

CONFLICT TRENDS

ISSUE 1, 2015



ACCORD is Ranked among Top Think Tanks in the World

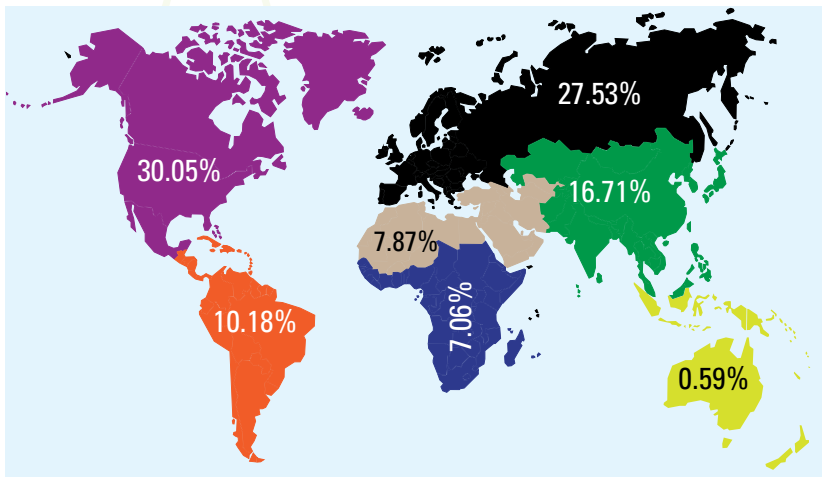
For the fifth consecutive year, ACCORD has been recognised by the Global Go To Think Tank Index as one of the top-100 think tanks in the world.

The 2014 Global Go To Think Tank Report was produced by the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania, USA.

ACCORD is proud to have been ranked out of over **6 600 think tanks** globally, of which 467 are based in sub-Saharan Africa, in the following sub-categories:

- **32nd** in the category 'Top Think Tanks Worldwide (Non-US)' (p. 62) and is the highest ranked African institution in this category
- **63rd** in the category 'Top Think Tanks Worldwide (US and Non-US)' (p. 66)
- **6th** in the category 'Top Think Tanks in Sub-Saharan Africa' (p. 69)
- **23rd** in the category 'Best Managed Think Tanks' (p. 118)
- **31st** in the category 'Best Use of Social Networks' (p. 134).

Global Distribution of Think Tanks by Region



Number of Think Tanks in the World in 2014



The Thinker

These rankings pay testament to ACCORD's Knowledge Production, Interventions and Training departments, which strive to produce both experientially-based and academically rigorous knowledge, derived from our 23 years in the conflict resolution field, relevant to practitioners, governments, civil society and organisations within Africa and throughout the world.

Now in its eighth year, the Global Go To Think Tank Index has become an authoritative resource for individuals and institutions worldwide. ACCORD would like to congratulate its fellow African institutions and organisations for their recognition by the Index. It is an honour for ACCORD, its Board of Trustees, and its staff to receive these rankings for a fifth year running.

More information about the report's methodology and findings can be found in the final report:

<http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=think_tanks>.

African solutions for African challenges



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Cover photo credit: Oxfam Novib (Creative Commons). Protesters in Cairo's Tahrir Square denounce military trials of civilians in a gathering on 30 September 2011.



EDITORIAL

BY VASU GOUNDEN

Few could have predicted that the self-immolation of a Tunisian fruit vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, on 17 December 2010, would become the spark to an unprecedented chain of events; an act responsible for recalibrating the dynamics of state and society in North Africa and beyond.

The massive and far-reaching popular protests that followed this singular act spread across the North African countries of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, while also affecting countries in the Middle East and Arabian Peninsula. These protests, which materialised from each country's respective indifference towards deep-seated socio-economic inequalities and political grievances, found expression, common purpose and momentum in the near-simultaneous actions and movement of millions of people across the region. Within weeks, the popular protests precipitated the downfall of deeply entrenched political regimes in Egypt and Tunisia, and ignited a destabilising civil conflict in Libya.

Early 2015 marks the fourth-year anniversary of the Arab protests. How do we assess the impacts and consequences of the movements that have now collectively become known as the 'Arab Spring'?

Since 2011, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have increasingly oscillated along the spectrum of stability and instability, but these three countries now appear on distinct and diverging paths. While Tunisia's November 2014 elections successfully concluded a highly contested but stable national dialogue process and constitutional transition, the breakdown of Libya's security environment and governance institutions continues to threaten the long-term social and economic welfare of its citizens. Egypt's transition process from former President Mohamed Morsi to current President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi underscores how the country remains a hotly contested space for ideas, policies and visions of the future. Even as this evolves, the three North African countries largely unaffected by the Arab Spring – Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco – must each confront emerging challenges and threats within both the domestic and regional spheres.

Within the broader geopolitical arena, the impacts of the Arab Spring continue to reverberate. First, the uprisings

in North Africa regorganised the medium and culture of protest politics throughout the world. Second, Western countries' humanitarian intervention in Libya, which rapidly succumbed to 'mission creep', continues to be examined as both a short-term cause and accelerator of transnational radicalisation and insurgency throughout the African Sahel region. And third, the developments emerging from the Arab Spring movements have now stimulated global debates on social and political transitions, especially in societies characterised by structural economic inequalities, frequent popular uprisings and rapidly emerging transnational security threats.

This Special Issue of *Conflict Trends* assesses these evolving dynamics and addresses a number of important questions concerning the fourth anniversary of the Arab Spring in North Africa. Have the uprisings' root causes been addressed and sufficiently resolved? How would different stakeholders and communities within each country assess developments over the past four years – would they consider themselves better off? What new obstacles now confront the full realisation of their aspirations? What lessons can we draw in managing shifts from autocracy to democracy? Are other countries in North Africa vulnerable to future social unrest and, if so, what are some of the conditions that would make these developments more likely? How have the events in North Africa influenced the rest of the African continent, as well as the rest of the world? And finally, what does the future hold for this important region?

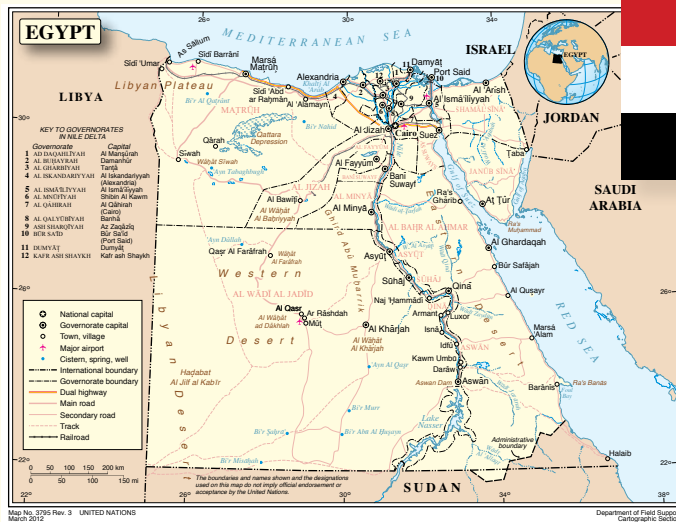
Inclusive dialogue and explicit commitments to socio-economic equality must be at the heart of societal changes across the North African region. While the world has already drawn many lessons from the Arab Spring, there is even more to be learned from these countries, including how they navigate the long-term challenges characteristic of such transitions and transformations. ▲

Vasu Gounden is the Founder and Executive Director of ACCORD.

EGYPT IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE ARAB SPRING: WHAT LIES AHEAD?

BY GAWDAT BAHGAT

GALLO IMAGES/REUTERS



regional and international systems. In the 1950s and 1960s, President Gamal Abdel Nasser pioneered Arab nationalism and championed the non-aligned movement. His successor, President Anwar Al-Sadat, was the first Arab leader to recognise and make peace with Israel. The impacts of toppling President Hosni Mubarak, the rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood and the ascendancy of President Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi are yet to be assessed.

Whilst providing stability and a measure of economic progress, Mubarak's rule was repressive, as illustrated by the continued implementation of emergency law since 1967.¹ Security forces became renowned for brutality, and

Above: Protesters flee from charging police during clashes in Cairo in January 2011. Police and demonstrators fought running battles on the streets of Cairo during many days of unprecedented protests by tens of thousands of Egyptians demanding an end to President Hosni Mubarak's three-decade rule.

Egypt is one of the most populous countries in the Arab world and has played a central role in Middle Eastern politics for centuries. In the last several decades, decisions and policies made in Cairo have significantly impacted



Ousted President Mohamed Morsi is behind bars during his trial at a court in Cairo (8 May 2014).

corruption was widespread. Encouraged by the protests that overthrew the long-term leader of Tunisia in early January 2011, mounting popular anger resulted in huge anti-government demonstrations later that month which eventually ended President Mubarak's long rule. However, the protesters' hope for transition to democracy proved elusive. Post-revolutionary politics became polarised between the newly ascendant Islamist president and any other changes. Following a year of interim military rule, the first presidential elections in half a century were won by Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi in 2012.² But a year on, growing dismay at the government's actions among many Egyptians – primarily secularists, liberals and Coptic Christians – resulted in another wave of protests. Siding with the demonstrators, the military ousted President Morsi and violently suppressed the protest sit-ins held by the Muslim Brotherhood in response.

The new authorities outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood, started drafting a new constitution and curbed media freedom. Army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi won the presidency in the May 2014 elections. His rise has left some fearing an effective return to military rule. Indeed, one can argue that the military opposed former president Mubarak's plan to have his son Gamal, a businessman with no military background, succeed him. This opposition opened the door for the Muslim Brotherhood to ascend to power. After successfully ending Gamal's aspiration to succeed his father, the military returned to power and ousted the Muslim Brotherhood. In other words, one can argue, since the

ousting of Morsi, the new political/military elites have sought to reconstruct the old political order.

The main objective of the Al-Sisi government is regime survival and avoiding a replay of the uprising that toppled Mubarak. In pursuing this objective, the Egyptian government has shown little tolerance for dissent and, indeed, has been more brutal than most of its predecessors. This brutality has galvanised and mobilised opposition forces. These forces include the Muslim Brotherhood, other Islamists and liberals, among others. Little effort has been made to reach out to these groups and initiate a political dialogue.

This article highlights some of the main security, economic and foreign policy challenges facing the Al-Sisi government. The analysis suggests that there is significant continuity of the Mubarak regime. In addition, the rising threat from the Islamic State (IS), Al-Qaeda and other Islamist militant groups is played at the hands of the Egyptian government. For decades, Egyptian military leaders have argued that if Western powers do not support their authoritarian regimes, the alternative is Islamic fundamentalism and religious extremism. Thus, the rise and fear of militant Islam has eroded Western pressure on the Egyptian government to reform and accommodate political opposition.

Security Challenges

Under Al-Sisi, Egypt faces complicated security threats. Externally, Cairo has few enemies. On the eastern front, Egypt has been at peace with Israel since the late 1970s. In the west, since the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya has become a failed state. Sudan in the south



Army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi won the Egyptian presidency in the May 2014 elections.



Riot police detain supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood at Talaat Harb Square, in Cairo (25 January 2015).

periodically has some territorial disputes with Egypt, but these disputes are not likely to lead to military confrontation. Indeed, top officials from the two countries regularly visit each other's capital cities and work together to deepen economic and political cooperation. In short, the Egyptian army is not likely to engage in a traditional war with any of its neighbours.

This absence of external threats does not mean that the Al-Sisi regime is secure. Internally, the authority faces tremendous challenges, mainly – but not exclusively – from different Islamist groups. Under Al-Sisi, the Egyptian government has shown little, if any, tolerance for political opposition. The Muslim Brotherhood was designated as a terrorist organisation and most of its leaders and followers have been arrested. This lack of political accommodation has forced the Islamists and other political forces to go underground. The state repression has weakened but not eliminated the opposition. The Muslim Brotherhood is down but not out. Repression can buy the regime some time but, in the long term, Islamists, liberals and others should be accommodated and represented in the political system. The Egyptian government has been fighting its

opponents – mainly Islamists – in Cairo, Alexandria and other big cities, as well as in Sinai and in the western Sahara on the border with Libya. Indeed, concerned about the rise of Islamist militias in neighbouring Libya, Egypt, in cooperation with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), has launched several air strikes inside Libya.

To sum up, in 2015 domestic security in Egypt is relatively better than it was a few years ago. A genuine economic and political reform is likely to weaken the appeal of extremist ideologies and violence. The lack of such reform would further destabilise Egypt.

Economic Challenges

Egypt has significant economic resources. It has an excellent geostrategic location for trade, being at the

INTERNALLY, THE AUTHORITY FACES TREMENDOUS CHALLENGES, MAINLY – BUT NOT EXCLUSIVELY – FROM DIFFERENT ISLAMIST GROUPS



Tourist numbers in Egypt have plummeted since 2011. This affects millions of Egyptians whose livelihoods depend on the tourism industry.

crossroads of Europe, the Middle East and Africa, with important ports as well as the Suez Canal. Having made significant gas discoveries over the past decade, it holds the third-largest proven natural gas reserves in Africa (after Nigeria and Algeria) and the fifth-largest oil reserves (after Libya, Nigeria, Angola and Algeria).³ Despite these large reserves, the country is a net importer of oil and natural gas, and has suffered from a consistent electricity shortage.

In Africa, Egypt has the third-largest population (after Nigeria and Ethiopia), and the second-highest gross national income (after Nigeria), according to the World Bank. Egypt's economy suffered during and after the 2011 revolution as the country experienced a sharp decline in tourism revenues and foreign direct investment, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth in Egypt dropped from 5.1% in 2010 to 1.8% in 2011 and still remains below the pre-revolution level, averaging 2.1% in 2013.⁴ Egypt's economy has not fully recovered since the 2011 revolution. The government continues to fund energy subsidies, which cost US\$26 billion in 2012,⁵ and this has contributed to the country's high budget deficit and the inability of the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation (EGPC), the country's national oil company, to pay off its debt to foreign operators. EGPC owes foreign oil and gas operators billions of dollars, which has led foreign operators to delay their investments in existing and new oil

and natural gas projects. EGPC accumulated US\$6.3 billion in outstanding arrears to foreign oil and gas companies, of which US\$1.5 billion was paid back in December 2013. The debt has since increased back to US\$7.5 billion as of June 2014, and continues to grow.⁶

Oil shipments through the Suez Canal fell in 2009 to their lowest level in recent years. The decrease in oil flows shortly before the 2011 revolution reflected the collapse in the world oil market demand that began in the fourth quarter of 2008, followed by Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) production cuts (primarily from the Persian Gulf), which caused a sharp fall in the regional oil trade, starting in early 2009. Political and security upheavals since 2011 have not had a noticeable effect on oil transit flows through the Suez Canal. Over the past few years, oil flows through the Canal have increased, recovering from previous lower levels during the global economic downturn.

The country has struggled to distribute the benefits of growth among the large and expanding population, nearly half of which lives on less than US\$2 per day. Growth has not translated into adequate jobs for the growing number of young people of working age. Unemployment is particularly high among young people with college degrees, who depend heavily on jobs in the public sector and the government. Moreover, the country's infrastructure, housing and social services have not kept pace with the rapid rise in the



Egypt's economy has not fully recovered since the 2011 revolution.

population. Egypt has also faced external shocks that are not directly related to domestic instability, notably persistently high world food prices and the return of more than a million workers from Libya. It also had to contend with slow growth in European export markets and reduced employment opportunities for Egyptians in Europe. Finally, political and security uncertainties have dealt a heavy blow to tourism – a major national industry. According to Hisham Zizou, Minister of Tourism, 2013 was the worst year on record for Egypt's tourism industry.

Given these gloomy economic conditions, in opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood and to prevent the economic and political collapse of the Al-Sisi government, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait have given billions of dollars to Egypt. These funds have proven critical in maintaining the survival of the Egyptian government. However, it is doubtful that the Gulf's financial assistance will generate economic development and prosperity. Indeed, with the collapse of oil prices and revenues, Gulf financial assistance is likely to be unsustainable. The bottom line is that serious reform strategies and commitments are needed.

The latest evaluation of the Egyptian economy by the IMF leaves room for optimism. The Fund recognises that during the prolonged political transition, growth fell and unemployment and poverty increased to high levels. Budget deficits grew and external pressures led to a fall in foreign

GIVEN THESE GLOOMY ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, IN OPPOSITION TO THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND TO PREVENT THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL COLLAPSE OF THE AL-SISI GOVERNMENT, SAUDI ARABIA, THE UAE AND KUWAIT HAVE GIVEN BILLIONS OF DOLLARS TO EGYPT

exchange reserves. Meanwhile, the government recognises these challenges and is seeking to reduce the budget deficit to 8–8.5% of GDP and the budget sector debt to 80–85% of GDP by 2018/19, while at the same time increasing spending on health, education, research and development.⁷ In short, there is growing national consensus on the need for economic reform.

