



The Arab Spring of Discontent

a collection from e-International Relations

Created in November 2007 by students from the UK universities of Oxford, Leicester and Aberystwyth, e-International Relations (e-IR) is a hub of information and analysis on some of the key issues in international politics.

As well as editorials contributed by students, leading academics and policy-makers, the website contains essays, diverse perspectives on global news, lecture podcasts, blogs written by some of the world's top professors and the very latest research news from academia, politics and international development.

The pieces in this collection were published on e-International Relations during the first half of 2011, as events unfolded.



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Introductory notes

Alasdair McKay

In a revolution, as in a novel, the most difficult part to invent is the end

Alexis de Tocqueville,
Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville

On December 17, 2010, Muhammad Bouazizi, a 26 year old street vendor, went to work in the provincial town of Sidi Bouzid, which lies in the centre of Tunisia. Bouazizi, a graduate who had struggled to find work, had taken to selling fruit and vegetables as a way of feeding his family, and putting his sister through university. Unfortunately, he had not acquired a licence to sell goods, and a policewoman confiscated his cart and produce. So Bouazizi, who had had a similar event happen to him before, attempted to pay the fine to the policewoman. In response, the policewoman slapped him, spat in his face and insulted his deceased father. Her actions were to have a lasting effect on him.

Feeling humiliated and infuriated, Bouazizi went to the provincial headquarters with the intent to lodge a complaint to local municipality officials. However, he was not granted an audience. At 11:30 am and only a few hours after his initial altercation with the policewoman, Bouazizi returned to the headquarters, doused himself in flammable liquid, which he had recently purchased, and proceeded to set himself alight.

The act itself was particularly brutal and Bouazizi subsequently died of the injuries he sustained, but it proved to be the spark from which greater forms of indignation would emerge. One man's self-immolation appeared to encapsulate a pent up sense of frustration which had been buried deep down inside many young Tunisians concerning a broad scope of social issues. Violent demonstrations and riots erupted throughout Tunisia in protest of the high unemployment, corruption, food inflation and lack of many political freedoms. The intensity of the protests was such that it led to the then President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali stepping down on January

14, 2011. This was a remarkably sudden series of events. In just a matter of weeks, a regime, which had enjoyed 23 years in power, had been ousted by a campaign of popular pressure. However, this phenomenon did not remain confined to Tunisia's boundaries.

The ruptures of the events in Tunisia seemed to echo elsewhere, the so-called "Tunisian wind" swept across North Africa and the Middle East, and began a great chain of unrest. Although events did not occur in an identical fashion to those witnessed in Tunisia, it seemed that people across the Arab world were actively taking the initiative to overthrow their autocratic governments. Modern technology played a part in this as social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter enabled the flames of discontent to be fanned and spread the news to an observing world.

To date, there has been a further revolution in Egypt; internal violence in Libya; major protests in Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Oman and Yemen; and comparatively minor protests in Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Western Sahara.

Not since the collapse of the Berlin wall and the demise of the Soviet Union has change swept so suddenly across a geographical region. However, the initial voices of optimism are not as confident as they once were. What may have started as genuine endeavors by civilians to achieve social change have now become causes for concern. There is an anxiety that new despots will simply replace the former ones in many of these states. History has suggested that this could easily occur and it is not necessary to go back too far in time to locate examples. In 1979,

the autocratic and domestically despised Iranian monarch, the Shah, was overthrown in a popular revolution, but was simply replaced by an extremist clerical dictatorship that consolidated absolute power in mere months, and holds it to this day. There are signs that many of the uprisings could follow in the same doomed footsteps.

In Tunisia, although tentative steps towards democracy have been made, there are serious concerns that the revolution is now being hijacked by politicians. More than 50 political parties have registered for the scheduled July elections, including some headed by well-known former members of the ruling party. Each of these groups may seek to fulfil their own personal ambitions rather than initiate policies for the collective good.

In Egypt, it seems that, for now, rule of the country still lies with the military rather than the people after Mubarak's fall. There is also the risk that Islamism may start to have a stronger influence in the state, particularly from groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which has branches all over the region.

Egypt is not the only nation where Islamist messages are being whispered alongside the clamour of revolt. In Yemen, religious radicals are seeking to exploit anti-government protests against President Ali Abdullah Saleh, a U.S. ally against Al Qaeda. In Syria, conservative Sunni Muslims, more antagonistic toward Israel than the President Bashar Assad, could fill the vacuum if his government is overthrown.

In spite of these sources of anxiety, Libya's situation has attracted the most engagement from the West, where the extent of the civil war has caused a US-led intervention. A UN sanctioned no fly zone has been established over the state, and air strikes have been conducted by British, US and French forces. If Gaddafi is overthrown, another power vacuum could open up in the nation.

Taking all of these developments into consideration, the central question of whether real long-term political change will occur in the Middle East and North Africa remains open, and perhaps only time will enable us to understand what shape these movements in the Arab world will take.

Nonetheless, these events have elicited a plethora of global interest from the media, policymakers and academics. E-International Relations has provided a platform for these voices to be heard. Written as events unfolded, this collection of articles offers insightful and diverse perspectives on the Arab uprising, and expands to consider related political unrest outside the predominantly Arab world, such as in Iran. This collection should be of considerable interest to students of international relations, particularly those with an interest in the politics of the Middle East and North Africa. It should also be of intrigue to those with an eagerness to examine the conceptual issues of social change, political protest and humanitarian intervention.

The collection begins with a trio of articles exploring the Tunisian revolution. Alyssa Alfano's opening piece engages with one of the most interesting aspects of the revolution, the role of the internet in the mobilization of popular pressure against Ben Ali's regime. Following this, Afshin Shahi contemplates the future of post-revolution Tunisia. This is an important area to venture into because questions have arisen concerning the direction of political life in the country, especially in regards to the role of the military in politics and the forthcoming elections. The third article acts as a significant addendum to a wider debate on the conceptual issue of revolutions. This contribution from Simon Hawkins considers the important question of whether the events in Tunisia can actually be understood as a revolution.

A Personal Perspective on the Tunisian Revolution

Alyssa Alfano

It was the first cyber-revolution, but it probably won't be the last. Ironically, my friends in the beautiful North African country of Tunisia, where I'd spent last summer learning Arabic, gave me daily updates on a technology formerly censored by the ousted regime.

After spending the two months in La Marsa, a suburb of the capital Tunis, the obvious way to stay in touch with my new friends was through Facebook. Little did I know that only months later I would be watching a revolution unfold in Tunisia by reading dozens of posts from the friends I made there.

Life in Tunis

Prior to arriving in the capital in June, I hardly knew what to expect of Tunisia. Some students in my Arabic language study program had been to Morocco in the past. But Tunisia? We'd all read the Wikipedia page. We knew the government was oppressive and that we wouldn't have access to YouTube for a few months. But beyond that, up until recently, Tunisia was practically unheard of. The small nation exceeded my expectations in only a matter of days. The people were incredibly hospitable and the modern capital impressed us with sidewalk cafes and the traditional market place, known as a souk. My school was located in Sidi Bou Said, the picturesque blue and white tourist destination located on the Mediterranean. I lived with a host family in the adjacent town of La Marsa, whose long beaches offered similar sights. But the realities of authoritarian rule slowly became apparent. On my walk to school every morning, I passed a huge billboard adorned with a stately photograph of former President Ben Ali.

Ben Ali's control over the press and internet quickly became apparent. His own Wikipedia page was blocked on the country's internet service providers, along with the web pages of countless human rights

organizations, opposition blogs, twitters, and critical newspaper articles.

Yet I was still impressed at how modern the country was. My young Tunisian host-sister had a cell phone and a Facebook profile. My real sister in New York didn't. My Tunisian peers were all informed and well-educated; the country's education system is well-developed and its universities are nearly free for students. However, unlike college campuses elsewhere, political discussions were not on the table. It was obvious that many of my peers and professors held contempt for Ben Ali, but it was unspoken. It had to be, considering the fear of the secret police. My host father told me that no one spoke poorly of the President in public for fear of being taken away and put in an unknown prison. This seemed unreal to me, and I brushed it off as an exaggeration. But even after living and bonding with my family for months, my attempts to bring up Ben Ali's politics after dinner were quickly evaded and became a forum for discussion on the well-respected first President of Tunisia, Habib Bourgiba. The mix of an authoritarian government yet a modern society was striking, and the ability of the state to permeate individual lives was unimaginable.

Cyber-revolution

After returning home to the Hudson Valley, I kept in touch with my new Tunisian friends and family over the internet. But before long, their posts and e-mails began to center around the soon-to-be "Jasmine revolution." Before mainstream press began to cover the events leading up to the revolution, friends on Facebook had posted videos and pictures of protests and links to articles about Mohamed Bouazizi, the man who set himself on fire after police confiscated his produce cart—his only source of income in a nation where some estimates place unemployment well over 20 percent. As the days passed, my "News Feed" was filled with videos, pictures, twitter links,

event invitations, and blogs all centered around the protests in each city. Grave updates filled my News Feed and inbox as police brutality, looting and the death toll rapidly increased.

In solidarity with the Tunisians, I, along with my American friends who also spent time in the country, changed our Facebook profile pictures to the Tunisian flag as the conflict escalated. As I noticed via Facebook and Twitter, the protests began over unemployment, but quickly escalated to include increased food prices, press censorship, and eventually to demands for the removal of President Ben Ali from office.

Facebook groups and event pages allowed millions of youth to collaborate protest details, as well as a means of documenting both successes and horrors. Prior to the relevance of the internet, revolutions relied on pamphlets and word of mouth. It was the internet that facilitated the speed and precision of this revolution.

Although much of the revolution was hardly covered by mainstream media, Bouazizi's desperate act finally gave citizens the courage, and a good reason, to speak up. On the day Ben Ali fled the country, a former teacher and friend posted: "We witnessed 01/14/2011! I am proud to be Tunisian!" After President Obama's State of the Union Address earlier this week, numerous friends posted quotes from the speech about Tunisia, impressed with their ability to gain the attention of the U.S. This week, the interim Tunisian government issued an arrest warrant for their former president and relatives for stealing money from the nation.

With the recent protests in Egypt and Yemen inspired by Tunisia, it seems clear that the Jasmine Revolution, fuelled by social-media, will not be the last of its kind. Many Tunisians have changed their

profile pictures to the Jasmine flower, a fragrant, pure white flower found throughout their country. While the violence has subsided, they recognize that the struggle for democracy has only begun, and are incessantly posting groups and statuses promoting the necessity of free and fair elections. Their resolve is inspiring to all.

While in the past it was more than common for leaders to rule their people through fear and threat, with increased education and accessibility to the internet, I would like to think that authoritarian leaders and dictators like Ben Ali will soon be known only in history. As Obama said in his State of the Union Address, "The will of the people proved more powerful than the writ of a dictator... The United States of America stands with the people of Tunisia." While it is encouraging to have the President's distant support, Tunisians and protesters around the world have an even better tool at their disposal: social media.

The Dictator is Dead, God Save the Dictator!

Afshin Shahi

I visited Tunisia a few days after the presidential election in October 2009. Then, the former President, Ben Ali, was just re-elected for a fifth term with an 89% share of the vote. During my short stay in Tunis, the capital was hosting many “celebrations” run by the state. The drumming echo of the musical bands could be heard from the distance. The streets were decorated with flags and innumerable portraits of the president. The state TV was broadcasting programs, which were entirely devoted to the event. Musicians and artists were doing their best to enthuse the masses. Ordinary people were being interviewed. They were thanking God and expressing their gratitude for the “re-election” of their leader who had been in office since 1987. However, the climate of political repression was prevailing.

Despite the “democratic” appearance, one could not forget Tunisia was still a police state. Initially Ben Ali reached the corridors of power through a coup d'état, removing control from Habib Bourguiba, the founder of the modern Tunisian Republic. Following many other Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) leaders, Ben Ali sustained his power through repression, fear, and censorship. Despite some of his progressive social reforms, he hardly tolerated political transparency and prospects of power sharing. Hence, his downfall through the popular protests stunned the world. However, there is still no guarantee for a new chapter in Tunisian politics.

Although the downfall of a dictator has symbolic values, it does not necessarily result in a political transition to democracy. In fact, dictatorships have often reproduced themselves in the MENA. For example, in the so-called Egyptian Revolution the Free Officers Movement led a coup d'état to remove a corrupt monarch. Although King Farouk I was forced to sail away from the country, the

repressive nature of Egyptian politics stayed the same. A corrupt monarchism turned to a form of “republicanism” which has produced rulers like Hosni Mubarak.

Even revolutions based on mass participation have not paved the way to democracy in the MENA. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 is a prime example of the revival of autocracy out of public uprising. Therefore, we should not be too excited yet about the downfall of Ben Ali. Undoubtedly, the Tunisian uprising involved a lot of courage and the fate of the overthrown president will keep a lot of dictators in the region awake at night. Nonetheless, there is no sign of a transition yet.

A few hours after Ben Ali was forced to leave the country, his Prime Minister and a preeminent member of the party, Mohammed Ghannouchi, announced to be the acting president of Tunisia. However, his presidential authority did not last more than a few hours and soon another fellow member of the same party Fouad Mebazaa was introduced as the interim president. He has been an indispensable figure in Ben Ali's administration for a number of years. Like Ghannouchi, Mebazaa was an indispensable figure within Ben Ali's administration holding many important ministerial positions. Although, he might be slightly more popular than his former boss, he was still a member of the same party, which has been dominating Tunisian politics for a number of decades. Lately, they have been attempting to distance themselves from the Constitutional Democratic Rally (CDR), but this is only a superficial change. Even by leaving the party, they still have history of active involvements in the previous regime.

Hence, what has happened so far is a mere shift of positions within the same political framework. Although there has been some political liberalisation,

there is no guarantee that there will be a fair and transparent election which the current government promises to hold soon. After all, the same party has been winning every election since the creation of the Tunisian Republic. There is always the threat of CDR making short-term tactical compromises in order to regain control. Once security is maximized they may embark on a major crackdown again.

A transitory political ‘Glasnost’ does not necessarily lead to long term political transparency. In the MENA, even the shift of leader within the same family sometimes has coincided with pragmatic ‘opening up’ policies to smoothen the transitional period. For example, following the death of President Hafiz al-Asad in 2000, Syria experienced a “liberalizing” period, which became known as the “Damascus Spring”. However, after autumn 2001, once the succession period was complete, most of the activities associated with Damascus Spring were suppressed by the state.

Today, in Tunisia the army and the security forces are still playing a key role in the unfolding events. Some segments of the army have supported the overthrow of Ben Ali. However, there is no certainty about their future strategic alliances in Tunisian politics. The uncertain role of the army raises a question about the coming election as well. Will the army subordinate to the electoral will or is it going to arrange its own deal with a “suitable” political faction? Furthermore, everything has happened so rapidly and there has not been enough time to build an efficient infrastructure to fill the power vacuum. The oppositional discourse is incoherent and we still do not know which party or coalition could provide a long-term and sustainable strategy for a democratic transition. Hence, it is too early to expect a major shift in Tunisian politics. There is still a possibility of political regress when dictatorship can reproduce itself. If that happens, the current

period of liberalisation will only be remembered as a mere “Tunisian Spring” which was short-lived and transitional.

Tunisia: Was it a revolution?

