The Security Implications
of the Arab Spring

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GCSP

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The Geneva Centre for Security Policy

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About the Author

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the implications that the 'Arab spring' has for the security of states and individuals in Europe and North America as core parts of the 'West'. It first discusses potential challenges which emanate from the foreign policies of Arab governments that in different ways respond to recent protests and the processes of political change that they have initiated. Reflecting concerns of their main constituencies, the new governments in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya may increasingly, though probably moderately, question aspects of the current international order, in particular global inequalities and Western policies towards Israel and Iran. Conversely, many governments that so far managed to resist change (with Syria as a notable exception) are likely to focus on Iran and its allies as a major perceived threat and may complicate the dispassionate search for common ground. More generally, Western policy makers will have to take into account that security perceptions among Arab states will increasingly diverge. The paper then discusses challenges that directly emanate from the continued or increasing weakness of the Arab states that manifests itself in terms of state capacities including the monopoly of the means of coercion, policy delivery and related discontent, and even state disintegration. It argues that diverging interests and concerns between the 'West' and the new Arab governments are manageable if analysed independently of received wisdoms. This also applies to Islamists currently in government but not necessarily to all Islamists. Threats associated with weak and collapsing states ranging from dangers to the environment to areas dominated by organized crime and terrorists need to be addressed by patient, long term attempts at state building and reconciliation; these should be based on power sharing arrangements strengthened by capacity building and inclusive social and economic development.

Introduction

From late 2010, largely peaceful mass protests have spread from Tunisia to most other Arab countries and prompted considerable political change referred to as the 'Arab spring'. In spite of various differences the protests expressed long standing popular grievances such as growing socio-economic inequalities. Closely related to policies of selective economic liberalization they were exacerbated since 2008 by the increase in world food prices and the (nonetheless mitigated) effects of the global financial crisis. At the same time, the unaccountable rulers and their crony capitalist associates continued to exclude even upwardly mobile beneficiaries of these policies from political participation and access to lucrative markets. Within months, presidents Zine al-Abidin Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt resigned, the former after some twenty five, the latter after thirty years in office. Colonel Muammar al-Qadhafi of Libya was lynched in public after his attempts to repress protests resulted in fighting and NATO intervention. President Ali Abdallah Salih of Yemen also put up resistance but then resigned. In Syria, the harsh repression of initially peaceful protests has by now developed into a fully fledged war. Even in the largely quiet oil monarchies in the Gulf, tensions rose as discontent repeatedly led to public protests. Demonstrations took place in parts of Saudi Arabia and developed into a sustained popular movement in Bahrain that lingers on in spite of heavy repression. Arab regimes have not been transformed or challenged to a similar extent ever since the 'socialist' revolutions of the 1950s and 60s had brought down the monarchies of Egypt and Iraq alongside the parliamentary republic in Syria[1].

Popular contestation, responses by the ruling regimes and ensuing political dynamics in the Middle East and North Africa have a number of security implications. Contested as it is, the concept of security focuses on the protection of individual or collective actors from physical harm and from threats to other attributes of their existence ranging from accustomed ways of life to prosperity and self determination. Notions like 'personal' or 'national security' define security with regard to different types of actors. In contrast, the overarching concept of human security covers a wide array of (economic, physical, environmental, etc) threats

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1   El-Meehy 2011, Gelvin 2012, Kienle 2012a, 2012b, Lynch et al 2011

that humans may encounter as individuals or members of social units including states. Attempts to find arrangements that guarantee the security of all have frequently failed to prevent actors from defining their own security in the light of their respective position, interests and concerns with only little regard for their counterparts. By implication, definitions of security may collide with one another, and the security sought by one actor may threaten that of another[2].

The present contribution will primarily discuss implications for the security of Europe and North America as core parts of the so-called 'West' or 'global North' and for its habitants. Rather than engaging with the vast literature on the subject (e.g. Cordesman / Yarosh 2012) it will focus on two types of security challenges, perceived or real: the ones emanating from the foreign policies pursued by Arab governments in the wake of the 'spring', and the others emanating from their domestic policies and broader transformations within Arab countries that disappoint popular expectations, weaken state capacity or even lead to state disintegration.

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2   Booth 2007, Buzon 1983, Buzon et al. 1998, UNDP 1994

ARAB FOREIGN POLICIES SINCE 2011

The new regimes in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt

In spite of a number of foreign policy continuities reflecting to strategic priorities shared by key political actors of different political persuasions the advent of new ruling coalitions in Tunisia and Libya and the substantial reconfiguration of the old ruling coalition in Egypt have led to the partial redefinition of foreign policy priorities and security concerns (for accounts of events and developments, see: CE for reports by the Carnegie Endowment and ICG for reports by International Crisis Group referred to below).

Continuities are particularly striking in Egypt where the new ruling coalition of Muslim Brothers (MB) and military officers no less than the Mubarak regime and its predecessors emphasize the country's strategic location and its vocation to be a regional power able and entitled to influence Arab and African affairs. Neither ambitions to broker a lasting agreement between Hamas and Fatah in Palestine nor attempts to influence events in the broader area of the Nile Valley have been abandoned since the departure of President Mubarak. Under the rule of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) the military, security and foreign policy establishments continued earlier policies that have been largely endorsed by Muhammad Morsi after he became president. As a Muslim Brother, he may harbor greater sympathies for Hamas than his predecessor but he seems aware of the need to accommodate the interests of both Fatah and Israel.