Foreign Policy Challenges

These key economic changes have taken place within rapidly evolving regional and global dynamics. The Arab world and the broader Middle East are fundamentally



Anti-government protesters walk towards Tahrir square in Cairo following the killing of three pro-democracy protesters (25 January 2015).

different from a few years ago. Equally important, Cairo's relations with the United States (US) and other global powers have had to readjust to the emerging threats and opportunities.

In 2011, Ethiopia announced its plan to construct the first hydroelectric dam – the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile. The GERD is set to become the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa, and is expected to be completed by 2015. It will not only break Egypt's millennia-long monopoly over the Nile waters, but will also threaten its water supply. The Nile is Egypt's only major source of fresh water and has served as the lifeline of the nation since the dawn of its civilization.⁸ The Egyptians firmly believe that their country is 'a gift from the Nile'.

The utilisation of the Nile water is governed by three treaties: the 1902 treaty between Britain and Ethiopia, and the 1929 and 1959 treaties between Egypt and Sudan. These treaties have never been accepted by all nine countries that share the basin (Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Tanzania). In 2010, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania signed a Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA), which sought to replace previous colonial-era treaties based on the principle of equitable use. Egypt (and Sudan) oppose

the CFA and claim that it infringes upon their historical rights.⁹ After unsuccessful efforts to convince or pressure Ethiopia not to build the dam, Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan organised a group of experts to review and assess the potential effects of the dam. Eventually, Egypt had no other option but to work with Ethiopia. Cairo has limited – if any – leverage. It cannot reverse the process of building the dam through military or diplomatic means. This is perceived as a serious threat to the matter of national survival.

AFTER UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORTS TO CONVINCING OR PRESSURE ETHIOPIA NOT TO BUILD THE DAM, EGYPT, ETHIOPIA AND SUDAN ORGANISED A GROUP OF EXPERTS TO REVIEW AND ASSESS THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF THE DAM

Remarkably, Egyptian-Israeli relations have witnessed little changes despite the major security and political upheavals in Cairo. Under the Mubarak regime, there was

a great deal of pragmatic cooperation. For example, Egypt exported natural gas to Israel. The pipeline carrying Egyptian gas to Israel (and Jordan) was frequently attacked in 2011, and eventually Egypt stopped its gas exports to Israel.

This limited cooperation, mostly between the two governments, was largely resented by the Egyptian public. It is important to point out that this Egyptian-Israeli partnership benefited both countries strategically and financially. The two countries have been the largest recipients of US foreign aid, and the Mubarak regime was viewed favourably because it was a 'reliable peace partner'. This close relation with Israel weakened Cairo's claim of leadership in the Arab world and the Middle East.¹⁰ Rhetoric aside, the Morsi government maintained the working relationship with Israel while expressing more sympathy towards the Palestinians. The Al-Sisi regime has distanced itself from the Hamas administration in Gaza and maintained cooperative relations with Israel. And in late January 2015, Egyptian authorities designated Hamas as a terrorist organisation.

DOMESTIC REPRESSION, ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE FROM GULF STATES AND LACK OF GLOBAL PRESSURE HAVE ALL HELPED AL-SISI TO CONSOLIDATE HIS REGIME

Finally, under Al-Sadat (1970–81), Egypt made a significant strategic shift from the Soviet camp to the American one. The signing of a peace treaty with Israel in 1979 has since consolidated this alliance with the US and Western powers. Concerns over abuse of human rights and lack of transparency had been regularly raised, but Washington, DC and Cairo maintained their close strategic cooperation. After brief hesitation, the US Obama administration supported the 2011 revolution that toppled Mubarak. Washington, DC accepted Morsi and kept pushing for political and economic reform. Officially, the Obama administration refused to call the transformation of power from Morsi to Al-Sisi a military coup.

Meanwhile, Egyptian authorities accused the US of intervening in Egypt's domestic affairs and supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Sisi has distanced himself from Washington, DC and visited Moscow and Beijing. Despite this cooling down of the close relationship between Cairo and Washington, DC, the two sides share significant strategic interests in countering terrorism and regional instability. Washington, DC perceives Cairo as a key regional power and Egypt needs US political and economic backing.

To conclude, in the short term, it appears that the Al-Sisi regime has strengthened its grasp on power in Cairo. Domestic repression, economic assistance from Gulf states and lack of global pressure have all helped Al-Sisi to

consolidate his regime. He has taken full advantage of the fear of Islamists. This combination of domestic, regional and global forces is likely to keep the regime in power for some time. In the long term, regime survival will depend on meeting the social, economic and political demands of the Egyptian people. The experience in Egyptian history and broader African history suggests that the military does not do a good job in policy. This does not leave much room for optimism. **A**

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Endnotes

- 1 Emergency law gives the government the right to detain suspects for a prolonged period of time without trial, and to try them before a military court instead of a civilian one.
- 2 The Muslim Brotherhood is one of the oldest and most popular Islamist movements in the Arab world. It was created in 1928 and has survived repression by several Egyptian governments. It generally advocates a bottom-up approach to Islamise society and rejects violence.
- 3 British Petroleum (2014) *BP Statistical Review of World Energy*. London: British Petroleum, pp. 6 and 20.
- 4 International Monetary Fund (2014) 'IMF Staff Concludes 2014 Article IV Mission to Egypt', Available at: <<http://www.IMF.org/external/np/sec/pr/2014/pr14538.htm>> [Accessed 1 February 2015].
- 5 Energy Information Administration (2014) 'Country Analysis Brief: Egypt', Available at: <<http://www.eia.gov/countries/analysisbriefs/Egypt/egypt.pdf>> [Accessed 14 August 2014].
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 International Monetary Fund (2014) *op. cit.*
- 8 Gebreluel, Goitom (2014) Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam: Ending Africa's Oldest Geopolitical Rivalry? *Washington Quarterly*, 37 (2), pp. 25–37.
- 9 Egyptian State Information Service (2011) 'The Situation After Signing the Framework Agreement', Available at: <<http://www.sis.gov.eg/en/templates/articles/tmparticles.aspx?artid=53981>> [Accessed 24 December 2014].
- 10 Mabrouk, Mirette F. (2011) 'Middle East Memo: Recalibrating a Relationship', Available at: <<http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2011/11/israel-egypt-mabrouk>> [Accessed 24 December 2014].

THE DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN TUNISIA: A SUCCESS STORY IN THE MAKING

BY YAHIA H. ZOUBIR



GALLO IMAGES/REUTERS

Introduction: The Tunisian Revolution

The Jasmine Revolution began in late 2010, and resulted in the ouster of the dictator Zine el Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January 2011. Ben Ali ruled Tunisia with an iron fist from November 1987, following his removal of the founder of the Tunisian Republic, Habib Bourguiba, through what was dubbed a 'medical coup'.

Four years after the Jasmine Revolution, Tunisia has made some great strides in its transition towards a democratic political order. The peaceful revolution by civil society and the powerful trade union, the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), had sent shockwaves, causing other uprisings throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Tunisia is the smallest country in the Maghreb, with a population of 11 million people. Unlike what took place in other parts of the world, the revolution did not revert to authoritarianism – like Egypt – or experience chaos – as in Libya, Syria and Yemen. The relatively successful transition is becoming not only a model, but it has debunked

the myth of the impossibility of the Arab world building democratic orders.¹ What makes Tunisia's revolution rather unique in the MENA region is that, in spite of the riots that took place in the mining region of Gafsa in 2008, barely any observers thought that three years later, Tunisians would be able to force out the dictator and his administration, or to defeat the powerful, brutal security apparatus that numbered more than 130 000 members. The refusal of the military – which had remained a republican institution as intended by Bourguiba, and which was marginalised by the Ben Ali regime² – to shoot at people partly accounts for the success

Above: Tunisian President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali (2nd from left) visits Mohamed al Bouazzizi, the protester who set himself alight during a demonstration against unemployment, at a hospital in Ben Arous near Tunis (28 December 2010). Bouazzizi died on 5 January 2011, igniting nationwide protests that forced Ben Ali to flee the country.



States (US) and Europe. With regard to the economy, the regime was favourably received by international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and by Western powers, which saw Tunisia as a model.⁵

The Tunisian government followed the recommendations of the IMF to the letter. However, the economy was not so efficient and corruption perverted its functioning; it could no longer create jobs for graduates in a country where the youth are dominant. Privatisation of the economy mostly benefited the Ben Ali families and their patrons, who controlled most

sectors of the economy. Furthermore, the regime opposed genuine democratic reforms under the pretext that there could be no prosperity and economic growth (under a liberal system) without the required political stability. Yet, unemployment increased constantly. There were huge disparities between the northern urban and littoral zones – which were dominated by the industrial, tourism and agriculture sectors, and received investments, and benefited to a certain degree from international trade and commerce – on the one hand, and the southern and western centres – which witnessed far higher unemployment and poverty levels – on the other hand. This explains why the riots that followed the immolation of a young graduate on 17 December 2011 took place in the western city of Sidi Bouzid – a region that, like many others, was neglected by the government. Thus, the conditions of high unemployment, especially among the youth (estimated at 40%), nepotism, bad governance, corruption, repression, lack of freedom and ageing leaders, which prevailed in other MENA countries too, were among the major factors that led to the uprisings.⁶

of the uprising. The will of Tunisians, who no longer feared the tyrannical regime and risked their lives to gain their freedom, was the major factor in bringing down the regime. The determination of Tunisians to achieve their transition without outside interference adds to their credit.

Tunisia Under the Ben Ali Regime

The Ben Ali regime had maintained itself through sheer repression; an impressive security apparatus controlled the population and suppressed any kind of political protest, no matter how benign it was. The regime, however, sought legitimacy through the holding of regular elections – which, of course, the president won overwhelmingly, usually with over 90% of the votes, while his party, the Republican Democratic Party (RCD), won all the seats in the legislature. When Ben Ali came to power, he changed the constitution to impose limits on presidential mandates, but then removed those limits so he could stay in office for life. He ran for re-election periodically, basically unopposed, since the other presidential hopefuls were disqualified or harassed. Scholars refer to such elections as ‘electoral authoritarianism’,³ or ‘new authoritarianism’,⁴ which MENA regimes resorted to in order to survive the Third Wave of democratisation or to please their benefactors in the United

THE REGIME, HOWEVER, SOUGHT LEGITIMACY THROUGH THE HOLDING OF REGULAR ELECTIONS – WHICH, OF COURSE, THE PRESIDENT WON OVERWHELMINGLY, USUALLY WITH OVER 90% OF THE VOTES, WHILE HIS PARTY, THE REPUBLICAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (RCD), WON ALL THE SEATS IN THE LEGISLATURE

The Revolution: The End of the Dictatorship

The spontaneous riots, which were directed by no political party or any ideological movement – similar to what occurred in Egypt – mobilised large segments of the population. The regime was incapable of reacting to such a wave of protesters, who demanded no less than the end



Tunisians wait in line at a polling station to cast their votes in the Marsa district in Tunis on 23 October 2011.

of the regime, thus forcing Ben Ali to escape into exile in Saudi Arabia on 14 January 2011. The military took charge of securing the country, while pledging not to interfere in the political process. Under pressure from a highly mobilised civil society, which rejected the political procrastinations of the interim authorities through incessant protests, the latter succumbed to society's increased pressure to allow for a fully-fledged democratic transition. Ben Ali's party, the RCD, was dissolved and the Political Reform Committee, set up after his departure, was fused into the 155-member Committee to Defend the Revolution, eventually renamed the Higher Commission for the Achievement of the Objective of the Revolution, of Political Reform and the Transition to Democracy.⁷ The State Security Division and other offices of the political police were disbanded, jettisoning the last institutional strongholds of the old regime. This process was ensured by the armed forces, who maintained their pledge to not interfere in politics other than protect it from reversal by forces of the old regime.

The members of the Higher Commission decided that the crucial first stage of the transition would be the full revision of the constitution and tackling the inequalities of power, which had so greatly benefited the president over the legislative branch of government, eventually leading to a dictatorship. They also decided on the election of a Constituent Assembly, which came to life in October 2011. A genuine democratic process was thus underway and saw the creation of an independent electoral commission – the *instance supérieure indépendante pour les élections* (ISIE) –

and a number of laws standardising the funding and electioneering of political parties.

The democratic process also consisted of not only authorising the many newly created political parties, but also legalising the Islamist Ennahda party, which had been



Rachid Ghannouchi, leader of the Islamist Ennahda party celebrates with supporters following the announcement of the country's election results. On 27 October 2011 Tunisian election officials confirmed the Islamist Ennahda party as winner of the country's election.



Members of the Tunisian parliament wave flags in celebration after approving the country's new constitution in Tunis on 26 January 2014. Tunisia's national assembly approved the country's new constitution in one of the final steps to full democracy.

banned under the Ben Ali regime and whose leaders had been imprisoned or forced into exile, including its charismatic chief, Rachid Ghannouchi. Ghannouchi, considered a moderate Islamist committed to democratic practices and institutions of government, declared that his party would not seek to amend the progressive Personal Status Code of 1957, which had guaranteed Tunisian women an exceptional (for the Arab region) package of rights, including full equality as citizens and the right to education. He also declared not to impose shari'a law as the foundation of the Constitution.⁹ He thus rescinded his initial claim of making Tunisia an Islamic state.

Surprisingly, and to the dismay of secularist forces, Ennahda won the first democratic election of the Constituent Assembly, with over 41% of the popular vote (89 out of 217 seats),⁹ although failing to secure an absolute majority. This shortcoming compelled the party to join a coalition with two smaller, more secularist, social democratic parties – the *Congrès pour la République* (CPR), headed by long-time regime opponent, Moncef Marzouki, with 29 seats; and the *Forum démocratique pour le travail et les libertés* (FDTL, also known as Ettakatol), with 20 seats – to form an interim 'troika' government. The Ennahda's efficient campaigning had paid off. The secularists failed to mobilise voters who still saw Ennahda as the most ardent opponent of the Ben Ali regime, of which it was the biggest victim. Ghannouchi had convinced large segments of society that Islam and democracy were compatible and that pluralism was not

antithetical to Islam – views that he had expounded well before the revolution.¹⁰

The 2011 election was generally free, transparent and fair, and stood in contrast to most elections held in the Arab world and Africa. Many factors explain this outcome during the Tunisian transition: a well-educated population, the existence of institutional structures (contrary to Libya, for instance, which practically had none), strong trade unions (mainly the UGTT), professional associations (such as lawyers' associations), and respect for the rule of law.

TUNISIA'S NEW CONSTITUTION IS THE MOST DEMOCRATIC AND LIBERAL IN THE MUSLIM WORLD – IT PROTECTS CIVIL LIBERTIES; SEPARATES LEGISLATIVE, EXECUTIVE AND JUDICIAL POWERS; GUARANTEES WOMEN PARITY IN POLITICAL BODIES; AND DECLARES THAT ISLAM IS THE COUNTRY'S OFFICIAL RELIGION, WHILE PROTECTING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR ALL

Another factor is the homogeneity of Tunisian society – which, although it has some divisions, does not suffer from fragmentation along religious, political, cultural or ethnic



Tunisia's President Béji Caïd Essebsi attends a meeting of the new government in Tunis on 18 February 2015.

lines, as is the case of Syria or Iraq, for instance. This factor accounts for the promulgation of a national Constitution on 27 January 2014,¹¹ resulting from a protracted process that met the approval of all political and societal actors. Tunisia's new constitution is the most democratic and liberal in the Muslim world – it protects civil liberties; separates legislative, executive and judicial powers; guarantees women parity in political bodies; and declares that Islam is the country's official religion, while protecting religious freedom for all.

The troika government faced many challenges, including a sense of betrayal felt by members of the two smaller parties in the National Constituent Assembly (ANC). They believed that their respective parties made too many concessions to Ennahda, and thus withdrew from the ANC.¹²

During the rule of the troika, a new party made its appearance in July 2012. Led by Béji Caïd Essebsi, minister of the interior under Bourguiba and prime minister in the first provisional government of 2011, Nidaa Tounès proved to be a potent challenger to the troika. The new party, which

attracted young people, trade-union activists, anti-Islamists, secularists, former members of the RCD and defectors from the two parties in the coalition with Ennahda, presented itself as a secular, modernist alternative to Ennahda and to those who wished to undo the gains of 'modern Tunisia'.

The Legislative and Presidential Elections of 2014: The Consolidation of the Democratic Transition?

