focused on politics, followed by Saudi Arabia, where bloggers focused more on technology than politics. This study combines research conducted on and offline since 2005 for the author’s doctoral dissertation on cyber-activism in Egypt, with additional analysis of key blogs in other countries.<sup>4</sup> Looking at social media for insights into looming changes can only tell part of the story. These texts must be examined not only for what they say, but also for the practices inscribed within them by the people who create them, and as the creation of particular people at a particular time. Hence the videos about torture reveal not only the abuses of the state, but also the concerted efforts to document it, to open up new issues to debate, and to hold the state accountable. Social media must be situated within a specific historic and technological context, and observers should realize that they represent a very small snapshot of society that is inherently biased towards the more affluent, literate, and impassioned portion of the population.

## Cyber-Activism

### Increasing Social Media Usage

Between 2005 and 2011, Internet access in the region expanded from 13 percent to 40 percent of the population. Blogging became a popular form of political activism and mobilization as it grew in popularity from 2005 onwards as new social media platforms emerged. Social media use in the MENA region expanded exponentially with the introduction of Twitter and Facebook in 2007, which Egyptians immediately adapted for political activism. By

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.arabawy.org/>

<sup>2</sup> D. Gillmor. *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, For the People* (O’Reilly Media, 2006). p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> The Berkman study created a network map of the 6,000 most connected blogs, and with a team of Arabic speakers hand coded 4,000 blogs. The size of the dot represents the number of other blogs that link to it, a measure of its popularity. The position of each dot is a function of its links with its neighbors. Etling, Bruse, John Kelly, Robert Faris, and John Palfrey. *Mapping the arabic blogosphere: Politics, culture, and dissent* (Cambridge: Berkman Center for the Internet & Society at Harvard University, 2009). [http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/Mapping\\_the\\_Arabic\\_Blogosphere\\_0.pdf](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/Mapping_the_Arabic_Blogosphere_0.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See end of chapter for description of methodology and blogs/social media pages reviewed.

the time the January 2011 uprisings took place, Facebook pages and Twitter hashtags were an integral part of any political protest. There were then more than 16.8 million Facebook accounts in the region representing about 13 percent of the population, and about 40,000 Twitter users, of which Egyptians accounted for about half.

Even so, because the percentages of the total population online remained relatively small, analysts and observers often discounted the importance of blogging and online social networking without acknowledging that official connectivity figures tend to discount the impact of public access points or pirated connections, while simultaneously ignoring the fact that youth, the middle class, and the politically active were highly represented. Mobile phones, on the other hand, were ubiquitous, with regional penetration rates surpassing 100 percent by late 2008. When coupled with Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube these became the most powerful tools for political activism, yet were largely outside the censorial regimes that governed the Internet.

Cyber-activists were particularly savvy at using digital media tools, the most important being their mobile phones, to build networks with transnational activist organizations and journalists around the world. Twitterers were especially likely to connect with media, perhaps explaining the fact that most users tweeted in English even though the Arabic platform was available in 2009. A 2009 survey found that nearly 60 percent of respondents said they interact most often with media and journalists, coming in just after friends at 70 percent.<sup>5</sup> By 2010, 9 percent of MENA Internet users said in a survey that they used Twitter, with Egyptians most strongly represented.

Interestingly, however, Internet and Facebook penetration does not necessarily appear to correlate with political upheaval. One likely explanation for this is that some of the Gulf countries host extraordinarily high numbers of foreign workers and resident expats, including significant percentages of Westerners, (representing some 70 percent of the population in the UAE, for instance, perhaps explaining why this country has the highest level of Facebook penetration in the region at 35 percent, and one of the highest levels of Internet penetration at nearly 76 percent.) Libya, on the other hand, has an Internet penetration rate of only 5 percent and a Facebook use of only 2.75 percent. Tunisia and Egypt were somewhere in the lower middle half of the region, with Internet access rates of 34 percent and 21 percent respectively, with 16 percent and 5 percent on Facebook.

Most of the online communities are grouped around Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the Levant, with active but relatively tiny communities in Tunisia, Bahrain, and the Maghreb (see Figure 1 on the next page). Analysis of the MENA blogosphere shows that blogs tend to group around countries, but that not all Arab countries have vibrant social media communities. For example, Egyptian Facebook pages are the only ones that garnered tens of thousands of supporters prior to the revolts. Yet even as these youth aspired to change, their prospects for fulfillment at home appeared dim. By 2008, youth unemployment in the region was 23.8 percent, making the risk of unemployment a whopping 3.5 times higher for youth as compared to adults.<sup>6</sup> Youth with a secondary education or above, and who were also

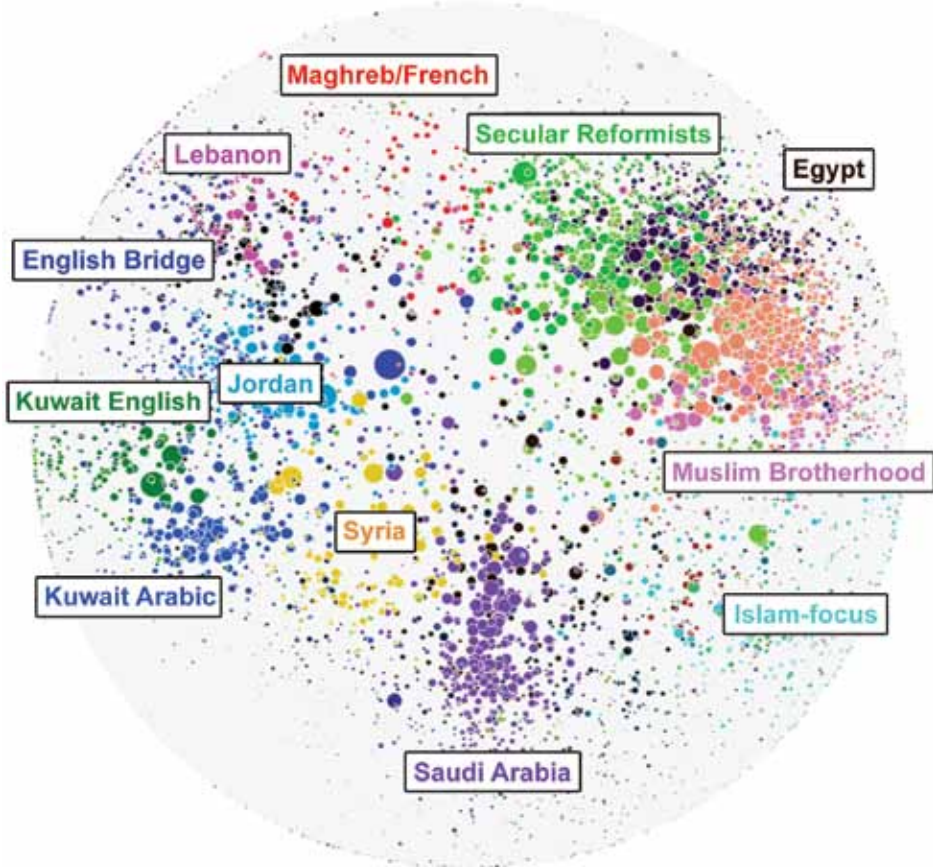
<sup>5</sup> <http://www.spotonpr.com/twitter-customer-service-survey/>

<sup>6</sup> International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends* (Geneva: ILO, January 2008), pp. 17, 20.

most likely to own or have access to a computer and Internet access, made up a staggering 95 percent of those unemployed youth.<sup>7</sup>

### Figure 1: Map of the Arab Blogosphere

The Berkman study created a network map of the 6,000 most connected blogs, and with a team of Arabic speakers hand coded 4,000 blogs. The size of the dot represents the number of other blogs that link to it, a measure of its popularity. The position of each dot is a function of its links with its neighbors.



*(Berkman, June 2009)*

## Egypt Leads the Way

Egyptian youth in particular were the vanguard of cyber-activists in the Middle East, in part because the adoption of technologies like blogging and mobile Internet coincided with the rise of a new political movement, Kefaya, and thus provided both inspiration and outlets for political activism. The median age in Egypt is 24, and state-subsidized higher education meant that many of these youth were highly educated and technologically savvy, but faced economically frustrating conditions including high unemployment (30 percent) and a corrupt patronage system. These youth make up the majority of Internet and social

<sup>7</sup> *Arab Reform Brief*, Oct. 23, 2008 and author's research in the field.

media users,<sup>8</sup> and Kefaya laid the seeds for the Youth Movement, forging space in the streets for public protests.

Egypt has been the leader in social media use, especially when it comes to political activism. By the end of 2010, Egypt had nearly 4 million Facebook users, representing about 5 percent of the population. Facebook exploded in 2008 with the April 6 youth protests, and has doubled in the past year. Fifty-six thousand people signed up for the Khaled Said solidarity Facebook page within the first 24 hours, and it had more than 400,000 fans by the end of 2010. But unlike other countries that have experienced one-off moments of contention driven by new media technologies, few of these developed into a social movement the way it did in Egypt. Cyber-activists, citizen journalists, and bloggers all contributed to the revolutionary throwing off of 30 years of one-man rule. Understanding the genesis of the blogosphere, its cyber-activists, and how it expanded helps explain why this is, and offers an explanation for why a social movement emerged.

Egyptian cyber-activists adapted social media to create a powerful activist tool out of what was originally conceived as a way to keep in touch with friends, using Facebook to organize political protests on and offline, and incorporating Twitter via mobile phones in civic activism and citizen journalism. Their influence in the region and the West, through the media and non-governmental organizations, helped spread cyber-activism as a form of political contestation, but it was only in Egypt that a concerted and sustained campaign to overturn the existing political system could be seen fermenting in the cybersphere. Yet it took the spark of the Tunisian uprising to inspire the broader public to take to the streets and overcome the fear inculcated during Mubarak's 30 years of repressive emergency rule.

## The Medium is the Message

Content analysis of blogs and social media from the region reveals that there was vocal discontent with the repressive political systems that limited freedom of expression and opportunity for their societies, but only in the Egyptian blogosphere was there evidence of the coming popular uprising. The very fact that so many individual blogs and social media accounts were created permitted a level of free expression and discourse that was unprecedented and noteworthy in and of itself. Although there was certainly discontent and evocative statements in other blogospheres, Egypt was the only place where bloggers were, indeed, writing about revolutionary change coming. Stirrings of discontent were visible in Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, and other cyberspheres, but the foreshadowing of what was to come could only be seen in the widespread discontent and increasingly combustible mix of highly educated, underemployed youth living in repressive political systems during a time of global economic hardship.

The 2009 study by the Berkman Center for Internet Studies at Harvard University on the Arabic blogosphere found that during a particular snapshot in time in early 2009, criticism of domestic leaders topped the list of political topics discussed (see Figure 2 on the next page). More than 20 percent of blogs surveyed were critical of domestic leaders, while

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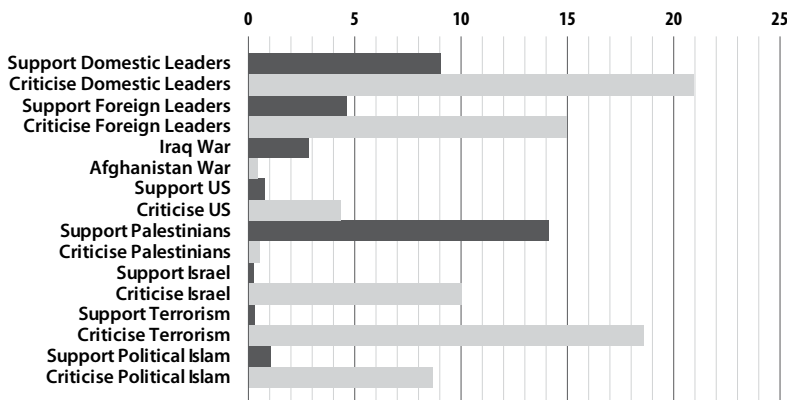
<sup>8</sup> Although by 2011, users age 40 and above became the fastest growing segment of Facebook users in Egypt.



a mere 8 percent were supportive. This gave credence to the sense that cyberspace was a politicized realm dominated by government critics unsupportive of the status quo. The study provided quantitative evidence of the sense of injustice and desire for change that pervaded the online realm and youth more broadly.

**Figure 2: Political Topics Covered by Blogs\***

Percentage of Arabic-language blogs that discussed the following topics, from April 2008 to March 2009:



\*Based on 4,370 blogs  
(Berkman, June 2009)

## What They Weren't Saying

But there were also group blogs like Global Voices, started by Tunisian journalist and activist Sami Ben Gharbeia in 2004, that provided a platform for activist bloggers to engage with a broader audience, attracting several prominent bloggers from around the region. It provides an overview of Arab social media, dating back to 2005 in several countries, and a roundup, often by prominent bloggers, of what is happening in their national blogospheres. Yet a comprehensive review of posts revealed few prescient posts on Global Voices outside of the Egyptians. It is ad-hoc, however, and thus selective. Nonetheless, a survey of the posts in MENA between 2005 to November 2010 revealed little inkling of what was about to take place, with the exception of a few scattered Egyptian posts. Even the Kuwaiti and Bahraini posts about national elections did not make sweeping calls for change, or call on bloggers to unite in a struggle for reform. Although there were posts about the political role bloggers played in elections,<sup>9</sup> elections take place within the system, and the posts were not concerned with overthrowing – much less fundamentally changing – that system. There was little evidence in the wider Arab blogosphere of the same level of political rancor and activism as that in the Egyptian blogosphere.

Yet even if bloggers weren't necessarily *saying* the revolution was on its way, their innovative uses of new digital media to organize collective action, mobilize street protests, publicize state-sponsored abuses, and network with Western media and advocacy organizations revealed that a significant youth contingent was becoming politicized and increasingly

<sup>9</sup> <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/04/02/kuwait-bloggers-to-play-leading-role-in-elections/>

adroit at using blogs and social media to challenge the status quo. Blogger trainings and capacity building focused on enhancing their activism skills, and connecting them into transnational activist networks. Bloggers were at the forefront of organizing virtual and street protests against government policy, in opposition to state repression, and in support of each other and their right to freedom of expression.

While political activism was prominent in the blogosphere and social media spaces from their inception, one could have been forgiven for dismissing cyber-activism as a fringe movement by a few disaffected youth. But the so-called “Facebook Strike” of 2008 should have been a wake-up call, with the launch of the April 6 Youth Movement and its strident anti-Mubarak agenda, commitment to the long-haul, and efforts to develop non-violent mobilization strategies.

## Elections

With the exception of Egypt, elections proved surprisingly uncontentious in the blogosphere. Even after the blatantly manipulated 2009 Tunisian presidential election, there were no calls for revolution or uprising, although blogs expressed disgust and satirized Ben Ali’s ridiculously high margin of victory. Heavy-handed government censorship, such as the targeted blocking of a wide swath of blogs and Facebook profiles ramped up throughout 2010,<sup>10</sup> and more sophisticated phishing schemes were coming to light as the 2011 uprising was gaining steam. Similarly, in Kuwait, there were no musings about imminent reform with the 2008 parliamentary elections and the death of its ruler Shaikh Saad Al Abdulla Al Sabah, just poetry and remembrances. Bloggers posted comments that were largely mild and moderate about calls for change,<sup>11</sup> such as “we are appealing for a little rationality and concern for the well-being of this land, which is tired and worn out from the burden of the actions of its people and government.”<sup>12</sup> Another blogger wrote about the need to look to the future, letting Kuwait’s rulers off the hook.<sup>13</sup> Although the Kuwait blogosphere was one of the more active, with similar numbers of English and Arabic blogs, it was not a realm of political contestation as it was in Egypt. Kuwait was freer than most of the countries in the region, ranking “partly free” throughout the decade according to Freedom House’s annual survey of political and civil rights.

In Egypt, however, the 2010 parliamentary elections were seen as a turning point by cyber-activists as far back as 2008. A campaign in support of Mohammed El Baradei drew huge support online, and inspired youth that this election would be different. A Facebook page calling for people to greet him at the airport drew thousands on and offline. His supporters and others mobilized for election monitoring, and integrated new media tools like digital mapping and SMS reporting into their unofficial monitoring efforts.