Nonetheless, the debate on foreign policy and security concerns is influenced by the Islamists who garnered a plurality of votes in the elections to representative bodies in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011 and 2012 (the constituent assembly in Tunisia and both chambers in Egypt, even though the lower house has been dissolved) and a short absolute majority in the presidential elections in Egypt. In Libya, the Alliance of National Forces defeated the local MB in the 2012 elections but advocates policies that in many domains resemble those of declaredly Islamist parties and groups. To an extent, the debate is also influenced by parties left of the centre who did relatively well in the elections in Tunisia. These parties see

Europe and North America as close allies of old regimes with little interest in the general welfare of Arab countries. Initial European responses to the 'Arab spring' only confirmed their impression; lukewarm at best, they even included an offer to prop up Tunisian police forces repressing protests. Especially the left sees Europe and North America as defenders of an unjust global economic order that generates social injustice in the southern hemisphere; for their part, the Islamists emphasize the alleged moral corruption of the 'West' that subverts the religious and social values they consider Islamic. Uncontrolled exchanges with the global North such as trade, aid, investment and communications threaten economic security in the eyes of the ones and moral security in the eyes of the others. Accordingly, both sides consider foreign funded civil society organizations as Trojan horses that further the interests of their sponsors and threaten political independence. No doubt, such perceptions and attitudes have already been common before the 'Arab spring' as crony capitalist autocracies sought to influence economic reforms in their own favor, continue to dominate local economies, and legitimate their action through moral and religious conservatism. At least in Egypt such perceptions have also been widely shared by the military and security establishments who under Mubarak repeatedly tried to limit the scope of economic liberalization and foreign investment; after his departure they launched the most concerted attack ever on foreign funded NGOs. However, after the fall from political grace of business circles closely wedded to international capitalism these views have a greater impact on policy than before.

Similarly, the new forces associated with the exercise of power seek to revisit relations with the allies and adversaries of Europe, in particular Israel and Iran. In all Arab countries political forces left of the center and Islamists have for long been highly critical of Israeli policies towards the Palestinians. At the same time, many Islamists perceive Iran as less of a threat than did the old regimes, even though the growing Sunni – Shi'i divide often mitigates sympathies and overtures. Policy changes vis-à-vis Israel and Iran remain however limited because of the constraints posed by the international balance of power, the related need to accommodate 'Western' concerns, and the continued importance of local political actors such as the Egyptian military who favor the status quo.

In Egypt, President Morsi will have to take into account the interests of the military establishment even though in August 2012 he retired a number of key officers including the chairman of SCAF and long time defense minister Muhammad Husayn al-Tantawi and the chief of staff Sami Anan. Highly visible, the two officers were widely identified with the increasing loss of legitimacy that SCAF suffered among the general public and lower ranking officers. Their replacement

partly repairs the reputation of the military establishment and allows it to return unharmed to the backstage of politics from where it had furthered its interest with success over the past decades. This all the more as their successors, Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi and Sidki Subhi, were appointed from among the remaining SCAF members. Whether through SCAF or otherwise, the officers will continue to seek for Egypt the role of a regional power, for its armed forces substantial US military aid, and for themselves material privileges and entitlements. The priviledges they obtain under the new constitution drafted by the Islamists only confirms this view. Currently irreplaceable, US military aid including knowledge and technology transfers is the backbone of any Egyptian attempt to project power regionally, even though it limits the exercise of such power to policy options acceptable to the US. For the officers this involves an accommodation with Israel whose existence, security and indeed regional military supremacy they consider a non-negotiable US objective. Openly questioning the 1979 peace treaty and status quo with Israel would endanger the security and welfare of Egypt, including their own. Conversely, a rapprochement with Iran would never work out in Egypt's interest simply because Iran is a regional competitor, possibly more attractive to some Arabs than Israel and therefore more dangerous.

The latter argument seems to be shared by many Islamists who otherwise seek to improve relations with Iran. Rather than to operate a complete realignment they attempt to build bridges that would allow them to selectively mobilize their relations with Iran as a resource to obtain as many concessions as possible from the 'West' and possibly Russia. Finally, a realignment would endanger substantial transfers of funds from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to Egypt, including transfers directly beneficial to Islamist actors. Even in the absence of international sanctions and other economic challenges Iran would hardly be in a position to replace such support, partly because its hydrocarbon revenues need to be distributed among a much larger domestic population.

At any rate, Egyptian policies on the ground have not much changed so far. The presidential candidate who most talked about 'tearing up' the peace treaty with Israel was the 'secularist' Amr Musa, not Morsi. Before and after his election Morsi repeatedly promised that Egypt would respect all international treaties it had signed. Restrictions for Palestinians from Gaza to cross into Egypt at Rafa have only partly been eased. The attack at the checkpoint, which in early August 2012 left sixteen Egyptian border guards dead, not only offered Morsi the opportunity to dismiss Tantawi and Anan; it also prompted him to publicly assume responsibility for military action against the various armed groups that had already been active in the Sinai for years. Under Morsi's command, Egyptian armed

forces and police killed dozens of alleged terrorists and criminals and destroyed tunnels linking Gaza to the Sinai. Egypt may have failed to respect the letter of the peace treaty with Israel when it sent its tanks into Sinai this time, but neither the number of vehicles nor the location of their intervention can be construed as a threat to Israel. Rather, Israeli reservations pertain to questions of procedure that could constitute a precedent and influence the possible partial renegotiation of the treaty. Earlier activities of armed groups in the Sinai had halted Egyptian exports of natural gas to Israel because of the damage they caused to the pipeline; they also led to a crisis in bilateral relations when Israeli troops chasing intruders from the Sinai killed Egyptian soldiers by mistake. The Israeli embassy in Cairo remains closed to the public since demonstrators tried to enter and occupy it under the early days of SCAF rule. However, attempts seem to be under way to find new premises that are easier to protect than the old offices in central Giza. Diplomatic relations have not improved from the low they had already reached under Mubarak but Egypt helped Israel and Hamas to reach a ceasefire in November 2012. Like his predecessors, Morsi will have to square the circle of pleasing the United States while appeasing a public exasperated by Israeli policies towards the Palestinians. Nor have relations with Iran much improved. While in September 2012 Morsi attended the non aligned summit in Tehran, he strongly criticized president Bachar al Assad, Iran's major ally, for waging a war against his own people.