Simon Hawkins

With the cascading events in Tunisia, there has been much debate about whether or not this represented a real revolution. The question is clearly important, however it is not clear exactly what the standard is for determining whether or not it was a revolution. Much of the debate seems to focus on whether or not Tunisia will move out of an autocratic system of government and into a liberal democracy. However, while the question of what form of government will arise in Tunisia is vitally important, this is a limited understanding of revolution. Revolutions are as much social as political, sometimes leading to their own forms of repression. The French revolution may have overthrown a king, but it led to the crowning of an Emperor. Whatever the eventual political outcome, Tunisians have already experienced a real revolution. Their actions have undone the decades old system of power, creating new possibilities for years in the future, regardless of the developments of the next few months or years.

If one hasn't lived in a police state, it's difficult to understand how it insinuates itself into daily life. Ben Ali's Tunisia was a cult of personality. His image was ubiquitous, in schools, stores, workshops, billboards, newspapers, television, and so on. One could never escape his gaze, both literally, from all his images that stared down at one, and metaphorically, from the lurking presence of the secret police. Political conversations were only possible between friends, either whispered, or behind closed doors. While the rules were never made explicit, everyone knew them. When a Tunisian university colleague grumbled about recent educational reforms, I jokingly told him that he needed to watch what he said. He replied with greater seriousness that it was okay to criticize policy, but never the person who made it.

To say that Tunisians lived in a state of fear would be an exaggeration. The reality is that with politics foreclosed, people turned to other things. With economic conditions so difficult, there were plenty

of other things to focus on. And yet the state (or rather, Ben Ali, for in a cult of personality the two are indistinguishable) was never far from people's minds. People believed that the state had its hand in everything. When the number of students passing the high stakes baccalaureate exam went up, people told me that the state had rigged the results to make itself look better. Conversely, university students believed that the faculty had government orders to fail a certain percentage of students every year. When the state raised the educational qualifications needed for teaching jobs, students rallied against this, charging that the real reason was to keep students in school longer, reducing the unemployment statistics. The truth or falseness of any of these claims is not the point. What mattered was that people believed them. And lurking beneath it was the specter of violence.

Whenever there was the possibility of unrest, busloads of police and paramilitary forces would appear in the side streets, an implicit promise of what was to come if people didn't behave. While there was a network of informants, not all the secret police were completely secret. Underemployed young men taught me the tricks for spotting them. Walkie talkies were one dead give away. While sitting with a friend in a crowd, we heard the unmistakable crackle of a walkie talkie. My friend looked at me whispered, "you heard that?" I nodded. "You know what it means?" I nodded. This semi-visible presence reminded everyone that they were being watched.

I only saw the violence become explicit once. Walking down Avenue de Paris, a major thoroughfare, a man emerged from a small alley. Suddenly two men appeared behind him, grabbed him, pulled him into the alley and began beating him. None of the Tunisians passing stopped to enquire, and neither did I. I've seen other forms of violence, (purse snatcher, fight, domestic violence) draw a crowd, but this was clearly different. One knew where the lines were. Where to go or not go. How to stay uninvolved.

Lurking over all of this was the hulk of the Ministry of the Interior building on Habib Bourguiba Avenue. As befits its occupants, it's an ugly gray building with dramatic iron bars across the windows. Although torture and abuse took place in a variety of locations in Tunisia, this was the center of it all. No regular person could get too close to it. The sidewalk in front was closed to pedestrians and it was forbidden to even point a camera at it. It was the embodiment of the state's repression, and it was the focus of the massive protests on the final days of Ben Ali's rule. There were other places they could have assembled. Constitutionally, the seat of power should have been found in the Place du Gouvernement in the Kasbah, but it did not have the same power in people's lives. One isn't forced to cross the street to avoid those buildings and tourists are encouraged to take photographs.

To rally in front of the Interior Ministry was to reject Ben Ali's entire power structure. If they could demonstrate that that building had no power over them, that they refused to be afraid of its always-lurking threat to them, then the entire structure of governmental domination was undone. Crossing the line irrevocably changed the nature of power in Tunisia. While the uprising had been growing for weeks and could, in theory, have gone on for much longer, once the demonstrators seized that space, the end, and a rapid one at that, was inevitable.

The vast majority of experts had not predicted a revolution. Certainly the motivations were clear to all but the most casual observer, but such an event was unprecedented in the Arab world. The Tunisians themselves had great resentment toward the state and the president, but there was little hope that any change was possible. The events of December and January shattered that impression, changing the preconceptions of outsiders, but also of Tunisians themselves. Tunisians became unified and proud. They realized the power they possess.

What they do with that power is a separate question.

Yes, the future is unclear. There are no guarantees of liberal democracy. A different form of autocracy may well arise. The unity among the protestors has already eroded. Corruption can never be completely eradicated. The unrest will not aid the precarious economy. But the people have proved to others and themselves that they can unite to defy an oppressive government. If the future is unclear, what has changed is that the Tunisian people are now playing a role in forming it. Unlike Egypt, where the military pushed through a new constitution shortly after the Mubarak's fall, in Tunisian debate about how to recreate the constitution galvanizes much of the population and the people refuse to be rushed into precipitous decisions. It is clear that the government cannot act without the support of the people. Their example has changed the relations of citizens to governments across the region, creating a new sense of what is possible. Countless pundits and experts have been proved wrong in their predictions about the developing events in the Middle East and it would be foolish to claim knowledge of what will happen in the future, but one thing is quite clear; there has been a revolution.

While events were in motion in Tunisia, protests also arose in Egypt against Mubarak's rule. This editorial was written by John Chalcraft when an uncertain political and social climate surrounded the Egyptian people's campaign of non-violent civil resistance. The article then proceeds to consider the implications of the Egyptian uprising for the rest of the Arab world.

The Egyptian People Demand the Fall of the Regime

John Chalcraft

The "Tunisian wind", stirred by the popular uprising that swept President Ben Ali of Tunisia from power on 15 January 2011, is inspiring the Arab world from Bahrain to Morocco. Ordinary people in their hundreds of thousands have joined activists in street protests. Men and women, old and young, have risen up with astonishing bravery against beatings, tear gas, and bullets. They are protesting corruption and authoritarian rule. They seek bread, housing, livelihoods, dignity, freedom and justice.

While protests (planned or actual) are happening across the region – even in Saudi Arabia – all eyes are on the popular uprising in Egypt, the most populous state in the region, and a key client state in the US informal empire. The thousands currently gathered in Midan Tahrir (Liberation Square) in downtown Cairo are determined not to leave until President Mubarak falls from power. No-one can foretell the future, but it is easy to forget how much depends on the determination and spirit of these crowds.

The idea that the US government has in fact been backing democracy activism in Egypt is naïve. The Daily Telegraph report is based on little more than the fact that some US officials showed some interest in a single activist who appears to have been ready to talk to them about activism in Egypt. This is not such stuff as revolutions are made of. On the contrary, the US government has been the single most decisive state-supporter of this sclerotic dictatorship – in terms of diplomacy, security and funds – since Egypt signed the Camp David peace agreement with Israel in 1979. And the White

House knew all about routine police brutality and widespread torture by the security services in Egypt, as the timely WikiLeaks release (28 January) of US embassy cables confirms. At least the US – unlike Saudi Arabia, a country increasingly famous as a retirement home for dictators – has not publicly supported Mubarak. Instead, the White House has vacillated – assessing Egypt to be stable early in the week, then urging 'restraint' on both sides, speaking of respect for 'universal rights', and now broaching the possibility of an 'orderly transition'.

If Mubarak falls, the US will try to maintain Egypt's subservient client status and prevent any real democracy, which might imply independent foreign and economic policies. The US will look to the army that it has been funding and training, and seek a client President. Up first is the "Arab strongman", ex-intelligence chief and new Vice-President Omar Suleiman, a key member of this defunct regime. The idea that the US will then pressure such generals towards democracy and social reform has no basis in evidence, reason, or precedent in the region and should be discarded as a snare and a delusion. The US places a vastly higher priority on the geopolitical position of its key "strategic asset" (read 'attack dog') in the region (i.e. Israel), a country whose version of settler colonialism has earned it the lasting enmity of any popular force in the Arab world, and which has already expressed its own horror of Arab democracy, pronouncing only fears for regional "stability". The US, moreover, has been intimately involved in the design of the IMF-led packages that have created such social misery in Egypt, and is utterly susceptible to the Islamophobic and self-serving fantasy that Al-Qa'ida or the Muslim

Brotherhood is about to take over the country.

While protestors made good use of Facebook, Twitter and other social media, UK-based Vodafone Group Plc agreed on Friday morning (28 January), apparently for legal reasons, to suspend at a critical moment the mobile phone network, the lifeline (in some cases, literally) of those on the front lines. Little or no support will come from the other kleptocracies in the region – from Libya to Yemen – with the exception of Qatar. This small state punches well above its weight thanks in part to Al-Jazeera, which has played an important role in reporting the protests as they happen, allowing ideas, inspiration and tactics to cross-borders, knitting together the Arab world in the process. Otherwise, the only cheering from authorities in the region came from that supposed opponent of democracy, Iran.

In short, faced with the vacillation, bet-hedging and outright opposition of many states, and the craven collaboration of at least one major multinational company, a very great burden has fallen on the protestors themselves, whose persistence one can only salute. Many Egyptians have overcome their fear of decades of repression and torture, and have taken much of Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and other towns from the regime. The essential dynamic has come not from the organized political parties, nor from Islamism or Marxism, nor indeed from abstract ideology as such. Instead, the moving force has been the determination of the people to secure bread and freedom, the culmination of decades of rising prices and repression, and the fruit of a diverse array of risky activism by workers, state employees, students, educated youth, and professionals going back to the protests surrounding the second intifada of September 2000.

Last Friday in Egypt the crowds began advancing peacefully, some bearing flowers. They gathered in the backstreets and streamed from the mosques after the Friday prayer. They were cheered and even fed from the balconies. The protagonists were

determined to win over the riot police to their cause in the name of patriotism and justice. But, along with would-be President and Nobel Peace Laureate Mohammad el-Barade'i, and without provocation, the crowds were usually met with batons and tear gas. Instead of running away, the people defended themselves. The fight was joined over the symbols of the hated regime, and police stations, government buildings and even the headquarters of the corrupt National Democratic Party were set ablaze. On the other hand, protestors formed a protective ring around the Egyptian museum, and took the initiative to set up neighbourhood protection. At other inspiring moments, even senior elements from the police and army have been seen fraternizing and joining with demonstrators.

With some of Egypt's super-rich rumoured to have left, and with its stock-market plummeting, and with urban-centres resembling war-zones, and with the people in charge of Liberation Square – in uneasy co-existence with the army – the regime can no longer govern the country. Whatever happens now, the bravery of ordinary people, has inspired those in and out of the region to believe that the epoch of the increasingly sclerotic, hereditary and entrenched dictatorships, the bastard offspring of the popular post-independence governments, is finally coming to an end in the Arab world.

In this essay, Francesco Cavatorta scrutinises the relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Arab world, and reconsiders this relationship in light of the events in Tunisia and Egypt. Cavatorta suggests that the EU betrayed its central norms of democracy and human rights by allowing dictatorships to emerge in Arab states. However, with the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt, Cavatorta sees an opportunity for the EU to redeem itself and initiate a genuine partnership with Arab countries by supporting calls for democracy and following this through with new policy initiatives.

The EU and the Arab world: living up to the EU's normative expectations

Francesco Cavatorta

The external relations of the European Union with the Arab countries of the southern bank of the Mediterranean, institutionalised initially through the Barcelona process, then the ENP and today the Union for the Mediterranean, were traditionally predicated on the twin pillars of political stability and economic integration into a liberal free trade area. On the one hand, political stability meant supporting authoritarian political structures in the Arab world in order to prevent the rise of political radicalism, namely Islamism. There is little doubt that the very Barcelona process was a reaction to the Algerian events of the late 1980s and early 1990 when the opening up of the political system saw the emergence of an Islamist movement with foreign policy views aimed at challenging the international status quo (Cavatorta, 2009). The Islamist challenge through the ballot box initially and then through armed struggle and terrorism was met and won by the Algerian military with the support of the international community and the Algerian democratic experiment ended in civil war. The support for authoritarianism in the region as bulwark against perceived extremism, however, was meant to be conditional on the progressive adoption of democratic reforms that would slowly transform Arab countries into more democratic polities. These reforms were to be introduced slowly in order not to upset the entire political system and create a vacuum that would be filled by what many European policy-makers consider extremist movements that would act as spoilers in the international arena. On the other hand, market reforms, undertaken with

the supervision and technical assistance of the European Union, would create economic growth and opportunities for both Arab businesses and citizens. According to the modernisation theory that the EU implicitly espouses, these positive economic outcomes would have beneficial effects on the political system, as emboldened by economic growth a rising middle-class would make democratic demands on the regime. The latter in turn would accede to such demands, as core supporting constituencies would realise that the adoption of democracy would deliver economic goods and further reduce radicalism.

This approach to the southern bank of the Mediterranean has been heavily criticised in the academic community (Youngs, 2003) and it is now evident that it is both a policy and an ethical failure. Embracing authoritarianism in the region has delivered a very precarious type of stability and has further undermined the credibility of the Union's commitment to democracy and human rights in large parts of the Arab world. The political structures across the Middle East and North Africa have evolved through the interaction with the EU and other international pressures leading to a number of democratic institutions such as regular elections being adopted, but they have also been completely hollowed out by regimes that know full well that the Union was unable to conceive of a regional stability that would see them departed. What we witnessed in the Arab world was an upgrading of authoritarianism (Heydemann, 2007)

that was satisfactory to both the US and the EU (Durac, 2009). Pushing for modernisation through the adoption of market reforms brought aggregate growth for most Arab countries, but unfair trading practices and the hijacking of reforms on the part of elites close to the various regimes meant that there were no trickle-down effects (Dilmann, 2002). In fact, what we have seen in the Arab world over the course of the last two decades is the rise of networks of economic patronage that accentuated the differences in the distribution of wealth (Heydemann, 2004). The case of the Ben Ali and Trabelsi clans in Tunisia is but one example of how rulers and their families and clans benefitted economically through their predatory behaviour. For some (Nasr, 2010), there is an Arab middle class that has grown and taken advantage of the possibilities that globalisation and economic integration has brought about, but this might be true only in small Gulf states. The 'revolutions' in Tunisia and Egypt and the widespread dissatisfaction of large sectors of the population in Yemen, Syria, Bahrain and Libya are rooted in economic desperation as they are in political dissatisfaction.

The European Union has purposefully supported regimes with very little legitimacy and it now finds itself in a desperate search for an alternative approach to the region. Designing a new set of external relations with Arab countries in light of the changes taking place there would have been easier if EU policy-makers had made more serious attempt to engage with different sectors of Arab society rather than sticking to the ruling elites and to the small liberal opposition elite that embassies tended to rely on. The EU has not built solid links with genuinely popular opposition movements and in addition forced drastic economic changes that might have been necessary, but that, when implemented by largely corrupt and illegitimate elites, proved to drive large sectors of the Arab population, particularly in the Maghreb, into further relative poverty. It is not,

therefore, a surprise that the recent events in Tunisia and Egypt have destabilised the manner in which the European Union deals with its Arab neighbours. The changes in Egypt and Tunisia are increasingly significant and while numerous obstacles remain on the path to democratization, there is no doubt that the EU has been on the wrong side of history and cannot claim to have had any positive role in such changes. Popular revolts, however they might end, indicate a profound malaise in Arab societies and the EU has to take some responsibility for creating such malaise through its pandering to authoritarian regimes and policy choices. The credibility of the European Union has been undermined not only because it pursued policies that partly led to such uprisings, but also because sticking to relations with discredited regimes and co-opted or ideologically marginal actors prevented the EU from having a clearer knowledge of what was occurring at the societal level. Was the EU aware of the profound dissatisfaction of sectors of the pious middle-class about the absence of personal freedoms and the patronage system that characterised access to economic resources? Was the EU aware of the profound imbalances of the Tunisian and Egyptian economy that drove many in the countryside to abject poverty? Was the EU interested in the reasons that led to a significant increase in strikes and demonstration to achieve better working conditions that occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco and Algeria over the last few years? If the EU was aware of all of this, how did it respond? These are the questions that EU citizens should ask their political representatives, who have to be held accountable for policies that not only failed in practice, but that were also ethically condemnable.