<sup>10</sup> <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/05/05/tunisia-a-black-day-for-bloggers/> and <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/02/08/tunisia-censorship-again-and-again/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/05/12/kuwait-election-call-to-women/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.hilaliya.com/2008/05/a-call-to-the-kuwait-blogging.html>

<sup>13</sup> [http://5-q8.blogspot.com/2008/04/blog-post\\_2824.html](http://5-q8.blogspot.com/2008/04/blog-post_2824.html)

## The Building of a Cybersphere

### 2005: The Arab Spring Awakens as Repression Wanes

In 2005, George W. Bush's democracy-promotion agenda and a relative decline in government repression coincided with the rise of Internet activism. In Egypt, a new political movement called Kefaya (Enough) had emerged, whose central message was focused on the presidential powers and the presidential system. In 2005, the protesters chanted "*la lil tandid, la liltandith*," an insulting way of saying "get out Mubarak, get out Mubarak," a refrain that echoed throughout the blogosphere. For the first time in recent memory, Egyptians took to the streets for domestic reasons, not for Palestine or Iraq, but to demand domestic political reform, sustaining a "[R]egular, almost cyclical outbreak of protests and demonstrations in both large cities and smaller towns" throughout 2005.<sup>14</sup>

Kefaya laid the seeds for Egypt's Youth Movement and helped forge space in the streets for public protests. It also inspired pro-democracy groups in several other countries. Mubarak's challenge to the independence of the judiciary prompted an outcry that resonated through the streets and the blogosphere against judicial tampering, providing an inkling of the political movement that was developing. "Judges' contemporary mobilization has sown seeds sure to be reaped by them in future iterations of struggle... Most fortuitous in my view is one unexpected process of linkage that's not likely to be sundered any time soon," wrote Baheyya.<sup>15</sup> But they were just gearing up in 2005, and organizers were just beginning to hone their mobilization skills. A post by cyber-activist Mahmoud Salem, of Sandmonkey, summed up the feeling: "The Egyptian blogosphere is almost as apathetic as the Egyptian public: Big on words, small on action. Actually, when I think about it, that's the problem of our country as a whole."<sup>16</sup>

The 2005 Egyptian activists focused their political demands, and perhaps aspirations, more narrowly. They protested the constitutional amendment, not the constitution. They demonstrated against the Press Law, but did not demand that the whole concept of criminalization of expression be tossed out. And they protested the existence of military tribunals when dozens of Muslim Brotherhood leaders were put on trial in 2006 and 2007, but they did not protest the role of the military in the system. The sum total of this new activism was that "something irrevocable has been set in motion, a process whose consequences we cannot fully fathom now."<sup>17</sup> This was also the point at which mainstream media 'discovered' blogging as a form of political activism in the Arab world, with a spike in coverage that included an *Al-Jazeera* documentary, articles in elite media, and increased interest in the roll new media might have in the Arab world.

Tunisian bloggers were also activists from the outset, especially when Tunisia hosted the World Summit on the Information Society in 2005. Cyber-dissidents launched the "Freedom of Expression in Mourning" campaign in conjunction with an online protest – Yezzi – against Ben Ali that garnered worldwide attention. The campaign won coverage on

<sup>14</sup> <http://baheyya.blogspot.com/2005/03/routinizing-right-to-protest.html>

<sup>15</sup> [http://baheyya.blogspot.com/2005\\_08\\_01\\_archive.html](http://baheyya.blogspot.com/2005_08_01_archive.html)

<sup>16</sup> Sunday, July 24, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> [http://baheyya.blogspot.com/2005\\_08\\_01\\_archive.html](http://baheyya.blogspot.com/2005_08_01_archive.html)

*Al-Jazeera* and *CNN*, with its calls for “enough of the dictator’s reign,” but was not linked to an offline movement, and the demands were not sustained.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Egypt, where the political movement Kefaya inspired new forms of political contestation, cyber-activism in the rest of the region was not linked to a broader political movement, and thus offered few opportunities for digital activists to learn organization, mobilization, and publicity skills. Thus cyber-activism largely remained confined to the cybersphere and the tiny sliver of the population that was online.

## 2006-2007: Retreat

With the election of Hamas in Palestine, and the Bush Administration’s concurrent pullback on the democracy agenda in 2006, political activism waned amid increased repression and socioeconomic unrest. Bloggers were arrested, and regional campaigns for their release became a key strategy for raising awareness and solidarity across borders.

In Egypt, labor strikes became increasingly common, with protest activities more than doubling during this time.<sup>19</sup> The early activist-bloggers had paved the way for a wider swath of youth to engage in political activism through the use of digital technology, with the labor movement being a focus for several from the outset. In Tunisia, blogs largely were seen as afflicted by “politicophobia” because they largely refrained from discussing national politics, and practiced self-censorship like the rest of the media.<sup>20</sup>

But bloggers were also looking to Egypt and Iran’s politically dynamic blogspheres, and professing a belief that Tunisia’s blogsphere could also potentially develop along those lines as greater numbers blogged. As one blogger noted, referring to other regional blogs: “Reading them, it is not doubted any more that the next great revolution will be cybernetic, or will not be,” while another suggested “[t]hese are Gutenberg times for us all.”<sup>21</sup>

Cyber-activism grew in popularity, usually focusing on solidarity campaigns with fellow bloggers in the country or the wider Arab world. In Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, for example, bloggers were focused on restrictions being put on the Internet and websites, arrests of bloggers, and the more general repression of free expression. They were not tied to a broader social movement or political activism, but rather focused more inwardly on their community and its concerns. There were certainly savvy insights, such as one blogger who wrote: “The reason why the Internet is so threatening to Arab governments is that it revolutionized the means of communication, making it virtually impossible to moderate or control.”<sup>22</sup> But there were really no calls for systemic change, predictions of major political upheaval, or any other indications of what would emerge during the 2011 uprisings. Bahraini blogger Mahmoud Al Yousif (Mahmoud’s Den) for example, saw back-room deals as being more important to change than street protests, exactly the opposite of the perspective in Egypt

<sup>18</sup> Only about 10 percent of the population was online at this time.

<sup>19</sup> Center for Socialist Studies. News Report: “Workers Leadership Forms Preparatory Committee for Workers” *The Socialist*. Pub. 1 (July 2009); Solidarity Center Report. *The Struggle for Workers’ Rights in Egypt*. [http://www.solidaritycenter.org/files/pubs\\_egypt\\_wr.pdf](http://www.solidaritycenter.org/files/pubs_egypt_wr.pdf). p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2006/10/05/blogging-tunisia-whisper/>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.mideastyouth.com/2007/02/22/democracy-is-possible-arab-bloggers-assure-us-every-day/>

during that time. There were few, if any, calls for mass mobilization. Even during the 2006 protests in the run up to Bahrain's parliamentary elections there was not a sense of the protests portending broader political change coming from the people, but rather a new era was at hand because of the King's reforms.<sup>23</sup>

By late 2007, the Egyptian state crackdown on Kefaya and the Muslim Brotherhood was accompanied by a crackdown on media freedom and regression on freedom of expression.<sup>24</sup> One blogger termed the government's harsh reactions a "War on Bloggers."<sup>25</sup> The imprisonment of bloggers for their activism on the streets in demonstrations was a personal hardship, but helped draw attention to them and get youth interested in learning about, and working with, the new technology. Around the same time, one of Saudi Arabia's most famous bloggers, Fouad Al Farhan, was arrested (December 2007) and held without charge for four months because of a critical post he wrote. Fouad's blog was blocked in Saudi Arabia, and an online campaign to advocate for his release was widely covered. Although he wrote about the need for political reform and was highly critical of the ruling family, his arrest had a chilling effect on criticism and did not instigate street protests or inspire significant numbers of youth to blog for freedom and against repression.<sup>26</sup>

Yet it is noteworthy that despite an international campaign for Fouad's release, the campaign's Facebook page (active 2007-2008) had fewer than 1,000 members. And although there were posts calling for freedom of expression and democracy in Saudi, there were no prescient comments or insights about any coming or future uprising. "We lack the concept of 'collective action' in our country, but I hope that blogging will help to change that. The social networking aspect of blogging can play a big role in building recognition of such a concept, through groups of bloggers who work together in what can be called 'online activism'."<sup>27</sup> The one explicit mention of any sort of revolution was actually a link to another blogger's post that rejected the idea of an overthrow of the government. In the post he writes that he found an interesting post from "Nour, a blogger from UAE, [who] thinks that the Internet can do for the Arab world what the printing press did for Europe, helping them to find the way out of the Dark Age."<sup>28</sup> He links to the post, in which the blogger writes:

- *"A Revolution is bubbling underneath the shrouds of ignorance. It will not happen overnight, but everyday is a step closer to it ... when I say 'Revolution', I don't necessarily mean overthrow-the-government-in-a-bloody-coup type of revolution. I mean an intellectual revolution, a social revolution, a religious revolution, a cultural revolution. Preferably, a peaceful revolution. The world's already lost too much blood. We've got to save whatever we can of it."*<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Bahrainis disillusioned with government and opposition.

<sup>24</sup> Human Rights Watch. *Egypt country summary*. 2007; Reporters Without Borders. *Egypt -- annual report*. 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Nora Younis. "War on bloggers unfolds." 2007. In Nora Younis.

<sup>26</sup> In Egypt, on the other hand, the arrests of prominent bloggers critical of the government like Alaa, Wael Abbas, Mahmoud Sherkawy, Malek Mustafa, Abdelmenem Mahmoud, Mahmoud Salem, and dozens of others inspired many youth to begin blogging or join Twitter or Facebook, often with an explicitly political approach.

<sup>27</sup> <http://saudijeans.org/2006/11/12/on-online-activism/>

<sup>28</sup> <http://saudijeans.org/2006/04/28/peaceful-revolution/>

<sup>29</sup> <http://grynprynt.blogspot.com/2006/03/internet-our-printing-press.html>

## Turning Points

### 2008: The April 6 Facebook Strike and Egypt's Demonstration Effect

In 2008, there was a political re-awakening as a new cohort of youth joined the blogosphere through social media, like Facebook and Twitter, and media began to wake up to the political effects of blogging and cyber-activism. Indeed, online Egyptian activists exploited new technologies, such as Twitter, as key tools for popular mobilization in applications that even the developers of Twitter did not themselves anticipate. “[W]hen we heard about this story and that Twitter was being used in Egypt in 2008 to organize these protests,” said Twitter co-founder Biz Stone, “that was one of the early, eye-opening experiences for us, that made us realize this was not just something in the Bay Area for, you know, technical geeks to fool around with and to find out what each other’s up to, but a global-communications system that could be used for almost anything and everything.”<sup>30</sup>

The second half of 2008 was a watershed moment in the region amid rising discontent, and labor strikes over the prices of food.<sup>31</sup> The Egyptian Facebook strike inspired Arab youth throughout the region, with solidarity strikes being called for by bloggers in Jordan, and a special coverage page on Global Voices. Other countries also covered the Egyptian blogosphere, such as Kuwait, where a newspaper inaugurated its blog coverage with an interview with Sandmonkey (also prompting dismay from Kuwaiti blogger).<sup>32</sup> And efforts to organize and collectivize Arab bloggers resulted in the first Arab Bloggers Meeting in Beirut.

Throughout 2008, hundreds of worker strikes continued to take place across Egypt, and when two young activists created a Facebook page calling for a general strike in solidarity with the workers in Mahalla, it spread like wildfire, attracting 70,000 virtual participants in about two weeks at a time when only about half-a-million Egyptians were even on the social network. The solidarity strike lacked specificity about how people were expected to participate, and the blogosphere was full of debate about its effectiveness, with seasoned activist bloggers feeling it would be futile to take to the streets and simply invite arrests and detentions of activists, effectively taking them out of commission. They supported the ideals, but not the means. Whether the strike was a success or not depends on who you ask. However, everyone was in agreement that it was practice for later, and not meant to be the endgame. The blogosphere was a-twitter with discussions about the “Day of Rage” coming in the future, about this being practice for the “long revolution.”

Several bloggers covered the worker’s strike in Mahalla, which turned violent when government thugs fired on protesters. Bloggers posted pictures of crowds tearing down posters of Mubarak and stepping on them, an unheard of action that spread through the

<sup>30</sup> National Public Radio. “Twitter's Biz Stone On Starting A Revolution” *Fresh Air*. February 16, 2011.

<sup>31</sup> <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/05/01/arabeyes-looming-food-crisis/>

<sup>32</sup> <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/07/17/kuwait-blogs-in-the-news/>

blogosphere like wildfire. One such post on Manalaa.net drew more than 40,000 views.<sup>33</sup> The April 6 strike helped increase public knowledge about social networking, and propelled Facebook to be the primary social network among Egyptians. As blogger and journalist Nora Younis observed: “More people are joining the blogosphere, Facebook, and Twitter by the hour... There is a techie, passionate, frustrated generation now on the playground... and one could only expect more to come. In few years time, there will be no need for registration of political parties. Like-minded people will organize and will be heard.”<sup>34</sup>

Other bloggers noted that the strike and its repercussions “sure hit a nerve, with thousands of people mobilizing themselves, and freely available online tools to demand their freedom, equality, democracy, and an honorable life for themselves and the future generations of Egypt.”<sup>35</sup> Anyone reading the blogs could have perceived a seismic shift underway.

### Linking the Revolution of Politics with the Revolution of Bread

The April 6 activists were strategic and committed to a struggle, asking why they should *not* talk about changing the whole system – the constitution, the government, people’s sociopolitical habits. To paraphrase a Sept. 29, 2008 post: People want to change, but there’s no reason to make small changes, the whole thing needs to be changed, the entire package, we’re not talking about hanging a person, but changing the whole system – the constitution, the government and ministries, the judicial system, and change people’s habits where they think that the way they are cannot be changed or fixed.

These calls for radical, revolutionary change were preceded by a demand to know where the thousands who were on the streets for the Iraq war, and hundreds from Kefaya’s apex in 2005 had gone.

“So how are we going to get to a million-person demonstration? People are scared to follow someone they don’t know if they can trust, they’re afraid to go into the street. You have to connect people and connect the revolution of freedom with the revolution of bread.” Such broad calls for revolutionary change were missing elsewhere in the Arab blogosphere, however, although there was certainly a recognition that successful initiatives depended on bridging the digital divide.

Interviews with Tunisian bloggers confirmed that no one in that blogosphere saw the revolution coming. But there were broader signals that in hindsight seemed to foreshadow change as far back as 2008, according to bloggers interviewed in the aftermath of the revolution. Among these signals were the 2008 protests in Gafsa and Al Radeef that bloggers labeled the “Revolution of Bread,”<sup>36</sup> when none of the mainstream media would cover them. Chants at football games, and other subtle signals marked a turning point in the acquiescence of society to Ben Ali’s rule. By this time, with Internet access at a mere 35 percent of the Tunisian population, nearly 20 percent were on Facebook, surpassing the number of newspaper readers.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> <http://manalaa.net/node/87357>

<sup>34</sup> <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/04/30/egypt-facebook-the-struggle/>

<sup>35</sup> <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/04/07/egypt-a-wake-up-strike/>

<sup>36</sup> <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/04/15/tunisia-al-radeef-protests-when-bloggers-give-a-voice-to-the-voiceless/>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

## Going for Broke: Calls for Systemic, Revolutionary Change in Egypt

On the eve of the first anniversary of the April 6 strike, Abdul Halim Kandil posted on the April 6 blog a call to protest against Mubarak and lift the veil of fear.<sup>38</sup> He discussed how originally they were going to call for Kefaya and opposition/banned parties to join in a general strike, but instead they called it a “Day of Rage,” the same term later used in 2011 during the protests that brought down Mubarak. He wrote that this was not only just a protest to mark the anniversary, but also planning for the future, for more protests, until the day of the 2011 parliamentary elections. “Egypt will not be the same by the end of 2011,” he wrote, noting that a fuse had been lit and the regime was delusional, falling apart, and perhaps, would not even last until the election.

These online debates and street protests opened up fundamental questions about what type of political system Egypt should have, further weakening the status quo. “Openly debating who should rule the country and how they obtain this power is now a defining feature of the political landscape,” as the anonymous blogger “Baheyya” put it on her post from August 15, 2009. In the post she blamed “change-hating Mubarak” for making “everything up for debate.” She similarly saw the current political contestation as part of a longer movement. “This does not mean that Egypt’s citizens are on the cusp of choosing who rules them. Not soon and not for some time to come, alas.” That time would be January 25, 2011.