Pragmatic polices may nonetheless go hand in hand with more radical rhetoric which in turn may push foreign actors to reassess relations with Egypt. The MB in Egypt and their political party, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), remain internally divided into various trends and factions, not all of them as accommodating as President Morsi. The current MB leaders occasionally failed to carry along followers impressed by more simplistic slogans. In particular before elections, the leaders may want to play to their gallery, be it only to defeat their Islamist competitors in the Salafi parties[3]. Under such circumstance external actors such as the US Congress may cut aid, impose sanctions, and ultimately push Egypt into a more far reaching redefinition of its foreign policy. One may think of the 1950s when the US viewed Nasser's Arab nationalist rhetoric as a sign of communist leanings, blocked World Bank funding for the construction of the Aswan dam, pushed Nasser to nationalize the Suez Canal, and thus contributed to the 1956 Suez war[4].

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3   Brown 2011, Brown 2012, Ottoway/Muasher 2012

4   Waterbury 1983

Such bilateral estrangement may also create tension between the MB and the military, as may domestic policies that challenge the role and convictions of the latter; in particular policies of economic liberalization that challenge military owned companies or even replace civilian crony capitalists close to the Mubarak regime with crony capitalists from among the MB would fuel such tensions.

The Impact of Islamism and its Limits

Though probably obvious to many readers it may be useful to restate that the mere advent of Islamist rulers or the growing importance of Islamist actors does not in itself amount to a security challenge. Islamists defined as actors who consider that human conduct should be governed entirely by Islamic law (shari'a) are as diverse as the interpretations of Islamic law. As there is no central generally recognized doctrinal authority in Islam (even though some institutions like al-Azhar in Egypt put claim to such a role) numerous religious scholars ('ulama) feel entitled to interpret religion and religious commandments including those concerning public life and the organization of the community. Even among the Shi'is where religious hierarchies are far more pronounced than among Sunnis there are several dozens of scholars able and entitled to authoritatively interpret religious law. More importantly, Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brothers or Salafi parties are largely lay movements that frequently challenge truths handed down by established religious authorities. Consequently, Islamists like Muslims in general hold a wide variety of views on the norms that should govern private and public life and inform domestic and foreign policies. They differ as widely as to the means that may be used to pursue political ends. Some of them advocate violence, but so do advocates of other religious or political causes. No less importantly, Muslims act no more in line with such norms than do non-Muslims. As conduct may differ from commandment, Islam is what Muslims make of it[5].

No doubt, once in power Islamists may redefine the norms governing private and public life in ways that are only acceptable to them but not to others, be they non-Muslims or Muslims. This may entail privileges for Muslims and men (vis-à-vis non-Muslims and women) and the prohibition of alcoholic drinks. However, policies based on such norms and their effects do not ipso facto amount to a security challenge to other countries or their citizens. Migration prompted by normative intolerance is primarily a challenge to the security of the migrants; depending on circumstances and perception receiving countries may even see it as a source of additional capital and talent. Nor are the effects of such policies fun-

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5   Boubakeur/Roy 2012, Brown 2012

damentally different from those of discriminatory or repressive measures taken by non Islamist rulers. In Iraq, the secular Saddam Hussein massacred Kurds, and Christians in the former Yugoslavia massacred Muslims.

A related question is whether Islamists will accept the principles of democratic government once they are elected or whether they will attempt to transform electoral victory into permanent authoritarian rule[6]. In line with wide spread (but questionable) assumptions about the affinity between democracy and international peace the authoritarian turn of elected Islamist governments might then develop into a new security challenges for their neighbors. Valid as it is, the question whether elected leaders at a later stage will relinquish power needs to be raised with regard to all actors, not only Islamists. So far the democratic credentials of all parties in the newly participatory polities are equally untested and hypothetical. At any rate, the question to ask is not whether individuals or groups are democrats; the question to ask is whether checks and balances and therefore counter powers are put in place to prevent one group to lastingly monopolize power. Contrary to a common misconception, democracy is not the product of democrats but democrats are produced by democracy. Democracy is a mechanism to manage conflict among actors unable to defeat each other or wishing to survive possible defeat[7].

Finally, there are concerns that Islamists in Arab countries might support the Islamic republic of Iran or otherwise unite against the 'West', for instance in a new 'caliphate' encompassing all Muslims. However, strong or vast alliances of this sort are unlikely for several reasons. First, the various Islamist regimes may agree on the need to reorganize private and especially public life in line with 'Islamic' norms but they often disagree on how to define these norms. Such disagreements are likely to be reinforced by the Sunni-Shi'i divide that for reasons of interests and perception rather than doctrinal differences separates most Arabs from most Iranians. Second, even ideological (and thus religious) proximity alone hardly prompts interstate cooperation. The various Arab nationalist regimes in Iraq, Syria and Egypt in the 1950s and 60s quibbled continuously, the People's Republic of China and the former Soviet Union went to war, and until the end of World War One the various Catholic monarchies in Europe frequently fought each other. Strategic and economic interests indeed differ widely, be it only that oil importers like Morocco and Tunisia cannot agree with oil exporters like Iran and Libya on the price of the barrel. Hamas' search for Islamist support in Egypt and Tunisia is at least partly an attempt (supported by Qatar) to reach out to the US that entertain good working relations with MB and al-Wahda.