There are a number of lessons that can be learnt from these events and one mistake that must be avoided from the EU's perspective. First of all, the EU must live up to its normative foundations when interacting with other states. This does not mean adopting an

overly confrontational attitude towards unpalatable regimes. Countries that are authoritarian and problematic must be engaged through diplomacy and commercial relations in order to be changed. Engagement, however, should not mean deference and a more targeted use of negative conditionality should occur when necessary to point out that the EU will engage with everyone, but will not accept abuses of human rights or stalling on political reforms if relations are to continue. Arab partners on the southern bank have received significant aid over time and the EU never managed to trigger conditionality clauses despite evidence that abuses were being committed and binding steps of political reforms were not being taken. There has been a tendency within the EU to operate as a realist actor (Hyde-Price, 2006) in its external relations and this attitude should be abandoned. This is one historical moment where an ethical commitment to democracy and accountability should trump short-term commercial and security interests, no matter what the outcome of the revolutions might be.

Secondly, the EU should want to revise the concept of stability it espouses and make sure that its long-term beliefs match short-term policies. The EU believes that peace and stability can only exist if all countries have broadly similar systems of government based on accountability and popular-democratic legitimacy. In the Mediterranean area, however, the EU has behaved contrary to such beliefs for too long, implementing policies that strengthened authoritarian rule for fear of what democracy might bring. Admittedly, this support for authoritarian elites was meant to be conditional on progress towards democracy so as to reconcile it with the long-term objectives and beliefs of the EU, but it was clear from the very beginning that Arab regimes would not be pushed and had no intention of introducing genuine political reforms. This dissonance should be ended even if the price to pay in terms of interests in the short-run might be high in some policy areas. Dealing with governments legitimated by popular rule might be even more difficult in fact, but longer-term relations between democracies can become far less volatile and more constructive.

Finally, the idea of pushing for a free trade area where benefits are not widely shared will continue

to increase the very inequalities that are partly at the root of the recent uprisings. Just as the EU struggles internally with the issues of unemployment, underemployment and the absence of opportunities for many university graduates, Arab countries struggle with the same but on a much larger scale. The policies of economic integration undertaken over the last two decades might be the only feasible ones and they might guarantee economic growth, but they have been implemented unequally (for instance agriculture has not been fully liberalised) and unfairly (European businesses are much stronger and therefore become predatory in markets where local industries are weak). This is no longer sustainable. Revising the terms of free trade agreements might be beneficial and more should be done to address unequal economic relationships because the expectations of ordinary Arab citizens regarding their economic 'rights' are considerable and extremism could be the outcome if such expectations were disappointed.

In all of this there is an opportunity for the European Union to redeem itself and initiate a genuine partnership with Arab countries, calling for meaningful democracy everywhere and following the call through with new policy instruments. It would be a great mistake if the EU, gripped by the anxiety of who might win free and fair elections in countries on the southern bank, were to repeat its stance as in Algeria in 1992 and Palestine in 2006. It is the army in both Tunisia and Egypt that will most likely decide the future direction of the country and it would be unforgivable if the EU betrayed its constitutive norms of democracy and human rights by encouraging soft dictatorships to materialise in order to achieve an illegitimate type of regional stability that would in the future prove once again extremely unstable.

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Despite being habitually described as a failed state, a portrayal which is often based on the lack of development and the influential presence of al-Qaeda operatives in the country, Yemen now seems to be feeling the heat of the Arab Spring. Signs of discontentment are emerging in the country with protests against Ali Abdullah Saleh's government. This article by Clive Jones offers a clear and concise overview of the Yemeni uprisings.

Yemen and the 'Arab Spring': Moving Beyond the Tribal Order?

Clive Jones

The 'Arab Spring' is without doubt a pivotal moment in the political and social development of the wider Middle East. Some have likened it to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, others to the impact of the 1979 Iranian revolution. It has even been suggested that this particular season heralds the demise of the old colonial state order carved out between the British and French in 1916, the Sykes Picot agreement, as not only pro-democracy campaigners find their voice, but equally, long suppressed national, ethnic, religious and indeed tribal identities come to the fore as the very nature of state identity is contested.

It is not inconceivable, for example, that an independent Kurdistan will emerge, that Western Sahara will achieve independence at long last from Rabat while despite the best efforts of the current Israeli government, an independent Palestinian state will be recognised internationally in the summer of 2011. Equally, events in Libya, Syria and Bahrain are a sober reminder that both dynastic and republican regimes can fight back and indeed, where national security interests are believed to be a stake, intervene directly in the affairs of a neighbouring polity. Hitherto preferring to fight its wars by proxy, Saudi Arabia's intervention in support of the al-Khalifa has to be set against a wider context of ongoing rivalry and suspicion between Riyadh and Tehran which, while sensitive to regional context, certainly finds parallels in terms of rationale to the Soviet decision to intervene in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Yet while some of the variables that caused Arab Spring can be readily identified – social networking technology that negates state censorship and a growing sense of disenfranchisement from the state (what Ted Gurr referred to as 'relative deprivation') across the Middle East the jury remains out on whether such change is to be limited or whether in fact it portends more profound upheaval across the Arab world that re-orders both the state elites and social fabric of any given society, something Theda Skocpol referred to three decades ago as 'social transformation'.¹ In short, Political Islam may be 'a' solution and indeed vehicle for achieving such transformation, but it is not the solution as the secular profile of many of the demonstrators in Tahrir Square in Cairo and elsewhere suggests.

Nowhere perhaps encapsulates the tensions and contradictory forces now shaping the Arab Spring more than Yemen, a state that has become synonymous with the epithets 'failed' or 'failing'. Endemic tribalism, religious sectarianism, a barely contained rebellion in the north of the country, a growing movement advocating succession across the south and, of notable concern to the West, the presence of a strong al-Qaida affiliate group all suggest a state authority under the existing President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, in terminal decline. When set against wider economic and social anomie brought about increased levels of water scarcity, the wholesale decline in oil production, a population of 24 million and growing, an unemployment rate approaching 50 per cent among those aged between

18 and 28, and possessing one of the highest levels of malnutrition globally, then Yemen would hardly seem to conform to the Weberian ideal where authorities in Sana'a exercise a monopoly over state power.²

Now, a younger generation, emboldened by events in Egypt and Tunisia and harnessing their activism to widespread grievances over political nepotism and social atrophy, have sparked widespread protests of a type and magnitude across Yemen that has united tribal leaders, the official opposition and indeed clerics, all calling for Saleh to step down from power after three decades in office. The President was caught off guard, his response to the protests displaying the carrot of political concession – announcing his intention not to run for re-election in 2013 – while condoning the stick of repressive and at times lethal force to quell mass opposition protests, most notably in the capital Sana'a on 18 March 2011 that left 52 anti-government protestors dead. But most importantly, Saleh has turned increasingly to that enduring feature of Yemeni politics – patrimony – to ensure both the continued loyalty of his power base among the powerful Hashid tribal confederation and to mobilise this support through counter-demonstrations as a visible symbol of continued fidelity to his regime.³

Given these multiple security challenges, 'dancing on the head of snakes', the title of a recent work on Yemen would seem an apt summation of dilemmas now facing Saleh.⁴ In a domain where manipulation through both power and patrimony have long held sway, he has perhaps danced on the heads of too many snakes for too long and now some are biting back with venom. Aware, however, of the security concerns in Washington and capitals across Europe over the emergence of Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in the southern and eastern provinces of Marib, Shabwa, Hadramawt and Abyan since 2009, Saleh has been quick to present himself as the only actor capable of mounting effective

operations against a movement whose global reach and influence belies their relatively small numbers and powerbase.⁵ It is a powerful message for despite the widespread concerns over the nepotism and corruption that for many define Saleh's regime, paying on primordial fears of jihadi threats determines a hierarchy of values that inevitably links the fate of Yemen's President to wider western security interests. It is in effect a dependency relationship but one perhaps where inflation of threat – in this case from AQAP – is realised in the political capital that Saleh has accrued externally, for unlike former President Hosni Mubarak, he has yet to become subject to overt calls from the United States to step down from office with immediate effect.

The International Crisis Group have termed this 'negative legitimacy', the assumption being that policy in Sana'a and Western capitals is determined by a confluence of what decision-makers are against, rather than in defining more enlightened approaches that link aid, be it in terms of security sector reform or infrastructure projects, to wholesale changes of an antediluvian political system prejudiced in favour of tribalism and autocratic role. The stark dichotomy, therefore, between 'reform and revolution' is seen in terms of 'an either or choice', which, framed as it is by an implicit acceptance of the 'Weberian' state, denies agency to other interpretations of political order within the geographic space that is Yemen.

But here (and elsewhere on the Arabia peninsula) the state is less an independent political actor and more a 'political field', where diverse actors compete for influence and resources. States, in this regard, should not be seen in a fully-fledged "Weberian" manner, dominated by a rational bureaucratic model'.⁶ Seen in this context, the current upheaval in Yemen not only accords with competition across the political field, but where the prospect of social revolution as defined by Skocpol remains distant. Undoubtedly, profound shifts in Yemeni politics are underway and few question that Saleh's regime is not in terminal

decline. As heartening as the demonstrations may be however (and their characterisation might be more anti-Saleh than pro-democracy), they cannot be divorced from a political field still determined by tribal allegiances. This ultimately will determine the dispensation of power in Yemen in the short to medium term future at least. Even the rifts in the military hierarchy that have so rattled Saleh have tribal context, while some of the main opposition figures, most notably Shaykh Hamid al-Ahmar, have shrouded his own tribal ambition against the prevailing order under the cloak of broad based political opposition. Acute political distress now defines Yemen, something that clearly nourishes a profound sense of 'relative deprivation'. But even with a change of President seemingly inevitable when set against the wider eddies of the Arab Spring, the power of tribal allegiance and its ability to determine leadership of the 'tribal field' will still determine Yemen's political future for some time to come.⁷

¹ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

² See 'Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (II): Yemen Between Reform and Revolution', *International Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report*, No.102 (10 March 2011), p.10 Per capita income is less than \$70 per month. Some 65 per cent of the population are under the age of 25.

³ The term 'tribe' is used throughout although it is recognised that readers may prefer the Arabic *qabīlah* (or plural *qabāyil*).

⁴ Victoria Clark, *Dancing on the Heads of Snakes* (London: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁵ The exact numbers of AQAP remain unclear but most informed commentators suggest that it currently consists of around 200 hard core activists. Many trace its roots to a 2003 jailbreak of 15 al-Qaeda operatives in Yemen, reinforced three years later by a further escape of 23 members from prison in Sana'a. See Eric Stier, 'Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Protests in Yemen', *The Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, 9/10 (March 2011), pp.1-2 at www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Bwords%5D=8fd5893 accessed on 22 March 2011.

⁶ See for example Uzi Rabi, *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society: Oman under Sa'id bin Taymur, 1932-1970* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press),

The next tetralogy of articles examines the Arab uprisings in relation to Iran. This provides something of a subtle nod to e-IR's 2009 article series on the Iranian election. The first three articles, which were written by Nadia Entessar, e-IR's anonymous Iranian source and Afshin Shahi, look at the opportunities for social change in the Islamic state of Iran, the role which the country's Green Movement may play in the uprisings and the methods employed by the Iranian government to deal with the protests. Expanding upon the latter, Jamsheed Choksy's nuanced piece delves into one of the more troubling responses to the uprisings in Iran, and indeed elsewhere, by Iranian leaders, the propagation of messianism amongst the masses.

The Arab Uprisings: Opportunities and Challenges for Iran

Nader Entessar

The ongoing people's uprisings in the Arab countries against autocratic rulers have provided Iran with both challenges and opportunities in the Middle East and beyond. Will these momentous events enhance Iran's foreign policy opportunities, or will they ultimately lead to further isolation and strategic loneliness for Iran? Iranian leaders, from the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei to President Ahmadinejad to the Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani and many civil and military personalities in the Islamic Republic have publicly praised the Arab uprisings as having been inspired by Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1979 and analyzed them within an Islamic framework. Similarly, the country's "Green Movement" has lent its support to the Arab uprisings and has interpreted them within the framework of the Iranian people's revolt against authoritarianism in the aftermath of the disputed 2009 presidential election in the Islamic Republic. However, neither of these two interpretations is correct. The template for the Arab uprisings should be seen within the context of the internal dynamics of the Arab world and changing constellation of power in the region. What is certain is that the political tsunami in today's Middle East will have strategic and foreign policy repercussions for Iran.

Perhaps the most positive development, so far, for Iran seems to be a willingness on the part of Cairo and Tehran to transform their three-decade old acrimonious relationship, as evidenced by positive statements from the new Egyptian leadership and

Iranian officials towards each other. Iran's Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Salehi, has offered his readiness to travel to Cairo in order to normalize Iranian-Egyptian relations. Such a development, if it comes to fruition, will be a major positive development for not only both countries but the region as a whole. What may emerge is an Egypt that, like Turkey, will have normal relations with the West and Iran as opposed to an Egypt that anchors Washington's anti-Iran axis in the Middle East.

On the other side of the spectrum, the brutal suppression of the Arab people's uprisings in the Persian Gulf region, which has been aided and abetted by Saudi Arabia's direct intervention in Bahrain and its indirect involvement in Yemen, have widened the bitter divide between Sunnis and Shi'as. As Michael Brenner has correctly pointed out, the al-Khalifa and the al-Saud regimes in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, respectively, have "laid down a line of blood" that no one can ignore. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and other family-ruled dictatorships in the Persian Gulf have spawned a story blaming Iran for their people's peaceful uprisings and their democratic aspirations. Unfortunately, the Obama administration's vacillating positions toward the democratic movements in the Middle East, especially in the Persian Gulf where Iranophobia reigns supreme, have emboldened the Arab regional dictators to use brutal tactics to deal with the legitimate aspirations of their people and use the Shi'a bogeyman (read Iran) to widen the sectarian

Cultural Emancipation & Political Liberation: The Iranian Green Movement

The author wishes to have their identity withheld for security reasons

divide and heighten political tension in the region. This will certainly present a major challenge to Iran's regional foreign policy and strategic goals.

Added to the aforementioned crisis is the dizzying rate of militarization in the pro-Western Arab countries of the region. For example, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Saudi Arabia ranks among the top 15 countries with the highest military expenditures, and the country experienced a 66.9 percent increase in its military expenditures in the period 2000-2009. Similarly, the mini-state of the United Arab Emirates accounted for 57 percent of the imports of major conventional weapons in the region in the period 2005-2009. Given the insecurity faced by the hereditary Arab regimes of the Persian Gulf, the current trend towards further militarization of the region will continue to accelerate. This will present a major challenge to Iran's national security in the near-to-medium term. In other words, the combination of political volatility and militarization will make the region more susceptible to outside intervention and regional power plays.