April 6 inspired many others to start using the social networking platform Facebook, with similar strikes being planned in Jordan, and calls for action in every country going out via Facebook. A page called “Facebookist Movement to Overthrow Mubarak” was created, and from then on protest movements throughout the region made use of the social networking platform to build support and awareness. Egyptian social media were far more activist and able to mobilize far more supporters than any of their fellows in the broader Arab blogosphere (aided by the fact that at that time about 18 percent of its 80-million people were online, including early adopters of Twitter and Facebook). Elijah Zarwan, however, cautioned that “[i]f it’s dangerous to dismiss what’s happened in Egypt as mere agitating on the part of a few left-wing activists, it’s equally dangerous to imagine that Facebook and Twitter are going to usher in a Gucci Revolution in Egypt.”

Another call went out for a strike on May 4 against price increases, but largely fizzled. A call went out on Facebook, however, and was picked up by others in the region. “It is a protest against the situation in the country in general, and in solidarity with a similar strike being held in Egypt on the same day,” the blogger at *Jordanian Issues* wrote in a post. Another blogger, Ibrahim Safa wrote on *Al-Jazeera Talk* that the call for a solidarity strike “has triggered a call for strikes across the region against increasing prices in the Arab world,” adding “the reason is to send a message that the people of Jordan are not able to withstand more.”<sup>39</sup> Yet there was very little discussion in Jordan about upending the system, as blame more often lies with the government, not the royal family. In fact, just two months later the king gave a wide-ranging, detailed interview addressing

<sup>38</sup> March 31 post.

<sup>39</sup> <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/05/03/jordan-gearing-up-for-strike/>



economic issues and criticism, and even left a comment on a blog, thought to be the first time a royal monarch directly interacted on a blog. This action garnered him significant good will.

## 2010: “We Are All Khaled Said”

When, in July 2010, the brutal murder of a middle-class youth, who looked like anybody’s brother or son, was captured on video and quickly went viral, it was clear that cyber-activism was not dead. Wael Ghonim, an executive with Google, set up a fan page for the deceased Khaled Said. Within the first 24 hours 56,000 people signed up for the “We Are All Khaled Said” page, growing to more than a quarter-of-a-million fans in a month. With more people joining daily, a post from August 31 expressed belief that there would be an end to emergency law and to imprisonment without charge, with fans writing that they believed in the future, and would continue their non-violent struggle. The fan page attracted international media coverage, with a picture of Said even being featured at a Pink Floyd concert in Florida. By the end of 2010, the page had more than 400,000 fans. Compare this to the eight months it took the Egyptian Movement for Change, or Kefaya, to gather 300 signatures for its founding statement.

On June 29, activists disgusted with the mainstream Egyptian press coverage of the murder held a sit-in in front of *Al-Gomhouria* newspaper, described by one blogger as an historic first. Protests continued for weeks, often violent, while unrest in Sinai continued. On September 4, the Arabic page “My Name is Khaled Said” was suspended, but the “We are all Khaled Said” page continued. In November, the administrator’s account was disabled. *The Arabist* posted an insightful link explaining that “Khaled Said’s brutal murder is a chilling reminder of what emergency law – and Interior Ministry impunity – means for Egyptians. Frustration with that impunity is what leads protesters to take to the streets.” On November 17, posts on the Facebook page said that November 26 would be day of anger, when Egyptians will no longer sit quietly watching police torture and abuse, vowing their voice would be heard. And indeed they were.

## Conclusion

Those who were watching Egyptian blogs would have seen a growing discontent and call for revolutionary action that, when combined with the factors of youth unemployment, stunted political opportunities, and expanded platforms for political activism outside the traditional power structures, was combustible. What was missing was the spark that would inspire hope, and dispel fear among a populace so that they would take to the streets in massive numbers. Tunisia was that spark (although there was little indication in the social media sphere that it would become so) that Egypt needed to propel the movement that had been growing online, and expand it to a broader segment of the population.

## Note on Methodology

The author conducted a systematic review of all MENA blog posts on Global Voices between 2005 and November 2011 (usually between 100 and 300 posts per month), which covers the entire region, along with comprehensive review of posts on the following individual blogs: Baheyya, Sandmonkey, Egyptian Chronicles, April 6 Movement, April 6 Facebook page, El Shaheed /We are all Khaled Said page, A Tunisian Girl, Mahmoud's Den (Bahrain), Silly Bahraini Girl, Ali Abdulemam (Bahrain), and Saudi Jeans. In addition, the author surveyed The Arabist/3arabawy (Egypt), Manalaa.net (Egypt),<sup>40</sup> Gr33n Data (Egypt), and Saudiwoman's Weblog. The focus was on individuals and blogs that could be searched chronologically, thus citizen journalism platforms like Nawaat, which was an important group blogging platform in the lead up to Tunisia's January uprising, was not included. The Tunisian government was the most active at censoring and hacking the accounts of its cyber-activists, so many Tunisian blogs that had been active prior to 2008 can no longer be accessed. Dozens of other blogs were also reviewed less systematically, especially when they were linked to and referenced in a relevant post by another blogger. Given time constraints and the parameters of the project, the author focused primarily, though not exclusively, on English-language content in the public sphere.

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<sup>40</sup> Blogger "godfathers," 10th most linked source in 2009 Berkman study, only individual blog in top ten linked to sites by Arabic blogs.





## Risk Analysis

*Robert Grenier and Andrew Marshall*

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### Explanatory Note

**T***his chapter examines risk analysis in the private sector, a dynamic and fast-growing area. We spoke with representatives of eight firms, which brought a variety of approaches to their analysis of protests and upheavals in the Arab world of 2011. There was some consistency in their response: most had understood that change was coming, but few had realized how fast, where, or how it would emerge. Once things began to move, they reacted swiftly and effectively to understand and report the changes to their clients.*

*Some limitations to our work should be noted:*

- Some companies – including some large investors – were unwilling to speak because of their own internal business and confidentiality issues.*
- Similarly, those companies that would discuss their experiences were keen to protect information because of client confidentiality, and a concern about sharing valuable intellectual property with competitors.*
- The range of the risk analysis firms' interests is set by clients, which to some degree limits the field that they look at.*
- We did not speak with non-US/UK companies, despite our best efforts.*
- We established interviews with companies that we knew. The sector has a spread of smaller companies with distinguished personnel and insights, and we do not exclude their experience. Some may have different lessons that are just as valid.*
- Companies were at liberty to present their own work in their own terms. We did not have (nor did we expect) license to examine all their output, and we were not out to find fault. Our goal was to gain new insights into risk analysis, and find useful lessons.*

*Notwithstanding this, we found our interviewees candid and helpful, and generous with their time. We found the sector more than willing to discuss the issues concerned, interested in lessons learned, and keen to share their experience of working at a turbulent moment in the region's history.*

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## The Growth of Risk Analysis

The private sector has developed its own range of approaches to forecasting and analyzing risk over the past 40 years. These approaches are related to, but separate from, those of government. Private-sector risk analysis organizations are increasingly recognized as a source of authority and insight by government, media, academia, and non-profits.

Risk analysis for the private sector comes from different perspectives. On the one hand, large companies and financial institutions with significant assets or operations at stake long have hired their own analysts – from the worlds of academia, intelligence, diplomacy, politics, and journalism – to staff in-house groups to support operations. They advise internally on decision making, investment, and operations. Some are attached to security functions; others operate within sales and marketing; many are part of a public affairs or government relations department; a few sit on boards, or are part of line management where political risk and government relations are central to business. We spoke with representatives of two of these organizations.

On the other hand, companies devoted specifically to risk analysis, or who have risk analysis as a main business line, also exist. They sell services and products to companies without their own departments, or assist those who do. An initial group of such companies sprang from the turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s, and focused on the risks of regime change and on doing business in developing countries. A second wave emerged in the 1990s and 2000s, post-Cold War and post-9/11, and focused on the new sets of risks and opportunities to be found in emerging markets.

These firms typically provide three types of analysis:

- At the most tactical level, firms provide updates and reporting on events on the ground aimed at supporting operations, working with logistics, security, and operational management.
- Firms provide risk profiles to assess levels and types of risk to support decisions about investments, projects, or operations. This can be more or less tactical, and tied to security measures; or strategic, and aligned with investment decisions, and sometimes to insurance or other forms of risk mitigation.
- At the most strategic level, firms provide forecasts and scenarios to assist companies and financial institutions that are considering or reviewing investments with longer time horizons. They sometimes work with management, strategy directors, business development, and marketing as the customers, or report to the board level.

Typical clients include: the extractive sector (oil and gas, metals, and minerals); financial services (investment banks, investment funds, private equity, and increasingly hedge funds);

companies with government as clients (defense, infrastructure, and capital equipment); investors in developing countries; and those with large trade or portfolio interests. The client base has grown exponentially over the last two decades, and so has the sector; there are at least 100 companies worldwide providing some element of risk analysis services. Some provide subscription products, such as reports with a wide readership and regular updates. Others are more focused on consulting and advisory work, and look at specific problems for specific clients. Most companies do some of both.

Just as some are more tactical and some more strategic, some focus more on political and security developments; others are more interested in business and economic conditions. They employ a mixture of backgrounds – intelligence, academic, diplomatic, journalistic, legal, accounting – and are heterogeneous in their approaches.

We spoke with a mixture of entities, and with companies from the US and UK, which are traditionally the two centers for this activity. In general, they have two primary focuses, and these tended to structure and constrain their views of a region:

- Government and elite perceptions, views, decision making, and structures. Most are focused on understanding for themselves or for clients how governments and states will act and react.
- Terrorism and security threats. Most maintain some effort to understand, analyze, and, where possible, foresee terrorist activity or associated political efforts that might harm clients' interests.

Typically, in-house analysts focus mainly on what is directly relevant to their company's interests, whereas analysts in risk consulting companies will be encouraged to take a wider view. Their clients may have diverse operations, and it may be easier to focus on indirect influences, peripheral threats, and the wider picture. But in both cases, there are relatively tight constraints. The paying client decides the focus, and going "off-piste" is not encouraged. From that perspective, it is important to understand how these analysts see their task.

## Regional and Sector Focus Helped Determine Results

The risk consulting sector had focused on the Middle East as a topic of interest for decades. However, this interest has centered on countries where oil and investment had lead clients – and hence the Gulf was the main area of analytical focus, with Algeria as a more recent addition. In recent years, sources of risk and instability had also become a focus; Iraq and Iran have attracted growing attention. There is growing interest in the region as a source of, and destination for, financial investment. In the last decade, service companies in telecommunications, media, and technology have aimed at these growing markets, and trade has grown; however, energy and direct investment still dominate analyst focus.

Each of those companies we spoke to covered at least some of the countries affected, (we focused on Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia) and each had published updates and forecasts of some sort on most, if not all, of these countries. Some had produced longer

“think pieces,” bespoke consulting products, or conducted broader studies on the subjects. But each remarked on the issues surrounding the countries where change came earliest and was most marked.

Egypt is of interest to the political community, but is of less consequence for investors. Despite its size, it has grown more slowly than other markets, and is often seen as bureaucratic and hard to penetrate. Tunisia, though attractive as a market, is small. Though both countries have energy resources and international investment, they are regarded as secondary topics of attention. Libya is a focus for a small group of companies, and hence, analysts, but was regarded as far from mainstream. Few we spoke to said they had good networks in Libya, which was one of the least transparent countries in the region. Bahrain, by contrast, has attracted great interest in terms of regional investment, but was seen as being of less inherent consequence than other places in the region (Saudi Arabia, UAE).

The lack of attention to Tunisia – where the events began – was bemoaned by many of those we spoke to. Tunisia is also of greater interest to political and investment interests in France and Italy than to Britain and the US; hence, again, it attracted less analytical firepower in London, Washington, and New York. The companies concerned were, in general, not watching Tunisia, and so they did not expect change at the outset. The spark that lit the fire was not seen. A few looked at Libya, but all said that it was opaque and that their networks there were not strong.

Bahrain was a focus for most companies, since it hosts considerable Western investment. All companies had noted it as a flashpoint, both because of the inherent instability of Sunni-minority rule in a Shi’a-majority country, and the public divisions within the Royal family. One company had also concentrated on the potential for Iranian meddling – this was a main focus of their collection and analysis after significant civil unrest began to appear in Bahrain. But again, few had seen the prospects for Bahrain to descend rapidly into civil disturbance and violent state response.

The countries where most companies direct most of their efforts – the Gulf states – were not (with the exception of Bahrain) so directly involved in the events of spring 2011. And physical oil and gas supplies were relatively unaffected (global price increases notwithstanding). This meant that many of the companies were less involved than if the events had affected Saudi Arabia, in particular.

Equally, most companies focus most of their efforts on understanding elite and government attitudes, policies, institutions, and actions. They are interested in broader social and political developments only to the degree they affect the client’s interests: that is, mostly indirectly. Again, this limited their focus on, and thus their awareness of, growing popular unrest. Private sector risk analysis has its strengths. It is fast moving and flexible; attuned to clients’ interests; tends to lack “institutional” blinkers; and is relatively un-ideological. But it has its weaknesses, too. It is better at some countries than others; it looks at what clients ask for, rather than the unexpected; it is better on top-down events than those focused on popular movements; and its pragmatism and focus on the granular can sometimes make bigger changes hard to see.

## Trying to Foresee Change: 2005-2010

Though the first signs of the Arab Spring may not immediately have been clear to many private risk analysts, all of them had looked at the background to the events. For years, many analysts had commented on the political, social, and economic problems in the region. If few of the participants we spoke to claimed any great perspicacity in predicting what happened, all had understood the basic social and political elements that led up to the Arab Spring. These elements included corruption, economic inequality, inadequate growth, demographic change, lack of opportunity and unemployment, dissent over the dynastic nature of many regimes, and uncertainty over succession.

In particular, the sector had devoted considerable energy to the topic of political change in the Middle East. Political stability in the Middle East is, and always has been, a central concern to the risk analysis community. This was where much of the early focus of the industry had been, after the revolution in Iran in 1979. Then, a mixture of popular unrest and regime instability had brought about the collapse of a pro-Western state with lasting consequences.

The task of understanding regime change, threats to regimes, and political stability was very much part of the picture. Clients with operations in the countries concerned would have been interested in the prospects for change, from the perspective of the continuity of decision making, the risk of confiscation and abrogation of contracts, the potential for social unrest, and the impact directly on operations (transportation and travel, supply chains, utilities, communications, etc.). Firms also had looked at the likely path for change, and where it might lead.

A primary focus was the generic topic of regime stability. Were the authoritarian, security-focused, often dynastic regimes of the Middle East and North Africa likely to remain intact? Several firms had put out specific analyses on this topic, often with regard to Egypt.

Several risk analysis firms had long believed that the political situation in Egypt was unstable and ripe for change. Their analysis focused on tensions regarding succession, and the dissatisfaction of the Army with both Mubarak and, especially, his sons. One firm had stated categorically that Gamal would never succeed his father. Particularly from 2007 onward, analysts at this firm believed that the regime's increased employment of repressive measures signaled its fundamental lack of confidence, and would undermine popular support and legitimacy over time. One company with investments in the region had gone further, looking at the prospects for the post-Mubarak and post-Ben Ali world, though it had not foreseen the specific mechanisms by which these regimes might fail. One analysis firm was influenced by comparisons with the authoritarian states of the former Soviet Union, and raised the specter of instability and failed succession in a publication in late 2009 and early 2010.

But several analysts, when they looked at the strengths and weaknesses of these autocratic and militarized states, saw them as – if not invulnerable – at least robust enough to survive. And even those who saw the states as rotten to the core had hesitated to predict their overthrow, still less from the street. A further issue was that few felt comfortable reminding their clients too frequently of the weakness of these regimes. “We did not want to cry



wolf,” said one analyst. Few had put much effort into analyzing Tunisia, where events were to start. And analysts had assessed these trends on a country-specific, and not on a regional, basis. They did not foresee the timing of the events in Tunisia, or the effect they would have on Egypt.