Regardless of the many changes of government and the tensions that prevailed in state and society, Tunisians succeeded in resolving those problems through peaceful means. The assassination of two popular leftist activists, Chokri Belaïd in February 2013 and Mohamed Brahmî in July 2013, almost derailed the transition in Tunisia. But, pressure from civil society, trade unions and new alliances among political parties forced the government to act more decisively to bring about stability and crack down on Islamist extremists. The emergence of Salafist extremists, whom Ennahda failed to confront compellingly – although concerned by their rise – resulted in accusations that Ennahda was complicit in those assassinations. The assassinations and the catastrophic economic situation, coupled with insecurity at the borders with Libya, tarnished the image of Ennahda and resulted in a sharp drop in its popularity. On 28 September 2013, Ennahda capitulated under heavy protests and demonstrations, and the government agreed to resign in favour of a negotiated technocratic caretaker government that would carry the country through to new elections. Ennahda's decision proved that the party lived up to its promise that it would only come to power via the ballot box, and would leave office through the same process. Whatever suspicions existed about the party since 2011, Ennahda showed respect for the political process in times of triumph and defeat. This also shows that Islamism can operate within a democratic system without necessarily undermining the foundations of democracy.¹³

The legislative election held on 26 October 2014 confirmed that Tunisia's democratic process remained on track. The election took place with no major incidents and saw the surprising defeat of Ennahda and the victory of Nidaa Tounès. Undoubtedly, Ennahda's failure to tackle Tunisia's socio-economic challenges, its neglect of the hinterlands, and the widespread political corruption caused its electoral defeat. On 23 November 2014, Tunisians went to the polls again to elect their new president – the first completely democratically elected president since the country's independence in March 1956. The election also ended the presidential system and one-party rule in the country – most of the executive power will henceforth be in the hands of the prime minister, who will be responsible before parliament. Out of 22 candidates with different profiles, two candidates made it to the run-off: Marzouki and Essebsi, who garnered 33.43% of the votes and 39.46% of the votes respectively.¹⁴ In the second round, Essebsi defeated Marzouki, who was favoured by the Islamists with whom he had worked in the troika, with a comfortable 56.68% of the votes, Marzouki

receiving 44.32%.¹⁵ Given that Nidaa Tounès gained 86 seats in parliament – a figure below the 109 required to form a government – it was necessary to enter coalitions. Therefore, negotiations for a coalition government were ongoing for 100 days after the legislative election before the head of the executive, Habib Essid, was able to present his government to parliament on 4 February 2015. Ennahda accepted being under-represented in government, with only one ministerial portfolio and three secretaries of state.¹⁶ Undoubtedly, the party accepted this under-representation to avoid the Egyptian scenario whereby the military intervened to suppress the Muslim Brotherhood. Regardless, the coalition that has been entered is composed of technocrats, whose main objectives consist of addressing as a priority Tunisia's dire socio-economic conditions and the insecurity prevailing at its western border with Algeria and eastern border with Libya. While the political transition has been successful overall, the difficult economic situation may pose a threat to its consolidation.

The Economy: The Achilles Heel of Tunisia's Democratic Transition

While Tunisia's economic challenges were apparent prior to the revolution, conditions since then have worsened. Socio-economic conditions, especially in the interior regions, were quite difficult. But the situation deteriorated further with the fallout of the Libyan armed uprising that began in February 2011.¹⁷ Gaddafi's fall has had particularly disastrous repercussions on post-revolutionary Tunisia. Before the war in Libya, Tunisia and Libya had the highest volume of trade between any two North African countries – and this grew at an average of 9% every year between 2000 and 2009. For its part, Libya absorbed 6.9% of Tunisia's exports, making it Tunisia's second-largest export market after the European Union.

WHILE THE POLITICAL TRANSITION HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL OVERALL, THE DIFFICULT ECONOMIC SITUATION MAY POSE A THREAT TO ITS CONSOLIDATION

With the uprising in Libya, all this came to an end. In the first quarter of 2011, Tunisia's exports to Libya dropped by 34% and imports fell by an astounding 95%.¹⁸ According to the African Development Bank, these changes were direct consequences of the civil war in Libya.¹⁹ In addition, more than half of the 100 000 Tunisians who had been working in Libya flooded back home. The remittances they sent home – an estimated 125 million Tunisian dinars before the war – virtually disappeared.²⁰ Meanwhile, Tunisia's unemployment skyrocketed from 14.2% in 2010 to 18.9% by the end of 2011, undoubtedly due in part to the returning expatriates.²¹ Libyans, who had previously visited Tunisia in droves, stayed at home. From 1.5 million tourists each year, the year ending



Tunisia's socio-economic conditions, especially in the interior regions, have deteriorated further since the Arab Spring uprisings in February 2011.

in May 2012 saw only 815 000 Libyan guests – all bad news for an economy that depends on visitors – tourism makes up 11% of Tunisia's gross domestic product (GDP) and 14% of employment.²² The drop in tourism caused the economy to backslide. In summer 2014, the situation was somewhat alleviated because of the many Algerian tourists who visited the country and saved the tourist season.²³ But the security situation discouraged Western tourists and investors to come to Tunisia. Tunisia's GDP growth has averaged 2.3% annually since the fall of Ben Ali's regime. This can be blamed on the political-economic expediency of the troika, which increased wages overall by 40%, while productivity grew by a mere 0.2%.²⁴ "The cost of state subsidies to oil-and-gas products and foodstuffs has rocketed by 270% over three years. The budget deficit was 7% in 2013 and is expected to rise to 9% in 2014. Foreign debt has risen by 38% over three years to over 50% of GDP. Such figures are unsustainable... The explosion of the informal sector, caused by the failure



Protesters wave flags during a demonstration in front of Tunisian television headquarters in Tunis (9 March 2012).

of the formal economy to provide jobs, is now fuelling inflation."²⁵

The socio-economic situation has also had some direct repercussions on the security situation prevailing in the country.

Security: The Threat of Salafist Jihadists

Once in power, Ennahda freed thousands of Islamist militants, some of whom were Salafist jihadists, imprisoned by the Ben Ali regime. Ennahda permitted Salafist preachers to exploit mosques across the country as platforms. "By early 2014, 90% of Tunisia's mosques were under the control of Salafists, which facilitated the propagation of jihadist messages. Those messages resonated with some youth, who had been marginalised under Ben Ali and continued to live on the margin following the 2011 revolution as Tunisia's economy struggled to recover."²⁶ As happened in Algeria in the 1990s, self-proclaimed imams manipulated the marginalised youth who were unable even to read the Quran, and provided them with an extremist interpretation that enticed them to join the jihad against the regimes in various Muslim countries, notably in Iraq and Syria (3000 Tunisian jihadists are said to have joined the fight there).²⁷ The desperate socio-economic conditions have favoured the recruitment and co-option of young people by jihadist networks. The youth, who lost confidence in state authorities, have engaged in the informal sector – organised crime and (arms) smuggling have thrived as a way of surviving in the destitute areas and/or to pursue jihad. Faced with this dangerous security situation, the authorities have restored the intelligence services, which had been dismantled in the

post-revolutionary period, and reformed the police force. The country has also relied on Algeria to assist it in the fight against terrorism. Tunisia's armed forces, however, lack the means to fight the jihadists, who are better armed and are able to escape into safe havens in Libya.

Conclusion

In spite of many remaining challenges and hurdles, Tunisia's transition to democracy is already a success story in the Arab, African and Muslim world. Overall, the transition has been peaceful and the various political parties, civil society, media, trade unions and associations have demonstrated a level of political consciousness and tolerance unrivalled in the MENA region. The main tasks of the new government are now to bring about greater stability, revamp the economy and restore Tunisians' confidence in the state and in the democratisation process.²⁸ Tunisia today holds the Arab world's expectations and hopes for authentic democratisation. The country has shown the necessary maturity to bring the democratic process and consolidation to completion. **A**

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THE 2011 LIBYAN CRISIS: WOULD THE AFRICAN SOLUTION HAVE BEEN PREFERRED?

BY DIA TUMKEZEE KEDZE

Popular uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, referred to as the 'Arab Spring' and which started in Tunisia, led to the collapse of the age-old authoritarian regimes of the Arab world. The Tunisian uprising had a domino effect as it spread to Egypt and later to Libya, which had been under a 41-year dictatorial rule.¹ The revolt spread rapidly throughout Libya, and the insurgents made swift progress. Unlike the other fallen leaders, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi declared his determination to stay in power and waged war against the rebels, thus throwing the country into a civil war. A spike in human rights violations saw the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) pass Resolution 1970 on 26 February 2011, and 19 days later Resolution 1973 was passed, imposing a no-fly zone and an arms embargo on

Libya. Under its Chapter VII powers, the Security Council demanded an immediate ceasefire; an end to violence and all attacks against civilians; and called for member states to "take all necessary measures" to prevent further civilian casualties and enforce compliance with the resolution. The implementation of this resolution was problematic, as it not only led to the murder of Gaddafi but also many Libyans, who lost their lives in the airstrikes carried out by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces and later threw Libya into a precarious situation, due to lack of follow-up.

Above: Libyans celebrate the fourth anniversary of the revolution against Muammar Gaddafi at Martyrs' Square in Tripoli (17 February 2015).



At a full United Nations Security Council chamber the Council adopts Resolution 1973, calling for an immediate ceasefire, strengthening sanctions, and authorising the use of military force - including a no-fly zone - in Libya (17 March 2011).

The African Union (AU) did not remain silent in the wake of the uprisings. Despite the fact that events unfolded quickly from Tunisia to Egypt and then Libya, and considering that these types of events were not in mind when the 2000 Lomé Declaration on Unconstitutional Changes of Government was being drafted, the AU was quite dynamic during the crisis:²

- On 23 February 2011, the AU Peace and Security Council strongly condemned the “indiscriminate and excessive use of force and lethal weapons against peaceful protesters, in violation of human rights and international humanitarian law”. It further called the aspirations of the Libyan people for democracy as “legitimate”.

THE COMMITTEE DEVELOPED AN AU ROADMAP TO PEACE, WHICH SOUGHT TO BRING ALL THE STAKEHOLDERS TO THE TABLE FOR PURPOSES OF WORKING OUT MODALITIES TO IMPLEMENT A FIVE-POINT PLAN

- On 10 March 2011, an AU High-level Ad Hoc Committee on Libya was established by the Peace and Security Council, tasked to find means to stop the escalation of the Libyan crisis. The committee was mandated to pay special attention to the troubled state, with a view to engaging all key stakeholders in the quest to mediate a solution to the crisis. Working with the AU Commission chairperson Jean Ping, five countries represented by their respective presidents were appointed to this ad hoc committee: South Africa (Jacob Zuma), Mauritania (Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz), Mali (then under Amadou Toumani Toure), Congo-Brazzaville (Denis Sassou Nguesso) and Uganda (Yoweri Museveni). The committee developed an AU roadmap to peace, which sought to bring all the stakeholders to the table for purposes of working out modalities to implement a five-point plan. The objectives of this plan were: protection of civilians and the cessation of hostilities; provision of humanitarian assistance to affected populations; the initiation of political dialogue among Libyan parties to



extraordinary session. It reiterated the need for a political solution, and called for an immediate end to all attacks against civilians and a ceasefire that would lead to the establishment of a consensual transitional period, culminating in elections that would enable the Libyans to freely choose their leaders. The assembly stressed the imperative for all concerned to comply with both the letter and spirit of UNSC Resolution 1973.

Added to this was the extensive travelling undertaken by Ping, the then-chairperson of the AU Commission, to foreign capitals including Paris, London, Brussels, Washington, DC and Rome in a bid to explain the AU roadmap and seek the support of international partners for it. Many other actions were continuously carried out by the AU, all of which emphasised the need for dialogue with

reach an agreement for implementing modalities to end the crisis; establishment and management of an inclusive transitional period; and the adoption and implementation of political reforms necessary to meet the aspirations of the Libyan people.

- On 19 March 2011, the ad hoc committee members met in Nouakchott, Mauritania, where they planned to travel to Libya the next day to meet with the parties. Their request to enter Libya was denied by the intervening forces, who started bombing Libya on the same day.
- On 25 March 2011, a consultative meeting was convened in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, involving all international stakeholders whose efforts the high-level ad hoc committee commended, and a consensus on the elements of the AU roadmap was reached.
- The ad hoc committee visited Libya on 10–11 April 2011 where they met with Libyan authorities, who accepted the AU roadmap. They later met with the members of the National Transitional Council (NTC), who were unwilling to comply with the AU roadmap.
- On 26 April 2011, the AU Peace and Security Council meeting at ministerial level reviewed the situation in Libya. On the eve of this meeting, the ad hoc committee engaged in discussions with the Libyan parties. A month later, in view of the continued deterioration of the situation in Libya, the AU Assembly convened an



UN PHOTO/PAULO FILGUEIRAS

Jean Ping, then-chairperson of the African Union Commission (left) and United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on a flight from Qatar to Cairo, Egypt, where they attended an international conference on Libya hosted by the League of Arab States (13 April 2011).



Presidents Amadou Toumani Touré of Mali, Jacob Zuma of South Africa, Denis Sassou Nguessou of Congo, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz of Mauritania and African Union Secretary-General Jean Ping (from left-right) at Gaddafi's Bab al-Aziziya residence in Tripoli on 10 April 2011. Gaddafi made his first appearance in front of the foreign media in weeks, when he met with this visiting African Union delegation.

Western powers and declared its efforts towards a ceasefire between the conflicting parties in Libya. Even though the AU expressed its general support for Resolution 1973, it equally established concerns regarding military intervention and declared the need for a peaceful solution within an African framework.

Issuing its first binding ruling against a state, the African Court on Human and People's Rights ordered Libya to "immediately refrain from any action that would result in loss of life or violation of physical integrity of persons",³ stating that failure to do so could constitute a breach of human

NOT ONLY DID THE AU ROADMAP PROVIDE AN ALTERNATIVE THAT WAS ACTIVE, PRACTICAL AND NON-VIOLENT, BUT A NUMBER OF OTHER PROPOSALS WERE ALSO PUT FORWARD AND EQUALLY FAVOURED

rights obligations. This position and the efforts of the AU thus negated the claim that the international community had no choice but to intervene militarily, and that the alternative was to do nothing. Not only did the AU roadmap provide an alternative that was active, practical and non-violent, but a number of other proposals were also put forward and equally favoured. For example, the International Crisis Group (ICG) published a statement on 10 March 2011, arguing for a two-point initiative:⁴

- The formation of a contact group or committee drawn from Libya's North African neighbours and other African states with a mandate to broker an immediate ceasefire.
- Negotiations between the protagonists were to be initiated by the contact group and were aimed at replacing the current regime with a more accountable, representative and law-abiding government.

These proposals, especially the latter, were backed by the AU and were aligned with the views of many major non-African states such as Russia, China, Brazil and India,



Hamady Ould Hamady, Head of the African Union's High Level Ad Hoc Committee on Libya and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, briefs the United Nations Security Council on the situation in Libya on 15 June 2011.

and even Germany and Turkey. The ICG detailed these initiatives and added provisions for the deployment of an international peacekeeping force to secure the ceasefire under a UN mandate. This was done before the debate that concluded with the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1973. Thus, before the UNSC vote approving military intervention, a worked-out proposal had been put forward, which addressed the need to protect civilians by seeking a rapid end to the fighting and set out the main elements of an orderly transition to a more legitimate form of government. These proposals were clearly ignored by the intervening states under the argument that only military intervention could stop the regime's repression of civilians. Yet, many argued that the way to protect civilians was not to intensify the conflict by intervening on one side or the other, but to secure a ceasefire, followed by political negotiations.

The weaknesses and strengths of Resolution 1973 and the AU plan were evident in their outcomes. The outcome of Resolution 1973 is, without doubt, indicative of a poorly constructed and badly implemented solution. This mission, which was structured on humanitarian goals and ended on 31 October 2011, 11 days after the murder of Gaddafi, reflects one of two scenarios. First, the death of Gaddafi constituted such a reduced threat against civilians that no additional airstrikes were required to protect them. Second, the bombing had achieved its ultimate objective: the fall of the dictator and the opposition's victory. But an operation that was justified in purely humanitarian terms was ultimately stretched to achieving an eminently political objective: the removal of a government and its replacement by that of the rebels.