In the Persian Gulf, the acquisition of sophisticated weapons by the Gulf states has not resulted in a balance of terror that may act as a deterrent against the use of force by regional adversaries against each other. Today, what exists in the Persian Gulf is an asymmetrical military balance against Iran. This asymmetrical balance has been exacerbated since the mid-1990s as many Gulf states began to enhance their air-strike capabilities and enlarge their air forces. The role of the United States in perpetuating the asymmetrical imbalance against Iran and the Islamic Republic's perception of the U.S. military goals in the region has created a siege mentality among Iran's leadership. Since the end of the Gulf War in 1991 and especially since the occupation of Iraq in 2003, the United States has assumed the overwhelming responsibility for the security of the

Persian Gulf. As the stability of pro-Western Arab regimes are threatened by popular uprisings, the rulers of these regimes will most likely seek further "protection" by aligning themselves more with anti-Iranian outside forces, thus perpetuating the vicious circle of insecurity among the Iranian leaders. How to deal with this spiraling crisis will be a formidable security challenge to Iran.

Last, but not least, the implications of the Arab uprising for the Islamic Republic may be manifested in its internal developments and intensification of popular uprising inside Iran. In other words, will there be a spill-over effect of the Arab people's uprising in Iran? If so, will this lead to a nonviolent movement, à la the Green Movement of 2009, or will it become violent? Can the center hold if we witness another popular eruption in the country?

While the Arab uprising is sweeping the Middle East and North Africa throughout, displacing dictatorships and defining a new dawn of democracy in the region, the Iranian Green Movement (IGM) appears to be enmeshed in a political morass. Protesters have retreated from the real public sphere and limited themselves to the less precarious haven of private corners or the more obscure sanctuary of virtual space; its recognized leaders have been detained and are kept under house arrest; the regime has been emboldened in intimidating, incarcerating or eliminating its supporters, activists and sympathizers, considerably ensured that it can do so with impunity; and above all, fierce controversies having erupted over its roadmap for progress and its central objective – revolution or reform – have reinforced divisions among its exponents, elite and grass roots alike.

In such a bleak political climate, in the winter of our discontent, a provocative question concerning the life and vitality of the movement may haunt many. Is it still alive and kicking or should we start a countdown of its final breaths? The doomsayer arguments indicating in one way or another the demise of the movement are not so well-grounded as to be convincing; after all, 14 February 2011 public protests represent a watershed moment in the Green struggle of Iranians for democracy and freedom.

However, there is no escape from the bare reality that it does not rage unabated as it did, and is not so dynamic and defiant as it was two years ago when a peaceful protest against the massive state-orchestrated fraud in June 2009 presidential elections gave birth to it. Would the dissident reaction to the de facto detention of IGM leaders, Mousavi and Karroubi, have been so lukewarm and muted as it is now if they had been confined and cut off the outside world in, say, a few months after the 2009 elections? To be straightforward, the answer is most probably not. We should admit that the once irreversible

upward momentum of the movement has slowed at the most optimistic.

Coupled with the democratic victories in Tunisia and Egypt and a likely popular triumph in Yemen, this leads us to the second haunting question that may pose itself more dauntlessly to those who harbor a racist belief in the imagined supremacy of Persians over Arabs: Why did Tunisians and Egyptians win the day before long whereas we are still muddling along through the hard times? A number of reasons and explanations have been offered from various quarters of differing political inclinations. Many have pointed to over-securitization of the public sphere by the state security apparatus and its large-scale attempts at embryonic suppression of emerging dissent; some have highlighted the relatively great resilience and high elasticity of "religious despotism" and the difficulty surmounting it; others may see the absence of a coherent strategy as well as an effective central leadership as the major reason for the failure of Green Movement to achieve its ultimate democratic aims; still others may point the finger of suspicion at the internal rifts and splits while some have gone so far as to blame foreign, and in particular Western, sympathy with the Greens for the lack of their satisfactory progress. And a final group may contend that if the movement has relatively subsided, it is a calculated move, as it does not seek revolutionary or radical action in the first place.

Indeed, all these factors have worked to varying degrees and with some more plausible than others, have exerted a proportionately discernable effect upon our Green struggle for liberty and justice. Of course, this is not to paint the wider picture in absolute black and white colors and deny their potential positive aspects: If the differences within the Green Movement have favored some at the expense of others, they have also helped to pluralize and diversify it, expanding its supporter

base; if international support for the movement has played into the regime's hands and facilitated its demonization of the Greens, it has also taken our emancipatory campaign beyond national borders, broadened its popular appeal, and globalized it. However, most of the explanations accounting for the relative dysfunction of the movement tend, consciously or unconsciously, to ignore an underlying but very significant fact concerning our national culture and the deficiencies, defects, syndromes and, in one word, malaise it has long been grappling with and suffering from, particularly since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and more so after the rise to power of Ayatollah Khamenei, the current Supreme Leader. Adequate investigation of this matter requires a strident and straightforward cultural self-critique and a profound moral pathology of our deep-seated collective dispositions.

II.

The central contention of this writing is that Iranian culture under the Islamic Republic has been highly contaminated, and in order to liberate Iran from the bondage of dictatorship and despotism, we must first emancipate ourselves from the decadent and degenerate elements of our culture; we must first decontaminate our culture. Throughout years of exposure to the originally Machiavellian survivalist strategy of "the end justifies the means," curiously Islamized by the regime and systematically practiced by it throughout, the Iranian culture has caught a degenerative disease manifest in our everyday affairs; it suffers from immoderate tendencies towards self-interest, indifference and sentimentality, and we are indeed "a people interrupted,"¹ a morally ailing nation living in the shadow of an "arrested decolonization," of a despotic decolonization. In fact, through its contradictory ideology, paradoxical behavior and often hypocritical way of governance, the Islamic Republic has inculcated in the Iranian culture strong senses of blunt egoism, acute self-centrism, and irresponsible utilitarianism on the one hand, and indoctrinated it with a mostly irrational religious sentimentalism and emotional extremism on the other. To put it simply, it has dehumanized the Iranian culture. Let us review a few examples that should serve the argument usefully: The oppressive silence of our grand ulema – who are deemed religious sources of emulation in Shi'ism and have traditionally been seen as solid bases of

resistance against oppression – and purportedly pious bazaar community – that in contrast to the state constitutes a powerful part of Iranian economy – in the face of systematic abuse of human rights by the regime (including murder, torture, rape, arbitrary incarceration, persecution and so on); our growing indifference to the predicament of rights activists and prisoners – what percent of Iranians really care about them, and more importantly, what percent are ready to take action or risks for the improvement of their situation?; and finally, increasing commodification and commercialization of our religious institutions and practices – take the Islamic months Muharram, Safar and Ramadan that have now been turned into a suitable financial occasion for state-endorsed religious eulogizers, who compete with each other over charging their audiences with the highest degrees of sentimentality and do not lose any opportunity to compare, implicitly or explicitly, the current IRI leaders to the sacred Shiite Imams.

Iranian contemporary culture is growingly degenerating into a "my problem only" culture which has at its disposal an unlikely blend of material and ideological means and mechanisms, and is influentially "residual" if not "dominant" in almost every part of our society. We are losing our moral authority as such symptoms of decadence as pretension, selfishness, corruption and hypocrisy are affecting our collective DNA and penetrating deep into the moral marrow of our national culture. Hardly can one ever deny the indispensable role lying, schmaltzy crying, and highly charged acts of swearing to God play in our personal and public lives. Distanced from its noble cosmopolitan origins, our culture has largely been Islamic-Republicized in the specific sense embodied by the Islamic Republic. And this is arguably the greatest capital of the regime to feed and survive on, and the chief impediment to the fulfilment of our long-run generational campaign for political liberation and democratic recovery. In other words, combination of a self-interested and responsibility-averse utilitarianism with an over-romanticized, ideologized and non-reflective religiosity has helped preserve the appeal of "authoritarian populism"² advocated by the state and sharpened the seductions of Messianic despot worship; very similar to what Achille Mbembe delicately describes as the "intimacy of tyranny."³ Having helped to foster and

cultivate different types of ideological "authoritarian personality"⁴, this pestiferous culture has given rise to a peculiar religious charlatanism represented by the state-sponsored plainclothes thugs or vigilantes as well as certain Basij forces who are authorized to perpetrate any abuse⁵ as long as they seek to defend the state system and secure its survival.

The matter with Iranian movement for democracy is that it is embedded, one should admit, in a despotic/despot-friendly culture, and that to fulfil itself it should first tackle this cultural malaise. For all its shortcomings, the Green Movement is not only a spontaneous reaction to our tragic political plight under the Islamic Republic, but also a sophisticated proactive rebellion against the deep-rooted ills and immoralities of our national culture. It is, as Hamid Dabashi has aptly argued, the incarnation of our collective endeavor to revive Iranian cosmopolitan culture.⁶ And to this end, its grand long-term strategy of "consciousness-raising" – the new Iranian year (1390/2011) has been named that of

"consciousness[-raising] until liberation" (Agahi ta Rahayi) – should include a crusade of cultural and moral self-critique. It should teach each and every Iranian that "freedom," as Akbar Ganji has famously stressed, "is not free"⁷ and that we should prepare ourselves to pay the price. We should learn that political liberation from the bondage of a seasoned religious dictatorship does not come without making sacrifices, and that if the Islamic Republic has dehumanized our culture, we should strive to humanize it. This is also a good lesson from the Arab awakening if only we learn it.

Notes

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The Silence of Fear Shattered by the Voice of Protests in Iran

Afshin Shahi

For many people, February 14 is about exchanging red roses and expressing their sentiments to their loved ones. However, this year Valentine's Day coincided with mass political activism in Iran, which reinvigorated the Green Movement. After the heavy political repression, which was followed by the mass protests in 2009, there was uncertainty over whether, once again, people would come onto the streets to express their opposition. For about a year the politics of fear has been at its peak in Iran, as hundreds of people were arrested and the regime used every instrument of trepidation to prevent any further escalation. Despite the heavy crackdown on opposition forces, the turnout on February 14 was much more noticeable than had been predicted by many observers. More than numbers and slogans, the protests – which took place in Tehran and other major cities – had the major symbolic value of indicating that the veil of fear is no longer enough to silence the opposition.

Since the new year, almost every eight hours someone has been executed in Iran. Among them are many political prisoners who were arrested after the first major uprising in 2009. The “crime” of these executed prisoners, such as Kazemi and Hajaghaei, included filming and distributing videos of the protests that followed the controversial presidential election in 2009. Many prominent human rights lawyers shared the same fate as their clients. For example, Nasrin Sotoudeh has been jailed for 11 years on charges of “acts against national security”, “anti-regime propaganda” and belonging to the Centre for Human Rights Defenders. An internationally recognized film-maker, Jafar Panahi, was given a six-year jail sentence as well as a 20-year ban on making or directing any movies, or giving any form of interview with Iranian or foreign media. Panahi was also banned from leaving the country. It goes without saying that such heavy-handed acts by the regime stoke fear in the heart of the opposition.

However, the escalation of protests on February 14 proved that the regime's politics of fear can only work on a short-term basis. Tens of thousands of people responded to the call from the opposition leaders and went out onto the streets to defy the state. The slogans were even more daring and radical than before. Many protesters were calling upon the Supreme Leader to follow the path of Mubarak and Ben Ali and relinquish power. It seems that the unfolding events in Tunisia and Egypt inspired many Iranians to think the unthinkable. However, the regime has not been inactive in response to recent events. A few days prior to the protest, the security forces increased pressure on opposition leaders and arrested many influential people. On Monday, all the major streets in Tehran and other big cities were flooded by the security forces brutally preventing any mass gatherings. There were reports about many casualties and at least two dead among the protesters. Hundreds of people are reported to have been arrested and their fate remains unclear.

Following Monday's protests, many MPs in the Iranian Parliament called for the execution of Mousavi, Kahroubi and the former president Khatami. Although hitherto a pragmatic state that has not persecuted these individuals, it is all too plausible to imagine that the regime will increase their pressure upon these political figures in light of the protests.

The protest on Monday demoralised the regime and it is expected it will resort to more violence to maintain the status quo. The Islamic Republic is not subject to pressure from global public opinion; hence the state does not need to be apologetic about using greater violence in dealing with what they perceive to be an existential threat. Unlike Egypt and Tunisia, the Iranian regime does not depend heavily upon the West. The Egyptian army could not be indifferent

to public opinion in the US as a considerable part of its budget is from the US taxpayers. While Mubarak was keen to cling on to power, the army – which was an integral part of his repressive regime – saw him as a liability to its own credibility. Tunisia is equally reliant upon the West, so the regime could not be indifferent to public opinion abroad. Although both states were repressive by definition, they had certain “vulnerabilities” that the Iranian regime does not have. Unlike Egypt and Tunisia, the Islamic Republic of Iran can afford politically to cling onto the politics of fear without much consideration for global public opinion.

At this stage, the regime has no interest in compromise and political reconciliation. Hence, they will increasingly rely on the politics of the iron fist to maintain the status quo. However, the politics of fear can be effective only as long as it silences the opposition and prevents social disobedience. Once a state heavily depends upon fear to maintain the status quo it becomes fragile by default, because as soon as the veil of fear is removed, its chains of monopoly start to evaporate. Indeed, the protest on February 14 made the regime's repressive policies look ineffective, and has sparked a new beginning for the Green Movement. This does not necessarily indicate that the regime is losing control, but it shows that the opposition is taking measures to overcome the climate of fear and intimidation.

Why is Iran Championing Messianism to the Arab Masses?

Jamsheed K. Choksy

As revolutionary movements sweep across the Middle East, the Islamic Republic of Iran, which hitherto had little success exporting its own brand of fundamentalism, is seeking to capitalize on the uncertain times. If all Tehran accomplishes by providing support for Arab protestors is a reduction in the orientation of governments in Tunis, Tripoli, Cairo, and Sanaa toward the West, Iran will gain much geopolitically.¹

Yet Iranian leaders are seeking much more. They are attempting to provide religious inspiration to all Muslims – and especially to Shi‘ite coreligionists in countries like Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Jordan – that could radically reshape politics across the Middle East.² Iran is also sending a not so subtle message to incumbent leaders in those and other Arab nations that they need to pay more attention to Tehran and less to Washington, London, Paris, and Berlin.

One influential means by which Iran is reaching out to disgruntled Arabs, while unsettling their pro-Western leaders, is by depicting problems in the Middle East specifically and around the world generally as foretelling the advent of a Muslim savior.³ Essentially, Iran is exploiting political and religious schisms within Arab societies to advance its confessional and nationalistic causes through a messianic scenario complete with a violent apocalypse.⁴

Messianism has been central to Iranian religiosity since early antiquity. The concept entered Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions including Shi‘ism, from Zoroastrianism or the faith of ancient Iran.⁵ Since the spread of those ideas, natural calamities and political upheavals have been regarded as portending the final days. The End’s non-advent has never dissuaded belief in it, either. But the Zoroastrian end of the world is one in which evil

generates the apocalyptic turmoil that God has to assuage. In Iranian Muslim belief, however, the savior returns to fiercely expunge all forms of deviation from Islam and establish Ithna-‘Asharism or Twelver Shi‘ism as normative and pervasive.

The twelfth imam Abu al-Qasem Mohammad ibn al-Hasan is believed to have disappeared, or according to Shi‘ism entered greater occultation, in the year 940 ce. Allah is said to have hidden that imam to protect him from religious and political opponents, especially medieval Sunni leaders who are alleged by Shi‘ites to have assassinated his ancestors.⁶ Some of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s leaders claim this twelfth imam will reappear soon as humanity’s savior, called al-Mahdi or the Guided One, because terminal battles between nations are about to cause the end of the world⁷ Their fixation on this messianism and its accompanying apocalypse, which politicizes traditional Iranian beliefs of God saving humanity from evil, has been rising to a feverish pitch.