Another factor that may have played a role was the belief that – to the degree that external forces were a factor – the US would continue to back Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. The US was and is an important influence particularly on the armed forces. We were given the impression that, for some, one of the surprises of 2011 was that the US did not, when push came to shove, back its longstanding ally – that indeed, the US may well have encouraged the Egyptian military to push Mubarak aside. The long-lasting effect of this apparent shift in US policy – and the very negative perception of it among the conservative Gulf states – remained one of the topics of interest to analysts in the private sector at the time of writing. Some of the firms we spoke to had produced long-range analysis of the prospects for political change during the years leading up to 2009. Nothing that we saw in this long-range forecasting correctly identified the possibility that popular unrest would topple regimes in Egypt and Tunisia, though some firms did discuss and write about the possibility that internal tensions would complicate or prevent successions.

It seems more useful to focus on where the firms had greater success, in the period immediately leading up to the events of 2011, and in their evolution. Even if they had better seen signs of imminent change, analysts in risk consulting companies would have been constrained by the difficulty of predicting what might come next: not just the “what,” but the “so what.” The sector and its clients have a predilection against what they would consider empty speculation; there would have been pressure to “put up or shut up” with sound, palpable evidence if an analyst wanted to talk about regime change. Such evidence might have included speeches, source comments, media articles, surveys of opinion, changes in leadership, structural changes in institutions – but not a generalized “feeling” that something was happening.

## Turning Points and Light Bulbs

As the flammable material piled up, risk analysts had watched and speculated. As it started to ignite, they reacted in different ways, with each picking up different elements at different times. The sector identified a series of moments when it realized what was going on, “light-bulb” moments. But there was consensus that many of these came late in the day.

There were signs of a worsening socio-economic environment throughout 2009 and 2010. At least one analyst in a firm that looked at the economy had pointed to the slowing of growth and the problems over succession as a sign of trouble to come around the end of 2009 or 2010. Growth was necessary to keep Egypt’s society stable, in his view. However, this analyst conceded that his organization had not foreseen the way things would unravel, or the timing.

Several analysts pointed to the worsening of the political environment in Egypt in 2010. The aggressive reaction of the Egyptian regime to former IAEA Director-General Mohammed El Baradei in March 2010, after he emerged as a possible Presidential candidate was seen

as indicating a clear lack of government confidence, and a significant indication of potential future instability. Likewise, in December 2010, in the aftermath of blatantly rigged elections, analysts saw ominous signs of growing public frustration, and a further fundamental weakening of social and political stability. Analysts felt that the government reaction in Egypt to the church bombing in Alexandria at the start of January 2011 and the sectarian tensions it generated were anomalous, and indicated a shift in the Army's attitude toward the Mubarak government, signaling the prospect of strong intra-governmental tension.

Some pointed to the turmoil over succession in Tunisia in late 2010, with growing indications that Ben Ali was being positioned for another term. But again, they had seen regime continuity – albeit with more evident stresses and strains – as the likeliest outcome. Tunisia long had been a very tightly controlled and less-transparent society (compared, say, with Egypt). Like Egypt, they had thought that the Tunisian model of political control was unsustainable over the long term, but they did not pick up on immediate warning signs of trouble; the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, in their view, was a “black swan” event. They were surprised at the rapidity with which protests spread, and also surprised by the military's actions in quickly ousting Ben Ali. They did not foresee the Tunisian Army acting so quickly to push the President aside, which in retrospect they attribute to the fact that the Army was not so closely implicated in the existing power structure, as was the Egyptian Army. They had not focused on Tunisia, and had not felt it important. There had been so little real politics in Tunisia for so long, that the political dynamic, such as it was, had become opaque to them, and they lacked insight into the Army's motivations. They simply had not had a sufficient structure through which to view and assess developments in Tunisia, and so they were at a great disadvantage when events began to accelerate rapidly.

Some analysts made an analogy with the Asian financial crisis of 1998. No one foresaw that such a crisis would start in Thailand, which is hardly a financial driver for the region. One could make similar analogies with the recent financial crisis in Europe, which began with comparatively marginal players in Greece and Ireland.

Some, however, seized on the protests in Tunisia and extrapolated to other countries, asking where might unrest spread? One firm focused on finding “copycat” self-immolations, which had helped catalyze opposition. Several looked at levels of inequality, succession issues, and imminent elections to predict where trouble might occur. They fixed on Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain, though at this stage the impact of such events was not clear.

The unrest in Egypt now turned to outright protest and demonstration. At least one firm saw this for what it was: the beginning of the end for Mubarak. The Army, they believed, was essentially looking for an excuse to push the Mubaraks out, and the street demonstrations gave them that opportunity. Although analysts did not anticipate the timing of the street demonstrations, they believe the prime importance of the demonstrations was to induce the Army to act. Others, however, did not see the end of the Mubarak regime until he signaled it in a speech. They had expected the regime to persist, struggle, and survive, and that the army would back it.

Several had foreseen that Bahrain would face a fight. They did not believe the oil-rich Gulf nations to be at risk, and anticipated that Bahrain would be a wild card that the other Gulf states could contain, particularly as events in Bahrain would be seen in light of traditional

Sunni-Shi'a rivalry, and therefore much less likely to inspire social restiveness elsewhere in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – indeed, analysts felt such restiveness in Bahrain would have much the opposite effect elsewhere in the Gulf.

As previously noted, few made the imaginative leap to Libya; it was seen as *sui generis*, and resistant to analysis.

Overall, the risk analysis sector found itself surprised by the beginning of the Arab Spring, and felt unsighted by events. As things moved on, some found their analytical bearings quickly. Most geared up rapidly, helping clients to understand how things were moving. A few seized on elements of the picture to help guide them through the fast-moving events and see what might be coming.

## Methodologies and Sources

The risk consulting sector and analysts working for companies tend to be relatively conservative. They are eclectic in terms of how they gather information and how they use it, with few adhering to particular schools of thought. Many use what might be termed a “synthetic narrative” analytical technique: they synthesize material (usually a mixture of local and international media, sources from professional networks, and expert judgments) then they turn it into largely narrative accounts of what is happening, and what is expected to happen next. This is sometimes tailored to client requests. Others use a more methodical approach, with a template of issues to consider (social, political, economic, security, etc), and in some cases, a formal scoring method that may be quantitative (aimed at rating a country as unstable; very unstable; etc). Many use regular reports, on a monthly or quarterly basis.

We found little evidence to suggest that having or not having a systematic methodology necessarily helped get things right. One that did have a methodology had found it helpful, as it emphasized regular, structured analysis. Another felt that it might have impeded their speed of reaction. Still another firm that stresses use of a very structured methodological approach felt that even though it failed to anticipate the timing, nature, and outcome of popular revolt in Tunisia, continued adherence to its methods had helped it to anticipate outcomes elsewhere, and to avoid over-reaction in the other direction. For example, once the contagion had begun to spread, many observers in the popular media leaped to the conclusion that the entire region would go up in flames, and that regimes would begin to fall wholesale.

One strength of the sector is the variety of inputs that go into the mix. Many said that local sources, networks, and local media were critical. Some highlighted the importance of local-language social media. However, they noted that their scrutiny of such media often had focused on jihadi websites and information sources. In many cases, analysts were looking for the threat of terrorism, not popular unrest. While elite, government opinion would have been useful to predict and understand regime reactions, it would not have helped understand the protests that galvanized events. And in some countries (Libya and Tunisia), they were largely unsighted.

All the companies we spoke to are staffed by people with experience in the region, and with local contacts. Most work not only through their staff but also maintain networks of contributors – usually in the region. Most pride themselves on their local insight and their connection to the region, even if much of the written work is done outside, elsewhere, by non-local staff. Most make a point of rigorous cross review of output by other analysts within the same company or by management, and some move analysts around countries and regions to ensure that they do not “go native.” Many have advanced degrees in their specialties. However, some said they would have preferred to have had more insights from the ground before and during events.

Some of the analysts we spoke to made a point of having a clear, articulated viewpoint (an articulated argument, rather than simply a cluster of facts) about a country, region, or issue. This was helpful where it encouraged analysts to make a point about change.

## Research Methods and Reform

Several analysts said that they envisaged making changes to their practices, though these changes were not wholesale revisions.

- Some had noted the gap in argument, which meant that regional comparisons (within the broader Middle East, or to other regions) had not effectively been made. They discussed making more of an effort to share analysis between regions.
- Some also had noted the need to do more intra-regional work, and to highlight comparisons and impacts among neighboring states, to help understand which other states might face similar issues, and how different states interacted.
- Several had begun making more use of social media.
- Some had revised or rethought their publication schedules. Where revisions were on a strict schedule (month by month or quarter by quarter – often inherited from paper reports), there needed to be more of an effort to be sensitive to moving news.
- Some mentioned the need to examine more outlying scenarios, and to be bolder in examining change.
- At least one firm concluded that faults in its analysis were attributable not to lack of sufficient inputs or to inadequacies of methodology, but to a failure to adhere with sufficient rigor to the structured methodology of their organization. The conclusion was not to change, but to do the same thing better.

Most were still preoccupied with following events in the region and analyzing what might come next. They rapidly had added analytical resources and geared up to produce more, faster.

## Conclusion

In general, the sector seems to feel that it understood the “why,” and the “what next” of the Arab Spring; it did not grasp the “when” or the “how” of change. But the consensus seemed to be that this was a broader failing, not confined to the risk analysis sector.

It is worth distinguishing between different stages of events:

- Most had understood and pinpointed the structural foundations of what occurred. The fuel: political stagnation, corruption, economic inequality, political dissent, social tensions. Few had any illusions about the popularity of the regimes.
- None claimed any insight, though, into the nature and timing of the initiation of events. The spark: few had anticipated a popular uprising that brought the middle and working class onto the streets. They had not systematically studied or targeted Tunisia, and few were set up to follow popular or street sentiment.
- Some had anticipated the spread and escalation of events – the regional translation into events in Cairo, Bahrain, Sana, Damascus, etc. – but some had not. In general, before the events, the Middle East tended to be seen as a series of more or less *sui generis* polities with few interconnections.
- The nature of the regime response – the failure to douse the flames when they started burning – took some by surprise. They had regarded the regimes as more stable, more united, and more deadly. They believed that as authoritarian states, security states, they would have responded faster, harder, and more effectively. But some firms, on the contrary, had expected divisions or even active support from elite actors for the end of regimes. There was a difference here.
- Some said they had anticipated the structural effect of a significant increase in stresses on the political system. In this case exerted by street protests, a regime change. At least one Western company told us that they had anticipated such change in both Tunisia and Egypt, and prepared for it. Few, however, had anticipated regional change. They tended to see the countries as single, stand-alone entities.

The significant issues for the risk analysis sector, in conclusion, were threefold:

- The revolution from below that came about on the streets of the Middle East in early 2011 was not anticipated, because few were looking for it, and they had not focused on Tunisia.
- The revolution from above – the decision of security forces to intervene against the regime – was not foreseen in Tunisia, but some firms did expect it in Egypt. In Libya and Bahrain, the regimes did essentially defend themselves, as most firms would have forecast.
- The regional conflagration – the rapid spread of unrest – was not anticipated because few were looking at the region as a single political, social, or economic space.

It seems likely that the direct impact for the sector will be to increase the focus on understanding the Middle East as clients adapt to a new and fast-changing reality. The

new reality of changing regional governance norms will have effects not only in the more inherently unstable countries of the region, but also in those, which thus far, have exhibited considerable stability during the recent upheavals – particularly those in the Persian Gulf, which are of disproportionate concern to clients of the industry. In short, there is much more work to be done.





## Think Tanks

*Andrew Houk and Ellen Laipson*

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### Explanatory Note

**W**e reviewed a sample of the research produced by major US and European think tanks between 2005-2010. From an initial survey of 20 think tanks that have Middle East programs, 10 were selected for further review: three European, and seven based in Washington, DC.

Each literature review included a web-based search for relevant analysis, papers, transcripts, or summaries of events, and books published between 2005 to late 2010. In addition, we conducted interviews with eight experts from five think tanks, all with strong track records of writing on the Middle East. Most had prior government experience, and several were known for their distinct methodological approach, such as polling, women's issues, or the role of the military.

The think tanks varied in the centrality that reform or political change plays in their overall research agenda. Many think tanks focus on the policies of the US or EU because that is where they see their greatest influence and impact. Some think tanks, therefore, characterize their focus on the region as framed by US interests, or by regional security concerns. Others explicitly name reform and/or democracy as the animating principle behind their Middle East work, and that generally led to deeper and more sustained access to democracy activists. It did not necessarily lead them to draw dramatically different conclusions about the timing and likelihood of significant political change as compared to those for whom reform was treated as one of many topics.

Most think tanks work on discrete projects that may be developed with a particular funding partner, planned well in advance, and often produce new, written products a year or more after the launch of a project. Some think tanks are more flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances, and most think tank scholars participate actively in information exchanges and media events when dramatic developments occur. Most think tanks foster a culture



*where individual scholars express their personal, rather than institutional view, and few think tanks use a collaborative or team work mode for producing new analysis, so within one think tank, multiple views on prospects for change in the Middle East can be found.*

## Broad Judgments: 2005-2010

Think tank experts generally believed that the long period of authoritarianism in the Arab world was not sustainable, that gradual reforms from the top were not sufficient, and that change would more likely be violent than not. Few, however, knew where, when, and how change would occur. Analysts noted there was a growing sense of political awareness and activism among the populations during this period, but generally concluded that regimes retained sufficient resilience in the short to medium term. Yet if these two forces continued in their trajectories without meaningful political reforms, many concluded that the region could well face revolutions.

- *“To the extent that Arab regimes do not reform politically and economically, they will erupt in one form or another over the coming years... There is a demographic time bomb ticking in the Middle East, and it is going to sweep away a lot of Western-leaning regimes sooner or later unless true reform begins soon.”<sup>1</sup>*
- *“Unless Mubarak or his successor lifts the state of emergency, dismantles the Political Parties Committee, and allows open debate, Egyptians will miss their chance for gradual transformation – and start thinking, along with other Arabs, about hitting the streets.”<sup>2</sup>*
- *“A crack has emerged in the authoritarian pattern of the state-society relationship, and there is no way of reversing its dynamics... In a region with a widespread political culture of lament, passivity, and fear of authorities, there is something truly revolutionary about these events. The autumn of the patriarchs is approaching.”<sup>3</sup>*

Since 2005, think tank analysts interested broadly in the politics of the region have directed their research to explore the political strength and behavior of regimes and opposition forces, the role of external actors in promoting change, trends in political Islam and their implications for democracy, and the social and economic dynamics altering the landscape. The relative importance of these factors may vary from country to country: while political reform was the dominant issue in Egypt, in Yemen the issues were instability derived from weak governance and a toxic mix of water scarcity, population growth, insurgency, and the capacity of the state to manage the al-Qaeda threat. Other analysts continued to focus on the countries of greatest relevance to the Arab-Israeli peace process, or on US-security interests and relations with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). For some of these researchers, political change and reform were a secondary consideration.

Coverage of Egypt was strong for a number of reasons:

<sup>1</sup> Larry Diamond. “Between Democracy and Stability” *Hoover Digest*. No. 1 (January 30, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Tamara Wittes. “Hosni Mubarak: Elections or No, He’s Still Pharaoh” *Slate.com*. March 3, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Amr Hamzawy. “Understanding Arab Political Reality: One Lens Is Not Enough” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. *Policy Outlook*. March 2005.

- As a major regional player and important US ally, Egypt's stability carries regional and global implications.
- Previous reforms and a robust civil society made Egypt a natural candidate for analysts examining peaceful, democratic, and popular movements in an authoritarian, Arab, and Islamic context.
- Growing socio-economic challenges revealed the regime's declining capacity to provide services and safety nets, and fed social unrest.
- The pending legislative elections in 2010 and presidential elections in 2011 provided a definitive time frame for political activists.