This clearly differentiates Western solutions to African problems with what has become known as 'African solutions to African problems', which in the Libya case was incarnated by the AU roadmap out of the crisis. The difference between both solutions (the AU roadmap and NATO intervention) is what has always differentiated Western orchestrated solutions from African solutions. African solutions refer to those solutions that are initiated by Africans and implemented by Africans. Such African solutions, if given a chance, can be sustainable and if they finally stop the crisis, the chances of falling into the same problems are slim. According to Charles Nyuykonge,⁵ this is because conventional interventions tend to be more exclusive and are aimed at punishing human rights offenders, focus more on the outcome, sideline the 'bad guy' and stress justice as the primary objective for peace, while African interventions are peculiar in their more inclusive nature, with focus on reconciliation and pragmatic confidence-building steps, and emphasis on the process and efforts to build confidence among disputing parties. A few examples of conflicts in which African solutions have been used are the Cameroon-Bakassi case over the Bakassi Peninsula, the Burundi Peace processes, and the resolution of the Biafra war. African solutions and interventions emphasise sustained dialogue between disputants, unlike Western-led conventional methods, which are aimed at quickly conducting elections and sending some people to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Similar factors can be deemed to have led to the uprisings in North Africa, but the peculiarity of Libya cannot be ignored. Arab transitions show unavoidable specificities according to

different national histories and colonial legacies. The special institutional shape of *Jamahiriyah*,⁶ the redistributive logic of the Libyan rentier state, the weakness of civil society, the security apparatus of Gaddafi's regime and the exceptional decolonisation after the Italian defeat during the Second World War testify to the uniqueness of the Libyan case among the Arab uprisings. While the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings challenged the regimes at their centre stages, symbolically occupying the heart of the respective capital cities, in Libya the rebellion was located in Benghazi, far away from the centre of Gaddafi's power. The rebellions in Cairo and Tunis were perceived and then proceeded as uprisings of the whole country against unfair and corrupt regimes, while the Cyrenaica (eastern coastal region of Libya) uprising was intended in Tripoli as a revolt of the eastern part of the country against the western region. It is true that the Libyan rebellion erupted in Benghazi on 15 February 2011 and was echoed after a few hours in Tripoli, but in actuality only Cyrenaica was able to challenge the regime.⁷ This region was clearly marginalised; it was not only economically impoverished but its high level of unemployment further catalysed its need for a change in power. In 2010, this region's unemployment level was as high as 30% – one of the highest rates among the North African countries.⁸ The speed with which the uprising took a violent turn could have served as a pointer to its complicated nature, and the need for a plan that would bring all disputing parties to the negotiating table.

The AU roadmap was doomed to fail, due to the presence and role of external forces. The support enjoyed by the NTC clearly gave them an upper hand over Gaddafi, and from

that perspective they were not ready to engage in dialogue. Gaddafi's willingness to accept the AU plan should have been exploited to avoid the bloodshed that ensued during and after his demise. It is now evident that the intervention complicated rather than solved the Libyan crisis, as it not only incited inter-regional confrontation between areas such as Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, but also created factions – inside both regions and all over the country – between different armed groups over the control of state resources,⁹ power and autonomy.

Today, Libya is referred to as a failed state by many commentators. Whether right or wrong, it is evident that Libyan society has deteriorated to a point where it has become a case of concern – not just for Libyans, but also for Africa and the international community as a whole. Of all the lessons that can be learned from the Libyan crisis of 2011, the most glaring is the malfunction within the AU. As Professor Jean Emmanuel Pondi puts it: "...[I]t is how difficult it is for the African Union to speak with one voice and project a coherent position within Africa on the world stage in times of crisis."¹⁰ Many other lessons can be learned, as has been suggested by many commentators,¹¹ and solutions to the existing problems have been proposed on numerous occasions – but for any solution to work, there must be political will. When Kwame Nkrumah first spoke of African solutions for African problems, he was aware of the fact that this can only work in the context of African unity. The AU should therefore be a body that not only propels values of unity within the continent in its actions and discourse, but those values must resonate in its stance.



GALLO IMAGES/REUTERS

Four years after a NATO-supported revolt toppled Muammar Gaddafi, Libya is at the mercy of rival brigades of heavily armed fighters who openly and regularly defy the new state.

In the Libyan crisis, can it be said that the AU did nothing? As demonstrated already, it evidently carried out many actions that, according to Ping, went unreported or were manipulated to suit a hostile agenda. If this political will among African leaders can be harnessed, it can lead to the implementation of most, if not all, of the proposed solutions by African intellectuals and leaders.

In an effort to determine which solution was better suited for the Libyan crisis, recourse can be made to the qualitative comparative analyses (QCA) method, as developed by Charles Reglin in 1987.¹² According to Lise Morje Horward and Van der Lijn Jaïr,¹³ the presence or absence of the following factors determine the success or failure of an intervention:

- A willingness and sincerity from disputants and stakeholders;
- B impartial security to all disputants and stakeholders;
- C adequacy of knowledge of, and familiarity with, the remote and immediate causes of the conflict;
- D support and cooperation from important outside actors and parties such as the UN, the AU and the European Union, to cite just a few;
- E blurred timelines in operations' deployment;
- F competent personnel and leadership;
- G broad and long-term vision;
- H coordination of internal and external mandates of the operation; and
- I allowing stakeholders to own and drive the peacebuilding process.

Table 1 depicts these factors and the NATO and AU solutions. The ☺ symbol represents the outcome of the combined effect of the factors on the peace operation.

Table 1: Qualitative Comparative Analyses Depicting Foreign Intervention by NATO and the AU Roadmap

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	☺
NATO Intervention	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
AU Roadmap	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

In Table 1, the presence of a factor is indicated by a 1, while its absence is indicated by a 0. The outcome indicates that the AU roadmap had greater chances of succeeding – if not solving the conflict, at the very least preventing the current situation in Libya – and recourse should have been made to it. However, the strategy pursued by the UNSC has exacerbated other humanitarian crises in the region whilst failing to resolve the situation in Libya. It would have been prudent to fully consider the consequences of military intervention before implementing it. A military intervention needs to be able to contain all the armed sides of the conflict, not only one.¹⁴ The numerous problems of civilian protection, establishment of the rule of law, control of all the different armed groups, and displacement and stopping crimes against humanity have clearly overwhelmed the current government and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). There are no

sufficiently robust mechanisms in place in Libya currently that are capable of dealing with such a multitude of problems. At this point, the NTC has to make frantic efforts to reconcile all the different factions within Libya, if Libyans are to have any reason to hope again. Libya should be a lesson to the international community that in Africa dwells the solution to its problems, and greater value should be given to African efforts. **A**

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- 5 Charles Nyuykonge is a senior researcher at the African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD). This statement was made at a talk he delivered to students at the International Relations Institute of Cameroon (IRIC) in Yaoundé, in January 2015.
- 6 *Jamahiriya* has to do with the concept of 'popular state' with direct democracy. It stems from the Arabic words '*joumhouria*', which means 'republic' and '*jamahir*', which means 'masses'. The country changed its name from the Arab Libyan Republic in 1969 to the Jamahiriya Arab Peoples Socialist Republic on 12 March 1977 at Sebha. [Pondi, Jean Emmanuel (2013) *Life and Death of Muammar Al Qadhafi, What Lessons for Africa?* Yaounde: Editions Afric' Eveil, p. 35.]
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- 8 Varvelli, Arturo (2010), *Libia: vere riforme oltre la retorica?* *Luglio*, Analysis No. 17, p. 3, as cited in Morone, *Ibid*.
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Four years after the first of the Arab Spring revolutions erupted in Tunisia, the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) is observing the trends and taking stock of the impact of the revolutions in the three most affected African countries: Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. This fact file examines two sets of indicators – governance and economic factors – to highlight the progress made and difficulties encountered in the three countries since the uprisings. Although some of the data is not yet available for 2014, the numbers are evocative. All three countries have known democratic gains, but Tunisia is the only country to sustain the momentum. All three states have become increasingly fragile since the revolutions and, as a consequence, high numbers of internally displaced persons, refugees and asylum-seekers are reported, particularly in Libya and Egypt. The economies of the three countries have been severely affected, but some progress can be seen. The tourism industry is on the mend in Tunisia, as is foreign direct investment in Egypt. However, the three countries have not yet begun to fare better than they did prior to the revolutions, and much remains to be done to guarantee their security and prosperity.

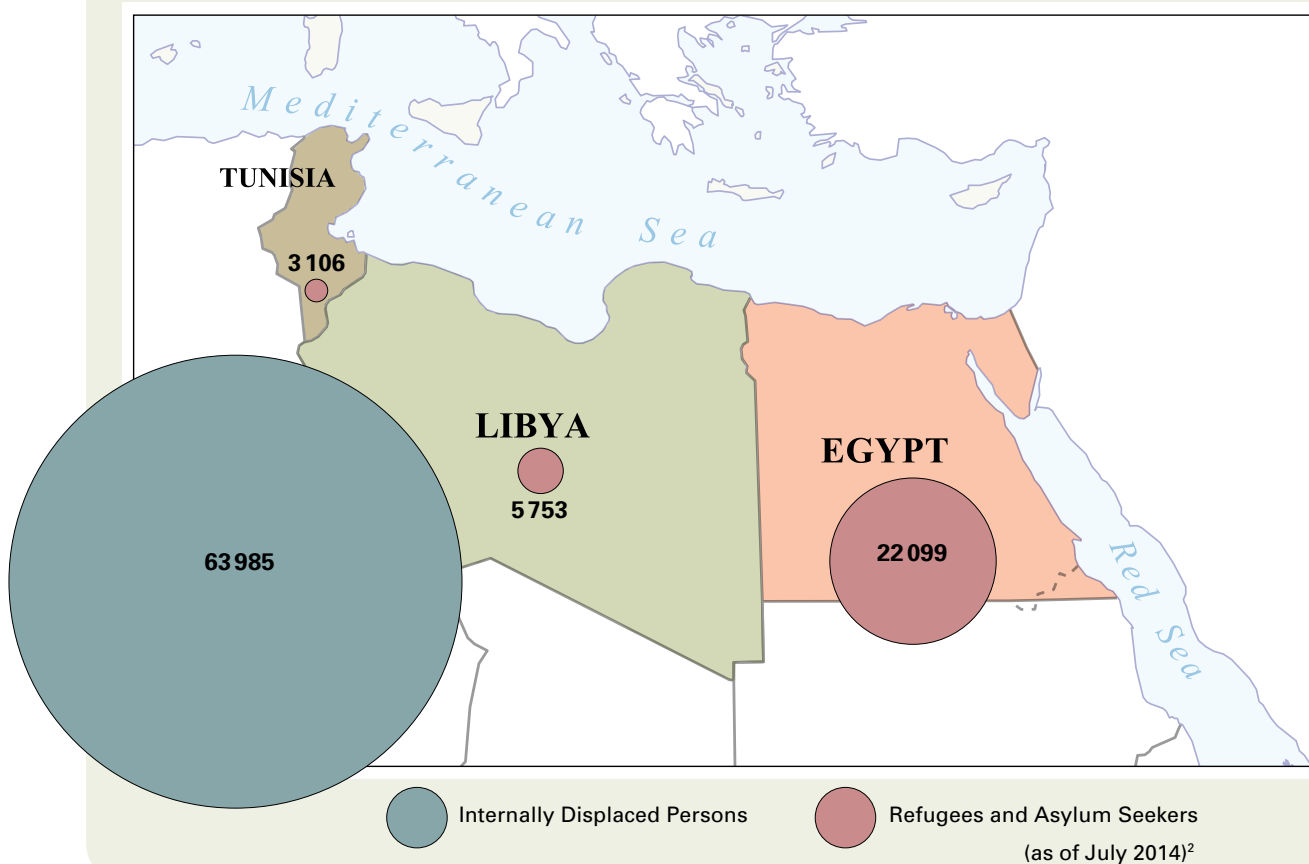
The Arab Spring in Numbers

Press Freedom Index¹

(1 = greatest level of freedom of expression)

	2010	2011 2012	2013	2014
Egypt	127	166	158	159
Libya	160	154	131	137
Tunisia	164	134	138	133

Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Internally Displaced Persons

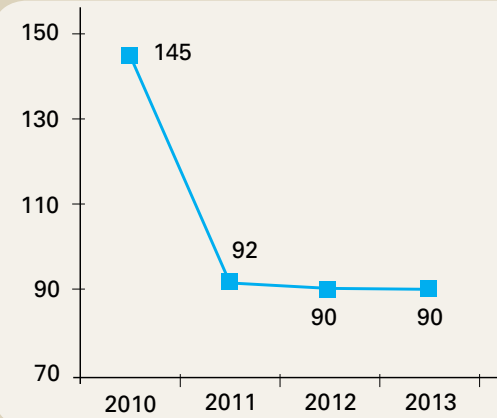


The Arab Spring in Numbers

Tunisia

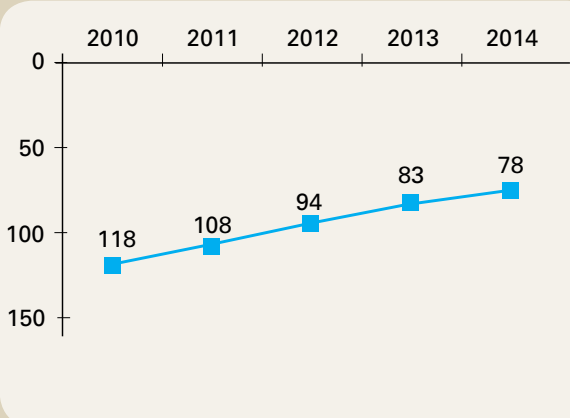
Democracy Index³

(1 = most democratic)



Fragile State Index⁴

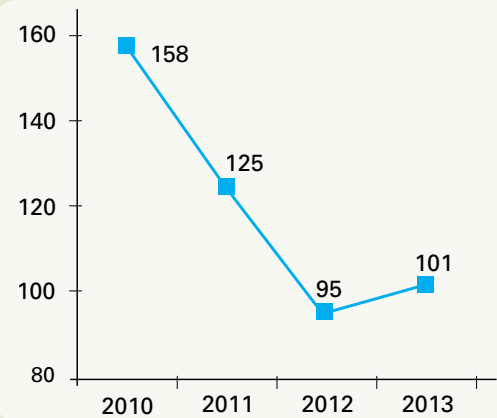
(1 = most fragile)



Libya

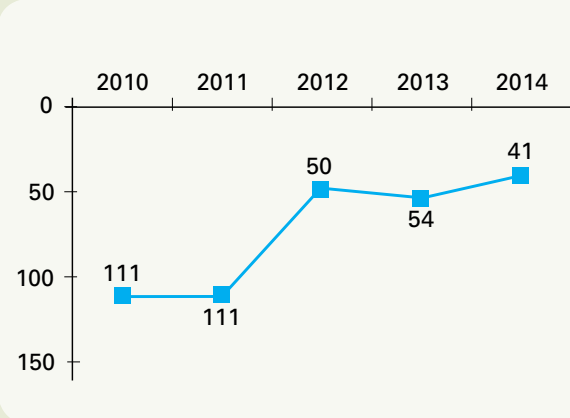
Democracy Index³

(1 = most democratic)



Fragile State Index⁴

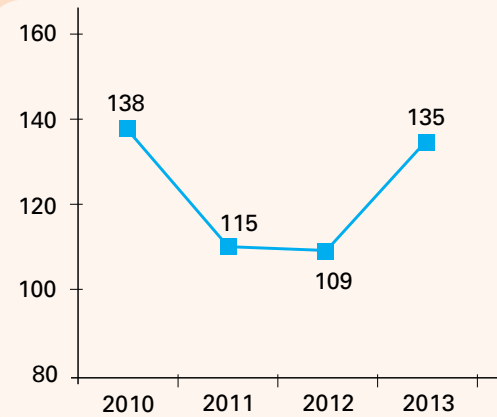
(1 = most fragile)



Egypt

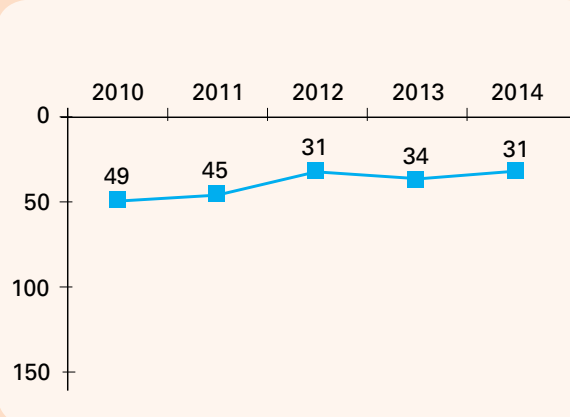
Democracy Index³

(1 = most democratic)