Messianism in Iran after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 was spurred first by indigenous fundamentalism, then by diplomatic tussles with the West, and recently by sociopolitical upheaval in the Arab Middle East. Essentially the Arab Spring is explained by the apocalyptically-inclined among Tehran’s leaders as yet another sign that the Mahdi is definitely about to reappear. Attempts by Sunni Arab leaders, as diverse as Colonel Muammar Gadhafi of Libya, King Abdullah II of Jordan, Sheikh Hamad ibn Isa Al-Khalifa of Bahrain, and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, to quash their citizens’ populist political, social, and religious aspirations are framed by Iranian mollahs or clergymen as contrary to the will of God and therefore detrimental to the wellbeing of the Muslim umma or community. The actions by most Arab heads of state are characterized in starkly religious terms by Iranian politicians

close to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as representing nothing but “heresy and deception.”⁸

In March, a 75-minute documentary entitled “The Re-appearance is Very Near” aired on Shia TV (which broadcasts in Persian, Arabic, Urdu, and English).⁹ Aimed at Muslims who feel oppressed by Western-oriented leaders, the messianic program was distributed globally via the internet and CD-ROMs. Its narrative fused fact, fiction, and belief into a seemingly pious tale that preys upon viewers’ religiosity. It links the savior’s impending arrival to Iran’s Islamic Revolution, to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s foreign policy, and to recent revolts in the Arab world. It calls for the overthrow of Arab, Israeli, and Western leaders as precursory steps to the Mahdi’s arrival. The Persian Gulf, which produces approximately 25 percent of crude oil and 35 percent of natural gas used around the world, is depicted smothered by smoke and fire (see photograph from the documentary’s stage set). Iranian, Hezbollah, and Hamas soldiers are shown training to storm Jerusalem. Khamenei and Ahmadinejad are presented greeting the Mahdi. A sequel to that religious narrative is said to be on its way as well.¹⁰



Western fears that Iran’s nuclear quest too may be linked to this rise and propagation of messianism are fueled by yet another video – one showing simulated warhead detonations.¹¹ Obtained covertly by the International Atomic Energy Agency in February 2008, the video included music from the movie Chariots of Fire. The messianic image of a chariot of fire was popularized by William Blake in a nineteenth century poem about Jerusalem. It was taught in Iranian schools prior to the Islamic revolution and is still read by intellectuals and scholars there. So, Iranian leaders viewing the nuclear video would have connected it to apocalyptic events even though Ahmadinejad and Khamenei publically deny developing weapons of mass destruction.¹²

The idea of a religious Armageddon lying around the corner is unusual in Twenty-First Century statecraft and few national leaders vocalize such beliefs or claim to be “paving the way for the savior’s coming.” Iran’s President Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Khamenei are stark exceptions. Even Venezuela’s mercurial Hugo Chavez utters similar words only when with his Iranian counterpart.¹³ Khamenei speaks publically about the Arab uprisings being unstoppable because they supposedly represent the desire of Allah and the twelve imams to establish politics based solely on Islamic tenets.¹⁴ The supreme leader and the president mention the Mahdi often in meetings with clerics and at public gatherings. Moreover Khamenei and Ahmadinejad have met with protest leaders from Arab nations – including members of Egypt’s Ikhwan or Muslim Brotherhood – urging them to work toward Islamist societies in preparation for humanity’s final days.

But many pious Shi‘ites, even among the mollahs, overtly or covertly oppose velayat-e faqih or guardianship of the (Muslim) jurist which is the system of government in Iran.¹⁵ They regard it

as superfluous and detrimental to establishing a devout society into which the Mahdi can return. They suggest politics in its current form, including velayat-e faqih, is obsolete since the end is nigh. Popular ayatollahs like Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi and Ahmad Khatami are said to belong to or at least share tenets with a banned Shi'ite messianic organization called the Hojjatiyeh or Association of God's Proof. Many of them therefore subscribe to a notion that messianism is a "divine mission" they must undertake for the savior to make current political systems valueless and establish a new divinely-mandated order.¹⁶

At the level of national politics, Ahmadinejad has a very pragmatic reason to facilitate the spread of messianism within and outside Iran for he stands to benefit politically because the weakening of Muslim clerical authority strengthens his executive branch. Even those mollahs who believe firmly in the Mahdi are aware of this political power play and are wary of its impact on their authority and status. Indeed, they have reason to be cautious of messianism's partisan ramifications even while believing in and proselytizing it. Adding to their political fear of messianism getting out of hand, a website sponsored by the president's close advisor Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei has gone as far as recommending that "Iran remove the mollahs from power once for all and return itself to a great civilization."¹⁷

Understandably, therefore, Khamenei and Ahmadinejad regard the immediacy of messianism differently. Iran's supreme leader sees the end of the world as an event occurring sometime in the relatively distant future. In reality, Khamenei is pragmatically ensuring belief in messianism does not threaten either his own temporal authority or that of other mollahs. Iran's president, on the other hand, views the world as on the cusp of Judgment Day. Therefore, Ahmadinejad speaks of preparing his country, Arab Middle Eastern states, and all other nations for a new, unified, divinely-inspired religio-political system. Because of this difference in approach toward messianism, and despite the Shia TV program's depiction of Iran's current Supreme Leader Khamenei as the Mahdi's facilitator, clerics close to him have abjured the presentation. They claim it misrepresents Shi'ism and the supreme

leader's outlook.¹⁸ Attributing its production to attempts by President Ahmadinejad to sideline them, the mollahs forced out his Chief of Staff Mashaei.¹⁹

These developments indicate messianism is becoming central to internal political struggles even as it is being utilized by Iranian politicians and clergymen to extend their authority beyond Iran's borders. Ahmadinejad and others in the executive branch of Iran's government, like senior bureaucrats of the civil service and commanders in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps are not from clerical backgrounds. Their loyalty to fundamentalist mollahs has been largely self-serving and now, in the wake of protests – that both inspired and drew upon the Arab Spring – against the supreme leader, is being cast aside.²⁰ But clerics and bureaucrats alike understand that messianism resonates well across the Arab Middle East as it provides hope all will be made right and just by God through his chosen Muslim agents. So they keep advocating it.

Yet again, and much to the chagrin of mollahs who are fearful of perchance expanding sectarian divides between Sunnis and Shi'ites, Iran's president and his allies are providing another twist to the Iranian rendering of messianism. They are rejecting the notion of Shi'ites as merely one of many groups within the Muslim community. Ahmadinejad has taken the position that "the Iranian interpretation of truth is the closest one to actual truth; thus we should plan our activities according to an Iranian interpretation of Islam."²¹

The rise of Iran on the world stage is being coupled with the eventual triumph of Shi'ism through the Mahdi's reappearance. The message, ultimately, is that Shi'ism and Iran offer the only path to resolution of all problems in the modern world. That theme is targeted at Sunni Muslims across the Middle East in addition to the Shi'ites of Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, other Gulf countries, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Lebanon. The Islamic Republic's opposition to the United States of America, the European Union, and Israel are proffered as examples of Allah's will working through Iran to provide all Muslims with a path to salvation in troubling and repressive times. Indeed, even the regime in Tehran's suppression of democratic aspirations at home is explained

as essential to ensuring the arrival of the Mahdi is not thwarted by a secularist turn in domestic sociopolitics.²²

Religious ideas often shape national, regional, and international events. Iranian leaders' manipulation of the messianic concept is aimed at Muslims in Arab and other lands in addition to their own citizens. Iranian leaders like Ahmadinejad have effectively co-opted not only Shi'ism's powerful notions of a world savior but Salafi and other activist Sunni ones as well.²³ Their apocalyptic warnings are aimed at extending Iran's influence by orienting peoples' political dispositions and reverential attitudes toward Tehran and Qom.²⁴ The message even permits Khamenei, Ahmadinejad, and other Iranian officials to undercut the Saud family's claim, based on Wahhabi tenets and Arabian sovereignty, to absolute authority over the Muslim holy sites of Mecca and Medina. Not surprisingly, Iran's involvement in supporting Arab protestors greatly unsettles the Saudi Arabian monarchy.²⁵

Yes, Iran is becoming the proverbial elephant in the room – with the power to do both good and evil like its ancient pre-Islamic faith claimed. Governments in the West, like the Sunni elites of the Middle East fear its interventions will not bode well. Yet, it is important to understand events since 1979 have demonstrated that the powerbrokers in Iran place their own regime's survival at the foremost of their concerns and are unlikely to initiate a cataclysm that torches it. But they also are championing messianism, and especially its apocalyptic features, in a globally menacing manner. Consequently, prudence dictates not discounting the possibility that Ahmadinejad and his cohorts do believe their rhetoric. Indeed, the Middle East has a long history of violence related to beliefs that a world savior is due. Political repressions, popular uprisings, and hope for heavenly intervention have worked together to fuel zealotry since antiquity.²⁶ So vigilance is necessary to ensure fanaticism does not lead to catastrophe especially now when many Middle Easterners are experiencing revolutionary fervor.²⁷

¹Toby C. Jones, "High Anxiety," *Foreign Policy* (March 23, 2011), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/03/23/high_anxiety?page=0,1; Doug Bandow, "Riyadh Scores One for Tehran," *National Interest* (March 21, 2011), <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/riyadh-scores-tehran-5045>; and Semira N. Nikou, "Iran Warns Gulf on Bahrain," *Frontline Tehran Bureau* (March 25, 2011), <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2011/03/iran-warns-gulf-on-bahrain.html>.

²Alex Vatanka, "The Islamic Republic's Cross-Sectarian Outreach," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol. 11 (2011), <http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/the-islamic-republics-cross-sectarian-outreach>; Khalid Sindawi, "Jordan's Encounter with Shiism," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol. 10 (2010), <http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/jordans-encounter-with-shiism>; Kristin S. Diwan, "Bahrain's Shia Question," *Foreign Affairs* (March 2, 2011), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67555/kristin-smith-diwan/bahrain-shia-question>; and Joshua Teitelbaum, "The Shiites of Saudi Arabia," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol. 10 (2011), <http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/the-shiites-of-saudi-arabia>.

³David Cook, "Messianism in the Shiite Crescent," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol. 11 (2011), <http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/messianism-in-the-shiite-crescent>.

⁴Regarding communal divides emerging in Arab nations due to populist revolts see for example Karen Leigh, "How Bahrain's Government is Dividing the People," *Time* (April 13, 2011), <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2064934,00.html>; and David Blair, "Sunni-Shia Relations: Bahrain Dilemma Exposes Tensions," *Financial Times* (April 18, 2011), <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/fa3eeaa2-67d1-11e0-9138-00144feab49a.html#axzz1JuiLepHX>.

⁵Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 77–115; and Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Iranian Apocalypticism and Eschatology: Grappling with Change," *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute*, vol. 70 (2011), pp. 79–110.

⁶Mohammad H. Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam*, Persian Studies Series, vol. 5 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975), pp. 210–217; Mohammad A. Amir-Moezzi, "Islam in Iran, vii. The Concept of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. 14 (2008), pp. 136–143, <http://www.iranica.com/articles/islam-in>

iran-vii-the-concept-of-mahdi-in-twelve-shiism; and Ahmad Ashraf, "Islam in Iran, xiii, Islamic Political Movements in the 20th Century," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. 14 (2008), p. 165, <http://www.iranica.com/articles/islam-in-iran-xiii-islamic-political-movements-in-20th-century-iran>.

⁷Abbas Djavadi, "The Apocalypse, Messianism Define Ahmadinejad's Policies," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty* (December 9, 2009), http://www.rferl.org/content/The_Apocalypse_Messianism_Define_Ahmadinejads_Policies/1899060.html.

⁸Mitra Amiri, "Iran Calls for Regional Unity and Hits Out at Saudi Arabia," *Reuters* (April 18, 2011), <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFTRE73H2BJ20110418>.

⁹Shia TV (March 2, 2011), http://www.shiatv.net/view_video.php?viewkey=14974e7fd34f975ced5b&page=&viewtype=&category.

¹⁰Mashregh News (April 12, 2011), <http://mashreghnews.ir/NSite/FullStory/News/?Id=38886>.

¹¹Erich Follath and Holger Stark, "The Birth of a Bomb: A History of Iran's Nuclear Ambitions," *Der Spiegel* (June 17, 2010), <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,druck-701109,00.html>.

¹²Reported by Islamic Republic News Agency (August 11, 2005), http://mathaba.net/0_index.shtml?x=302258; Associated Press (February 29, 2010), <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/02/19/world/main6223178.shtml>; and Fars News Agency (March 5, 2010), <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8812140757>.

¹³See also Djavadi, "Apocalypse, Messianism;" Kasra Naji, *Ahmadinejad: The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 92–95, 128, 210; Daniel Pipes, "Ahmadinejad's Mission and Mysticism," *Real Clear Politics* (January 12, 2006), http://www.realclearpolitics.com/Commentary/com-1_12_06_DP.html; and MEMRI (September 6, 2009), http://www.thememriblog.org/blog_personal/en/19787.htm.

¹⁴Robert Tait, "Khamenei Praises Arab Revolts as Iran Crushes Its Own Protests," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty* (February 21, 2011), http://www.rferl.org/content/khamenei_backs_arab_revolt/2316073.html.

¹⁵Abbas Milani, "The New Democrats: An Intellectual History of the Green Wave," *New Republic* (July 15, 2009), <http://www.tnr.com/article/the-new-democrats>; Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Iran's theocracy Implodes," *Real Clear World* (August 4, 2009), http://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2009/08/04/irans_theocracy_implodes.html; and Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Ahmadinejad's Newfound Independence," *World Politics Review* (September 3, 2009), <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/4252/ahmadinejads-newfound-independence>.

¹⁶See also Djavadi, "Apocalypse, Messianism;" Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, p. 15; and Muhammad Sahimi, "Hojjatiyeh, Mesbahiyeh, and Ahmadinejad," *Frontline Tehran Bureau* (September 29, 2010), <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/09/hojjatiyeh-mesbahiyeh-and-ahmadinejad.html>.

¹⁷<http://www.mashanews.com/>. Since his removal from the position of Chief of Staff, the website has been blocked.

¹⁸AEI Iran Tracker (April 6, 2011), <http://www.irantracker.org/roundup/iran-news-round-april-6-2011>; (April 11, 2011), <http://www.irantracker.org/roundup/iran-news-round-april-11-2011>; and (April 17–18, 2011), <http://www.irantracker.org/roundup/iran-news-round-april-17-18-2011>.

¹⁹Asriran News (April 11, 2011), <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/162013>. See more briefly *Los Angeles Times* (April 9, 2011), <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/apr/09/world/la-fg-iran-demotion-20110410>.

²⁰Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Ahmadinejad Bucks Religious Establishment," *Newsweek* (February 11, 2010), <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/02/10/ahmadinejad-bucks-religious-establishment.html>.

²¹AEI Iran Tracker (October 26, 2011), <http://www.irantracker.org/roundup/iran-news-roundup-october-26-2010>.

²²Editors, "Cultural Emancipation Precedes Political Liberation: The Matter with Iranian Movement for Democracy," *e-International Relations* (March 31, 2011), <http://www.e-ir.info/?p=7939>.

²³Reuven Paz, "Hotwiring the Apocalypse: Jihadi Salafi Attitude towards Hizballah and Iran," *Project for the Research of Islamist Movements (PRISM), Occasional Papers*, vol. 4, no. 4 (2006), http://www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM_no_4_vol_4_-_Hotwiring_the_apocalypse.pdf; David Cook, "Messianism in the Shiite Crescent – Analysis," *Eurasia Review* (April 15, 2011), <http://www.eurasiareview.com/messianism-in-the-shiite-crescent-analysis-15042011/>; Roel Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (New

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²⁴Robert Tait, "Is Iran Still Center Of Middle East's 'Great Game'?" *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty* (April 13, 2011), http://www.rferl.org/content/is_iran_still_center_of_mideast_great_game/3556457.html; and Jamsheed K. Choksy, "The Arab Rising – Part II," *Yale Global* (February 4, 2011), <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/arab-rising-part-ii>.