Coverage of Tunisia was stronger in European think tanks; few US think tanks have dedicated sustained attention to North Africa in general, or Tunisia in particular. (Intermittently, US think tanks cover Morocco, or energy issues or terrorism trends in North Africa.) A rare, in-depth working paper on Tunisia by a European analyst in 2009 identified indicators that unrest in Tunisia was present:

- *“At a closer look, however, the socio-economic situation appears neither as uniformly positive nor as sustainable as it is usually portrayed... Youth unemployment is on the rise... corruption and patronage are rampant... Popular discontent is also growing stronger, leading young people increasingly to turn to radical ideologies, and raising the possibility of a popular uprising. The recent social unrest over unemployment, corruption, and lack of equal opportunities in the southern mining region of Gafsa, for instance, has revealed the extent of rage within both the workers' movement and the wider population... According to activists, the desperation in the South which led to the Gafsa uprising is present everywhere... insofar as socio-economic development is unsustainable and inequalities are on the rise, it is questionable how long this will last.”<sup>4</sup>*

Overall, think tank experts largely agreed on the following conclusions:

- Regimes were unwilling, and perhaps unable, to enact deep political reforms without risking their collapse; reforms enacted over the past decade have been half-hearted and superficial.
- The United States and Western powers were inconsistent and ineffective in pressuring regimes to reform. Analysts speculated this is out of concern that political Islam was the only alternative political force, or the fear of chaos was sufficient to keep outside powers committed to the status quo.
- As extant opposition parties including Islamists were outmaneuvered or co-opted, meaningful reform movements would need to come from grassroots mobilization.
- Despite continued social unrest and a growing sense of political awareness and activism, the emerging informal opposition was not organized enough to bring about significant change.

<sup>4</sup> Kristina Kausch. *Tunisia: The Life of Others*. FRIDE, Project on Freedom of Association in the Middle East and North Africa. Working Paper No. 85 (July 2009).

During the time period 2005-2010, think tank analysts, therefore, saw that the most likely scenario for the near term was an increasingly precarious status quo. But several think tanks took more nuanced positions about prospects for change, and focused in particular on Egypt and various efforts to change the status quo. None saw a region-wide upheaval, or anticipated the contagion effect that occurred after the Tunisian revolt. There was, therefore, considerable tension in think tank analyses, acknowledging pressures for change and yet little momentum for change due to regime ambivalence about reform, failure of outside powers to use leverage and influence, the weakness of organized opposition, and the lack of organization of the growing informal opposition.

## Understanding Change

There are several analytic frameworks that think tank analysts have used, implicitly more than explicitly, to interpret politics in the Middle East since 2005.

Most Middle East experts hold a strong view that political change will only be successful and legitimate if seen as a local, indigenous process. This view was strengthened by the Iraq experience after 2003, although a minority of US think tanks would defend the proposition that US action to jump-start democracy in Iraq was salutary for the region as a whole. Think tank analysis about the role of outside actors in stimulating or supporting reform intended to shape policies in Washington or EU capitals may infer that the impact of aid or outside leverage is greater than regional experts personally believe. Getting the balance right is tricky: in the Bush to Obama transition, the perception that the US was no longer interested in the “freedom agenda” and reverted to the old stability argument was comparable to “throwing the baby out with the bathwater.”<sup>5</sup>

One think tank invoked Samuel Huntington’s “King’s Dilemma” theory, positing that limited top-down changes often intensify demands for more radical changes from below. Through this theoretical framework, think tank scholars concluded that even reformers within the regime are unlikely to cede real power and risk a total regime collapse.

- *“Incumbent regimes in the Arab world are as acutely aware of the dangers of runaway reform as they are of the necessity for change. Different regimes are following different approaches in an attempt to control the process of change, making sure that it will go as far as they want, but will not gain an unstoppable momentum.”*<sup>6</sup>
- *“One of the essential lessons of the ‘King’s Dilemma’ is that decompression is ultimately unsustainable, and by allowing for the construction of a strong civil society that advocates the transfer of power away from the monarch, the King [Bahrain] must eventually face a choice: suppress or relent. For now, King Hamad continues to search for another way.”*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Michele Dunne. “The Baby, the Bathwater, and the Freedom Agenda in the Middle East” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 129-141.

<sup>6</sup> Marina Ottaway and Michele Dunne. *Incumbent Regimes and the ‘King’s Dilemma’ in the Arab World: Promise and Threat of Managed Reform* Carnegie Papers No.88 (December 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Edward Burke. *Bahrain: Reaching a Threshold*. FRIDE, Project on Freedom of Association in the Middle East and North Africa. Working Paper No. 61 (June 2008).

Another approach examines the changing relationships among elites upon whose cohesion the regime depends. Events such as mass popular protests or leadership succession may change the calculation for a segment of the elite, such as the military, to provide continued support for the regime. Military-regime relations were an important topic of analysis for several experts.

- *“The regime [Egypt] – consisting of the traditional bureaucracy, neo-liberal technocratic ministers, state security, business cronies loyal to Gamal, and a military less loyal to him – has become too large to function as a unitary actor. The one thing keeping the lid on is Hosni Mubarak.”*<sup>8</sup>

Another expert emphasized the fundamental importance of gauging fear when evaluating stability in a coercive regime. If a regime’s legitimacy is wholly dependent on coercion, an erosion of fear leaves little space for gradual reform, and inevitably leads to revolution.

- *“Mubarak has been forced to rely on coercion to control the Egyptian population. This is both expensive and risky. Indeed, the showdown between the regime and the opposition, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, over the elections only adds to an increasingly angry, polarized, and potentially radicalized political arena... It is entirely plausible that as the Egyptian leadership continues to brutalize its citizens to ensure its monopoly on power, it could trigger another round of violence.”*<sup>9</sup>

## Analytical Shifts

In 2005, the Arab world experienced a number of dramatic political developments that came to be called the “Arab Spring,” but the net effect was to usher in a period of disappointment and uncertainty about reform trends in the region. In 2005, historic elections were held in Palestine (the first local elections in 30 years), in Saudi Arabia (the first municipal elections in 40 years), in Egypt (the first multi-candidate presidential elections), and the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon (inspired by the assassination of Rafik Hariri in February). Think tank analysis generally considered these developments important milestones for the region.

But over the next four years, there were many setbacks and disappointments in reform and democratization efforts, and those analysts interested in the reform agenda became pessimistic, and aligned, perhaps reluctantly, with those who said that regimes would be able to sustain the status quo. The following are important incremental turning points or shifts in think tank analysis.

### 2006: Islamists as Early Beneficiaries of the Arab Spring

In early 2006, the electoral gains of Islamist parties in Egypt and Palestine led many think tank experts to acknowledge the extensive societal networks and mobilization capacity of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. An ongoing debate emerged about whether and

<sup>8</sup> Shadi Hamid. “Can’t We All Just Get Along?” *Foreign Policy*. June 2, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Steven A. Cook. *Egypt’s Weakness on Display in Elections* Council on Foreign Relations. November 29, 2010.

how Islamists would behave and change once in parliament or in other institutions of power. This issue engaged experts of diverse views about the compatibility of Islam and democracy. In the absence of any data to the contrary, it was widely assumed that Islamists were the only political force that could muster widespread support as an alternative to authoritarian regimes.

- *“Without the active participation of moderate Islamists, calls for political transformation in the Arab world are bound to remain whispers among tiny communities, irrelevant for the larger social fabric, and harmless to authoritarian regimes... democratic change will depend on the existence of large, popular, homegrown, opposition alliances – not outside pressure. To this end, the contribution of moderate Islamists is indispensable and overdue.”<sup>10</sup>*
- *“The Brotherhood’s greatest success, however, is understanding that formal politics are only a small piece of the puzzle of working toward political change in Egypt. The formal channels – represented by political party life – are sterile and heavily controlled. They seek to change the Egyptian government by changing Egypt. Those who are opposed both to the status quo and the Brotherhood should take note.”<sup>11</sup>*
- *“If fully free elections were held today in the rest of the Arab world, Islamist parties would win in most states. Even with intensive international efforts to support civil society and nongovernmental organizations, elections in five years would probably yield the same results.”<sup>12</sup>*
- *“Allow Islamists to compete and accumulate power, the argument goes, and they will have little incentive to radicalize... But this belief is dead wrong. Not only is it impossible to agree on a working definition of the word ‘moderate,’ but there is scant evidence that extremists really do moderate once they assume power.”<sup>13</sup>*

## 2007: Reassessment of Models of Political Change

By early 2007, think tank analysts generally concluded that authentic political reform in the Arab world would not originate from the incumbent power, but from as yet unidentified bottom-up societal forces. This conclusion was based on:

- The reversal of democratic reforms in Egypt;
- The crackdown on Islamists, culminating in March 2007 with the passage of 34 constitutional amendments, which consolidated the regime’s power and banned religious-based political activity; and

<sup>10</sup> Amr Hamzawy. *The Key to Arab Reform: Moderate Islamists*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Policy Brief No.40. August 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Jon Alterman. *Middle East Notes and Comment: Should the Party Be Over?* Center for Strategic and International Studies. December 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Shibley Telhami. “In the Mideast, the Third Way is a Myth” *The Washington Post*. Op-Ed. February 17, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Steven A. Cook. “The Myth of Moderate Islam” *Foreign Policy*. June 16, 2008.

- The apparent reluctance of Western powers (US and EU) to encourage further reforms, in part due to the 2006 election results.

For democracy advocates, the minimal US response to Egypt's stalled reforms killed hopes for gradual top-down reform. For skeptics, it confirmed suspicions that previous reforms were no more than "reformulation of restrictive measures." Other analysts correlated the absence of international support with the declining credibility of moderate Islamists in the Muslim Brotherhood. All parties recognized that any political change that might occur would originate from home-grown movements, and not the establishment. In light of the state of the weak and divided opposition parties, the prognosis for political change remained poor.

- *"By resorting to outright repression of the Brotherhood, Mubarak is making a mockery of the American push for democracy in the Middle East. Turning a blind eye toward the ongoing crackdown undermines the credibility of an already shaky American commitment to democratization in the Middle East. It also cements the perception among Egyptians that Washington blesses autocratic regimes."*<sup>14</sup>

## 2008: Political Lockdown

The narrowing of space for political opposition inaugurated a period of uncertainty and stagnation, leaving analysts to speculate how the growing frustrations might manifest. Many new factors emerged in the political environment, such as youth activism, new information technologies, economic recession, and regional instability, but no one believed that any one of those factors would be transformative, in the short run. It is noteworthy that the relative importance of Islamists as a topic of think tank research and as an analytic factor in regional politics had contracted by 2008. The Islamists came to be seen as ineffective or co-opted, unlikely to be catalysts for political change.

- *"The multiple exclusion of youth, coupled with the insistence of the regime to bloc[k] all avenues of youth participation, threatens to radicalize youth activism. Thus far, youth activism has been moderate and reformist in tone and has relied exclusively on non-violent tactics. However, continued exclusion might lead to the emergence of more radical and militant groups among youth... Absent such a development, youth in Egypt, as in much of the Arab world, will remain a ticking time bomb."*<sup>15</sup>
- *"Already, different factions within and outside the regime are maneuvering to improve their prospects after President Mubarak leaves the scene. All of this is occurring, moreover, against the backdrop of deteriorating social and economic conditions that have been exacerbated by the global recession – an environment ripe for Egypt's Islamist opposition to press its anti-regime agenda and pursue political power."*<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Amr Hamzawy. "Burying Democracy Further in Egypt" *The Daily Star*. March 16, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Dina Shehata. "Youth Activism in Egypt" *Arab Reform Brief*. October 23, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Steven A. Cook. *Political Instability in Egypt*. CPA Contingency Planning Memorandum. No. 4. Council on Foreign Relations Press. (August 2009).

In April and May 2008, the eruption of mass labor strikes coordinated using social media signaled the emergence of new forces of opposition. Experts saw an emerging alliance of labor with more politically motivated activists, and saw in polling as well as through other means that Arab publics were increasingly focused on domestic grievances rather than foreign policy issues, such as Iraq and Palestine. Some analysts decided to shift their focus to labor and the use of social media as tools of opposition.

The growing potential of “new media,” such as blogs, Facebook, and Twitter, to facilitate communication and dissemination of information also began to attract the attention of analysts as a factor for change, especially after the recognition of their role during Iran’s Green Revolution in June 2009. One institution held a series of conferences in the region in 2008-2010 to examine new protests’ movements.

- *“New media is a new technology, but it has enabled the incredibly swift dissemination of information and given rise to a new, positive spirit of political curiosity and questioning... These developments... represent something even more exciting: a point at which it is not possible to turn back, only to move forward.”*<sup>17</sup>
- *“...In talking to activists all throughout the world, they took a lot of best practices away from Iran... it wasn’t successful in Iran in terms of achieving its immediate objectives. But it was successful in terms of inspiring activists in other parts of the world to think about the power of what technology can do to identify an entirely new set of challenges that they need to solve for as they’re advocating for basic freedoms and civil liberties.”*<sup>18</sup>
- *“Egyptians are... demonstrating creative outlets of resistance. Understanding that no one will bring change to Egypt but Egyptians themselves, many regime opponents are working for change at great personal risk...”*<sup>19</sup>

Many analysts observed that Egyptians viewed the upcoming leadership succession as the crux of retaining power for the regime, and a moment of opportunity for opposition to break from the political lockdown.

- *“When it happens, it will rock the world, at least briefly: ...Mubarak ...will leave office, either by his own decision or that of Providence, probably within the next three years. So far, few in the West have paid much attention. But Egyptians certainly are getting ready, and we should do so as well.”*<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Mirette F. Mabrouk. *Changing the Channel: Egypt’s Evolving Media Landscape and its Role in Domestic Politics*. Saban Center Analysis Paper No. 15 (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution: May 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Jared Cohen, Richard N. Haass, and Eric Schmidt. “The Digital Disruption” (EVENT TRANSCRIPT) Council on Foreign Relations, New York. November 3, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Dina Guirguis. *Political Change in Egypt: A Role for the United States?* Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Policy Watch #1719. November 18, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Michele Dunne. “A Post-Pharaonic Egypt?” *American Interest*. (September/October 2008).

## 2010: Run-up to the Egyptian Parliamentary Elections

By the summer of 2010, analysts described the tension as “palpable.” The parliamentary elections were scheduled only months away, mystery shrouded Mubarak’s absence while receiving health care in Germany, ambiguity surrounded the military’s relationship with the regime’s scion, Gamal Mubarak, and the return to Egypt of potential presidential candidate, Mohammed El Baradei, infused a sense of inspiration among democrats.

- *With or without El Baradei, Mubarak’s reign will soon be over. The West, with great stakes in Egypt as a regional power hub, would be well advised to forge new alliances before it is too late.*<sup>21</sup>
- *Shadi Hamid recounts that Islamic blogger and journalist Ibrahim al-Houdaiby explained the significance of Mubarak’s illness in the summer 2010, that “Egyptians were able to not just contemplate, but visualize, an Egypt without Mubarak.”*<sup>22</sup>
- *“...the surprisingly positive reaction of Egyptian citizens to the seven-point initiative of El Baradei – which would make real political contestation legitimate... – suggests that the idea is gaining ground among the public ...if citizens on a large scale start acting as though they want and deserve open political contestation, we are looking at big change. And if that happens, the United States will have some tough choices to make about whether it values more its friendship with the regime or with the people of Egypt.”*<sup>23</sup>
- *“...There is, today, a critical mass for substantive change. The lines between economic and political reform are increasingly blurred, replaced by an enveloping sense that too much has gone wrong for too long... Egypt’s ruling elites have become almost comically out of touch with their own people. While they continue emphasizing their economic bona fides to the few who still care to listen, their own citizens are angry, growing angrier, and – more importantly – doing something about it.”*<sup>24</sup>

Several think tank experts gradually concluded that the Mubarak succession was a divisive point within the regime itself, but did not write explicitly about this shift. It was increasingly clear that the military would not accept the transfer of leadership to Gamal Mubarak, and this was causing an impasse at the leadership level.

- *“Many in Egypt’s entrenched military elite will not easily agree to surrender control to a civilian president with no credentials to lead country and army...A military coup is rather unlikely, as the army is loyal to Mubarak and keen to keep current arrangements in place. This may change, however, if the prospective*

<sup>21</sup> Kristina Kausch. *Why the West Should Relinquish Mubarak*. FRIDE. May 4, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Shadi Hamid. “Can’t We All Just Get Along?” *Foreign Policy*. June 2, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Michele Dunne. “Can Egypt Change?: Reviewing a Decade of Changes” *Foreign Policy*. July 23, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Shadi Hamid. “In Egypt, Mubarak’s Regime May Be a Victim of Its Own Success” *The National*. July 29, 2010.



*succession outcome were to endanger the military elite's considerable rents and prerogatives.*"<sup>25</sup>

Some experts began to draw the conclusion that the Egyptian military saw its interests as separate from those of the Mubarak family, and some foresaw the prospect that the military would not fire on crowds of mass protestors.