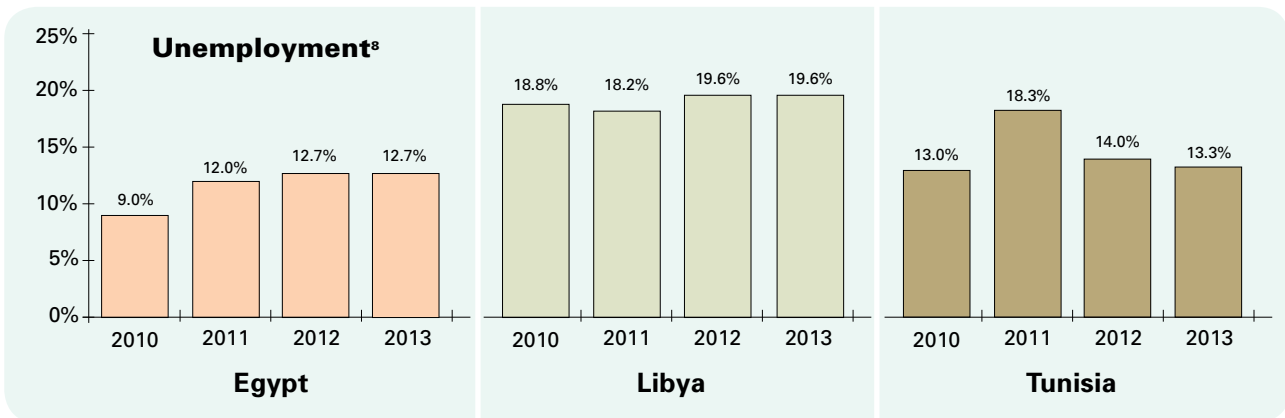
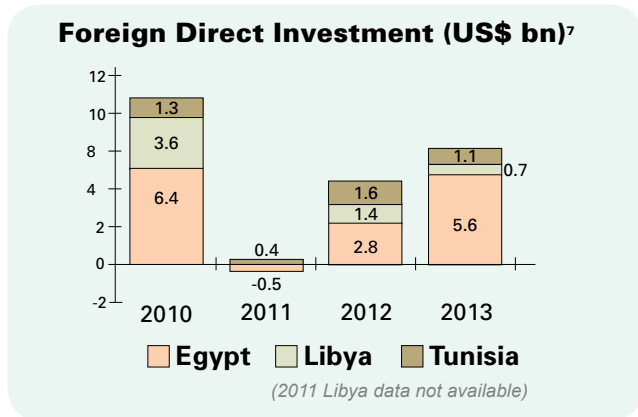
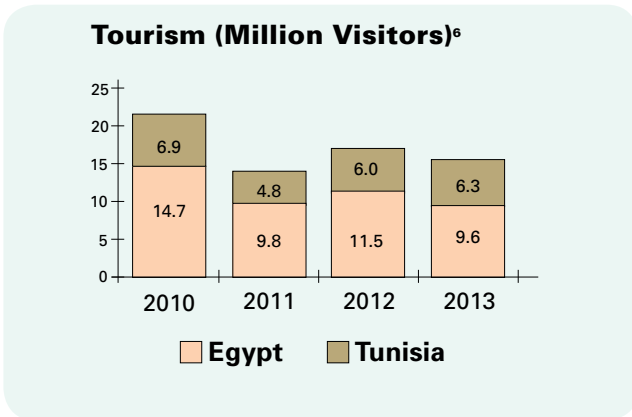
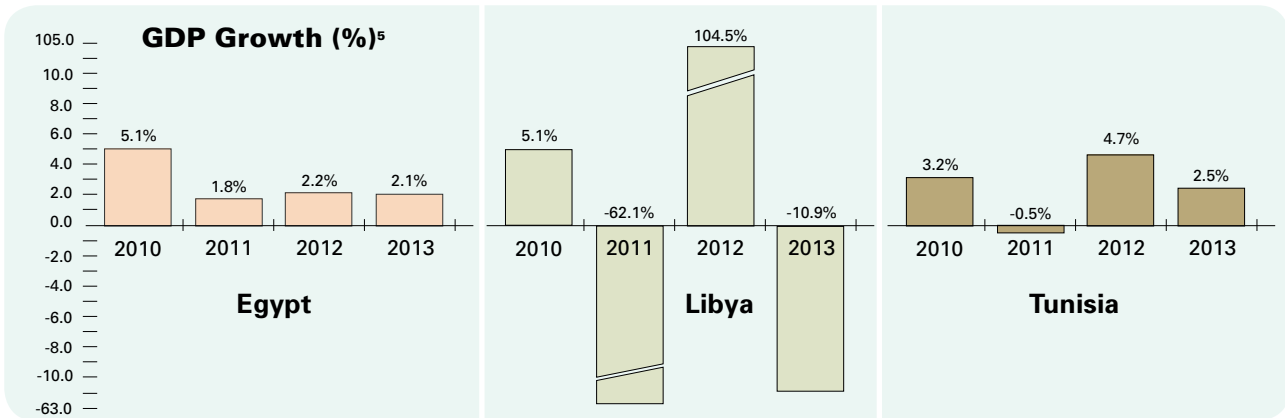


Fragile State Index⁴

(1 = most fragile)



The Arab Spring in Numbers

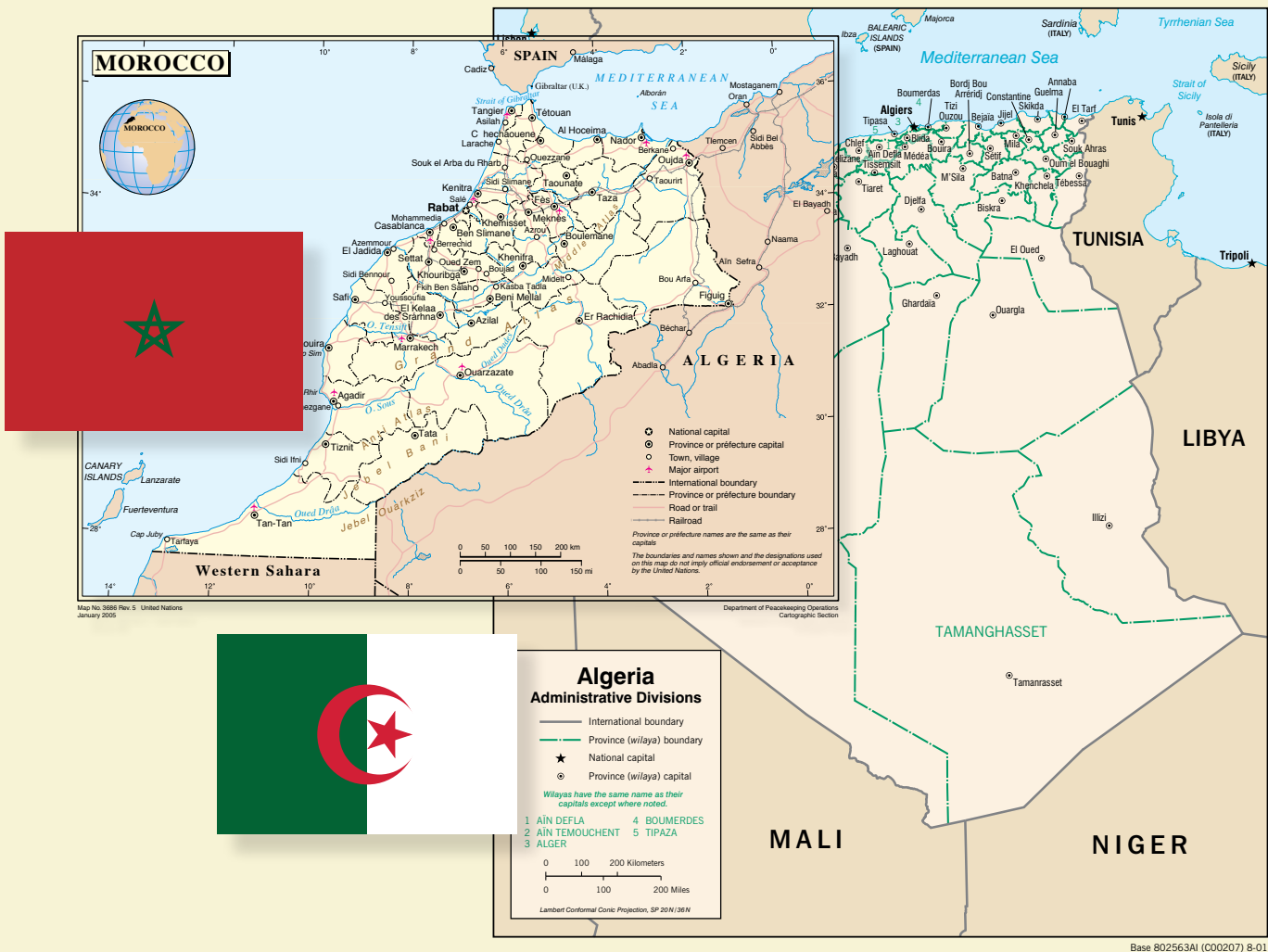


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ALGERIA AND MOROCCO AND THE POPULAR UPRISING IN NORTH AFRICA: WILL THE EXCEPTIONS LAST?

BY AZZEDINE LAYACHI



While what was termed the ‘Arab Spring’ and ‘Arab Revolutions’ were in full swing in 2011, Morocco and Algeria sailed safely through the strong winds of change and avoided the serious clashes and violence experienced elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. They appeared to have done so thanks to gradual reform processes, among other things, which helped avoid unsettling revolts. In these two countries, street protests in 2011 were relatively limited, and the countries’ national leaders were at no time targeted for removal or even

condemnation. Morocco and Algeria became ‘the exceptions’ in a region engulfed by violent protests and instability.

This article examines why Algeria and Morocco did not experience social upheavals in 2011 and thereafter, in spite of the fact that their respective societies have enough grievances against their respective political and economic systems to prompt some revolt. It also discusses the extent to which the nature of the two ruling regimes and their evolution since the early 1990s can help explain why these two countries did not experience the disruptive and destabilising revolts seen in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen.



Police confront rioters during clashes at Al-Harrach neighbourhood, in eastern Algiers on 6 January 2011. Hundreds of youth clashed with police in several cities in Algeria, including the capital, over food price rises and chronic unemployment.

Finally, the article examines whether these two countries will (a) evolve in the near future without much disruption and social upheaval, (b) finally join the list of MENA countries whose economic, social and political systems have been violently contested by the masses in recent years, or (c) experience yet another clever adaptation of the authoritarian rule to the challenges of the day.

For important reasons, the expression 'Arab Spring' will not be used here.¹ Other expressions will be used instead, such as 'popular revolts,' 'mass protests,' and 'social upheavals'. The social upheavals of 2011 are understood as a mass protest (peaceful or violent) against existing political and economic systems, rulers and policies in the Arab region; the 2011 protests were persistent, vocal, peaceful or violent, and either challenged the status quo or aimed for regime change.

The revolts, which began in December 2010 in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, and culminated in the overthrow of the presidents of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, challenged political systems and leaders that failed the people in many ways. They were against the social and economic conditions that deprived many people while a few predators, thanks to privileged connections to the state, became illicitly wealthy and grew contemptuous toward the rest. Finally, the upheavals constituted a rejection of the post-colonial order that was characterised by an autocracy whose survival depended on being compliant with, and subservient to, the

wishes and interests of former colonial masters (mainly France in North Africa and the United States (US)). This post-colonial order was maintained in the Arab world for many decades after the end of formal colonialism. The 2011 revolts in North Africa and the Middle East were more about these multiple rejections than just a clash between authoritarian states and unemployed youth.

The upheavals made some people wonder whether the Arab countries have finally entered the third wave of democratisation that Samuel Huntington outlined in his 1993 book, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*.² However, post-2011 developments do not seem to confirm that – except perhaps for Tunisia, which appears to be on the way to some substantial change. Beyond the debate generated by Huntington's view on the absent democracy in the Islamic world, which is discussed elsewhere,³ it is undeniable that most of the MENA region was not substantially affected by the three waves of democratisation in the West and beyond – that is, until now. As will be discussed here, in Morocco and Algeria the reform processes have been limited to minimal political liberalisation in spite of – or maybe because of – the turmoil that spread in the region since 2011.

The Moroccan and Algerian Contexts

Since their independence from colonialism, Algeria and Morocco achieved important progress in economic

and human development. The 2010 Human Development Report placed them in the 10 'top movers' – that is, countries which achieved the greatest improvements in human development since 1970.⁴ However, in spite of a relatively positive Human Development Index (HDI), both countries lag in social and economic development and cannot keep up with their growing populations and income disparities. The external pressure for economic liberalisation and the effect of global economic shocks and other factors made it difficult for Algeria and Morocco to maintain welfare systems and distributive policies dictated by some form of post-independence social contracts. These factors, in combination with neo-liberal policies promoted by international institutions, pushed the two states to lessen their role in the economy by privatising public companies, limiting subsidies and lifting price controls.

While Algeria remains highly dependent on the export of oil and gas whose price fluctuations it does not control, Morocco – a non-hydrocarbon country – has a little more diversified economy, but is still heavily dependent on the export of phosphates. It is highly vulnerable to rising international competition and demand fluctuations for its key export products. Stringent structural adjustment programmes sponsored by the International Monetary Fund

(IMF) and the World Bank in Algeria and Morocco had some success at the aggregate level, but they did not alleviate the poverty and unemployment experienced by many people, especially the youth. The difficult socio-economic conditions of many people were made even more untenable by large-scale corruption, cronyism, nepotism and limited freedom to express grievances and demands.

Over the last three decades, the governing regimes of the two countries faced serious and long-standing complaints against authoritarian systems that abused power openly and with impunity, limited individual liberties, treated citizens with disdain and condescendence (referred to as *hogra* in popular parlance in Algeria), neutralised political opposition by way of repression and co-optation, limited the means of free expression, inhibited the accountability of institutions and individual power holders, allowed the judicial system to serve the powerful at the expense of the weak, produced meaningless elections and institutions of representation, and used rent from natural resources (gas and oil for Algeria and phosphates for Morocco) to quiet occasional social unrest without reforming.

Both states perfected their coercive capacities and their effectiveness; the pervasiveness of coercion increased in recent years, especially with (a) increased violent actions by



Young unemployed graduates protest against unemployment and the cost of living, in front of the Moroccan Parliament in Rabat (2 November 2011).

radical Islamist groups roaming the Maghreb and the Sahel (for example, al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb – AQIM), and (b) participation in the ‘global war on terror’ (GWT) initiated by the US after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. These two factors enabled the security services of the two countries to impose more limits on political dissent. Morocco also became a destination country for the policy of ‘extraordinary rendition’⁵ enacted by the US government under George W. Bush.

Many of the social, economic and political conditions that have been outlined were also present in the MENA countries that experienced social upheavals in 2011. Since they did not generate a revolt wherever they were present, this series of common conditions cannot alone explain why upheavals occurred in some countries (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen), and not in others (Morocco and Algeria). Additional explanatory factors may include trigger events, such as the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouaziz in Tunisia, and the way a government responds to spontaneous mass protests.

Explaining the Algerian and Moroccan Exceptions

Both Morocco and Algeria were not totally immune to the social upheavals in the region in early 2011. On 5 January 2011, Algerian youth engaged in a series of riots in many cities and towns. These riots were triggered by both a sudden rise in the price of basic food and the events in Tunisia. The rioters had no specific political demands. In Morocco, the main trigger was the protest in Tunisia, combined with prevailing social, economic and political grievances.

Unlike the Algerian riots, the Moroccan protest that began on 20 February 2011 featured specific political demands but did not target the monarch himself. They were aimed at the overall unsatisfactory political and economic conditions and at the *Makhzen*, which is the informal centre of power that stands behind the façade of the modern state – it is powerful and feared.⁶ The massive but peaceful demonstrations started in the capital city of Rabat, and were youth-led and inspired by social media. The protesters demanded an end to corruption, jobs for the unemployed youth, and constitutional reforms that curtailed the powers of the monarch and increased those of elected representative institutions.

In both countries, the street protests ended or died out slowly after the leaders addressed some of the immediate grievances, thereby avoiding an escalation of the situation. Algeria and Morocco did not experience the kind of violent and sustained upheaval witnessed elsewhere, partly because the leadership reacted swiftly with proactive policies meant to appease people ahead of an almost-certain storm. Another equally important reason as to why the region’s winds of upheaval did not unsettle these two countries was that both had been engaged in gradual political reforms for more than a decade. These reforms did not affect the authoritarian nature of the two regimes, but they set them apart from the

much harsher autocratic rule that existed in Libya and Tunisia before 2011. For example, in North Africa, only Algeria and Morocco had integrated opposition parties – both religious and secular – in the political process for a decade at least. Furthermore, Algerian and Moroccan citizens have been enjoying relatively more political freedom than in most other Arab countries. However, high youth unemployment and wide-scale corruption made them disillusioned and resentful. Once social upheaval was underway in several countries, it inspired similar protest movements in the two countries, but they were short-lived and limited in their scope.

The two countries quickly acted to limit the contagion effects on their respective populations by enacting some reforms and promising others, by preventing the rise of basic food prices, and by maintaining subsidies on essential products and services. Also, the security services were ordered to avoid any provocation that could trigger a social explosion. Moreover, the leaders of the two countries often pointed to insecurity problems and disruptions caused by social unrest in the region (without specifically mentioning Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria and Yemen) as things they and their people did not wish to see happen in their countries.