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6   Brumberg et al. 2003

7   Rueschemeyer et al.1992, Luciani/Salamé 1994

Foreign policy coordination among Islamist regimes of the MB variety will probably focus on more or less effective attempts to reduce global inequalities in their own favor. Islamists by and large hold that the international economic and political order has been dominated and shaped to their advantage by non Muslim Europe and North America, and more generally by the OECD countries. Historically as well, the rise and fortunes of Islamism were intimately linked to the (sometimes complex, delayed and diffuse) effects of direct and indirect 'Western' domination of countries with a Muslim majority population. Since the foundation of the MB in Egypt in 1928 Islamists have ultimately sought to build a better future for Muslims that would be determined by themselves and their own values rather than those imposed by external forces. Similar to the Arab nationalist regimes in the 1950s and 60s Islamists will try to catch up in economic terms with the 'developed' countries, a policy that may lead to various conflicts of interest. For the reasons already mentioned, such coordination could however easily exclude major hydrocarbon producing countries. Simultaneously, Islamist rhetoric used to legitimate foreign policy coordination among Islamist regimes would scare off potential non Islamist and non Muslim allies in the global South and prevent such coordination from developing into a broad based international alliance to reduce inequalities between the North and the South[8].

Policy coordination among Islamists and their activities more generally pose quite different security challenges where the actors concerned are motivated less by leveling the global playing field than by resentment over perceived past and present discrimination against Muslims. This is the case of many terrorist groups and of actors who, in reaction to Satanic Verses, Danish cartoons or video clips attack individuals, property and symbols associated with the 'West' including embassies and schools. Without condoning such activities 'Western' foreign and security policies need to take into account their origins in a historically shaped view of the world where Muslims are dominated by non-Muslims.

The Surviving Old Regimes

Changing attitudes towards Israel and Iran in more participatory political systems contrast with the policies of the authoritarian regimes that so far weathered the Arab spring relatively unscathed. In particular, the GCC monarchies increasingly consider Iran as a major threat to their welfare, stability and even survival. In

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8   Brown 2012, Boubakeur/Roy 2012, Kienle 2001, Zubaida 2011

their eyes Iran seeks to establish itself as the dominant regional power and a major global player. Iranian expansionism could endanger their capacity to export hydrocarbons by sea. In the absence of alternative routes, this would seriously affect income from rent on which depend their economies, their capacity to buy social peace and thus their domestic stability. In actual fact, they already see Iran behind popular unrest at home, in particular among Shi'i inhabitants. The Gulf monarchies no doubt remain critical of Israel's policies towards the Palestinians. However, in need of continuous US military support they content themselves with occasional statements and attempts to revive the Saudi inspired Arab peace plan of 2002 (in which the Arab states declared their readiness to recognize Israel in exchange for the creation of a Palestinian state). To an extent, many in the Gulf see Israel as an undeclared strategic ally against Iran, albeit an uncontrollable one whose action, especially military, may also seriously backfire. Divided on Iran, GCC policy makers will have to act through, or in line with, the US, be it only for their own lack of military and political resources. The exacerbation of their conflict with Iran, that could also result from Israeli military action, could endanger oil and gas exports from the Gulf. Historically, such dangers have however been circumscribed.

For the Gulf monarchies, and indeed all other surviving Arab autocracies containing Israel presently is a lesser concern than containing the effects of the Arab spring. The only exception is their measured support for the Syrian opposition which, however, they primarily view as a means to roll back Iranian influence. Largely dominated by Alawis whose faith historically developed out of Shi'ism, the Syrian regime already under former president Hafez al-Assad built an alliance with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The initial aim was to contain Iraq rather than to build a 'Shi'i arc'. Consequently, Syria in the 1980s Iraq-Iran war supported Tehran against Baghdad, much to the annoyance of all other Arab states including the Gulf monarchies who already felt threatened by Iran. Another Syrian concern was to re-establish a strategic parity of sorts with Israel at a time when Cairo and Jerusalem sought a peaceful solution to their conflict. Apart from Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon and – Sunni – Hamas in Palestine were supposed to be instrumental in this regard. After inheriting the presidency Bashar al-Assad continued to cultivate the alliances built by his father. Over the years, Syria and its Arab critics increasingly came to stress the identity dimension of their conflict that superficially could be seen as one opposing Shi'is to Sunnis. From mid-March 2011, growing contestation in Syria provided Saudi Arabia, Qatar and more recently the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with an opportunity to unseat a cumbersome adversary. Diplomatic, media, financial and a degree of military support for the Syrian Na-

tional Council, the Free Syrian Army, the new Alliance of Opposition Forces and other groups serve this purpose rather than supporting the Arab spring. For Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, support for the Syrian opposition nonetheless creates a dilemma as it may strengthen the local MB and other Islamist forces in the country, an outcome they would much rather avoid.