- *"... Events over the course of the past five years have done much to undermine the pervasive sense of fear that runs through Egyptian society despite the leadership's best efforts to reestablish its deterrent. It is entirely possible that Egyptians – like the millions of Iranians who turned out into the streets to protest rigged elections in June 2009 – would rally around a charismatic figure armed with an attractive alternative vision of society. Under these circumstances, it is not at all clear that Egypt's commanders... or their conscripts would have the fortitude to kill large numbers of demonstrators."*<sup>26</sup>
- *"The relative liberalization of some Arab regimes, and their greater reluctance to use deadly force against striking nationals or other domestic demonstrators, may have turned some protests in an inward, rather than anti-American direction."*<sup>27</sup>

Many observers remained cautious in predicting significant political change, despite the rising popular demands for change. The regime had long proven its ability to navigate social upheaval and unpopularity. At best, analysts noted that while Egypt was unlikely to change, it was more possible than widely assumed. It was not until observing the response to the fraudulent election in December 2010, analysts began to sense that tensions were mounting at unprecedented levels. Reports that previously divided opposition groups were forming a shadow parliament was one such indicator from one analyst.

- *"Sectarian conflicts are among several other issues – economic dissatisfaction, police brutality and torture, and public safety problems – souring the attitude of Egyptians toward the government and keeping the internal situation at a simmer, if not a boil. A parliamentary election seen by Egyptians as having been stolen will turn the temperature up another notch."*<sup>28</sup>
- *"It would be misleading to say that Egypt is 'on the brink' – as several experts have recently claimed – although it may be... In opting to wipe out its opposition, and with such lack of subtlety, it has made a major and potentially debilitating miscalculation. The regime has lost whatever legitimacy it had left. More importantly, however, it has breathed new life into what was, just one month ago, an aimless, fractious opposition that couldn't agree on whether or not to boycott the elections."*<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Kristina Kausch. *Managed Successions and Stability in the Arab World*. FRIDE. Working Paper No.104. November 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Cook. August 2009.

<sup>27</sup> David Pollock with Cole Bunzel and Curtis Cannon. "Actions, Not Just Attitudes: A New Paradigm for U.S.-Arab Relations" *Policy Focus #104*. Washington Institute for Near East Policy. June 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Michele Dunne. "Opaque and Messy Elections" *Carnegie Commentary*. November 29, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Shadi Hamid. "Egypt Election 'Blunder' by Mubarak's NDP" *BBC News*. December 2, 2010.

## Research Methods

Overall, the research sources and methods employed by think tanks do not vary significantly between institutions, although some believe that their field research methods are better than others. Great value is placed on language skills, frequent travel to the region, contacts with a wide spectrum of views in society, and, increasingly, an established presence and ability to conduct workshops and hold conferences with local partners.

Think tank analysts all emphasized the importance of balancing their attention to formal politics and interstate relations, with greater focus on societal issues and attitudes in the region. Future research will address issues such as employment, water, youth, education, women's issues, and informal politics. Most institutions expressed their intention to expand their capacity to network in the region, conduct opinion polls, and monitor non-English regional press and social media.



## Appendix I: Contributing Authors' Biographies

**Richard Cincotta** is the Demographer in Residence at the Stimson Center in Washington, DC, and a consultant to the Woodrow Wilson Center's Environmental Change and Security Project. Dr. Cincotta served as the Political Demographer in the National Intelligence Council's Long Range Analysis Unit from 2006 to 2009. He has authored articles in various publications, including *Foreign Policy*, *Current History*, *Nature*, and *Science*.

**James C. Clad** is an independent consultant and a Senior Adviser at the Center for Naval Analyses, Alexandria, VA. From 2007-2010 he served as a US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asia security affairs, and as a Senior Research Fellow at the National Defense University. He has also held senior positions at the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and at the US Agency for International Development. During the 1990s up to 2002, he was Professor of South and Southeast Asian Studies at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. During the 1980s and 1990s, he wrote for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

**F. Gregory Gause, III**, is Professor of Political Science and Chair of the Department at the University of Vermont, and was Director of the University's Middle East Studies Program from 1998 to 2008. He was the Kuwait Foundation Visiting Professor of International Affairs at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, in 2009-10, and in the spring of 2009 he held a Fulbright Fellowship at the American University of Kuwait. He was previously on the faculty of Columbia University, and was Fellow for Arab and Islamic Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York.

**Robert Grenier** is the Chairman of ERG Partners and recently served on a national task force dealing with the intelligence community. Previously, Mr. Grenier was the Chairman for Global Security Consulting and a Managing Director at Kroll. He worked for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for 27 years, serving as Director of the Counter-Terrorism Centre from 2004-2006.

**Andrew Houk** is the Research Associate for the Southwest Asia program at the Stimson Center. While at Stimson, he has published analyses examining nuclear energy in the Middle East and factors affecting Iran-Afghan relations. Prior to joining Stimson and completing an MA in International Affairs from the George Washington University, Houk taught social studies in secondary education from 2004-2008. Through the Fulbright-Hays program, he studied religious pluralism in secular Middle East governments (Syria and Turkey) in 2007, and studied Arabic in Damascus in 2009. He has held internships at the International Rescue Committee and the Stimson Center.

**Ellen Laipson** is President and Chief Executive Officer at the Stimson Center. She also directs the Southwest Asia project, which focuses on security issues in the Gulf region. Before joining Stimson in 2002, she served in government for 25 years and held senior positions in the National Intelligence Council (NIC), the National Security Council, the US

Department of State, and the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress. In late 2009, President Obama named Laipson to the President's Intelligence Advisory Board.

**Andrew Marshall** is currently a consultant to clients in the US and UK via Consultifi. He has worked for risk consulting companies Kroll and Oxford Analytica, focusing on business intelligence, investigations, and security; and was also Managing Editor at eCountries.com. He spent 13 years in international journalism, working primarily in the UK, US and Europe, and covered politics, foreign affairs, business, and economics for the *Independent* and the *Financial Times*.

**David Michel** is Senior Associate and Director of the Environmental Security program at the Stimson Center. He previously served as Senior Associate at the Center for Transatlantic Relations at the Johns Hopkins University's Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. He has written widely on the human security and international governance challenges presented by global environmental change, has advised the US government, and consulted with several NGOs on climate policy and resource management issues.

**Courtney C. Radsch** is an international media expert with more than 10 years of journalism and media-affairs experience in the US and the Middle East. She is currently a Senior Program Officer at Freedom House, where she manages the Global Freedom of Expression Campaign. She previously held positions with *Al-Arabiya*, the *New York Times*, and the *Daily Star* in Lebanon. She is completing her Ph.D. in international relations at American University's School of International Service and turning her dissertation, "The Revolution will be Blogged: Cyberactivism in Egypt," into a book.

**Corey Sobel** is the Research Associate for the Environmental Security program at the Stimson Center. While at Stimson, he has published analyses of refugee movements in East Africa, Africa's negotiating stances in international climate negotiations, environmental degradation in the Nile River Basin, and scientific cooperation between the US and the Muslim world. Prior to joining Stimson, Sobel was a Duke University Hart Fellow in Northern Thailand, a Research Associate at the National Endowment for Democracy, and an HIV/AIDS researcher in Kenya.

**Mona Yacoubian** is an independent consultant and Special Adviser to the US Institute of Peace (USIP) Center for Conflict Management, where she provides analysis and policy advice on the Middle East and North Africa. She currently directs the Institute's Lebanon Working Group, and also contributes to the Institute's ongoing work on the Arab Uprisings. Yacoubian has consulted for a number of organizations, including the World Bank, the Department of State, RAND Corporation, and Freedom House.

## Appendix II: Experts Interviewed or Consulted

- Khairi Abaza, Senior Fellow, Foundation for the Defense of Democracies
- Abdelwahab Al-Kebsi, Regional Director for Africa and MENA, Center for International Private Enterprise
- Jon Alterman, Director and Senior Fellow of the Middle East Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies
- Hussein Amin, Professor and Chair, Department of Journalism and Mass Communications, American University of Cairo
- Ben Barber, former Middle East Correspondent and Editor, USAID *Frontlines* magazine
- Kerry Boyd Anderson, Deputy Director of Advisory, Oxford Analytica
- Eva Bellin, Associate Professor of Political Science, Brandeis University.
- John Bradley, journalist and Cairo resident
- David Butter, Regional Director, Middle East and North Africa, Economist Intelligence Unit
- Daniel Calingaert, Deputy Director of Programs, Freedom House
- Les Campbell, Senior Associate and Regional Director, Middle East and North Africa Programs, National Democratic Institute
- Thomas Carothers, Vice President for Studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
- Scott Carpenter, Keston Family Fellow, Washington Institute for Near East Policy and Director of Project Fikra
- Juan Cole, Professor of History, University of Michigan
- Isobel Coleman, Director of the Civil Society, Markets, and Democracy Initiative and Director of the Women and Foreign Policy Program, The Council on Foreign Relations
- Steven Cook, Hasib J. Sabbagh Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies, Council on Foreign Relations
- Lorne Craner, President, International Republican Institute
- Mark Danner, Principal, National Strategies, Inc.
- Michael Denison, Research Director for Global Risk Analysis, Control Risks Group
- Director of Mid-East Analysis, Stratfor
- Michele Dunne, Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Editor of the online journal, *The Arab Reform Bulletin*

- Heba el-Shazli, currently Visiting Professor at the Virginia Military Institute, Regional Program Director, Middle East and North Africa, The Solidarity Center
- Anthony Garrett, Consultant, Internews
- Thomas Garrett, Vice President for Programs, International Republican Institute
- Eric Goldstein, Deputy Director of Middle East and North Africa Division, Human Rights Watch
- Jack Goldstone, Director, Center for Global Policy, George Mason University
- David Gordon, Head of Research and Director, Eurasia Group
- Nate Haken, Senior Analyst, Failed States Index, Fund for Peace, Washington, DC
- Julien Barnes-Dacey, Editor, Middle East, Control Risks Group
- Amy Hawthorne, Senior Adviser NEA/State and former Director, Hollings Center [Istanbul]
- Barry Hughes, Pardee Center for International Futures, University of Denver
- Graham Hutchings, Director of Analysis, Oxford Analytica
- David Ignatius, Columnist, *The Washington Post*
- Lila Jaafar, Country Director in Egypt, National Democratic Institute
- Omar Karmi, Washington Bureau Chief, *The Nation*
- Eric Kaufmann, Reader in Politics and Sociology at Birkbeck College, University of London
- Mohamed Ali Kembi, Director/ Tunisian Institute de Presse et des Sciences de l'Information (IPSI)
- Rami Khouri, journalist and writer; Contributing Editor, *The Daily Star* [Beirut]
- Carol Klinger, All Things Considered, *National Public Radio*
- Laith Kubba, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Program, National Endowment for Democracy
- Sherif Mansour, Senior Program Officer, Middle East and North Africa Program, Freedom House
- Scott Mastic, Regional Director for MENA, International Republican Institute
- Monty Marshall, Director of Research, Center for Global Policy, George Mason University
- Raffaello Matarazzo, Senior Researcher, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) [Italy]
- Amira Maty, Program Officer for Middle East and North Africa, National Endowment for Democracy
- Steven McInerney, Executive Director, Project on Middle Eastern Democracy (POMED)
- Hugh McLeod, Chief Operating Officer, Stirling Assynt
- Christian Mesquida, Researcher/Administrator, York University [Canada]

- Karim Mezran, Director/Centro Studi Americani [Rome]
- Fadi Nahas, writer, businessman and founder, *The Awakening* [Beirut]
- Paolo Passarini, Senior Correspondent, *La Stampa* [Italy]
- Mark Perry, a Washington, D.C.-based journalist
- Political Risk Specialist, a US-based multinational oil company
- Kenneth M. Pollack, Senior Fellow and Director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution
- David Pollock, Senior Fellow, focusing on the political dynamics of Middle Eastern countries, Washington Institute for Near East Policy
- Hugh Pope, journalist, author, and Turkey/Cyprus/ Middle East Rep. for International Crisis Group
- Risk Advisor to a leading Western energy firm
- Patrice Sabatier, Editor, *Liberation* [Paris]
- Hani Sabra, Senior Egypt Analyst, Eurasia Group
- Security Specialist, a US-based multinational oil company
- John Sullivan, Executive Director, Center for International Private Enterprise
- Jonathan Wright, former *Reuters* Cairo Bureau Chief
- Tim Williams, Head of Training, Stirling Assynt
- Vice-President for Strategic Intelligence, Stratfor



# Appendix III: Mission Statements of Organizations Interviewed or Consulted<sup>1</sup>

## Democracy Promotion Organizations

### National Endowment for Democracy

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) is a private, nonprofit foundation dedicated to the growth and strengthening of democratic institutions around the world. Each year, with funding from the US Congress, NED supports more than 1,000 projects of non-governmental groups abroad who are working for democratic goals in more than 90 countries.

The National Endowment for Democracy's Core Organizations:

- **Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE)**  
CIPE aims to strengthen democracy around the globe, through private enterprise and market-oriented reform.
- **International Republican Institute (IRI)**  
IRI advances freedom and democracy worldwide by developing political parties, civic institutions, open elections, democratic governance, and the rule of law.
- **National Democratic Institute (NDI)**  
NDI and its local partners work to promote openness and accountability in government by building political and civic organizations, safeguarding elections, and promoting citizen participation. The Institute brings together individuals and groups to share ideas, knowledge, experiences, and expertise that can be adapted to the needs of individual countries.
- **Solidarity Center**  
The Solidarity Center's helps to build a global labor movement by strengthening the economic and political power of workers around the world through effective, independent, and democratic unions.

## Human Rights Organizations

### Freedom House

Freedom House, an independent nongovernmental organization, supports the expansion of freedom in the world. The organization supports nonviolent, civic initiatives in societies

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<sup>1</sup> All organizations are US-based unless otherwise noted.

where freedom is denied or under threat and stands in opposition to ideas and forces that challenge the right of all people to be free. Freedom House functions as a catalyst for freedom, democracy, and the rule of law through its analysis, advocacy, and action.

## **Human Rights Watch**

Human Rights Watch is dedicated to protecting the human rights of people around the world. It stands with victims and activists to prevent discrimination, to uphold political freedom, to protect people from inhumane conduct in wartime, and to bring offenders to justice. Human Rights Watch investigates and exposes human rights violations and hold abusers accountable. It challenges governments and those who hold power to end abusive practices and respect international human rights law. It enlists the public and the international community to support the cause of human rights for all.

## **Hybrid Organizations (Democracy Promotion-Think Tanks)**

### **Arab Reform Initiative [Jordan]**

The Arab Reform Initiative is a network of independent Arab research and policy institutes, with partners from the United States and Europe. Its goal is to mobilize the Arab research capacity to advance knowledge and develop a program for democratic reform in the Arab world which is realistic and home grown. The Initiative also aims to produce policy recommendations that can help promote reform in the region.

### **Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)**

The Project on Middle East Democracy is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to examining how genuine democracies can develop in the Middle East and how the US can best support that process. Through dialogue, research, and advocacy, POMED works to strengthen the constituency for US policies that peacefully support democratic reform in the Middle East.

## **Think Tanks**

### **American Enterprise Institute (AEI)**

The American Enterprise Institute is a community of scholars and supporters committed to expanding liberty, increasing individual opportunity, and strengthening free enterprise. AEI pursues these unchanging ideals through independent thinking, open debate, reasoned argument, facts, and the highest standards of research and exposition. Without regard for politics or prevailing fashion, we dedicate our work to a more prosperous, safer, and more democratic nation and world.

## **Brookings Institution**

Brookings conducts high-quality, independent research and, based on that research, provides innovative, practical recommendations that advance three broad goals: strengthen American democracy; foster the economic and social welfare, security, and opportunity of all Americans; and secure a more open, safe, prosperous, and cooperative international system.

## **Carnegie Endowment for International Peace**

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing cooperation between nations and promoting active international engagement by the United States. Founded in 1910, its work is nonpartisan and dedicated to achieving practical results.

## **Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)**

At a time of new global opportunities and challenges, the Center for Strategic and International Studies provides strategic insights and policy solutions to decision makers in government, international institutions, the private sector, and civil society. CSIS conducts research and analysis and develops policy initiatives that look into the future and anticipate change.