THE PROTESTERS DEMANDED AN END TO CORRUPTION, JOBS FOR THE UNEMPLOYED YOUTH, AND CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS THAT CURTAILED THE POWERS OF THE MONARCH AND INCREASED THOSE OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTIONS

As the early utterances of protest in Morocco and Algeria were quieted relatively easily and peacefully, their authoritarian regimes – one a republic and the other a monarchy – continued to give the impression of being engaged in constant political liberalisation, while in fact maintaining the status quo on many fronts.

Algeria: A Precarious Stability

The Algerian authorities reacted negatively to the unrest in the region by pointing to instability in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Yemen as a strong reason for not falling ‘victim’ to the ‘Arab Spring’, which was presented as a ploy by foreigners to cause instability in the Arab world. At the same time, they used substantial financial resources to satisfy the demands expressed by the rioters in early January 2011, and promised political reforms at a later time. Algeria thus remained mostly unaffected by this ‘Spring’ of upheavals, and up to today has not yet engaged in any substantial reform.

Algeria, just like Morocco, had already enacted some reforms long before the upheavals of 2011, not after.

The reforms began in the late 1980s following a major popular upheaval in October 1988, when wide-scale youth riots shook the country (500 young people were killed within a few days by military repression).⁷ These events – the first of their kind in the region – pushed the authoritarian regime to open the public sphere to mass political participation through changes to laws on associations, parties and the media. By 1989, substantial political liberalisation brought about the end of the one-party system and the establishment of multiparty elections, and freedom of association and of the press. However, this substantial political opening was slowly recanted in the name of security, due to the raging Islamist rebellion that lasted from 1992 to the early 2000s. Armed rebellion began after the first multiparty parliamentary elections were cancelled in January 1992 by the military, when the Front of Islamic Salvation (FIS) appeared about to achieve a landslide victory. In that war of 10 years, 200 000 people died, economic and social infrastructure was destroyed and 1.5 million people were displaced.⁸

In that context, all political opposition was dispersed by intimidation, repression or judicial action, or co-opted. However, in spite of this, Algeria has maintained a formal multiparty political scene and a lively independent press. Political liberalisation stalled in the 1990s, but that was not a reason in itself to get people to challenge the system again, so soon after the bloody decade.

The riots of early January 2011 did not have explicit political demands, and the rioting Algerian youth – unlike the Tunisian ones – did not get the support of labour unions, political parties or civic associations. The events lasted only a week, and ended as soon as the government imposed a low price ceiling on basic food, tabled impending market regulations and provided “temporary and exceptional exemptions on import duties, value-added tax and corporate tax for everyday commodities”.⁹ In other words, the economic demands received an immediate regulatory response.

Political demands were finally expressed by a series of peaceful protests that were started on 12 February 2011 by the newly created National Coordination for Change and Democracy (CNCD), an organisation formed in January 2011 and made up of small parties, the National League for the Defense of Human Rights, and other civic associations. In spite of a large police contingent preventing demonstrations in the capital, a small number of protesters demanded democracy, an end to the 19-year-old state of emergency, and the release of people arrested during the January 2011 riots. The protest, which did not target President Abdelaziz Bouteflika but the behind-the-scenes true power holders in Algeria, collectively known as *Le Pouvoir*, and the authoritarian regime. *Le Pouvoir* includes army generals, old leaders of the National Liberation Front (FLN, which was the sole legal party from 1962 to 1989) and powerful business magnates, who enjoy de facto business monopolies, access



Algeria's President Abdelaziz Bouteflika was sworn in for a fourth term on 28 February 2014 at a swearing-in ceremony in Algiers, after winning the presidential election.

to state resources, and a privileged relationship with the regulatory state bureaucracy.

The weakness of these peaceful demonstrations and their lower turnout was due to governmental restrictions, as well as the fact that Algeria was still healing from the 10-year war of the 1990s. Another reason for the weak appeal of the protest movement was that its key figure was the leader of the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), a party that has considerable support in the mostly Berber region of Kabylie to the east of the capital, and not much elsewhere. The RCD supported the government's cancellation of the 1991 elections when the Islamists won the first round, and welcomed the repression of the victorious religious party, the FIS.

Under some domestic and international pressure, the government legalised more parties and increased the female quota in parliamentary elections. As a result, 21 new parties were legalised, diluting further both the overall political opposition and the Islamist formations. A new gender quota system for electoral lists and parliament seats helped elect 145 women to parliament in May 2012 – 31% of the 462 deputies of the National Assembly, up from a mere 7%.¹⁰

With a pro-government coalition made up mainly of two conservative parties (FLN and National Democratic Rally, RND) that qualified the 'Arab Spring' as a foreign ploy, a parliament that is still a rubber-stamping machine for the president and his government, a president himself who

is ill and regularly absent from public view, and a military establishment that is still a key holder of political power, Algeria does not seem to be heading toward substantial reforms. The governing system remains authoritarian – albeit softened a bit by the 10-year war and concerned about the possible impact of violence and unrest in neighbouring Libya and Mali.

Morocco: Status Quo with Limited Reforms

Gradual political reforms started in small steps during the reign of the late king Hassan II, who ruled his country with an iron fist for 38 years (1961–1999). After he died in 1999, his son King Mohammed VI deepened some of those reforms – the latest being the constitutional changes enacted in July 2011 in response to street protests. Since ascending the throne, the new king enacted several reforms, such as changes to the *moudawana* (family code) in 2004, which improved the legal status of women, and programmes aiming to alleviate poverty and illiteracy. These moves earned him the title of ‘king of the poor’, and helped enhance his legitimacy – even if these moves did not actually improve living conditions or create jobs.

The constitutional change of 2011 did not diminish the political, religious and economic powers of the monarch. The new constitution affirmed the separation of powers by reinforcing the authority and autonomy of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. The government is no longer responsible to the king, but is exclusively accountable to parliament – in theory, at least. The prime minister, who was

previously handpicked by the king, is now appointed from the party that controls the most seats in parliament. The scope of the legislature’s areas was increased, the role of the opposition was reinforced, and the independence of the judiciary was affirmed. The constitutional changes, which did not affect the substantial authority of the monarch, were approved by referendum on 1 July 2011. In spite of that, demonstrators continued to demand economic reforms and an end to the endemic corruption.

New parliamentary elections, held on 25 November 2011, produced a government led by the Islamist party Justice and Development (PJD) in alliance with three secular parties: Istiqlal (PI), the Popular Movement (MP) and the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS).¹¹ The PJD won the most seats in parliament (107 of 395) and became the de facto number one party in Morocco.¹²

The PJD became the only hope for substantial changes after the traditional opposition (nationalists and the left) was weakened by many years of repression, wide-scale co-optation and internal divisions. However, this Islamist party quickly found itself in a bind as it headed a coalition government, under the supervision of the monarch: to remain popular among its constituency, the PJD had to challenge policies and the institutional setting, and this may have entailed taking on the *Makhzen* – and maybe the king himself.

Abdelilah Benkirane, the party’s leader and prime minister of Morocco, decided at the outset to focus on social and economic issues and on corruption – major points of



GALLO IMAGES/REUTERS

Morocco’s King Mohammed casts his ballot at a voting station in Rabat on 1 July 2011. Moroccans voted in a referendum on a revised constitution offered by King Mohammed to placate “Arab Spring” street protesters.



Thousands of Moroccans participate in a rally, in Casablanca, to support the government's project for constitutional reform (26 June 2011).

contention raised by the 20 February Movement. He has avoided questioning – for now, at least – the institutional order or take on the *Makhzen* and the big private sector leaders, all of which are seen by many people as major obstacles to change.

The wave of upheavals across the region pushed the Moroccan monarch to accommodate the vocal protest movement through inconsequential constitutional changes, the promise of economic reforms and more co-optation. The king also allowed Benkirane's moderate, pro-monarchy, Islamist party to head the government, as a way to contain the Islamist sentiment and the protest movement, especially when the traditional secular opposition – mainly of the left – saw its popularity decline steadily in recent years.

While political liberalisation has progressed since the late 1990s, the essential character of Morocco's governing system remains authoritarian, albeit with a monarch who is popular and seemingly benign.

Piecemeal Reforms and Authoritarian Continuity

In the study of authoritarianism, many questions still elude scholars, especially in light of the recent and rapid collapse of 'robust' authoritarian systems in the Arab world, to everyone's surprise.¹³ The questions include: Why does authoritarianism persist for a long time in one country or region and not in others? What helps it resist internal and external challenges, and how? What factors can end it, and when? Answers to these questions may be possible through a study of the recent revolts that unseated four long-time Arab rulers within a year. Such a study could also explain the persistence of authoritarianism, in spite of the downfall of

rulers or the enactments of a series of reforms such as those discussed previously.

In the face of resilient authoritarianism in many parts of the world, including the MENA region, some scholars and keen political observers created conceptual shades of authoritarianism to explain the longevity and adaptation of this phenomenon.¹⁴ These conceptual shades (for example, 'illiberal democracy,' 'liberalised autocracy' and 'semi-authoritarianism') have been used to characterise authoritarian regimes that, under pressure, enacted some political liberalisation without changing fundamentally.

As discussed previously, Algeria and Morocco have not moved away from the authoritarian pattern of governance, in spite of some enacted reforms and policy accommodations when faced with potential upheaval. They merely seem to be going through an adaptation of the authoritarian rule to the circumstances of the day through limited acts of political liberalisation, rather than democratisation.

DEMOCRATISATION MAY ENHANCE THE STATE'S LEGITIMACY AND MAY HELP SOCIETY ACQUIRE GREATER AUTONOMY AND SAY IN PUBLIC POLICY

Political liberalisation, as defined elsewhere, is "a process that gradually allows political freedoms and establishes some safeguards against the arbitrary action of the state".¹⁵ It is only a preliminary set of conditions for democracy. Democratisation is the intermediate stage between political liberalisation and democracy; it is "a higher level of political opening, a process through which state control over society is slowly diminished to a point where the state becomes less arbitrary and more prone to bargaining with key groups representing differentiated social, economic, and cultural interests. At this stage, the state tends to progressively resort less to command governance and more to negotiated public policies."¹⁶ Democratisation may enhance the state's legitimacy and may help society acquire greater autonomy and say in public policy.¹⁷ Both Algeria and Morocco are still far from that, and their ability to shun serious and much-needed changes may diminish in the coming years if the rising expectations of their citizens do not get a matching response from the state.

The Prospects of Change

If things do not improve substantially for the average Algerian and Moroccan in the coming years, these two countries' approach of gradual and superficial change will show its limitations and may not hold off a serious contestation. With some good foresight, the two countries could avoid more difficult times by taking adequate and lasting actions on several fronts. They should curtail the use of rent (from hydrocarbons and phosphates, remittances, foreign aid and so on) as an instrument of state dominance

over society, of personal power, and of select group privileges. Of equal importance is the need for blind and equal justice for all and a strong system of accountability for all office holders – even monarchs. To avoid the perennial tenure of office holders, free and multicandidate elections must be held on a regular basis and be monitored by independent institutions. These conditions, which are not yet established or consolidated in the two countries or in the rest of the MENA region, will take time and persistent efforts to realise.

The two countries are under strong domestic pressure for serious reforms. There are also external pressures from regional dynamics and contingencies, as well as extra-regional pressures, such as the actions and roles of great powers in the current turmoil in the Maghreb and Middle East. Because future developments in the MENA region will be affected by many internal, regional and international factors, it is not easy to predict what will happen in Morocco and Algeria as they muddle through the effects of the ‘Spring’ of Arab upheavals. Stringent, essential and necessary economic reforms are needed to maintain the momentum of change. Genuine political reforms are equally needed. Such reforms are crucial to relative stability in these trying moments. **A**

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Endnotes

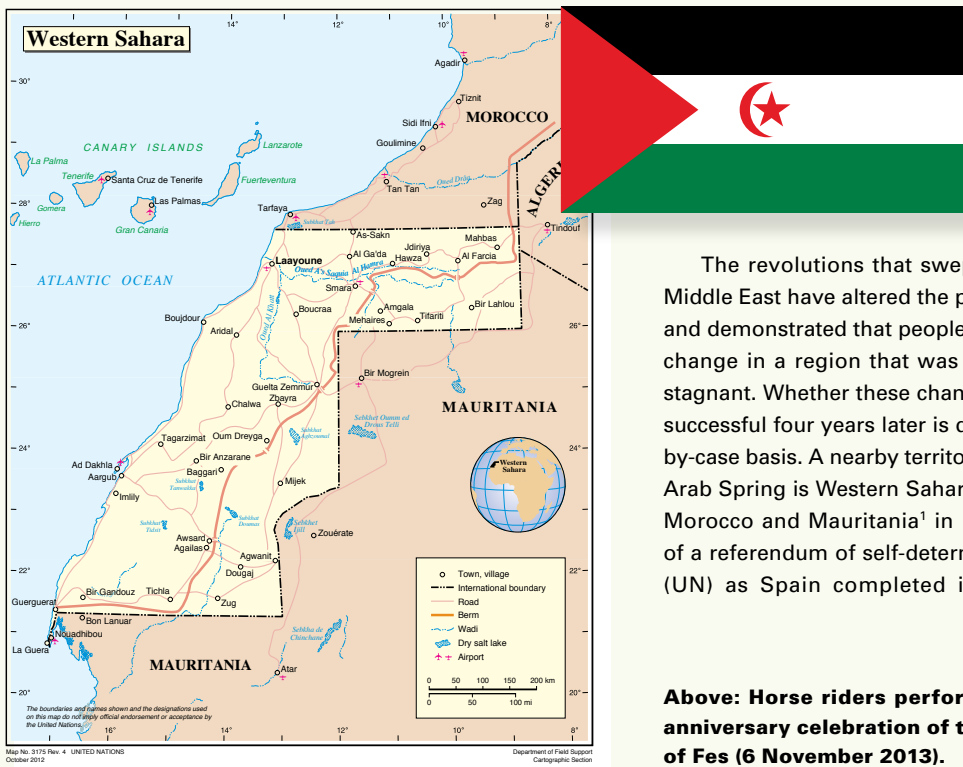
- 1 The phenomenon to which the expression ‘Arab Spring’ refers might be misconstrued and misunderstood in academic and media publications, as it tends to relay more what is wished than what is actually happening. Also, the word ‘Arab’ in the expression ‘Arab Spring’ tends to exclude those who have rebelled but do not share the Arab identity, such as the Berbers of North Africa.
- 2 Huntington, Samuel P. (1993) *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, p. 19. The first wave started in the 19th century in Western Europe and North America; the second wave began after World War II in Europe and swept away dictatorships that came to power before and during the war; and the third wave started in the mid-1970s and affected Latin America, Spain, Portugal and, more recently, Eastern Europe. It has been suggested that the 1990s collapse of the Soviet Union and East European socialist systems constituted a fourth wave.
- 3 Layachi, Azzedine (2013) Algeria: The Untenable Exceptionalism in the Spring of Upheavals. In Larémont, Ricardo René (ed.) *Revolution, Revolt, and Reform in North Africa*. New York: Routledge, pp. 125–147.
- 4 UNDP (2010) ‘The 2010 Human Development Report (The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development)’, Available at: <<http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev/lets-talk-hd/2010-11b/>>.
- 5 Extraordinary rendition is defined as “the transfer of an individual, with the involvement of the United States or its agents, to a foreign state in circumstances that make it more likely than not that the individual will be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.” Source: Association

- of the Bar of the City of New York & Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (2004) ‘Torture by Proxy: International and Domestic Law Applicable to “Extraordinary Rendition”’, p. 4, Available at: <<http://chrgj.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/TortureByProxy.pdf>>.
- 6 The *Makhzen* refers to the informal network of power holders revolving around the monarch. They include royal notables, big businessmen and landowners, tribal leaders, top-ranking security officers and high-level non-elected bureaucrats. The *Makhzen* makes many important decisions and acts through patronage networks and formal political structures, including political parties, administration and influential power brokers.
- 7 Evans, Martin (2012) ‘Contextualising Contemporary Algeria: June 1965 and October 1988’, *Open Democracy*, 25 May, Available at: <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/martin-evans/contextualising-contemporary-algeria-june-1965-and-october-1988>> [Accessed 16 February 2015].
- 8 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2009) ‘Algeria: National Reconciliation Fails to Address Needs of IDPs’, Available at: <<http://www.internal-displacement.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/algeria/2009/national-reconciliation-fails-to-address-needs-of-idps>> [Accessed 16 February 2015].
- 9 Bertelsmann Stiftung (2012) ‘BTI 2012 Algeria Country Report’, p. 23, Available at: <http://www.bti-project.de/fileadmin/Inhalte/reports/2012/pdf/BTI_2012_Algeria.pdf> [Accessed 18 November 2012].
- 10 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2013) ‘Atlas of Electoral Gender Quotas’, Available at: <<http://www.idea.int/publications/atlas-of-electoral-gender-quotas/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageID=63855>> [Accessed 16 February 2015].
- 11 This coalition collapsed in 2013 and the PJD had to form a new one with pro-monarchy forces in parliament, thereby undermining its ability to have much impact on policy.
- 12 BBC (2011) ‘Islamist PJD Party Wins Morocco Poll’, *BBC*, 27 November, Available at: <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-15902703>>.
- 13 On the resilience of authoritarianism in MENA, see Bellin, Eva (2004) The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective. *Comparative Politics*, 36 (2), pp. 139–157.
- 14 See Brumberg, Daniel (2002) The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (October), pp. 56–68; Anderson, Lisa (1991) Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East. *Political Science Quarterly*, 106 (Spring), pp. 1–15; Schlumberger, Oliver (ed.) (2007) *Debating Arab Authoritarianism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; Lucas, Russell E. (2004) Monarchical Authoritarianism: Survival and Political Liberalization in a Middle Eastern Regime Type. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 36 (February), pp. 103–19; Wegner, Eva (2007) Islamist Inclusion and Regime Persistence: The Moroccan Win-Win Situation. In Schlumberger, Oliver (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 75–93; and Albrecht, Holger (2007) Authoritarian Opposition and the Politics of Challenge in Egypt. In Schlumberger, Oliver (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 59–74.
- 15 Layachi, Azzedine (2005) Political Liberalization and the Islamists in Algeria. In Bonner, Michael, Reif, Megan and Tessler, Mark (eds) *Islam, Democracy and the State in Algeria*. New York: Routledge, p. 47.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 Democracy, the ultimate goal, is understood here as a set of institutions, a process and a corresponding political culture, which allow individuals and groups to have regular input in the policy-making process. It implies the end of authoritarianism, participatory politics, regular elite turnover and accountability, and the transparency of political and economic transactions.