²⁵Bill Spindle and Margaret Coker, "The New Cold War," *Wall Street Journal* (April 16, 2011), http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704116404576262744106483816.html?mod=WSJ_WSJ_News_BlogsModule; Greg Scoble, "Saudi-Iran Cold War," *Real Clear World Compass* (April 18, 2011), http://www.realclearworld.com/blog/2011/04/saudiiran_cold_war.html; and Ali Khalil, "Tension Rises between Iran and Gulf States," *AFP* (April 18, 2011), <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gfjCO8-MEYzagdjPeGe7whwH-Krw?docId=CNG.56fb5187cd3c5d3cae064e25869ff3f4.bf1>.

²⁶Comparisons can be made with medieval Iran and also with medieval Europe on which see Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Norman Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

²⁷Toby C. Jones, "The Persian Gulf Tinderbox," *e-International Relations* (March 23, 2011), <http://www.e-ir.info/?p=7766>.

Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are brought into focus in the following commentary. Toby Jones investigates the pro-democracy movements and demonstrations in these countries, and the measures taken by Saudi elites to counterminimize such campaigns. The piece expounds how the Saudi Arabian government, the most dominant power in the region, is attempting to suppress the democratic movement in Bahrain by promoting sectarian divisions between Sunni and Shiite Muslims.

The Persian Gulf Tinderbox

Toby Jones

Once again, the Persian Gulf is threatening to become a tinderbox and Bahrain is emerging as ground zero. Saudi Arabia, the Gulf's preeminent power, is playing the role of antagonist in chief. Riyadh is unnecessarily provoking a stand-off with its long-time nemesis in Tehran and is leading the region into another potential crisis.

Riyadh and its allies on the Arab side of the Gulf have decided to take a stand against the revolutionary fervor sweeping the Middle East by turning Manama into the frontline of defense for regional autocracies. The kingdom has shrewdly avoided framing its intervention in Bahrain as a defense of the existing political order. Instead, desperate to prevent Bahrain from falling, the Saudis and their collaborators are trying to reshape what is a battle for a democratic future in Bahrain into a cosmic sectarian struggle between Sunnis and Shiites in the Gulf. It is a cynical but predictable move. While it seems Riyadh will succeed in saving Bahrain's ruling Al Khalifa, at least for now, it appears equally likely that the cost will be enduring insecurity in the region and a return to the kind of bitter rivalry that shaped the region in the immediate aftermath of Iran's revolution.

Over the last month tens of thousands of pro-democracy protesters in Bahrain have sought to remake the country's crude dictatorship into a more inclusive political order. A little over a week ago, Bahraini security forces initiated a brutal crackdown on peaceful demonstrators and turned the country into a war-zone. The political opposition was defiant, but it remained peaceful. In mid-March, through sheer numbers, the demonstrators had backed the regime into a corner and seemed poised to score a major political victory.

On March 14, a Saudi Arabian led military contingent stormed into Manama in order to squelch the pro-democracy movement and rescue the Bahraini regime from the tipping point. In doing so, Saudi forces participated in a devastatingly violent crackdown and helped drive the opposition from the streets. At least 15 Bahrainis have been killed so far. Hundreds have been arrested and another 100 are missing. Saudi and Bahraini security forces have seized the country's largest medical clinic, are arresting doctors, and forbidding the treatment of suspected opposition sympathizers. At least one 6 month old girl has died as a result of being denied medical help. Authorities are also systematically imprisoning the country's leading political figures and human rights activists, effectively disappearing the opposition's leadership. Martial law has taken hold, while Bahrain has been turned into a giant military prison.

The crackdown on Bahrain's opposition has been justified largely through the lens of sectarianism and allegations that Shiite Iran is behind events there. The country's demographic make-up lends a veneer of plausibility to claims of sectarian motivations on the part of the opposition. Over 60 percent of the country's indigenous population is Shiite, while the ruling Al Khalifa and their closest allies are Sunni. And the vast majority of the demonstrators hail from Shiite communities, although it is vital to note that a considerable number of Sunnis, including members of one of the country's most important political societies, The National Democratic Action Society, also seek democratic change. Bahrain's Shiites might be justified in using their religious status as a pretext for political mobilization. They have been subject to systematic abuse, political exploitation, and discrimination for decades. Over time, the Al Khalifa have institutionalized anti-Shiism and effectively

built a political system based on sectarian apartheid.

In spite of this, the reality is that Bahrain's opposition has exhibited a consistent determination to avoid seeking a sectarian outcome or settling scores against Sunnis. Their demands have been largely secular, namely the creation of a constitutional monarchy in which all citizens have equal rights to participate, and end to corruption, and the more equitable distribution of wealth.

Leaders in Riyadh and Manama have deliberately looked askew of the actual political grievances articulated by Bahrain's opposition. Instead, they have taken to leveling charges of foreign meddling and a preternatural Shiite irredentism and connections with Iran. Saudi Arabia's Prince Saud al-Faisal remarked the week before the kingdom ordered its military across the causeway connecting his country with Bahrain that "we will not tolerate any interference in our internal affairs by any foreign party...and if we find any foreign interference, we will deal with this decisively." Al-Faisal was speaking of the specter of an uprising in his own country, but the warning proved equally important for the kingdom's closest neighbor.

For their part, Bahrain's leaders have celebrated driving the pro-democracy crowds from the streets as a victorious deliverance from Iranian efforts to topple them. On March 20, King Hamad declared that Saudi Arabia's intervention helped foil foreign machinations against his kingdom. He remarked to his military that "an external plot has been fomented for 20 to 30 years until the ground was ripe for subversive designs... I here announce the failure of the fomented plot." Hamad's comments were a deliberate obfuscation, intended to distract focus from the real terms of the struggle and to reframe the

nature of the political contest.

There is no compelling evidence of Iranian meddling in Bahrain. Bahraini activists have spent far more time in the United States and Europe looking for support in their struggle to gain political rights than in Iran. While Bahrainis did in the past seek counsel and inspiration from Iranian revolutionary politics, those relationships have long since been abandoned.

The consequences of Saudi Arabia's and Bahrain's sectarian gambit are already beginning to take shape and the immediate impact has been to raise the temperature in the region. Iran has responded forcefully to the provocation. Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi warned that Saudi Arabia's intervention "can take the region toward a crisis which would be followed by dangerous consequences." Bahrain and Iran have already withdrawn key diplomats and leaders across the Gulf have done little to tone down anxieties.

With the sectarian framing beginning to take hold, and because Bahrain's pro-democracy movement has little leverage and no support from outside powers, most importantly in Europe and the United States, the possibility that they will ultimately turn to Tehran for support is a potential possibility. If that happens, it will not be because they were disposed to do so from the start, rather it will be because Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and their Arab allies in the Gulf left them little choice.

The tragedy of the current course is that it is entirely avoidable. But the autocrats in the Gulf have made clear that they are willing to use any means necessary, even provoking another regional crisis, to cling to power. Avoiding reform, it seems, is desirable no matter the cost.

The civil war and humanitarian intervention in Libya are the motifs of the next four articles. The editorial by Ramesh Thakur stresses the importance of enforcing the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in Libya, and implies that the Libyan episode represents a significant opportunity for the international community to honour the normative pledges made in the doctrine. In a critical response to Thakur, Mary Ellen O'Connell highlights the dilemmas yielded by the international community's intervention in Libya. O'Connell's piece also illuminates the problems created by the violent nature of the protests against Gaddafi. Viewing the Libyan crisis through a similar lens, Daryl Morini's exposition analyses the role of diplomacy in the crisis. In the fourth piece in this section, Jamsheed Choksy tackles the important question of what will transpire – in regards to both the neighbouring region and the world – if Gaddafi manages to maintain his grip on power.

Libya: The First Stand or the Last Post for the Responsibility to Protect?

Ramesh Thakur

Until the twentieth century, state sovereignty included the right to go to war and an unchallengeable monopoly on the lawful use of force domestically. Gradually by the time of the creation of the United Nations in 1945 and more rapidly thereafter, the right to use force internationally was progressively restricted to self-defence against armed attack or under UN authorisation. Historically, individual states had also intervened inside sovereign jurisdictions to stop the slaughter of kith and kin or co-religionists. Under the impact of the Holocaust and starting with the Genocide Convention in 1948, the international community asserted the collective right to stop states killing large numbers of civilians inside their borders.

Even so, for 350 years – from the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 until 1998 – sovereignty functioned as institutionalised indifference. International interventions in Kosovo and East Timor in 1999 broke that mould and were the backdrop to Kofi Annan's search for a new norm. Both the Rwanda genocide and the Srebrenica massacre happened on his watch as head of UN peacekeeping. After becoming Secretary-General, instead of collective gnashing and wailing during atrocities followed by a traumatic repeat afterwards, yet again, of promises of 'Never Again', he pushed for a new doctrine to take timely and effective

action. With Canada's help, an international commission formulated the innovative principle of the responsibility to protect (R2P).

In 2005, world leaders unanimously agreed that where governments were manifestly failing in their sovereign duty, the international community, acting through the United Nations, would take 'timely and decisive' collective action to honour the international responsibility to protect people against atrocities. Describing R2P as one of his most precious achievements, Annan used its preventive pillar as a prism to mediate in the post-election violence in Kenya in 2008, our only successful R2P marker to date. Ban Ki-moon has put his full weight behind R2P.

The language of R2P refers to state inability or unwillingness as the catalyst to the international responsibility to protect being activated. But when security forces, meant to protect people, are instead let loose in a killing spree, the state itself becomes the prime perpetrator of atrocities. With precisely such an unfolding scenario, Libya today is the place and time to redeem or renege on R2P's solemn pledge. In the popular uprising against Colonel Muammar Gadhafi, many civilians have already been killed and a carnage is feared. After 42 years of autocratic rule, Gadhafi is using deadly violence

to crush and kill people rebelling against his harsh dictatorship. He and son Saif have vowed to fight to the last drop of their blood and deployed air, sea and land forces. Putting all options on the table as the riposte to planes, bombs and tanks seems a pusillanimous response.

R2P provides the normative and political cover to deal robustly, promptly, effectively and, if necessary, militarily with Gadhafi's threat to his people. Action will also help Africans, Westerners and the UN to cleanse the stain of having been passive spectators in Rwanda and Srebrenica, and of complicity in privileging stability over freedoms for the Arabs. In a lazy stereotype, Arabs were held unready for political modernity and the Arab world was in effect deemed a democracy- and human rights-free zone. R2P is narrow – it applies only to the four crimes of ethnic cleansing, genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes – but deep: there are no limits to what can be done in responding to these atrocity crimes. Conversely, global support for R2P is broad but shallow. Libya is the golden opportunity to convert the noble sentiments and words of R2P into deeds whose import will resonate long and far. The problem is atrocities committed by the regime in power. The twin challenge is to protect victims and punish the perpetrators. In response, the international community has used two relatively new instruments: the International Criminal Court (ICC) and R2P. Designed to grapple with the grave problem of mass killings, both give primacy to domestic means of redress but imply a fallback responsibility on outsiders.

The UN Security Council, Human Rights Council, and Ban and his special advisers on genocide prevention and R2P have called on Libya to respect its R2P, human rights and international humanitarian law obligations. When these early appeals were ignored, the Security Council imposed arms, financial and travel sanctions on Libya and referred Gadhafi to the ICC (Resolution 1970). This could complicate efforts to persuade him to end the killings and leave Libya. Those who reject the ICC — China, India, Russia, the US — but refer others to it violate natural justice and are guilty of gross hypocrisy. Many of the most influential countries voting to refer Libya to the ICC refused

to back the Goldstone Report into Israel's actions in Gaza with matching robustness.

The perception of hypocrisy is worsened by the widespread belief that Western leaders who may have committed aggression against Iraq, and Western commanders who may be guilty of war crimes in Iraq – cue Fallujah – and Afghanistan (drone strikes may violate international humanitarian law) are unlikely to be put in the international criminal dock. There is little prospect of those who sold arms to Gadhafi – now trained on the people – being called to criminal account either.

Thus the ICC has been subverted into a tool of the powerful to be used only against the others. This is a perversion of the principle of justice and the rule of law that is meant to be impartially applied to all and put the weak and the strong, the rich and the poor, on equal footing.

In poignant testament to its tragic origins and normative power, R2P is the dominant discourse around the world – from Asia and Africa to Australia, Europe and North America – in debating what must, should and can be done in Libya. R2P is the mobiliser of last resort of the world's will to act to prevent and halt mass atrocities and mitigate the effects of sovereignty as organised hypocrisy, as Stephen Krasner famously put it. It is the normative instrument of choice to convert a shocked international conscience into timely and decisive collective action. It navigates the treacherous shoals between the Scylla of callous indifference to the plight of victims and the Charybdis of self-righteous interference in others' internal affairs.

Three sets of issues are involved: military capacity, legal authority, and political legitimacy.

Military operations would entail four activities: surveillance and monitoring, humanitarian assistance, enforcement of the arms embargo, and enforcement of a no-fly zone. Only the West has the military assets and operational capability for these tasks. But NATO would be ill-advised to take any military action on its own authority.

Calls have grown for a no-fly zone, not the least

How to Save a Revolution

Mary Ellen O'Connell

from rebels under aerial attack. Military analysts seem divided on its scale, complexity and feasibility. Some say it would require the prior destruction of the Libyan air force, others add anti-aircraft batteries, and still others warn of mission creep and the risk of being branded Western imperialists.

Yet a no-fly zone was successfully enforced over Iraq to protect the Kurds for twelve years until 2003. It did not lead to mission creep: the 2003 war was a deliberate policy choice for totally independent reasons. The quality of Libya's air force is suspect. A no-fly zone could tip the balance between Libyan air force officers' motivations to bomb fellow-citizens and defection to the rebels or the West. On 12 March Defense Secretary Robert Gates, clarifying earlier widely-quoted remarks on the risks of a no-fly zone, said that the US does have the capacity to enforce it.

The risks of mission creep – a deepening quagmire leading to nation-building – would arise only if ownership of the uprising was appropriated from the Libyans by the West, as would happen with ground troops. But no one is asking for foreign boots on the ground. Legal authorisation from the UN Security Council should be restricted to the four military tasks listed above.

If the Security Council dishonours the world's collective responsibility to protect, limited and legitimate action by NATO is still possible under clear mandate from the African Union and Arab League, backed by the Organization of Islamic Conference and the Gulf Cooperation Council. Absent that, NATO guns should stay silent. Standing idly on the sidelines yet again will add to the shamefully long list of refusing to accept the responsibility of being our brothers' keepers across borders. Against the 'unknown unknowns' of the results and unintended-cum-perverse consequences of intervention are the 'known knowns' of no military action: the slaughter of people and victory

for a ruthless tyrant. If and when Gadhafi re-enters a recaptured Benghazi in ceremonial triumph, the United Nations should sound the last post for R2P.

The Libyan opposition has shown great courage and serious miscalculation. Principally, they failed to take into account the loyalty, training, and resources of Colonel Ghaddafi's forces. They also failed to realize that revolutions such as theirs depend on non-violence. Influenced perhaps by calls for no-fly zones and other forms of foreign military intervention in Egypt, they have failed to understand both the importance of non-violence and the importance of self-reliance.

The revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt succeeded in part because the opposition employed non-violence. Brave individuals demonstrated peacefully, contrasting their movements with the violence, torture, and suppression of the dictatorial regimes. Egyptians and Tunisians needed no outside military intervention from the West. Such intervention would have called into question the claim to be popular movements. In this, too, the Tunisian and Egyptian opposition distinguished themselves from the dictators. The "strong" men have relied for decades on close ties to Western powers, receiving excessive military assistance.

How could any pro-democracy activist agree to resort to the very means employed by the dictators for decades?

The Libyan opposition did understand—at least at the outset of their struggle—the need to prevent Western military interference in their movement. Voices from the opposition made clear that any outside assistance had to be through the United Nations. Then, in their desperation by mid-March, the opposition seemed to have reversed course, calling for the imposition of a no-fly zone. Proponents of military intervention have grasped these confused and desperate pleas (See Ramesh Thakur, in e-IR, and Anne-Marie Slaughter, in the New York Times).

But the Libyan opposition's contradictory calls indicate the critical problem faced by the Libyan

rebels—Ghaddafi controls Libya more effectively than his counter-parts did Egypt and Tunisia. Ghaddafi's opponents are too few in number, too disorganized, and have too few links to human rights organizations outside Libya. The young, untrained men who grabbed weapons and hurled themselves against Ghaddafi's trained fighters have revealed much about their movement.

To impose a no-fly zone over this situation would be the height of irresponsibility. Ghaddafi does not need air power to decimate his last opponents. Recall what happened when the air war began against Slobodan Milosevic's forces during the 1999 Kosovo Crisis. That is exactly when the real killing on the ground began. NATO's intervention removed the last restraints on a cornered dictator. Ghaddafi has been backed into the same corner.

A no-fly zone will not have save the Libyan revolution. It is most unlikely that any military intervention will. There is barely a revolution to support, and what is there cannot survive as a popular movement opposed to a violent dictatorship if it needs foreign military violence to succeed. The way to save the Libyan revolution is to urge regrouping now. The remaining fighters should seek asylum immediately in Tunisia and Egypt. The United Nations should move quickly to provide security to asylum seekers. This is the sort of use of force the UN can execute well (See the views of my colleague, Robert Johansen, in the Globalpost).

Yes, tragically, many are likely to be killed while seeking refuge but many fewer will die if the opposition ends the fighting now. Once out of Libya, the opposition can receive assistance and support toward a peaceful transition of power in Libya. If the opposition does not leave, there is unlikely to be anyone left to build a viable opposition.

Indeed, a well-developed opposition that can negotiate with Ghaddafi for a peaceful transition

Did Diplomacy Succeed or Fail in Libya?

Daryl Morini

might even lead to a smoother and more complete change than is occurring in Egypt and Tunisia. The United Nations, the European Union, the African Union, and others have plenty of expertise respecting transition. This could be deployed to great advantage.

Ramesh Thakur supports military intervention in Libya by citing Kofi Annan's assistance in Kenya in the aftermath of election-related civil violence. Thakur says this was a successful exercise of R2P that supports the exercise of R2P in Libya using military force.

Thakur is right about Kenya—Annan's efforts did help. An even better example is Mozambique in the 1990s, which was aided toward peace by Sergio Vieira de Mello. But we called Vieira de Mello's efforts mediation when he was in Mozambique.

R2P, by contrast, is known best for its association with military force. Indeed, one of my major concerns with the R2P since its unveiling in 2001 is that it has helped promote military force as an acceptable approach to extremely serious problems, discouraging thinking about creative, peaceful approaches with a better chance to succeed. Did the rebels in Libya risk an uprising against the country's military because they heard calls for military intervention in Egypt and statements about "nothing off the table?"

If there is no intervention and the Libyan rebels go down to defeat, some will say R2P is vindicated. But the evidence will support a different conclusion and a different lesson: the successful revolutions were non-violent.

Due to the fast-changing nature of events in Libya, one aspect of the following analysis was outpaced by a new development before the article's published: the Libyan government accepted an African Union-mediated peace plan. For the sake of intellectual accountability, the section of this article dealing with the African Union (AU) mediations—and the Gaddafi regime's conduct towards these—has not been substantively altered following this news. However, this AU peace plan cannot yet be assumed to form the basis of a durable peace treaty, because Libyan opposition leaders are insisting on the condition that Gaddafi and his sons step down from power. The rebels have thus refused the AU peace proposal, on the grounds that it does not meet this basic demand.¹ Additionally, as noted by BBC news correspondent Jon Leyne, "neither government nor opposition appear under enough pressure yet to sue for peace."²

Since the Libyan crisis began, a storm of commentary has questioned the legality, legitimacy, desirability, necessity, and morality of the international intervention in the North African country.³ A question that is less frequently asked is that of preventability. While recriminations over the present international intervention in Libya have only begun, it may help to clarify the parameters of the debate to focus on what alternative options were available to the international community in response to events in Libya. What were the alternatives to an international show of force? Were soft-power tools exhausted before resorting to hard-power sticks? Could the United Nations have successfully practiced preventive, as opposed to reactive and coercive, diplomacy? Could—or should—the world have negotiated with Gaddafi? These are important questions, insofar as they may help us to make sense of the ongoing Libyan war.

Alternatives?

Firstly, could the international community have avoided the use of force in Libya via alternative

diplomatic means?⁴ If diplomacy is to be understood as "the management of international relations by negotiation", then a failure of negotiations to find a peaceful solution to conflicts of interest qualifies as a failure of diplomacy.⁵ But if diplomacy is defined in realist terms as "peaceable coercion" in pursuit of states' self-interested objectives,⁶ or in the more explicitly zero-sum and militaristic view of the "continuation of war by other means," then we can arrive at divergent explanations of whether diplomacy has succeeded or failed.⁷ To get around this problem, we will judge the success or failure of UN-sanctioned (multilateral and coercive) diplomacy, in the lead-up to the use of force in Libya, first and foremost in relation to the alternatives available to policy-makers, and their credibility and cost-benefit trade-offs.

There were certainly other options at hand for the United States, the United Kingdom and France—buttressed by an Arab coalition—short of the use of force. One of these, the weapon of choice in many contentious international issues, was to enact a policy of "strategic patience". This approach, practised in international conflicts on the Korean peninsula⁸ and in Georgia,⁹ may mean nothing more than condemning belligerents, calling for international engagement, and observing how the situation develops. This was a possible alternative to international intervention in Libya. Strategic patience may have stood a chance in the Security Council, were it not for the ghosts of international failures past—most notably the world's bystander role in Rwanda.¹⁰ It was indeed the ghost of Rwanda which reduced the appeal of strategic patience, at least for key U.S. actors such as UN Ambassador Susan Rice and Samantha Power.¹¹ Theoretically, the Permanent Five members of the UNSC could have avoided the dangers of military involvement in the Libyan conflict by staging a stereotypical show of disunity, or else a symbolic joint declaration expressing the Security Council's "grave concern" at events in Libya. This was a distinct possibility.

As is well known, however, on 17 March the UNSC approved a No-Fly Zone to protect Libyan civilians by “all necessary measures”.¹² The logic of resolution 1973 can be seen to support the view, expressed by Jim Murphy on e-IR, that international anger about Iraq did not trump the shame of Rwanda.

As we saw, a policy of doing nothing was a clear alternative. Short of this extreme policy of inaction, however, we may question whether the United Nations was too quick to approve violence to combat violence. Sending a UN-led buffer force to separate the rebels and government soldiers was a possible alternative, but the three pressing constraints of UN peacekeeping shortfalls in military assets,¹³ the political horse-trading and quiet diplomacy Ban Ki-moon needed to engage in to secure troop commitments and another UNSC resolution,¹⁴ as well as the sharp time constraints meant that the Libyan crisis would have been ‘solved’ militarily before the UN could have formulated a coherent peacekeeping strategy. Additionally, even if it had been deployed on time, it is unlikely that such a UN force could have kept out of the fray. As in Ivory Coast, where UN and French forces engaged in a coercive peace enforcement mission,¹⁵ UN troops on the ground would have been compelled to impose the peace by force. The result would have still been the international community’s use of force in Libya, only via troops on the ground rather than a No-Fly Zone. Nevertheless, did the UN miss a chance to negotiate with Colonel Gaddafi? Empirical facts suggest that Gaddafi was less interested in a peaceful compromise with his domestic challengers than their total submission.

Negotiations?

Uganda’s president Yoweri Museveni, for one, critiqued the intervention of Western powers in the Libyan conflict for undercutting an eleventh-hour African Union (AU) mediation attempt between Tripoli and the rebel movement—a mission which was called off when French and British missiles began raining down on Libyan military targets.¹⁶ According to Jean Ping, the head of the Commission of the AU, the diplomatic intervention had been over-ruled by the UN Security Council, on the grounds that it was too dangerous for the

mediators.¹⁷ But how successful the AU mission would have been is questionable. The UN (resolution 1970) had already employed the alternative sanctions of an arms embargo, a travel ban and assets freeze of Libyan officials, and a referral of Libya to the International Criminal Court. Despite these punitive measures—and irrespective of the condemnation of the Arab League, the AU, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and Western powers¹⁸—Gaddafi’s troops marched on Benghazi.

If Western media and intelligence reports were accurate,¹⁹ then Libya’s unilateral cease-fire declaration (on 18 March) was an attempt to gain time, complicate the enforcement of a UN-sanctioned no-fly zone, and potentially present the world with a classic *fait accompli* in Benghazi. Gaddafi said as much in his speech. The Libyan leader warned of a house-to-house “slaughter” in rebel-held communities, and called for his people to “capture the rats”, and “cockroaches”, and “sick” groups rebelling against his rule—who were allegedly drugged by evil Western powers spiking their Nescafé (!). According to early warning systems designed to avoid the repetition of a Rwanda, Gaddafi’s use of dehumanising rhetoric to vilify target groups by likening them to animals or a disease—“vermin or rats, cancer or plagues, or...cockroaches”, in the case of Rwanda²⁰—triggered alarm bells of potential large-scale massacres to come. Moreover, Gaddafi explicitly stated his intention to imitate the Russian (Yeltsin’s shelling of the Duma in 1993) and Chinese precedents (1989 Tiananmen massacre), which had successfully “snuffed the rats out” before the world could effectively react.²¹ What exactly would have occurred to Libyan rebels in Benghazi in the absence of coalition airstrikes—and precisely what Gaddafi had in mind when warning that his troops would “find you even in your closets”—is a counter-factual question that no historian will ever be able to answer. But there was a clear intention behind the government military advance on eastern rebel strongholds, which aimed to change the military facts on the ground by killing rebels en masse, banking on international disunity and Western rhetoric and diplomacy not being backed by the credible threat of the use of force. Gaddafi miscalculated. The UN Security Council served its

stated purpose: “to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace...”²²

Which brings us back to the question: How successful could the AU peace-making mission have been? The AU mediation mission, backed by Gaddafi’s few international friends, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Cuba’s Fidel Castro,²³ and potentially funded by the European Union,²⁴ seems to have been pushed by Tripoli at two precise moments: On the 5th of March, and twenty days later. These dates are interesting, as they correlated with two reversals of fortune for pro-Gaddafi forces, including a large-scale rebel counter-attack (the battles of Ras Lanuf and Bin Jawad, 4-5 March), after resolution 1973 was implemented in Libya, and the intensification of coalition air strikes against government military targets, and NATO taking control of the air and naval missions (24-25 March).²⁵ If we can deduce anything from these dates,²⁶ without making exaggerated causal claims, it is that Muammar Gaddafi has supported the idea of AU mediations only when the tide of battle turned against government forces.

Hence, we can see that Gaddafi did not seriously commit to third-party mediation as a matter of policy, but instead as a form of tactical retreat—only after events on the ground had begun shifting against the Libyan regime. This suggests that Colonel Gaddafi, in the time-honoured tradition of military strategists, perceived dialogue and negotiations in utilitarian terms as a cover for military plans and manoeuvres,²⁷ rather than the means to finding a mutually-acceptable solution to the Libyan civil war. Like Spartan leaders before him, Gaddafi sought negotiations out of tactical considerations, “meanwhile we can employ the time gained in perfecting our preparations...”²⁸ Dialogue could be used to gain relative gains and military leverage over the enemy. This also implies that Tripoli’s offers of “conditional compromises”²⁹ to the rebels and foreign powers are signs that Gaddafi is bargaining from a weak—and weakening—position.³⁰ This can also be seen in Gaddafi’s (5 April) letter to President Obama (whom Gaddafi refers to as his “son”), in which he boils down the two problems facing Libya to: 1. NATO’s military involvement in the conflict;

and 2. the presence of Al Qaeda operatives among Libyan rebels. If this letter, conveniently leaked to the media, is the original and whole correspondence, then Gaddafi seems to be suggesting that problem #1, with Obama’s help, can be traded for an end to problem #2: i.e. an end to NATO operations in exchange for an end to Al Qaeda’s (alleged) activities in Libya.³¹ This tacit *quid-pro-quo*, which the U.S. has publicly rejected, demonstrates the limited leverage of the Gaddafi regime, exhausted after Libya’s defiant return to pariah status, despite having re-emerged from international isolation to become a *de facto* U.S. ally in the war on terror in the early 2000s. Hence, the regime is now isolated and bargaining for its very survival.

This does not mean that the African Union’s ongoing attempt to broker peace talks between Gaddafi and the rebels are worthless or doomed to fail. To the contrary, they should be sustained to encourage the Libyan leadership to perceive negotiations as a viable alternative to the continued use of military force against their own people. The AU can continue to offer Gaddafi a way out. But the fact remains that the escalation of internationally-sanctioned military force on the Libyan battlefield, which halted the pro-government advance on Benghazi and induced a stalemate—rather than an all-out victory by Gaddafi forces—was a necessary precondition for the Gaddafi regime to be persuaded of the need for negotiations. Western commentators have expressed concerns over a protracted Libyan stalemate,³² which may risk draining domestic support for the military intervention. Unfortunately, however, mutually-hurting stalemates are often required to bring about a mediated solution to violent conflicts.³³

In other words, although China and other international observers may criticise the intervening powers, and urge them to “give peace a chance”,³⁴ a stable peace in Libya would have had no chance of surviving without the Security Council’s diplomatic backing and military enforcement. The possibility of genuine and lasting peace for Libyan civilians—as opposed to a Tiananmen-inspired Carthaginian peace which Gaddafi openly intended—was only made possible by the diplomatic battle leading to resolution 1973 and the subsequent UN-mandated intervention in Libya, both of which China and

Russia passively approved by withholding their veto power. This is the paradox of Libya, and humanitarian intervention broadly speaking. Although all wars may represent a failure of diplomacy, war is often the last resort of diplomacy.³⁵ [This paradox results from two competing ideas of what the supreme objective of diplomacy should be: peace at any cost, or peace by any means. More than a definitional paradox, this is a moral dilemma.