## **Chatham House [UK]**

Chatham House is a world-leading source of independent analysis, informed debate, and influential ideas on how to build a prosperous and secure world for all.

## **The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)**

The Council on Foreign Relations is an independent, nonpartisan membership organization, think tank, and publisher dedicated to being a resource for its members, government officials, business executives, journalists, educators and students, civic and religious leaders, and other interested citizens in order to help them better understand the world and the foreign policy choices facing the United States and other countries.

## **FRIDE [Spain]**

FRIDE informs policy and practice in order to ensure that the EU plays a more effective role in supporting multilateralism, democratic values, security, and sustainable development.

## **The Hoover Institute**

The Hoover Institute recalls the voice of experience against the making of war, endeavors to make and preserve peace, and sustains for America the safeguards of the American way of life....with these purposes as its goal, the Institution itself must constantly and dynamically point the road to peace, to personal freedom, and to the safeguards of the American system.

## **RAND Corporation**

RAND helps improve policy and decision making through research and analysis.

## **Washington Institute for Near East Policy**

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy advances a balanced and realistic understanding of American interests in the Middle East. Under the guidance of a distinguished and bipartisan Board of Advisors, the Institute seeks to bring scholarship to bear on the making of U.S. policy in this vital region of the world. Drawing on the research of its scholars and the experience of policy practitioners, the Institute promotes an American engagement in the Middle East committed to strengthening alliances, nurturing friendships, and promoting security, peace, prosperity, and democracy for the people of the region.

## **Government and Inter-Governmental Research Institutes**

### **Food and Agriculture Organization**

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations leads international efforts to defeat hunger. Serving both developed and developing countries, FAO acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy. FAO is also a source of knowledge and information. It helps developing countries and countries in transition modernize and improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices, and ensure good nutrition for all. FAO has focused special attention on developing rural areas, home to 70 percent of the world's poor and hungry people.

### **International Food Policy Research Center (IFPRI)**

The International Food Policy Research Center seeks to provide policy solutions that reduce poverty, and end hunger and malnutrition. The two key premises that underlie IFPRI's mission are that sound and appropriate local, national, and international public policies are essential to achieving sustainable food security and nutritional improvement; and that research and the dissemination of its results are critical inputs into the process of raising the quality of food policy debate, and formulating sound and appropriate policies.

### **International Labour Organization (ILO)**

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is devoted to promoting social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights, pursuing its founding mission that labour peace is essential to prosperity. Today, the ILO helps advance the creation of decent work and the economic and working conditions that give working people and business people a stake in lasting peace, prosperity and progress. Its tripartite structure provides a unique platform for promoting decent work for all women and men. Its main aims are to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues.

## **USDA Economic Research Service (ERS)**

The Economic Research Service is a primary source of economic information and research in the US Department of Agriculture. ERS conducts a research program to inform public and private decision making on economic and policy issues involving food, farming, natural resources, and rural development. ERS's highly trained economists and social scientists conduct research, analyze food and commodity markets, produce policy studies, and develop economic and statistical indicators. The agency's research program is aimed at the information needs of USDA, other public policy officials, and the research community. ERS information and analysis is also used by the media, trade associations, public interest groups, and the general public.

## **Academic Institutions**

### **The American University of Beirut (AUB)**

The American University of Beirut is an institution of higher learning founded to provide excellence in education, to participate in the advancement of knowledge through research, and to serve the peoples of the Middle East and beyond. The university bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. It believes deeply in and encourages freedom of thought and expression, and seeks to foster tolerance and respect for diversity and dialogue.

### **The American University in Cairo (AUC)**

The American University in Cairo is committed to teaching and research of the highest caliber, and offers exceptional liberal arts and professional education in a cross-cultural environment. AUC builds a culture of leadership, lifelong learning, continuing education and service among its graduates, and is dedicated to making significant contributions to Egypt and the international community in diverse fields. AUC upholds the principles of academic freedom and is dedicated to excellence.

### **Center for Global Policy**

The Center for Global Policy at George Mason University conducts research on a wide range of global policy issues. Faculty undertakes basic academic research on such topics as foreign trade, democratization and state-building, and transnational networks, and analyze specific policy issues for a variety of government agencies.

### **Pardee Center for International Futures (IF)**

The Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures is the home of long-term forecasting and global trend analysis at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies on the University of Denver campus. The core of the Center's forecasting efforts is the Patterns of Potential Human Progress series. This project produces annual volumes on human development topics, beginning with global poverty reduction, which can be purchased or

downloaded for free. The second published volume, *Advancing Global Education*, can also be purchased or downloaded. Each volume includes tables with long-term country-level forecasts across the various issue areas of the IFs model.

## Other Organizations

### The Aspen Institute [Italy]

The mission of the Aspen Institute Italy is the internationalization of entrepreneurial leadership, political, and cultural life of the country through a free exchange of ideas and different backgrounds to identify and promote values, knowledge, and common interests. The Institute focuses its attention on the problems and challenges of today's politics, economy, culture, and society, with special emphasis on the Italian and international business community.

### Center for Systemic Peace

The Center for Systemic Peace (CSP) is engaged in innovative research on the problem of political violence within the structural context of the dynamic global system, that is, global systems analysis. CSP supports scientific research and quantitative analysis in many issue areas related to the fundamental problems of violence in both human relations and societal development. The focus of CSP research is on the possibilities of complex systemic management of all manner of societal and systemic conflicts. CSP regularly monitors and reports on general trends in societal-system performance, at the global, regional, and state levels of analysis and in the key systemic dimensions of conflict, governance, and (human and physical) development in the sincere belief that the foundation and guarantor of good governance is an active, informed public.

### The Freedom Forum

The Freedom Forum is a nonpartisan foundation dedicated to free press, free speech and free spirit for all people. The foundation focuses on three priorities: the Newseum, First Amendment freedoms, and newsroom diversity. The guiding principles of the Freedom Forum are: Free Press – the freedom to print or broadcast without censorship. Free Speech – the freedom to speak without compromise. Free Spirit – free spirits dream, dare, and do. A free spirit can also be a risk-taker, a visionary, an innovative leader, an entrepreneur or a courageous achiever who accomplishes great things beyond his or her normal circumstances.

### Fund for Peace

The Fund for Peace is an independent, nonpartisan research and educational organization that works to prevent war and alleviate the conditions that cause conflict.

It promotes sustainable security through research, training and education, engagement of civil society, building bridges across diverse sectors, and developing innovative technologies and tools for policy makers.

### **Hollings Center for International Dialogue**

The mission of the Hollings Center is to promote dialogue among citizens of the United States, the nations of the Middle East, North Africa, Southwest Asia, Turkey, and other countries with Muslim-majority populations on issues of shared concern, with the goals of opening or reinforcing channels of communication and deepening mutual understanding. The Center believes that people-to-people dialogue is an essential component of the long-term process of strengthening relations.

### **Institute for Security Studies [South Africa]**

The Institute for Security Studies conceptualizes, informs, and enhances the debate on human security in Africa in order to support policy formulation, implementation, and decision making at all levels.

### **Institut de Presse et des Sciences de l'Information (IPSI) [Tunisia]**

IPSI is a state institution under the Ministry of Higher Education. Its aims are: training journalists and specialists in the field of Information Sciences and communication; participation in the development of scientific research in the fields of Information Sciences and Communication; and organization of training periods and missions related to IPSI's fields of specialization in cooperation with regional, national and international institutions.

### **Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) [Italy]**

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)'s main objective is to promote an understanding of the problems of international politics through studies, research, meetings, and publications, with the aim of increasing the opportunities of all countries to move in the direction of supranational organization, democratic freedom, and social justice.

### **Knight Foundation**

The Knight Foundation is a national foundation with local roots. The Foundation advances journalism in the digital age and invests in the vitality of communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. The Foundation focuses on projects that promote informed, engaged communities and leads to transformational change. It believes that information is a core, community need and seeks to ensure that all citizens get the information they need to thrive in a democracy, and act in their own best interest.

## **The Nieman Fellowship**

The Nieman Fellowship is the oldest and best-known mid-career program for journalists in the world. More than 1,300 journalists from the US and 88 other countries have come to Harvard for a year of learning, exploration, and fellowship. Nieman Fellows are provided the opportunity to step back from deadlines, renew their intellectual curiosity, and enrich their understanding of the topics they cover.

## **The Open Technology Initiative (OTI)**

The Open Technology Initiative Formulates policy and regulatory reforms to support open architectures and open source innovations, and facilitates the development and implementation of open technologies and communications networks. OTI promotes affordable, universal, and ubiquitous communications networks through partnerships with communities, researchers, industry, and public interest groups, and is committed to maximizing the potentials of innovative open technologies by studying their social and economic impacts – particularly for poor, rural, and other underserved constituencies. OTI provides in-depth, objective research, analysis, and findings for policy decision-makers and the general public.

## **Wolfensohn Center for Development**

After five years of rigorous, independent research and analysis, the Wolfensohn Center for Development has concluded its work. During its tenure, the Center did high-quality research on a number of important topics, including how to lift people out of poverty and create a better future for today's youth. Following this successful endeavor, issues of development and global poverty, including foreign aid effectiveness, have been powerfully woven into a host of initiatives across Brookings and in particular, the Global Economy and Development program.

## **Political Risk Firms**

### **Control Risks Group [UK]**

Control Risks is an independent, specialist risk consultancy with 34 offices on five continents. Control Risks enables its clients to succeed in complex or hostile business environments. By applying the right mix of skills and experience, Control Risks enables its clients to pursue their interests wherever in the world they may wish to operate. Since 1975 Control Risks has worked in more than 130 countries for more than 5,000 clients, including more than three quarters of the Fortune 100. Through 34 offices worldwide, Control Risks enables its clients to succeed in complex and hostile environments around the globe.

### **The Economist Intelligence Unit [UK]**

The Economist Intelligence Unit delivers trusted business intelligence and advice to more than 1.5 million decision-makers from the world's leading companies, financial institutions,



governments, and universities. They credit their rigorous and transparent methodology as the principal reason for being one of the world's most trusted sources of research, analysis, and forecasting services. The Economist Intelligence Unit is renowned for the accuracy and consistency of their analytical insight and quantitative forecasts, all sustained by an abiding commitment to objectivity, clarity, and timeliness.

## **Eurasia Group**

The Eurasia Group is the world's leading global political risk research and consulting firm. By providing information and insight on how political developments move markets, the Eurasia Group helps clients anticipate and respond to instability and opportunities everywhere they do business.

## **Oxford Analytica [UK]**

Oxford Analytica is a global analysis and advisory firm, which draws on a macro expert network to advance clients' interests at the intersection of politics and economics, government, and business. Oxford Analytica works closely with corporate clients to identify the key political, economic, legal, and regulatory factors affecting their commercial interests in complex markets, where macro factors often can determine success or failure. For investors and corporations seeking growth and value, Oxford Analytica provides critical macro diligence capabilities that expose hidden risks and reveal unseen opportunities. In their macro analytical capacity, they ensure the strongest foundation for market entry in emerging markets. As macro advisors, they serve their clients in the equally important execution stage, ensuring the strongest long-term foothold in a new market and forging sustainable partnerships with key stakeholders across business and government. For government and institutions, they provide advice and research to complement or benchmark their clients' own findings, from political, economic and social analysis of key state actors, to transnational issues such as trade or demographics.

## **Stirling Assynt [UK/Hong Kong]**

Stirling Assynt provides strategic business intelligence needed to ensure that clients have the depth of information necessary to aid the decision-making process. Their approach is to provide transparency of sourcing and costs, an informal dialogue on all aspects of the work in hand, and easy access to all senior analysts and researchers. Stirling Assynt offers services in: enhanced due diligence, new market entry, and crisis resolution.

## **STRATFOR**

STRATFOR's global team of intelligence professionals provides an audience of decision-makers and sophisticated news consumers in the US and around the world with unique insights into political, economic, and military developments. The company uses human intelligence and other sources combined with powerful analysis based on geopolitics to produce penetrating explanations of world events. This independent, non-ideological content enables users not only to better understand international events, but also to reduce risks and identify opportunities in every region of the globe.

## Appendix IV: Selected Publications, Blogs, and Websites Consulted

### Blogs and Websites

- Ammannet
- April 6 Facebook/blog (in Arabic)
- April 6 Movement
- Arab Barometer Reports
- A Tunisia Girl
- Baheyya
- BahrainOnline.org
- Egyptian Chronicles
- El Shaheed /We are all Khaled Said page
- Global Voices: all of the MENA posts from 2005-2010
- Mahmoud's Den
- Manalaa.net (English and Arabic)
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- Silly Bahraini Girl
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## Appendix V: Insights from the Experts

(Chronological)

“For most of the Arab world, technological change means that they are exposed to a broader variety of views than has ever been true before. As literacy and bandwidth both expand dramatically, publics are exposed to a broad, often unregulated, spectrum of views that range from secular to religious, from nationalist to global, and from material to spiritual. Under the new paradigm, information is demand-driven rather than supply-driven, and the universe of available views is far broader than ever before...One consequence of this is greater political spontaneity. Whereas Arab politics have often been characterized by orchestrated demonstrations of solidarity, anger, sorrow, or joy, the regime’s ability to orchestrate such demonstrations in the future will be greatly diminished. What we are likely to see is a more bottom-up expression of joy or rage.

— Jon Alterman. “The Information Revolution and the Middle East” in *The Future Security Environment in the Middle East: Conflict, Stability, and Political Chance*. RAND, 2004.

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“While I would agree that the political systems in most Arab states today retain a wide variety of powerful tools to sustain the ruling regimes in power, it appears to me as a social scientist that the demographics and the economics in the region are such that those regimes are rubbing up against the limit of their ability to use those tools effectively. I think that, more than anything else this is what has driven liberals in the region and others in the region to discuss questions of reform. ...there is a younger generation of liberals who are not necessarily all journalists and novelists: they are businessmen, they are lawyers, they are doctors and they are parliamentarians.”

— Tamara Cofman Wittes. “Arab Liberalism and Democracy in the Middle East: A Panel Discussion.” [Event transcript]. *Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal*. December 4, 2004.

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Mr. MOHAMMED KAMAL: “Reform is not as easy as the Bush Administration thinks it is. Too much reform, too quick reform might lead to instability. Reform is a risky business.

AMOS: After 24 years of autocratic rule, Mubarak has taken a risk. In February, he called for the first open and direct presidential election in the country’s history, but his party and parliament effectively sets the rules on who can challenge him in September’s election. The guidelines seem to rule out any Islamist candidates, a message, says Moheed Taki of the Ibn Khaldun Center, that Mubarak intends to tightly control the pace of change.

Mr. TAKI: He's always raising the fear of the bogeyman. If you are going to push me too far, too quickly, you will destabilize the area and who are you going to get? You're going to get the Islamists. Do you want the Islamists?

AMOS: This argument was strengthened by recent suicide attacks in Cairo against tourist targets, this one near the Egyptian museum where police tried to seal off the area. Some here believe radical Islamists see this time of political unrest as an opportunity, and that could also set back reforms. Still, Ahmed Galal, an economist with an independent think tank in Cairo, believes change is now inevitable.

Mr. AHMED GALAL (Economist): I do know that there is a democratization process that's taken place over time. Its taken place in all sort of subtle ways that are very hard to see from a distance.

AMOS: Even close up, it's not always clear. On the streets of Cairo, not much has changed. Only a new protest movement has given voice to the anger. Again, Ahmed Galal.

Mr. GALAL: We don't really know how does a country move from a state of authoritarianism to a fully-democratic regime.

AMOS: How Egypt finds the answer to that question matters to the rest of the Middle East.”  
— All Things Considered. *National Public Radio*. Deborah Amos. May 23, 2005.

“Yet the truth is that we can probably not predict with any convincing certainty how ‘democracy’s drama’ would unfold in the Middle East or what broad ramifications it would visit upon the region. If there is a convincing conclusion to be drawn from the rich literature on democracy and international relations, it is that democracy itself can have a dramatically varying impact across different states, strategic contexts, and time periods. The potency of path-dependency in democratic change militates against overly confident prediction – especially at a moment when debate is so vivid over the extent to which the Middle East’s internal politics really are on the brink of meaningful change.”