WESTERN SAHARA SINCE THE ARAB SPRING: ANY HOPE FOR CHANGE?

BY NISRINE AMEL LAMAMRA

GALLO IMAGES/REUTERS



The revolutions that swept across North Africa and the Middle East have altered the political landscape in the region, and demonstrated that people-power revolutions can achieve change in a region that was often thought to be politically stagnant. Whether these changes can be deemed completely successful four years later is debatable, and varies on a case-by-case basis. A nearby territory that has been inspired by the Arab Spring is Western Sahara – a land that was annexed by Morocco and Mauritania¹ in 1975, prior to the organisation of a referendum of self-determination by the United Nations (UN) as Spain completed its retreat from the territory.

Above: Horse riders perform with guns during the 38th anniversary celebration of the Green March near the city of Fes (6 November 2013).



The Sahrawi people's struggle is for self-determination. They demand the right to carry out their overdue referendum for self-determination.

Local resistance to Morocco's annexation was found among the Sahrawi people through their military arm, the Polisario Front, and government-in-exile, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR).

ACCORDING TO NOAM CHOMSKY, THE ARAB SPRING BEGAN IN OCTOBER 2010 WHEN THE PEOPLE OF WESTERN SAHARA REVOLTED AGAINST THEIR MOROCCAN OCCUPIERS

This article delves into the impact of the Arab Spring revolutions on the 40-year-old Western Sahara conflict. Four years after the revolutions were launched around Western Sahara, have there been spillover effects on the territory? First, the article tackles the notion that the Arab Spring was born on the outskirts of El Aaiún, during the Gdeim Izik protests. The article argues that although these protests were described as being precursors to the Arab Spring protests, they were actually the most prominent recent rallies against Morocco's annexation of many that have occurred since 1975. The article then focuses on the fate of the territory since the Arab Spring began and highlights the continued struggle of the Sahrawi people to express dissent to Moroccan rule

in the occupied territories, the continued curtailment of human rights in Western Sahara, and the status quo that has characterised the United Nations' (UN) peacekeeping efforts. The article concludes with thoughts on the impact of the post-revolutionary political reshuffle in Libya and Egypt on the traditional stances adopted by these countries on the Western Sahara conflict.

Western Sahara: The Real Birthplace of the Arab Spring?

According to Noam Chomsky, the Arab Spring began in October 2010 when the people of Western Sahara revolted against their Moroccan occupiers.² This opinion has been echoed by North Africa analysts, including Hicham Yezza, who commented: "In October 2010 – a few weeks before that fateful December encounter in Sidi Bouzid (Tunisia) between Mohamed Bouazizi and a municipal official – thousands of Sahrawi men, women and children set up Gdeim Izik, a camp a few miles East of Layyounne, the capital of occupied Western Sahara, in an act of mass protest against their continuing marginalisation under the decades-long Moroccan occupation of their land...."³

Gdeim Izik, as the protests began to be dubbed, succeeded in breaking the media embargo on Western Sahara, and images of a fiercely repressed peaceful protest were indeed reminiscent of those which were to follow in Tunis, Cairo, Tripoli and other Arab cities throughout the Middle East.



Thousands of Sahrawi men, women and children set up Gdeim Izik, a protest camp, in an act of mass protest against their continuing marginalisation under the decades-long Moroccan occupation of their land.

Thousands of Sahrawis moved out of the cities of Western Sahara and into about 6 500 tents in the area of Gdeim Izik, outside the capital El Aaiún, to protest the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara and the ongoing discrimination, poverty and human rights abuses against Sahrawi citizens.⁴ Moroccan authorities dismantled the camps forcefully and blocked wounded Sahrawis from seeking medical treatment.⁵ In fear of the bad publicity that its activities could engender, Morocco expelled the Al Jazeera journalist sent to cover the events and closed the channel's office in the country.⁶ The national airline, Royal Air Maroc, also impeded foreign correspondents from the Spanish television channels TVE and TV3, and from the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo*, from boarding flights from Morocco to El Aaiún, cancelling their flights in advance or blocking them at the airport.⁷ It is therefore difficult to find exact numbers of the casualties at Gdeim Izik, but it is estimated that at least several dozen Sahrawis lost their lives and hundreds were arrested. Among those detained were the 'Gdeim Izik 25' – 25 civilian Sahrawis who were convicted in a Moroccan military court on charges relating to violent resistance against security forces and forming criminal gangs. Nine of the men received life sentences, 14 received prison terms ranging between 20 and 30 years, and two were released after spending their two-year sentences in prison in court-ordered pre-trial detention.

That these events are reminiscent of scenes witnessed shortly after across North Africa is undeniable. However, in the words of Samia Errazouki: "If the 'Arab Spring' refers to

the recent wave of popular uprisings throughout the region, rooted in socioeconomic grievances and the opposition to authoritarianism, placing the Western Saharan struggle on this spectrum is dismissive of a long history."⁸ Defining the Western Sahara conflict as the Sahrawi people's uprising against Moroccan authoritarian rule and unequal socio-economic opportunities indeed offers a limited perspective of the conflict. The Sahrawi people's struggle is one for self-determination, as the Western Saharan territory's decolonisation from Spain was never completed following Morocco's annexation of the territory before a referendum of self-determination could be carried out by the UN. Elements of social unrest do exist in Western Sahara, as many Sahrawis feel that they are not given the same employment opportunities as Moroccan settlers in the region, and Sahrawis in the territory are treated with great distrust by the Moroccan authorities and suffer extreme restrictions on their freedoms of expression and association.⁹ However, Sahrawi protests in Western Sahara, while expressing dissatisfaction with the effects of Moroccan rule over the territory, largely contest this rule and demand the right of the Sahrawi people to carry out their overdue referendum of self-determination. In that, Gdeim Izik stands out in stark opposition to any of the Arab Spring uprisings and highlights the singularity of Western Sahara among the revolutions in North Africa.

Presenting Gdeim Izik as the spark that ignited the protest movement in Western Sahara is also an erroneous

depiction. As important as that protest was to draw international attention to the Western Sahara problem, Gdeim Izik-like demonstrations have been occurring since Morocco occupied the territory – and continue to do so, away from the coverage of world media, as Morocco has blocked media from reporting on Western Sahara. Indeed, in the 1990s, the Sahrawis launched a series of protests that were labelled the ‘Sahrawi Intifada’. Starting in early September 1999, dozens of Sahrawi students organised a sit-in, asking for more scholarships and transportation subsidies to Moroccan universities. This evolved into constant vigils lasting 12 days in the square in front of the Najir Hotel in El Aaiún, which housed UN personnel. The protesters were quickly joined by former Sahrawi political prisoners seeking accountability for state-sponsored disappearances. The Moroccan authorities moved in to break up the sit-in, arresting dozens and reportedly dumping some in the desert miles outside of the town.¹⁰ Five days later, a larger demonstration with definite pro-referendum demands was dispersed by Moroccan authorities – this time through the unleashing of local gangs into the homes and places of business of the city’s Sahrawi residents – and a further 150 demonstrators were arrested.¹¹

Six years later, following James Baker’s departure as the head of the UN mediation talks and the subsequent political standstill, tensions grew again, from 2004 to 2005. Frustrations arising at the lack of prospects for the holding of the much-anticipated referendum of self-determination exploded in May 2005. The protests began when it was discovered that Ahmed Mahmoud Haddi, a Sahrawi political prisoner known for his support for the Polisario Front, was to be transferred from a prison in El Aaiún to

one in southern Morocco. His family members and other Sahrawi human rights activists staged a demonstration on 21–22 May 2005 outside the prison, which was forcefully dispersed by Moroccan authorities. This only spurred the protesters to return, in increased numbers and with more political demands. Pro-independence cries were shouted and SADR flags wielded. The Moroccan reaction was brutal, invading and besieging neighbourhoods to which the protests had spread, ransacking homes, forcefully dispersing the crowds and imprisoning dozens of activists. This inspired further protests in other cities in Western Sahara, namely Smara and Dakhla, and in the southern Moroccan cities of Tan Tan and Assa. Solidarity demonstrations were also organised throughout Morocco in the universities of Agadir, Marrakech, Casablanca, Rabat and Fez. The total number of political detainees quickly surged to over 100 in the space of a few days, and many of the detainees conducted hunger strikes in protest of their arrests. The protests and clashes with the police continued for months, and peaked in intensity in October 2005 when Moroccan security agents beat a Sahrawi demonstrator, Hamdi Lembarki, to death in full public view. Subsequently, a massive number of protesters, who unfurled SADR flags, gathered at his funeral.¹²

Western Sahara since the Arab Spring

Since Gdeim Izik, protests unbeknown to the international community continue to take place. Indeed, in April and May 2013, 10 days of protests took place across Western Sahara to call for self-determination after the UN Security Council voted to renew the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) without a human rights component, culminating in a protest on



GALLO IMAGES/REUTERS

Moroccan security forces forcefully break up the Sahrawi tent camp on the outskirts of Western Sahara’s capital city, Layyone (8 November 2010). Several people were killed when Moroccan authorities stormed the protest camp.



Sahrawis shout slogans for the freedom of Western Sahara during a demonstration organised by officials from the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) - 28 February 2011.

4 May 2013 that saw thousands of Sahrawis taking to the streets to reiterate their call for self-determination. A few days later, on 9 May 2013, as another mass protest was being organised on social media, Moroccan police launched a wave of arrests and detentions aimed at nipping the growing movement in the bud. Amnesty International reported on the fate of six of the detainees and revealed that they had been the victims of severe torture.¹³

Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, human rights issues continue to surface regularly in the territory. A delegation from the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights (a US-based human rights organisation) undertook a visit to Western Sahara in 2012 and observed: "In Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara, the overwhelming presence of security forces, the violations of the rights to life, liberty, personal integrity, and freedom of expression, assembly, and association create a state of fear and intimidation that violates the rule of law and respect for human rights of the Sahrawi people."¹⁴ Subsequently, a British All-Party Parliamentary Group delegation visited the territory in February 2014, and declared in its report that it was made aware of major cases of human rights violations, including "several individual victims of extrajudicial execution by the Moroccan police; the 'Gdeim Izik 25' (...); the 15 young Saharawi men who 'disappeared' on 25 December 2005 and whose whereabouts are still unknown; the large number of activists arrested and ill-treated while in detention; and the crackdown on freedom of expression through intimidation and arrest of individuals trying to

document or report on human rights violations in Occupied Western Sahara".¹⁵ In 2014, Human Rights Watch observed repeatedly that Sahrawis who attempted to participate in demonstrations for self-determination were detained by Moroccan authorities and allegedly tortured during their interrogations to force them to sign confessions of wrongdoing.¹⁶ Despite these reports, MINURSO is one of the rare UN peacekeeping missions not to contain a human rights component to its monitoring activities, and annual efforts by the SADR to include such a component have been thwarted for years, as Morocco has resisted such an inclusion.

Finally, the UN's efforts to resolve the conflict have not been fruitful since the Arab Spring. Since 2012, Christopher Ross, the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, has had a tense relationship with the Moroccan government. Indeed, in April 2012, the Secretary-General delivered a report to the Security Council that contained recommendations from his Personal Envoy which offended Morocco (including one that called for adding a human rights component to MINURSO). Ross also stated that he wished to visit Western Sahara for the first time during his next trip to the region – a request that irked Morocco. Following these two events, the Moroccan government officially declared that it had lost confidence in the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy, describing his work as "unbalanced and biased".¹⁷ Although the UN Secretary-General communicated his continued support for his Personal Envoy to the Moroccan authorities, and Ross



Christopher Ross, Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, speaks to the press after briefing the Security Council in New York (28 November 2012).

was able to make his first trip to Western Sahara, Morocco continues to be wary of his proposals, which are viewed as being partial to the Sahrawi cause. This has limited Ross's ability to dialogue with the Moroccan authorities, and the frequency of his visits to Morocco has dwindled. After concluding nine rounds of informal talks with the parties to the conflict since August 2009, Ross declared that the two sides were no closer to a solution, and announced that he was halting informal talks and turning to shuttle diplomacy between the two sides to break the deadlock. Since it was launched in February 2013, Ross's shuttle diplomacy has not yet succeeded in breaking this deadlock, and has yet to yield concrete results.

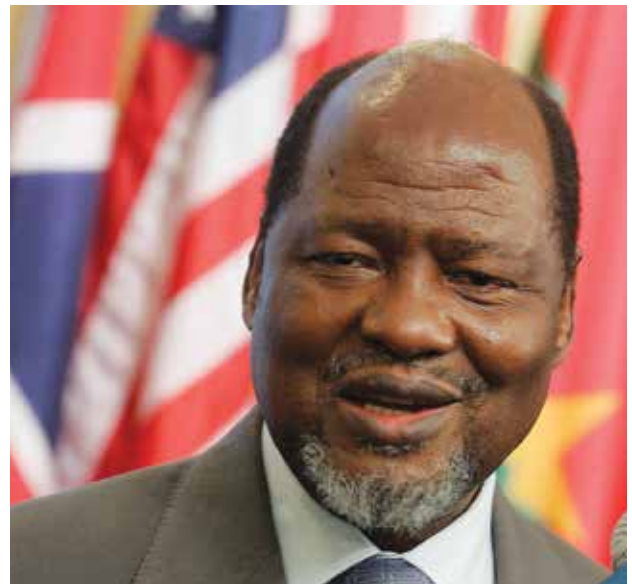
In a new turn of events, the African Union (AU), perceiving this lack of progress, has recently attempted to re-exert some control over the international community's peacekeeping efforts in Western Sahara. Indeed, at its Executive Council's 22nd Ordinary Session held in January 2013, the body requested that the AU Commission takes all necessary measures for the organisation of a referendum for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. In a letter to the Secretary-General of the UN dated April 2013, the AU Commission's chairperson, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, requested that Ross visit Addis Ababa "for an exchange of views with the Commission on the best way forward".¹⁸ In addition, in 2014, the AU appointed its own Special Envoy for Western Sahara, Joaquim Chissano, the former president of Mozambique, to determine the best ways for the AU to support the international efforts aimed

at finding a settlement to the Western Sahara conflict.¹⁹ Chissano began consultations with the permanent members of the UN Security Council, UN officials and Spain, and is expected to produce a report for the AU's 24th Summit of Heads of State and Government in January 2015. Although the UN is not likely to take a backseat to the AU on this issue, the AU's efforts are meant to put pressure on the UN and the parties to the conflict – in particular, Morocco – to organise the long-overdue referendum of self-determination in Western Sahara.

The Effects of the Libyan and Egyptian Revolutions on Western Sahara

Since its inception, the Western Sahara conflict has been characterised by an international diplomatic tussle between the SADR and Morocco for the recognition of their stances by third parties. The battle for recognition of the Sahrawis' right to self-determination or Morocco's claim over the territory is one that is waged country by country, and after the Arab Spring toppled trusted allies, both Morocco and the SADR launched diplomatic campaigns to claim or reclaim allies in Libya – a supporter of the SADR under Gaddafi – and Egypt – an advocate of Morocco's claim over Western Sahara under Mubarak.