In the eyes of the surviving autocracies, the stakes today are similar to those in the famous 'Arab Cold War' that in the 1950s and 60s pitted the conservative monarchies against the revolutionary regimes of Gamal Abd al-Nasser in Egypt and the Ba'this in Syria and Iraq[9]. No doubt, the new regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya do not attempt to export their 'revolution' as did the Nasserists and Ba'thists in the old days. However, the success of contestation in these countries may strengthen opposition in the remaining autocracies and this all the more so as they are also rife with socio economic and political discontent. The common language and the, however weakened, idea of a single Arab nation only increase the possibility that protests elsewhere are considered as models to emulate. Unlike their predecessors in the bipolar 1950s and 60s, today's 'revolutionaries' are not supported by a super power hostile to the 'West'; however, for the monarchies in the GCC, Jordan and Morocco it is hardly reassuring that they are at least partly supported by this very 'West'. It is even less reassuring for them that at the same time they attempt to build new bridges with Iran, a country the conservatives already see as an external power more or less as hostile as the old Soviet Union.

So far attempts to contain the effects of the 'Arab spring' entailed overt military action only in Bahrain where troops led by Saudi Arabia helped to put down the protests. Clearly, the GCC umbrella helped to legitimate the intervention to support a fellow monarch. Saudi Arab attempts to back up President Salih and his supporters in Yemen were not entirely pacific but more discrete. In most cases, containment strategies have privileged other forms of repression and the control of communications with external political forces suspected of spreading the revolutionary word.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE are particularly worried about the growing importance of the MB in Egypt and their offsprings in other Arab states like al-Nahda in Tunisia. Unimpressed by their respective independence as organizations they consider them a dangerous alliance of competitors for power. Thus, the Emirates in March 2012 threatened to arrest Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a popular Qatari preacher and MB of Egyptian origin, who criticized the UAE authorities for expelling al-

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9   Kerr 1971

legedly Islamist Syrians critical of Bashar al-Assad. More difficult to verify are the persistent rumors about lavish Saudi Arab and UAE funding for Salafi parties and candidates in the Egyptian elections. Whether provided by the rulers and their families or ordinary nationals, such funds may have helped Salafis, all of them political newcomers, to obtain some twenty percent of the seats in the Egyptian parliament, to split the Islamist vote and to weaken the MB. Saudi Arabia also offers asylum to former Tunisian president Bin Ali. Only Qatar supports the MB, probably in order to counter Saudi Arab influence. Concomitantly, the Gulf monarchies have stepped up nationalist propaganda to create a domestic consensus by emphasizing differences with the outside world and depicting opponents as foreign stooges.

The partly changing foreign policy orientations of Arab states may challenge traditional definitions of security in the 'West'. Increasingly critical attitudes towards Israel adopted by the 'new' regimes and their readiness to explore potential areas of cooperation with Iran will not please the guardians of American and European foreign policy orthodoxy. Nor will increasingly forceful attempts by old regimes to ostracize and combat Shi'i actors dovetail with attempts to find a negotiated solution to the Iranian nuclear issue or to ensure the viability of power sharing arrangements among religious groups in Lebanon and Iraq. In the former case, 'Western' actors may have to reconsider their current position if they want to avoid alienating their Arab neighbors; in the latter case they may disappoint their hydrocarbon allies if they want to maintain a dialogue with Iran. Nor will the surviving old regimes welcome 'Western' policies that more or less explicitly endorse the position of the new regimes.

DISINTEGRATING, WEAKENED AND DISAPPOINTING STATES

Disintegrating States

In several cases, contestation and regime responses (further) reduced state legitimacy and capacity, or even entailed severe domestic conflict and the (further) disintegration of states that in various respects had already been weak before. Internationally-recognized as states and members of the United Nations, each of them no doubt fulfills the minimum requirements of statehood which include a territory, a population and a central government that in theory at least formulates and implements policies concerning the land and the people. However, frequently the borders and therefore the territory of these states are contested not only from without but also within, parts of their population challenge their existence, and the reach of government fails to cover all geographical and policy areas. Put differently, they often lack legitimacy, and sometimes even the monopoly of the means of physical coercion. It is in part such weakness that accounts for their fierceness in terms of repression. They are all territorial states in the sense that they form geographically delineated entities. However, only a very few of them resemble nation-states where the population forms a single imagined community that considers the state as the prime focus of its loyalty. Only Tunisia and Egypt come close to the nation state model but still comprise geographical areas like the Sinai where the authority of the state is heavily contested and policy areas where state capacity remains marginal. Most others are deeply divided along linguistic, religious, regional, tribal, etc, lines and thus into as many identity groups or imagined communities at sub-state level. To complicate matters further, many of these groups stretch into neighboring countries and maintain close cross border relations with their counterparts there[10].

Contestation related to the Arab spring generally developed first among constituencies that felt economically and/or politically disadvantaged or neglected. In territorial states where power and resources often seem to be monopolized by linguistic, religious and other easily identifiable groups, discontent quickly tended to threaten the welfare and security, or simply the privileges, of these

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10   Bromley 1994, Korany 1987, Migdal 1998

very groups. In Libya, contestation began in the Eastern part of the country that considered itself marginalized by the Qadhafi regime. In Syria, protests began in border regions that faced particular challenges and in spite of its propagation remained largely confined to the Sunni Arab majority. In Bahrain, contestation was strongest and most wide-spread among the Shi'i majority that felt dominated by the Sunni rulers and minority (ICG). Contestation thus further weakened the already loose bonds and shaky foundations on which these states had been built. Latent conflict turned into open conflict. The defenders of the status quo no longer only feared but faced its possible collapse.