— Richard Youngs. *Democracy and Security in the Middle East*. FRIDE. March 2006.

“A Revolution is bubbling underneath the shrouds of ignorance. It will not happen overnight, but everyday is a step closer to it.”

— <http://grynprynt.blogspot.com/2006/03/internet-our-printing-press.html>

“Egypt, like much of the Middle East, is a powder keg. An increasingly unpopular regime seeks to hold power at any cost, even if the cost is violent confrontation.”

— Shadi Hamid. “Aiding and Abetting Egyptian Repression” in *The American Prospect*. web commentary. June 6, 2007.

Mr. GHARBIA: “I think it is a big victory. Bloggers are now trying to fill the gap that the mainstream media kept empty. I mean, in Morocco, last three months, there is a video snipe of someone who is shooting video of police officer taken money from auto driver and letting them bypass the road. So – and this videos on YouTube are causing that the Moroccan governments are blocked access to YouTube. And there is new office in the police establishment in Morocco who is following those corrupted police officers, so it is being infused in the political scene inside those countries.

BURBANK: Well, Sami Ben Gharbia, thank you so much for coming on The Bryant Park Project, and talking to us. Your blog – the Fikra blog – is from the Netherlands, and is not quite getting back to Tunisia where you hail from originally, but maybe someday. We’ll put your blog – a link to it up on our blog. Also, he’s the director of advocacy at a group called Globalvoices.com.”

— A Tunisian blogger was interviewed on *NPR*’s “Bryant Park Project” October 18, 2007.

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“Egypt is now at a real turning point, and more ripe for change than at any time in the past.... we have to move to the confrontation stage...It’s no longer any use begging for our rights by appealing to the regime, because it will not listen. But if a million Egyptians went out into the streets in protest or announced a general strike...the regime would immediately heed the people’s demands.”

— Excerpt from Egyptian novelist Alaa El-Aswany’s Arabic-language columns in Cairo’s *Al-Dustur* and *Al-Shorouk* newspapers February 2008.

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KENYON: “For Egypt’s poor, it’s not just the indignity of the bread lines – cooking oil is up, rice and oil and meat has long been a luxury item. The local press is filled with stories of how the economic crisis is affecting people. Civil servants are now depending on bribes to make ends meet, young men are extorting protection money from small shops. One report even claims the crisis is causing Egyptians to lose their legendary sense of humor.

The pain is spreading around the region. In Tunisia and Morocco, where dissent is not tolerated, police have been deployed recently to quell food protests. In oil-rich Saudi Arabia, boycott campaigns spreading out to protest the soaring cost of staple foods. Poor people in Yemen are reportedly spending more than a quarter of their income on bread.

Food experts are warning that prices are likely to stay high in the near term and social unrest could turn into violence.”

— Peter Kenyon. *National Public Radio*. April 17, 2008.

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“The people are feeling that they are suppressed and can’t take it any longer. They are so angry and pissed off this government and regime... The people can’t take it any more from this government or this regime.”

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— Zeinobia. *Egyptian Chronicles*. August 2008.

“Western and regional analysts say in general, these governments have been right to make security a priority in the face of al-Qaeda threat, but they wonder if the repression that has resulted is sowing the seeds of future unrest that could prove every bit as destabilizing as a terror campaign.”

— *National Public Radio*. “All Things Considered” Peter Kenyon reported on August 13, 2008 that the anti-terrorism measures in North Africa were eroding civil rights.

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“When it happens, it will rock the world, at least briefly: octogenarian Hosni Mubarak, President of the largest Arab country for over a quarter century, will leave office, either by his own decision or that of Providence, probably within the next three years. So far, few in the West have paid much attention. But Egyptians certainly are getting ready, and we should do so as well. The question is not so much one of stability. Few expect a succession in Egypt to be violent.”

— Michelle Dunne. “A Post-Pharaonic Egypt?” *The American Interest*. October 2008.

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“Islamic extremism is no longer the most important, interesting, or dynamic force in the Middle East... in the early twenty-first century, a budding culture of change is instead imaginatively challenging the status quo – and even the extremists. New public voices, daring publications and increasingly noisy protests across two dozen countries are giving shape to a vigorous, if disjointed, trend.”

— Robin Wright. *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East*. 2008. p. 24.

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“Web sites and blogs have become the twenty-first century chroniclers of policy crackdowns, human-rights abuses and election irregularities. In countries where I once sought out clandestine cells, I now also look for computer nerds, now known as ‘pyjamahedeem’ (pajama warriors) in Arabic slang.”

— Robin Wright. *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East*. 2008. p. 26.

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“Protests and strikes have proliferated in a way that Egypt has not seen since 1952... Revolution is a stage a society goes through at a certain moment, when everything becomes liable to ignite... We are definitely at such a stage... the old status quo is no longer tenable or acceptable, and change is inevitably on its way.”

— Excerpt from Egyptian novelist Alaa El-Aswany’s Arabic-language columns in Cairo’s *Al-Dustur* and *Al-Shorouk* newspapers, March 2009.

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“Egypt will not be the same by the end of 2011.”

— Abdul Halim Kandil on April 6 Youth Movement Facebook page. March 31, 2009.

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“Egypt has witnessed an explosion in the blogosphere, with thousands of Egyptians, both citizens and trained journalists alike, providing information and analysis and pushing the limits of what the government will tolerate.”

— Paula Schriefer. Director of Advocacy, Freedom House, Remarks prepared for delivery to the Tom Lantos Congressional Human Rights Commission. May 7, 2009.

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“The relative liberalization of some Arab regimes, and their greater reluctance to use deadly force against striking nationals or other domestic demonstrators, may have turned some protests in an inward, rather than anti-American direction.”

— David Pollock with Cole Bunzel and Curtis Cannon. “Actions, Not Just Attitudes: A New Paradigm for U.S.-Arab Relations” Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Policy Focus #104. June 2010.

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“... Events over the course of the past five years have done much to undermine the pervasive sense of fear that runs through Egyptian society despite the leadership’s best efforts to reestablish its deterrent. It is entirely possible that Egyptians – like the millions of Iranians who turned out into the streets to protest rigged elections in June 2009 – would rally around a charismatic figure armed with an attractive alternative vision of society. Under these circumstances, it is not at all clear that Egypt’s commanders...or their conscripts would have the fortitude to kill large numbers of demonstrators.”

— Steven A. Cook. “Political Instability in Egypt” Council on Foreign Relations Press. CPA Contingency Planning Memorandum, No. 4. August 2009.

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“At a closer look, however, the socio-economic situation appears neither as uniformly positive nor as sustainable as it is usually portrayed...Youth unemployment is on the rise...corruption and patronage are rampant...Popular discontent is also growing stronger, leading young people increasingly to turn to radical ideologies, and raising the possibility of a popular uprising. The recent social unrest over unemployment, corruption, and lack of equal opportunities in the southern mining region of Gafsa, for instance, has revealed the extent of rage within both the workers’ movement and the wider population...According to activists, the desperation in the south, which led to the Gafsa uprising is present

everywhere... insofar as socio-economic development is unsustainable and inequalities are on the rise, it is questionable how long this will last.”

— Kristina Kausch. *Tunisia: The Life of Others*. FRIDE, Project on Freedom of Association in the Middle East and North Africa. Working Paper no. 85, July 2009.

“Openly debating who should rule the country and how they obtain this power is now a defining feature of the political landscape... This does not mean that Egypt’s citizens are on the cusp of choosing who rules them. Not soon, and not for some time to come, alas.”

— *Baheyya*. August 15, 2009.

“The upsurge of workers’ protests which began in 2004 and continued into 2010 has been the most powerful movement for democracy in Egypt in more than half a century.”

— *Justice for All: The Struggle for Workers’ Rights in Egypt*. Report by the Solidarity Center, February, 2010. pps. 122-23.

“Conditions in Egypt have reached rock bottom...the reality is likely to produce an explosion at any moment...”

— Excerpt from Egyptian novelist Alaa El-Aswany’s Arabic-language columns in Cairo’s *Al-Dustur* and *Al-Shorouk* newspapers, May 2010.

“With or without El Baradei, Mubarak’s reign will soon be over. The West, with great stakes in Egypt as a regional power hub, would be well advised to forge new alliances before it is too late.”

— Kristina Kausch. “Why the West Should Relinquish Mubarak.” FRIDE. May 4, 2010.

“Despite Ben Ali’s best efforts to conceal his government’s dishonest methods to silence and quash dissent, the carefully crafted façade of ‘modern, democratic, and moderate’ Tunisia is coming apart at the seams.”

— Rasha Moumnieh. “The Myth of Moderate Tunisia.” *ForeignPolicy.com*, May 6, 2010.

“The regime [Egypt] – consisting of the traditional bureaucracy, neo-liberal technocratic ministers, state security, business cronies loyal to Gamal, and a military less loyal to him – has become too large to function as a unitary actor. The one thing keeping the lid on is Hosni Mubarak.

— Shadi Hamid. “Can’t We All Just Get Along?” *Foreign Policy*. June 2, 2010.



“Political talk in Egypt has always been acidly cynical, but now a new bitterness has crept in. This has not been prompted by any change from above, since little has really changed in Egyptian politics since President Hosni Mubarak came to office 29 years ago. The sour mood is informed instead by the contrast between rising aspirations and enduring hardships; by a growing sense of alienation from the state; and by the unease of anticipation as the end of an era inevitably looms ever closer...

Nevertheless, the expectation of a seismic shift is almost tangible in the air, and not just because of Mr. Mubarak’s health. Egyptians may be renowned for being politically passive, but the rising generation is very different from previous ones. It is better educated, highly urbanized, far more exposed to the outside world and much less patient. Increasingly, the whole structure of Egypt’s state, with its cumbersome constitution designed to disguise one-man rule, its creaky centralized administration, its venal, brutal and unaccountable security forces and its failure to deliver such social goods as decent schools, health care or civic rights, look out of kilter with what its people want.

For some time Egyptian commentators have been noting resemblances between now and the years before Egypt’s previous seismic shift. That happened in 1952...

This time may just be different. The country now faces three main possibilities. It could go the way of Russia, and be ruled by a new strongman from within the system. It might, just possibly, go the way of Iran, and see that system swept away in anger. Or it could go the way of Turkey, and evolve into something less brittle and happier for all concerned.”

— Max Rodenbeck. *Economist*. July 15, 2010.

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“We must face the fact that all the new media, and hundreds of thousands of young bloggers from Morocco to Iran have not triggered a single significant or lasting change in Arab or Iranian political culture. Not a single one. Zero.”

— Rami Khouri. *International Herald Tribune*. July 22, 2010.

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“... the surprisingly positive reaction of Egyptian citizens to the seven-point initiative of El Baradei – which would make real political contestation legitimate ... – suggests that the idea is gaining ground among the public...if citizens on a large scale start acting as though they want and deserve open political contestation, we are looking at big change. And if that happens, the United States will have some tough choices to make about whether it values more its friendship with the regime or with the people of Egypt.”

— Michele Dunne. “Can Egypt Change?: Reviewing a Decade of Changes” *Foreign Policy*. July 23, 2010.

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“...There is, today, a critical mass for substantive change. The lines between economic and political reform are increasingly blurred, replaced by an enveloping sense that too much has gone wrong for too long. ...Egypt’s ruling elites have become almost comically out of touch with their own people. While they continue emphasizing their economic bona fides

to the few who still care to listen, their own citizens are angry, growing angrier, and – more importantly – doing something about it.”

— Shadi Hamid. “In Egypt, Mubarak’s Regime May Be a Victim of Its Own Success” *The National*. July 29, 2010.

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“Many in Egypt’s entrenched military elite will not easily agree to surrender control to a civilian president with no credentials to lead country and army...A military coup is rather unlikely, as the army is loyal to Mubarak and keen to keep current arrangements in place. This may change, however, if the prospective succession outcome were to endanger the military elite’s considerable rents and prerogatives.”

— Kristina Kausch. *Managed Successions and Stability in the Arab World*. FRIDE, Working Paper No.104. November 2010.

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“Western elites didn’t understand, or perhaps refrained from accepting, that the multiplication of political parties and elections in Iraq and Afghanistan has unleashed the dreams of the youth and women around the region... we haven’t realized... that mere debates about a possible democracy in the region have triggered unprecedented liberal narratives in the Gulf, the Maghreb and beyond.”

— From Walid Phares. *The Coming Revolution*. 2010, p. 2.

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“Egyptians are awakening to this reality and demonstrating creative outlets of resistance. Understanding that no one will bring change to Egypt but Egyptians themselves, many regime opponents are working for change at great personal risk. Indeed, several opposition groups are coalescing around the rejection of father-to-son succession, out of a concern that an undemocratic transition will allow Egypt’s authoritarianism to deepen, weakening the country domestically and internationally. Egypt’s ailing infrastructure and aging institutions and leadership are juxtaposed against an increasingly bold media, unprecedented youth connectivity through new media, and rising expectations prompted by economic growth, all of which are creating opportunities for change, but also possible instability. In a report earlier this year on Egypt’s growing labor activism, the Solidarity Center, which promotes the rights of workers worldwide, noted that “workers’ protests, strikes, sit-ins, and various types of job actions have reached a crescendo, becoming daily, weekly, and monthly events threatening the stability of Egypt’s economy and social structure, and without doubt having an effect on the political regime.”— Dina Guirguis. “Political Change in Egypt: A Role for the United States?.” Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Policy Watch #1719. November 18, 2010.

“Sectarian conflicts are among several other issues – economic dissatisfaction, police brutality and torture, and public safety problems – souring the attitude of Egyptians toward the government and keeping the internal situation at a simmer, if not a boil. A parliamentary election seen by Egyptians as having been stolen will turn the temperature up another notch.”

—Michele Dunne. “Opaque and Messy Elections” *Carnegie Commentary*. November 29, 2010.

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“While the Egyptian regime is escalating its crackdown on political opposition, Internet and Facebook activism provide an alternative space for newly emerging civil society groups and political forces to operate. Growing dissent movements are planning nationwide grassroots organizing to peacefully mobilize against Mubarak and his party in the upcoming presidential elections.”

—Sherif Mansour. “Egypt’s ‘Facebook Revolution,’ Kefaya, and the struggle for democracy and good governance (2008-ongoing).” May 2010. *International Center for Nonviolent Conflict* [Updated December 2010].

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“It would be misleading to say that Egypt is ‘on the brink’ – as several experts have recently claimed – although it may be... In opting to wipe out its opposition, and with such lack of subtlety, it has made a major and potentially debilitating miscalculation. The regime has lost whatever legitimacy it had left. More importantly, however, it has breathed new life into what was just one month ago an aimless, fractious opposition that couldn’t agree on whether or not to boycott the elections.”

—Shadi Hamid. “Egypt Election ‘Blunder’ by Mubarak’s NDP.” *BBC News*. December 2, 2010.

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**THE MOMENTOUS EVENTS** sweeping the Arab world since late 2010 raise important questions about the art and science of analyzing political and societal events. In an age of information surplus, which creates the illusion that one can easily know what is happening anywhere in the world, big surprises still occur. Societies change, governments make choices that have consequences, and the political life of a country or a region is transformed.

For analysts in and out of governments, the upheaval in the Middle East lends itself to reflections about how regional experts with deep knowledge of the Middle East and those who use distinct political science or other methodologies to understand processes of change, fared in their assessments of the likelihood of change.

In early 2011, the Stimson Center invited a group of experts who represented distinct non-governmental institutional perspectives to look back on the work of these sectors and evaluate how they looked at prospects for change in the Middle East. The sectors included: university scholars and international organizations, think tanks, democracy and human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs), journalists, social media, and private business. The result was *Seismic Shift*.



**Ellen Laipson** was the Project Director for this study. As President and CEO, she leads the Stimson Center, and also directs its Southwest Asia project, which focuses on security issues in the Gulf region. Prior to joining Stimson, Laipson served in government for 25 years, and held senior positions in the National Intelligence Council (NIC), the National Security Council, the US Department of State, and the Library of Congress. In late 2009, President Obama named Laipson to the President's Intelligence Advisory Board.

**The Stimson Center** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan institution devoted to enhancing international peace and security through a unique combination of rigorous analysis and outreach. Stimson's approach is pragmatic – geared toward providing policy alternatives, solving problems, and overcoming obstacles to a more peaceful and secure world.

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