The Paradox of Diplomacy

Did diplomacy succeed or fail in Libya? The international military intervention resulted from a mixture of an arguably ‘successful’ strategy of coercive diplomacy at the UN, framed as a case of preventing democide—a government’s mass murder of its own citizens—and a failure of third-party mediations. This crisis demonstrated the tension at the heart of international initiatives to prevent violent conflicts and massacres, namely that the multilateral and UN-sanctioned use of force is a legitimate tool of conflict prevention.³⁶ At this point, our consideration of diplomacy can no longer remain divorced from the broader debate about the role of morality in international affairs, which has been reignited by the Libyan crisis. Diplomacy itself is a paradox: although it has historically been idealised as an antidote to power, it may more accurately be conceived of as an instrument of power.³⁷ Like any instrument, diplomacy is morally neutral. It is neither good nor bad, and the morality or immorality of its outcome ultimately depends on who is wielding it, when, why, and how. One may agree, with Benjamin Franklin, that there never was a good war or a bad peace. But what of the grey areas between both moral absolutes? There is scarcely anything inherently good about the kind of peace which Tacitus described: “they make a wasteland and call it peace”. Just as there may be nothing inherently bad about the targeted use of military force to stop large-scale massacres of unarmed civilians by their own governments, or to enforce peace between warring factions.³⁸ Similarly, diplomats are neither messengers of the Gods, in the image of their Greek patron Hermes, nor are they necessarily “just as essential to starting a war as soldiers for finishing it,” as Will Rogers joked.³⁹

The present debate about whether President Obama’s

backing of the intervention in Libya vindicated the amoral theory of realism, or the values-based worldview of Wilsonian idealism, is overly reductionist.⁴⁰ The tensions between interests and values, between peace and justice, and between national and global priorities routinely confront heads of state and policy-makers every waking and working hour—particularly the representatives of democratic polities, who must worry about such things as opinion polls, popular opinion, and elections.⁴¹ Simplifying the complexity of the Libyan crisis to two moral poles exposes us to what Harold Nicolson saw as the terrible danger of self-righteousness. “Diplomacy is not a system of moral philosophy,” warned Nicolson.⁴² The conduct of diplomacy must not be judged by the moral beliefs it confirms, but by the crises it avoids, the conflicts it manages, and the lives it saves. To the extent that these can ever definitely be known, as in the case of Benghazi, successful diplomacy must be benchmarked against the internal and external validity of intentions, the legal and political legitimacy of actions, the correspondence between rhetoric and reality, the existence or lack of credible alternatives and, ultimately, by its outcomes. By these measures, it is too early to provide a definitive post-mortem of the Libyan operation. But we can see that the use of multilateral coercive diplomacy, through the UN Security Council system—in distinction to unilateralism—was surprisingly effective in providing the legal and political legitimacy for international intervention in Libya. Whether this was good or bad, smart or stupid, desirable or mistaken, and exactly what NATO will now do with the UN-sanctioned legitimacy it has inherited (i.e. use it or lose it) are important questions, but they will only be answerable once the dust of the Libyan mission settles.

Those who argue that, to the contrary, the Libyan intervention has “weakened the UN as a body operating within the constitutional framework of the UN Charter,” are right to point to the contradicting imperatives at the heart of the UN system: saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war, whilst uniting in strength to suppress, contain and remove acts of aggression and threats to international peace and security; the self-determination of peoples vs. the sovereign integrity and equality of member-

states.⁴³ But resolutions 1970 and 1973 were not the final nail in the coffin of the United Nations; they demonstrated the relevance and necessity of multilateral diplomacy in the Twenty-First Century. Whether the international use of force, legitimised by the UN and enforced by NATO, ultimately succeeds in bringing about a peaceful and stable political settlement in Libya (and indeed in Afghanistan) remains very much to be seen. At minimum, multilateral diplomacy was efficiently employed by the intervening powers. Libya does not belong in the same category as the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, but is comparable to the UN-backed use of force during the First Gulf War (1990) and in Korea (1950).

In conclusion, analysing the role of diplomacy in the present Libyan crisis may help to ground the debates about morality versus Realpolitik, and humanitarian intervention versus the principle of non-intervention in the civil wars and massacres of other states. If politics is the art of the possible, diplomacy is the art of taking the possible to a global scale.⁴⁴ Hence, proponents of intervention in Libya under the umbrella of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) must weigh up the long-term limitations and diplomatic constraints of the UN engaging in humanitarian interventions in every crisis, from Yemen to Bahrain, and from Côte d’Ivoire to the Democratic Republic of Congo. The critique that R2P represents Western double-standards in humanitarian garments and the realist point that might makes right is a vexing one, which R2P advocates have not yet answered satisfactorily. Proponents of the increasing use of R2P in world affairs must respond to the question: ‘could R2P ever be used in Iran, or China, or Russia?’ But those who argue for inaction, strategic patience and not meddling in tyrants’ internal affairs, must also assess the costs of these choices—because choices they are—relative to the short-term safety of doing nothing. Critics who argue against Western military interventions as a matter of principle must begin by recognising that interventions in the affairs of other states out of perceived or alleged humanitarian concerns is not a neo-colonial policy, but has been practised by such diverse states as Iran (support of Kurds in Iraq until 1975), Cuba (1975-1991, in Angola), Vietnam (1978 intervention in Cambodia), arguably Tanzania (1979 intervention

in Uganda), Rwanda (1998, in the DRC), Ethiopia (2006) and Kenya (2011) in Somalia, Russia (2008, in Georgia; 2010 in Kyrgyzstan), and more. Finally, those who argue that the Libyan intervention was a strategic and political mistake, no matter the initial humanitarian necessity and UN-sanctioned legitimacy, must consider the question: What were the credible alternatives?

Notes

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⁵Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd, 1939), 15.

⁶Chas W. Freeman, Jr., *The Diplomat’s Dictionary* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 105.

⁷Zhou Enli, cited in *Ibid.* 102.

⁸See Ian Rinehart, ‘The Value of Strategic Patience’, *International Affairs Review*, 28 March 2011, available at: <http://www.iar-gwu.org/node/290>

⁹Rebecca Weisser, ‘Georgia uses “strategic patience”’, *The Australian*, 20 November 2010, available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/georgia-uses-strategic-patience/story-e6frg6zo-1225956758782>

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- ¹⁷See 'Head of African Union: UN blocked mediation efforts in Libya', available at: <http://pajamasmedia.com/tatler/2011/03/29/head-of-african-union-un-blocked-mediation-efforts-in-libya/>
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- ²⁸King Archidamus, cited in Nicolson, *Diplomacy*, 39.
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What If Libya's Qaddafi Hangs On?

Jamsheed K. Choksy

Rather than unambiguously backing the cause of freedom in Libya, Western governments seem to be reconciling themselves to the possibility that the regime of Muammar Qaddafi might remain in power.

If this is the case, however, the world must prepare for the possible re-emergence of a global threat — Libya's weapons-of-mass-destruction (WMD) program. After "cleansing Libya" of "rats, cockroaches, and drug addicts" (as Qaddafi characterizes those defying him), Libya's leader will turn his attention to the foreign countries he believes fueled the rebellion against him.

Qaddafi is well aware of the global turmoil he can cause by abrogating the 2003 WMD agreement he reached with the West. Indeed, he has already threatened to pull out of all international agreements. Doing so would send already high oil prices soaring. "We know this game," Qaddafi's elites are fond of saying, citing Europe's dependence on oil they control. The current nuclear crisis in Japan merely strengthens their hand.

Of course, the leaders of countries like North Korea, Iran, Syria, and Venezuela are on the lookout for opportunities to overturn the current global system; sideline the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations; vitiate the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty; and eliminate any threats to their own authority. Helping Qaddafi recreate a major nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons program on Europe's doorstep would clearly help them further these ambitions.

Enemies Of My Enemies

But things are not all good among the world's troublemakers. After the administrations of U.S. President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair busted the A.Q. Khan nuclear-trafficking ring, Qaddafi not only rolled over but also incriminated North Korea and Iran. He'll have to make some effort to mend fences with these two countries.

Nonetheless, Pyongyang has had nothing to say about the uprising in Libya. And leaders in North Korea know that helping Qaddafi resume his WMD programs would deflect international attention from their own activities. Unable to threaten Europe from far-off Asia, North Korea would surely be tempted to resume providing missile technology to Tripoli, especially since doing so would indirectly funnel Europe's own oil money into Pyongyang's depleted coffers.

Reconciling with the mullahs in Tehran will be harder. Iran has come out in favor of an Islamist regime in Libya, so it is unlikely the Qaddafi family will be able to come to terms with Iran's theocrats. But the dynamics of proliferation do not demand hugs. Iran has said it is prepared to "export nuclear technology and products." There are plenty of intermediaries in the Middle East who are on good terms with both countries. Past differences didn't keep the nuclear programs of Iran and Libya from cooperating, as the International Atomic Energy Agency has demonstrated using uranium-particle data.

Although often in agreement with Tehran, Syria did not speak out against Qaddafi because populist Arab uprisings bode no good for its own authoritarian regime. President Bashar al-Assad can exploit that noninvolvement to facilitate cooperation between Iran and Libya. In addition to the Israeli-bombed site of Al-Kibar, where the Syrian atomic energy organization is suspected of having collaborated with its Iranian counterpart, Assad may well have at least one more nuclear plant. Syria has long had chemical and biological WMD programs as well. Damascus would benefit politically, ideologically, and financially by serving as a pipeline for Iranian technology heading to Tripoli.

Venezuela's Hugo Chavez has been championing his Arab mentor — from whom he received the Qaddafi International Prize for Human Rights in 2004! — during the present crisis. Caracas is

linked to Tehran's uranium prospecting, weapons development, and nuclear proliferation. Flights into Caracas from Tehran and Pyongyang go unmonitored and unregulated. So Venezuela is an ideal conduit for indirect restocking of Qaddafi's WMD arsenal. Indeed when Chavez visited Qaddafi in October 2010, the two leaders declared they would "come out as steel tigers to face the [U.S.] empire."

Exhausted militarily and politically by their drawn-out struggles to establish order in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States and the European Union have largely chosen to sit out the intra-Libyan struggle. But will Washington, London, and Paris have the same luxury if Qaddafi turns against the outsiders he imagines are to blame?

U.S. President Ronald Reagan may very well have been on target in characterizing the Libyan tyrant as "this mad dog of the Middle East." Given his consistent displays of mercurial, violent behavior, Qaddafi is perhaps a more likely deployer of WMDs than his counterparts in North Korea, Iran, Venezuela, or Syria. After all, he still has mustard gas on hand for use against domestic and international opponents. Reality frequently gives way to delusion among such leaders and their supporters.

The story of the Arab Spring is still being written. As implied in the introduction and in many of the essays which followed, the outcomes of these remarkable events in global politics are still clouded with uncertainty and are yet to be fully apprehended. This concluding piece by Shashank Joshi poignantly captures the uncertain futures of the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa.

Three Ripples from the Arab Spring

Shashank Joshi

It is extraordinarily difficult to make sense of events in North Africa and the Middle East as they continue to unfold. In late 1978, as protests against modernising, yet unpopular, governments mounted in both Iran and Afghanistan, few would have understood the scale of the Islamist wave that would sweep the region over the following decade. Over three decades on, we are seeing a series of revolutions and proto-revolutions whose pace, connectivity, and breadth have no parallel in modern history other than that triggered by the European revolutions of 1989 as the Soviet Union collapsed.

Though it may be impossible to say whether resilient and flexible regimes – like Syria and Jordan – will survive unscathed, or whether Libya will go the way of Iraq into potential balkanisation and civil war, one can at least pick out some less-noted but far-reaching implications.

Cairo's Renewal

First, we are seeing subtle changes in the distribution of power and prestige. Egypt, after a post-revolutionary spell in which it led the Arab world in three wars against Israel and forged a short lived unification with Syria, had slid into a diplomatic backwater. This was not just a function of peace with Israel, though Cairo's voice was never as loud or resonant after 1978 as it had been in the heady days of the war of attrition from 1967 to 1970, or the perversely celebrated defeat of 1973. Even afterwards, Egypt's position sunk as the state found that national-socialist ideas had little ideological or economic purchase on its citizenry.

Even with Mubarak gone, a military junta remains in charge and constitutional amendments –

overwhelmingly approved – will not cure either maladministration or an overweening military-industrial complex. Worse still, Egypt lacks the single greatest advantage of what were nascent democracies in Central and Eastern Europe – the lure of the EU, a powerful engine of norm diffusion and reform whose effectiveness is scandalously neglected.

But all this said, Egypt's next president will be profoundly more in tune with his people (the gendered pronoun is sadly unavoidable) than any of his predecessors. That means not just a more nationalist and independent politics, more akin to Pakistan and Turkey than Qatar or Jordan, but also a proud and likely respected voice on the Middle Eastern stage that will re-take its rightful place alongside Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Sectarian Cold Wars

Second, the uprisings will buffet the region's perpetual Sunni-Shia cold war in different ways. In the years after 2001, Iran – leading a putative Shia camp – looked ascendant. Its long-time adversaries in Afghanistan (the Saudi-backed Taliban) and Iraq (the Sunni Baath regime led by Saddam Hussein) were toppled, and Israeli over-reach in Lebanon and Gaza strengthened the stature and confidence of Iranian allies Hamas and Hezbollah.

This trend will not suddenly reverse. Iran still enjoys the singular advantage of choosing the pace of advancement of its nuclear programme to achieve a quiet and implicit deterrent without provoking what would be a profoundly self-defeating attack by the US or Israel. And the protests by Bahrain's Shia majority, implausibly tarred as Iranian fifth

columnists by the Sunni Gulf monarchs, furnishes Tehran with a new grievance around which it can build a Syrian-Lebanese-Iraqi diplomatic coalition to grandstand and thereby divert attention from its own protests, the worst since the abortive Green Revolution in 2009.

But in Syria, Bashar al-Assad is in a weaker position than he appears. Despite ruling alongside hardliners (next to whom he can appear a reformist of sorts), unrest has permeated even within regime strongholds. If the army repeated the Hama massacre of 1982, it would silence protests for days, but would unleash a wave of grievance that, unlike post-Tiananmen China, it would have no hope of containing in the longer-term. Syria's Sunni majority is not poised to usurp the instruments of power, but their increased influence in domestic and foreign policy would be a blow to Iran's ambitions. The great danger is that Iran responds to these changes – including the provocative Gulf Cooperation Council force in Bahrain itself – with the sponsorship of armed movements. That would wrench sectarian cleavages further apart and ensure that no constitutional settlement could take hold.

The Model Democrats

Third, and finally, what are the models for change? Are there plausible images of Egypt's or Libya's futures? The regimes undergoing upheaval differ radically. Libya has none of the civilisational profile and history of regional leadership present in Egypt; it has no respected and cohesive national army, nor a civil society that was managed and contorted – but not destroyed – by the government.

Egypt can look to both Turkey and Pakistan. In 1960, Turkey underwent its first military coup. Pakistan, that same year, formalised its first coup that had taken place two years earlier. After decades of democratic flickers and sporadic backsliding, Turkey has fashioned what looks to be a vibrant, functioning, and perhaps influential marriage of

political Islam and democracy under the occasional thumb of a powerful military. Pakistan has utterly failed to come to terms with any of these things.

But Turkey is a non-Arab power, and one whose stature in the Arab world has grown significantly only in the past five years. If Egypt can replicate the experience, this will have profound demonstration effects on civil society activists and political organisations in each direction – both westward in North Africa and eastward towards the Gulf. Those societies in which tribal and regional fractures inflect political alliances, such as Libya or Yemen, cannot as easily travel this road.

The three aforementioned points of focus are neither the only, nor the most important, dimensions of change. Revolutionary change is hard to understand, but – as 1989 showed – it is even harder to predict. In the unlikely event that the House of Saud were to dissolve in the face of internecine sectarian and tribal civil conflict, each of these predictions would be washed away. If Libya's opposition are as broad-based and democratic as they claim, and Gaddafi's revolutionary travesty is replaced with an enduring and legitimate political system, North Africa's possibilities would be transformed at a stroke.

Yet whatever transpires in Libya, political tectonic waves are shifting. In the coming years, Cairo will rediscover its stature and voice; the Arab world's sectarian cold war will move into a dangerous period; and aspirant democrats will search for models of their own, first Turkey, but perhaps eventually, Egypt.

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