In Syria, these dynamics have strengthened armed opposition groups that dominate large parts of the country, lay down rules of conduct, requisition resources and adjudicate conflicts of interest. Even though physical violence motivated by mere linguistic or religious difference still remains contained, almost any trust between Alawis and Sunnis seems to have evaporated. In Libya, regional cleavages continue to divide the population even after peaceful elections yielded by and large uncontested results. Issues like the political representation of the three large regions and their constituent parts and their share in hydrocarbon revenues will no doubt divide the members of the new assembly and possibly lead to conflict among the voters who they are supposed to represent[11]. In Yemen, a variety of partly overlapping regional, religious and tribal cleavages is reinforced by the sequels of the 1960s civil war, the subsequent partition of the country and the legacy of its incomplete unification after the end of the Cold War.

Any conflict over the distribution of power and resources over-determined by identity politics may produce political violence similar to what we have seen in Iraq since 2003. Strong loyalties linking populations in collapsing states with parts of the populations in neighboring states make it difficult to contain such violence within state borders. Regime change in Libya has already prompted heavily armed Tuaregs once clientelized by Qadhafi to enter Mali and contributed to its de facto partition in April 2012[12]. Similarly, the conflict between rulers and large parts of the ruled in Syria has deepened the Sunni-Shi'i divide in Lebanon with assassinations in the Akkar and armed confrontations in and around Tripoli and Saida. The coalition government in Beirut may collapse and the ones or the others may once again try and take control of central parts of the capital and the airport; acts of violence like assassinations, kidnappings and skirmishes may proliferate and possible develop into larger fighting.

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11   ICG, Salem/Kodlec 2012

12   Lacher 2012

Whether or not related to open domestic conflict, the collapse of a state easily entails large numbers of internally displaced people and refugees, the destruction of economic resources and remaining or newly built state institutions, and the dissolution of societal bonds necessary for people to live and work together. Apart from broader implications for human security, the disintegration and ultimate 'failure' of a state puts an end to any semblance of the monopoly of the means of physical coercion. Competing armed groups vying for international recognition or support tend to establish or further consolidate control over parts of the territory. Violent conflicts erupt, weapons including weapons of mass destruction circulate without control, and criminal and terrorist groups find abode and allies. The attack against the US consulate in Benghazi in Libya in September 2012 and related events illustrate some of these consequences.

Weakened States

The erosion of the monopoly of the means of physical coercion and more generally of state capacities is a challenge even where states do not fall victim to complete disintegration. The erosion of such capacities may reduce repression and strengthen individual liberties but at the cost of new forms of lawlessness, abuse of the poor and the weak, criminal activities, etc. In parts of Tunisia, for instance, police stations closed down for the night after being attacked by locals unhappy with the pace or forms of change, thus leaving policing in the hands of local notables or strongmen[13]. In Egypt, parts of the Sinai have been increasingly controlled by a variety of groups some of which advocate violence for criminal or political ends. In Upper Egypt the proliferation of firearms is such that the police negotiate with their owners rather than enforce the law. A strong state based on participatory, if possible democratic, government, accountability and the rule of law is no doubt a more effective remedy for repression than a weak state.

Similar to authoritarian rule, declining state capacities marginalize, disenfranchise or victimize individuals and groups who as a result may stage protests, take matters into their own hands or emigrate. Where protests or regime responses are not peaceful the dynamics created by declining state capacities may ultimately entail security challenges within the countries concerned and beyond their borders. Apart from the much exaggerated effects of uncontrolled migration declining state capacity in individual (Arab as much as other) countries produces or at least reproduces a number of risks ranging from the spread of diseases to environmental disasters. Failing medical facilities, poorly maintained infrastructures

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13   ICG 2012

and the ineffectiveness of regulatory authorities all put security at risk. Though at a smaller scale than in collapsing states patchy law enforcement favors all sorts of illegal activities with security implications. It also further endangers occasional targets of popular wrath such as marginalized populations and foreign embassies and schools.

Disappointing States

Equally problematic in the medium and long term are weaknesses that impede the formulation and implementation of economic, social and political reforms supposed to increase the material welfare of the public and to strengthen political participation and other liberties. Rulers may disappoint the ruled because consultation and expertise are missing on the input side, or because efficacy and efficiency are missing on the output side. Inadequate policies may be disruptive when they create health and other hazards. Where issues of social justice and participation are involved they easily result in major protests against the rulers, their foreign allies and various scapegoats.

New and old regimes have adopted countless piecemeal domestic measures to calm or preempt contestation and thus to ensure their own political survival. By and large, concessions remained limited to socio-economic improvements for constituencies that took part in protests or could be expected to take to the streets. Particularly important in the major hydrocarbon producing states, such measures were also implemented in poorer states without similar resources. With the help of expansionary budget policies Oman and Saudi Arabia created large numbers of public sector and government jobs, Kuwait inaugurated a new citizen salary of sorts, Syria substantially increased public sector wages and like many others extended or renewed food and energy subsidies[14].

In contrast, political reforms adopted by the old regimes remained limited at best. In Oman, the Sultan granted the assembly some say in matters of legislation. In Morocco the King promulgated a new constitution that nonetheless leaves his major – sweeping – powers unchanged. A similar project of constitutional reform in Jordan is even more limited. Political reform in Saudi Arabia essentially consisted in allowing female athletes to compete in the London summer Olympics. Everywhere such limited extensions of liberties and participation were accompanied by continuous repression of those who demanded more far reaching change[15].

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14   Amin 2012, Saif 2012, Ülgen 2012

15   Kienle 2012a, 2012b

These economic and political adjustments may work for some time but not in the longer run. Sooner or later economic measures involving additional expenditure are likely to become unsustainable, even in the hydrocarbon states. Current limits to political decompression (rather than reform) may be contested. New long term strategies for economically and ecologically sustainable growth and distribution need to be developed in line with the particular conditions of each country. None of the old and new regimes and almost none of the major political actors have so far developed such a strategy. Issues like youth unemployment, poverty and lack of appropriate regulation that contributed to the Arab spring may soon haunt again old and new rulers.

'WESTERN' RESPONSES

Inadequate Responses as Additional Security Challenges

Changes in the foreign policies of Arab countries should be critically examined in the light of their causes and possible effects rather than simply be defined as challenges to accustomed definitions of security. More critical policies towards Israel pursued by new regimes may collide with the currently dominant definitions of Israeli security. They may nonetheless be compatible with more modest definitions of Israeli security formulated and defended even by Israelis. Hitherto none of the new regimes has questioned the existence of the state of Israel or implemented any measures that could raise such doubts. Official declarations remained limited to Israeli policies regarding Arabs, in particular Palestine and Palestinians. Uncritically embracing positions defended by the current Netanyahou government could encourage it to use force in what it conceives as an increasingly hostile environment. Policies towards new Arab regimes that are simply based on assumptions about what they or Islamists might do will create or deepen rifts and therefore security challenges. The same applies to overly sensitive responses to Arab attempts to improve relations with Iran as long as they respect UN sanctions.

Conversely, Arab adversaries of Iran should be encouraged to define threats to their interests without simply deriving them from a supposedly unbridgeable Sunni-Shi'i divide. If Shi'is in Bahrayn, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon look towards Iran, they do so largely because they have been traditionally marginalized in their respective countries. This being said, most allegations about active links that Shi'is in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia entertain with the Islamic Republic are entirely uncorroborated by evidence. The Syrian Alawis are historically an offspring of Shi'i Islam but their faith is sufficiently idiosyncratic to be considered heterodox by Sunnis and Shi'is alike. The alliance between the Asad regime and the Islamic Republic was largely intended to contain Iraq under Saddam Hussein and to create a new strategic balance with Israel and the US. Assumptions about the existence of a 'Shi'i arc' are tenuous at best; they are plainly wrong if they claim that Shi' actors support each other simply because they are Shi'is.

Disintegrating states pose a security dilemma in the sense that external intervention and interference may be as dangerous as external neutrality or passivity. Neutrality may lead to humanitarian disasters, political violence, massacres, the uncontrolled circulation of WMDs, the rise of hostile forces and the emergence of safe havens for terrorists and organized crime. It may also embitter the conflict parties that demand intervention and ultimately transform them into new enemies. Many Syrians today clearly think that they have been abandoned. On the other hand, intervention will hardly ever be seen as impartial by the conflict parties, therefore easily exacerbate conflicts and finally lead to similar results as non-intervention. For instance, none of the American, European and Israeli interventions in the Lebanese civil wars in the 1950s, 70s and 80s have had a mitigating influence on these conflicts; Israeli intervention in 1982 may have lastingly weakened the PLO, but at the price of alienating Southern Lebanese Shi'is and strengthening their ties with Iran as the only power ready to support them.

Attempts to topple despotic (or simply authoritarian) regimes may entail the disintegration of states in their minimal definition of territories and populations ruled by a central power. The risk is particularly strong in countries that are divided into various identity groups based on religion, language or other cultural markers. To put it cynically but realistically, the short term choice is between centralized violence by the despotic rulers or 'decentralized' violence among identity groups. Iraq since the 2003 US intervention is a case in point. Syria after Bashar al-Asad may well resemble Iraq after Saddam Hussein. In Libya, the jury is still out, even though the recent elections were generally peaceful and fair, and neighboring countries are less prone to exploit internal divisions than in Iraq and Syria. Finally, external intervention may directly or indirectly cause many military and civilian casualties; depending on sources their number in Libya rose from some 1-2,000 dead at the eve of NATO intervention to 10-50,000 dead at its end[16].

In Syria, external military intervention to topple the current ruling group around president Asad could come at a cost yet higher than the one paid for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003 or Muammar al-Qadhafi in 2011. Even limited intervention to open up and defend humanitarian corridors, establish safe havens for the population and opposition on Syrian territory, or impose no fly zones is risky. After more than eighteen months of domestic conflict key parts of the Syrian armed forces remain loyal to the regime and functional, partly thanks to continued material and moral support from Russia. External intervention could entail military and civilian casualties on both sides that the intervening countries

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16   The Guardian 26/10/2011

themselves might consider difficult to bear. They could surpass the number of casualties caused by NATO intervention in Libya. Even covert intervention may deepen the divisions within the Syrian opposition may easily develop into violent conflicts with ramifications into neighboring countries. Without a modicum of political consensus about the 'day after' (The Day After 2012) Syria is in danger to turn into a 'failed state'.

Most crucially, however, unilateral military intervention in Syria would not be easily accepted by Russia which already accuses NATO to have overstepped its UN mandate in Libya in order to bring about regime change. Russia fears to lose a major customer of its military industries, a strategically well located ally, and its military base in Tartus on the Mediterranean. Ultimately, however, Russia uses Syria to illustrate its own return as a major global player and possibly as a bargaining chip to obtain concessions elsewhere. Various differences notwith- standing, for Russia an intervention in Syria today echoes the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia in 1914. The claim is not that military action in Syria will prompt another world war. However, unlike in 1999 when NATO intervened in the former Yugoslavia, Russia is today in a position to back up with deeds, criti- cisms, warnings and threats. It is no longer plagued by an acute fiscal crisis and other aftershocks of the collapse of the Soviet Union, a haphazard transition and the difficulties associated with the creation of a new political order. It is therefore able to use all its nuisance power, be it to support the Kurdish PKK in Turkey, to thwart diplomatic efforts to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue or to complicate exit strategies from Afghanistan. Curiously, major advocates of an intervention in Syria remain silent on these aspects of the matter[17].

Appropriate Responses

Apart from dispassionate analysis, Western responses to perceived security chal- lenges should include balanced approaches to domestic conflict and state dis- integration as well as support for institutions and policies, in particular socio- economic policies, that enhance and guarantee human security in the Arab states.

In cases of protracted domestic conflict like in Syria, the answer can hardly be to exclusively support one side against the other. Current manifestations of seri- ous political violence in Syria are not the result of a struggle between good and evil in which the opposition would occupy the former and the regime the latter place. The key issues are not that regime forces were the first to resort to vio-

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17   Lévy 2012

lence when they attempted to crush peaceful protests in Dar'a; that over the first four months of the uprising from mid-March to July 2011 none of the opposition groups took up arms to resist harsh and violent repression (the Free Syrian Army was formed in late July) ; or that an unelected authoritarian ruling group, recruited largely from a religious minority monopolizes power. Rather the key issue is that societal divides between identity based groups in Syria since independence in 1946 (in actual fact even far longer) have been sufficiently deep to prevent most members of these groups to establish a basis of trust that would allow them to cooperate politically and especially to share power. From the point of view of the *dramatis personae* in government and opposition, sharing power entails losing power and losing power entails the danger of continued domination or even physical annihilation. Slightly simplified, poor Alawi peasants and sharecroppers in north west Syria had for decades and centuries been exploited and repressed by absentee landlords living in the mainly Sunni and Christian cities of Homs, Hama and Aleppo. Their rise to power through the armed forces (which thanks to free tuition in the Military Academy was one of the few channels of social mobility) allowed them to turn the tables on their former masters whose retaliation and revenge they now fear. What from the opposition's point of view is a struggle for liberation from the rulers' point of view is a struggle for survival. The recourse to violence and counter violence is the result of societal cleavages that in the eyes of the actors are unbridgeable and whose irreducible character has been illustrated by history time and again. Moreover, the regime defends the interests of a constituency that is not simply coextensive to the Alawis, Christians and other religious minorities fearful of Sunni domination. Having redefined its social base over time the regime also caters to the interests of other, non-minority constituencies including middling peasants, rural notables, liberal professions and owners of capital; nor has it lost all support among public sector workers. Important as they are, societal cleavages based on specific cultural markers such as religion are complicated and mitigated by cleavages built on other cultural markers and simply on interest. For the same reasons not all Alawis support the regime[18].

Only a 'historical compromise' based on a power-sharing (or power-dividing agreement[19]) that in the absence of mutual trust provides sufficient tangible and operational guarantees for all parties offers a way out of the quandary. Lopsided solutions that disenfranchise the hitherto dominant actors and their constituencies will only lead to renewed conflict at a later stage. Such a historical compromise may need foreign support and guarantors who have sufficient legitimacy

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18   van Dam 2011

19   Rothschild/Roeder 2005

and clout to keep it alive against the inevitable and numerous challenges it will meet. Considering the local and global balance of power, the guarantors will have to include the external allies of each conflict party or none of the external allies of any conflict party. If they include the US and the EU, they need to include major external allies of the Assad regime as well. However, even the most balanced and broadly supported power sharing agreement will not immediately bring about the peaceful resolution of conflicts among the various Syrian actors. The latter will have to be convinced of the impartial implementation of the agreement, which can only happen over time. They will have to see with their own eyes that conflict resolution mechanisms under the agreement not always favor the same side. Considering the time it took for such arrangements to take hold in other parts of the world, including in the countries that today are considered established democracies, Syria and the 'international community' should brace themselves for decades rather than years. Critics may object that external actors hardly look beyond their own electoral cycle and that they would never accept such lengthy commitments. These critics may be right and Iraq and Afghanistan fatigue in the 'West' may support their skepticism. However, any other approach is doomed to failure and any quick fix is but a dangerous illusion. *Mutatis mutandis* these caveats apply to other divides states in the Middle East and beyond.

Neither a power sharing arrangement nor any other solution should be based on the division of existing states into territorial subunits inhabited by specific linguistic or religious groups. Establishing such culturally homogenous territories would not only necessitate the forced relocation of large parts of the population. It would also prevent individuals from emancipating themselves from their respective groups and further strengthen political entrepreneurs, dubious 'community leaders', and unelected and unaccountable religious authorities whose political fortunes depend on identity based ideologies and extremisms. It ultimately would exacerbate conflict rather than ease it.

Any effort aimed at consolidating disintegrating states or strengthening weak central government needs to be underpinned by economic policies that contribute to the welfare of all, in particular through the constituencies that were most affected by domestic conflict. The various losses suffered by the ones and the others probably will not be compensated for by purely material gain, but they will be easier to bear. Appropriate economic policies need to be based on broadly shared definitions of social justice. By implication, they must not favor growth at the expense of distribution, which rules out policies that simply rely on unregulated economic liberalization that in practice tend to increase inequalities in terms of income and wealth.

Finally, balanced and sustainable socio-economic development is no less important to address key concerns of political actors and forces whose influence has increased after the departure of the old autocrats. Such balanced development may challenge some 'Western' interests but is an essential plank of attempts to ultimately overcome the vision of an unbalanced global order dominated by the 'West' that is shared by Arab nationalists, representatives of the left and most Islamists.

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