In the case of Libya, Gaddafi's regime was closely tied to the conflict for a significant period of time. In fact, Libya was the first and biggest supporter of the Polisario Front at the outset of the conflict, even sending arms to the resistance movement during the early years of the war. Gaddafi's support waned, however, particularly after the signature of the Treaty of Oujda, which for a short time



In 2014, the African Union (AU) appointed the former president of Mozambique, Joaquim Chissano, as its Special Envoy for Western Sahara, to determine the best ways for the AU to support international efforts aimed at finding a settlement to the Western Sahara conflict.

linked Morocco and Libya in a union.²⁰ However, once that project fell through, Gaddafi resumed his assistance to the Sahrawis – albeit not as enthusiastically as in the early days of the conflict. His assistance included offering humanitarian aid to the Sahrawi refugee population in Tindouf, Algeria. Politically, Libya was one of the countries that sent a letter to the Organisation of African Unity’s Secretary-General in July 1980, supporting the admission of the SADR into the organisation. In later years, Gaddafi was firm in his rejection of the Moroccan Autonomy Plan,²¹ stating that the Sahrawis should be able to choose one of two options through a referendum: integration within Morocco or independence.

When Libya’s revolution began, the Moroccan government quickly aligned itself with the National Transitional Council (NTC) and not Gaddafi’s flailing regime, in the hope that the new establishment in the country would remember Morocco’s early recognition of the Libyan revolutionaries, which was made in August 2011, and return the favour by lending its support to the Moroccan claim over Western Sahara. An official visit was organised in the same month by the Moroccan foreign minister, Taieb Fassi Fihri, to the revolutionaries’ capital city, Benghazi. This was the first visit by an Arab foreign minister to the rebel stronghold since the beginning of the Libyan uprising.

THE SAHRAWIS WERE UNDOUBTEDLY INSPIRED BY THE PEOPLE-POWER REVOLUTIONS TAKING PLACE AROUND THEM, AND REASSURED THAT THEY WOULD ALSO EVENTUALLY ACHIEVE WHAT THEIR NEIGHBOURS OBTAINED – THE RIGHT TO A POLITICAL VOICE

Morocco also sought to create a rift between the revolutionaries and the Polisario Front. It claimed on the website *Polisario Confidentiel*, linked to the Moroccan secret services, that the Polisario Front had sent hundreds of Sahrawi mercenaries to Libya, and these mercenaries were paid US\$500 a day by the Libyan regime to support Gaddafi.²² In reaction to this claim, the SADR’s press agency, the Sahara Press Service, published an article quoting the former president of the NTC denying these allegations.²³ In the wake of the changes that occurred in Libya, Polisario Front members also expressed hope that their cause would be championed by the new leadership in the country. Indeed, during the 13th edition of the Polisario Front’s annual congress, which was themed around the Arab Spring, the SADR representative to the AU, Sidi Mohamed Omar, stated that he hoped that “[t]he winds of change which are blowing over these states will benefit the Sahrawi cause... [including by] building more fraternal and solid relations

with our brothers from these Arabic countries, including Libya.”²⁴

In the case of Egypt, the relationship between Morocco and Egypt has recently undergone turbulent times. The origin of this turbulence is a host of critical Egyptian media reports on Morocco, the last of which criticised King Mohammed VI’s use of five airplanes during his last trip to Turkey.²⁵ In turn, in early 2015, Morocco’s media launched a critical campaign against Egypt, and President Al-Sisi in particular, labelling the ousting of President Morsi “a coup which put a halt to a democratic process” on the state-owned Al Aoula channel, and implying that Al-Sisi’s election was flawed, due to the 25 million Egyptian electors who did not partake in the vote.²⁶ This statement came in stark contrast to Morocco’s position following Morsi’s ousting – the country was one of the first to congratulate Interim President Adly Mansour two days after Morsi’s removal.

In the wake of Mohammed VI’s visit to Turkey, with which Egypt has a strained relationship, Egyptian authorities showed signs of a rapprochement with the SADR, making it seem as though the ambivalent relations between the two countries could cost Morocco Egypt’s traditional support on the Western Sahara issue. Indeed, Egypt allowed itself to be wooed by the SADR, which invited Egyptian journalists to the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria, in June 2014.²⁷ This visit was followed by another, more official one, in October of the same year, in which an Egyptian delegation headed by the undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture visited the camps in Tindouf and met with the SADR president, Mohamed Abdelaziz.²⁸ However, on 16 January 2015, Morocco and Egypt mended fences during the Egyptian foreign minister’s visit to Morocco, where he was received by his Moroccan counterpart as well as the king of Morocco. During these exchanges, Morocco was assured by the Egyptian minister of his country’s continued support for Morocco’s autonomy proposal for Western Sahara.²⁹

As things stand, it is not yet clear whether post-revolutionary Libya will continue to support the Sahrawis’ right to self-determination, as Gaddafi had for decades – but in the case of Egypt, the current post-revolutionary government has decided to continue to support the Moroccan position, as the kingdom seems to have succeeded in discouraging Egypt from balancing its position to salvage the relationship between the two nations.

Conclusion

The political changes brought about by the Arab Spring have given the Sahrawis hope that their own hardships might eventually come to an end. The Sahrawis were undoubtedly inspired by the people-power revolutions taking place around them, and reassured that they would also eventually achieve what their neighbours obtained – the right to a political voice. The fact that the wave of revolutions was encouraged and even materially supported by Western

powers further drove the Sahrawis to wonder why their neighbours, in such a short span of time, could obtain what they had been fighting for, for decades. This sentiment was further exacerbated by the birth of a fellow African nation, South Sudan, in 2011, following a referendum monitored by the international community. As demonstrated in this article, for now, the Western Sahara conflict remains at a standstill, as it is left behind in the wave of political revolutions in North Africa – much as it was left behind during the era of decolonisation. Western Sahara seems doomed to remain the exception to the rule in these sweeping international political trends, and as much as it predates the Arab Spring, will probably outlast it unless decisive action is taken to resolve the conflict fairly, once and for all. **A**

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SECURITY IN NORTH AFRICA: ADDRESSING NEW AND OLD CONCERNS IN LIGHT OF THE ARAB REVOLTS

BY MIKAEL ERIKSSON

GALLO IMAGES/REUTERS



The year 2015 marks the fourth anniversary of what is left of the so-called Arab Spring. Whether this anniversary is genuinely celebrated or passes by unnoticed remains to be seen. The reason is simple: for some actors, the past four years have been considerable disappointments, while for others, reason has prevailed over emotions. Given the two viewpoints, how then are we to analytically understand the dynamics of the so-called Arab Spring in North Africa?

Broadly seen, two broad narratives exist that explain where the political developments in North Africa stand.¹ On the one hand, there are those scholars and practitioners who have practically declared the revolts in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt as technically dead. The election in Tunisia in late

October 2014 brought former members of the Zine El Abidine Ben Ali administration back into power; for Libya, scholars close to the armed conflicts literature would hardly disagree with defining the situation in the country as that of a civil war; and for Egypt, the ruling military elite continues to maintain its all-encompassing grip on power at the expense of democratic rule.

Above: Tunisia's President Béji Caïd Essebsi takes the oath of office at the constituent assembly in Tunis on 31 December 2014, giving the country a democratically elected leader four years after an uprising ousted President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.



Many states that experienced the “Arab Spring” four years ago have since held elections in line with democratic practices and processes.

On the other hand, there are those who view the past years’ development in North Africa in a diametrically opposed way – by looking at developments in a very positive way. Albeit recognising that there have been instances of violence, abuses and atrocities against civilians in most of the North African states, political change has undeniably taken place. Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have taken major steps to reform previous system malfunctions. For example, all states in the region have made amendments to their constitutions to conform better to democratic practices and representations. Adding to this, most states have held elections without much international critique (although the disposal of former President Mohamed Morsi of Egypt will remain a thorn for the military). From this perspective, formal institutional democratisation measures have been taken and the liberalisation process appears to be on the right path.

TUNISIA, EGYPT AND LIBYA HAVE TAKEN MAJOR STEPS TO REFORM PREVIOUS SYSTEM MALFUNCTIONS

In light of these two opposing viewpoints, it is pertinent to ask two sets of questions. First, why did the so-called Arab Spring actually turn out the way it did (what lessons were learned for any possible future processes of this kind)? Second, what challenges are we to witness in the future? To limit the scope of analysis, the remaining emphasis of this article will be on security developments in North Africa.

Taking a security perspective – as opposed to reviewing political developments only – gives a strong explanatory basis for understanding what has been at stake, as well as what there is to expect in the years to come. The main argument pursued is that a new integrated framework is needed for the analysis of security-related events in North Africa.

Current State of Affairs

For the majority of ‘Arab’ and ‘African’ states affected by the Arab Spring, the political reform process has taken two steps forward and one step back. This is particularly true for political developments in Libya and Egypt. In Libya, Muammar Gaddafi’s authoritarian government was soon replaced by domestic turmoil in which militias with foreign backing were fighting each other (also resulting in profound negative impact for states in the Sahel). In Egypt, the military government regained control over the political system with an increase in oppression, notably against the Muslim Brotherhood and any other opposition group criticising the military. Nonetheless, a possible sign of positive progress is perhaps Tunisia, where institutional democracy has at least gradually deepened and non-violent talks have been held between political parties such as the Ennahda Movement and Nidaa Tounes. However, Tunisian society, in which the Arab Spring revolt unfolded, remains polarised and is expected to be so in the near-term years to come. This has partly to do with the fact that former members of Ben Ali’s administration are back in power.² Meanwhile, political reforms in Morocco and Algeria have practically stood still

as a result of the geopolitical rivalry that existed between the two political systems.

At the outset of the Arab revolt, the 'end result' of the turmoil that erupted in North Africa was clouded in uncertainty. Few analysts could foresee where things were moving. Four years down the road, however, one important lesson can be learnt on why the revolt turned out the way it did: the securitisation of the revolts and the subsequent geopolitical positioning of intraregional and inter-regional actors.³

From Peaceful Opposition to Securitisation

While Ben Ali, Tunisia's president, disappeared from power relatively quickly, Hosni Mubarak, then president of Egypt, met his protesters with different political strategies to quell demonstrations. Unaware of the strength of the protests and that the army would turn its back on him, Mubarak underestimated his opponents by offering cheap political and economic concessions. Rather than co-opting his opponents, his political countermoves further fuelled grievances. For the United States (US), Egypt was most complicated, because of the country's central role in its regional security architecture following the Camp David Accords (relaxing tensions between Egypt and Israel).⁴ In Libya, the demands were met almost immediately with full-scale violence by Gaddafi's regime. What quickly came to add to the negative spiral of violence were both the fragility of the unique character of the Libyan state as well as the

early realisation in the broader Middle East and the West that Gaddafi himself was an unreliable power holder, and therefore could be sacrificed for the sake of stability.⁵

Geopolitical Positioning

As the Arab revolt spread in 2011–2012, actors within and outside the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region began to take more proactive control over the security developments. The aim was to ensure that national interests prevailed. With this also came the switch in the Arab revolts dynamics: from being a local, peaceful and national protest phenomena to that of an arena for regional and international security actors. This positioning stood in sharp contrast to the early dynamics.

UNAWARE OF THE STRENGTH OF THE PROTESTS AND THAT THE ARMY WOULD TURN ITS BACK ON HIM, MUBARAK UNDERESTIMATED HIS OPPONENTS BY OFFERING CHEAP POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONCESSIONS

In 2012, several states in the region with more or less sophisticated policies tried to change internal political dynamics. Local actors and states gradually came to obtain increasing financial and military support. As the security



Egyptians protest against the military government and flash the *Rabaa* sign during an Islamist protest in a Cairo suburb (28 November 2014). The *Rabaa* sign symbolises support for the Muslim Brotherhood.



At a meeting with the United Nations (UN) Special Envoy for Libya in Tripoli, the Libyan General National Congress confirmed that Libya's elected parliament will return to UN-sponsored peace negotiations (2 March 2015).

concerns and political rifts spread and deepened, other actors stepped up their political, economic and military support. As a result, a number of political conflicts developed into war, and segments of the previously peacefully demonstrating population became radicalised. The dividing lines in the region have since become increasingly clearer – that is, with different interests manifesting at the local, national and regional level.⁶

In essence, then, an important explanatory factor for why the so-called Arab Spring in North Africa took form had to do with international actors' positions and actions vis-à-vis local events. In this context, the role of US policies is particularly crucial.⁷ While the US was initially taken by surprise by the events in North Africa, it became increasingly clear that its national interests were given priority over its other principles on democracy and human rights. Put differently, Washington, DC regarded the Arab Spring as both a threat and an opportunity. During the early stages of the revolt, there was a policy position by the US administration to support the revolts, as a democratic transition would eventually strengthen the US-led security order in the region. The calculus was that geostrategic interests and democratisation were able to go hand in hand and mutually reinforce each other. This, in turn, may explain why the US came to accept the *fait accompli* in Egypt and Tunisia – that is, Ben Ali and Mubarak were forced from power. However, as seen over the past four years, US national interests prevailed over its more democratic and liberal-leaning aspirations. This has probably contributed to the often-ambivalent policy of the so-called Arab Spring. While US intervention in Libya clearly supported the rebels and was aimed at *de facto* regime

change (through a 'leading from behind' strategy), the policy vis-à-vis Egypt was far more ambivalent. Sometimes support for the Muslim Brotherhood, and sometimes support for the Egyptian military (as well as support to both sides) complicated the US's approach to the developments, not only in Egypt but also in other political trouble spots in the region.

In sum, the tumultuous and uncertain situation prevailing at the outset of the Arab Spring subsequently went on to become a process where the region's various stakeholders actively came to position themselves for and against various scenarios. The revolts by freedom-aspiring citizens were overrun by geopolitical interests. This, in turn, led to the establishment of three competing visions or narratives of the Arab Spring: those in favour of continued democratisation; those calling for stability and the return to authoritarianism; and those accepting violence and confrontation for the purpose of securing a preferred geopolitical order.

Refocusing the Security Analysis

In light of the takeover of peaceful revolts by geopolitical considerations among inside and outside actors to North Africa, there is a clear need to start rethinking the conventional hard security paradigm and shift the limelight back on more human security and broad-based security concerns. The reason is simple: beyond the more immediate political challenges that states in North Africa face, there are a number of more profound structural security challenges looming on the horizon – challenges that unless addressed at an early stage are likely to have devastating social, political and economic consequences. To illustrate what these



People wait in line to buy gas cylinders at a distribution point in Cairo (19 January 2015). Egypt is going through its worst energy crisis in decades.

challenges are and how they play out, Egypt can be used as a case in point. However, any of the states in Africa or in the MENA region could experience the same challenges.

Having removed Morsi from power in July 2013, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) under General Sisi took on the goal of bringing security to the state, and effectively bringing the anti-terrorism agenda to the table. However, the military's security priority in this regard may prove to be a fundamentally erroneous prioritisation, as all Egypt's attention should be focused elsewhere. There are a number of structural factors that will have a considerable impact on Egypt's long-term security and stability. The most pressing of these challenges include the explosive mix of a growing and more demanding population, increasing energy shortages, a near-term lack of adequate freshwater, increasing vulnerability to food insecurity, and negative impact of climate change.⁸

Egypt has one of the largest populations in the Arab world. One estimate suggests that about 81 million people live there. An estimated 63% of the population is aged between 15 and 64 years, and the youth cohort clearly dominates. The Egyptian population roughly doubled in size between 1980 and 2011, from an estimated 40 million people in 1980 to nearly 79 million people in 2011. The population is currently growing at an annual rate of 1.8% (estimated growth that is mostly occurring in urban areas).⁹

Hence, the stability of Egypt in the long term is related to its ability to meet the demands of its growing population, in particular with regard to economic growth, employment, energy supply and natural resources (food and agriculture). Although the demands of a young generation of citizens that aspire for integration in the globalised world may prove challenging in itself, Egypt's growing population will likely require a new energy basis, which it does not have at the moment. The problem arises when population and energy factors are combined and understood in a more integrated security framework. With a growing population, the demand for energy will continue to rise. This will pose new costly challenges for Egypt, in addition to the social and economic challenges that the country's citizens are currently experiencing. Put differently, the growing population in Egypt and the increasing demand by domestic and industrial consumption suggests that Egypt will face an energy shortage in the years to come. While Egypt is currently a net exporter of energy, it will soon become a net energy importer. In turn, Egypt's energy shortage is also likely to affect its foreign relations (and thereby geopolitical interests) – not least its trade relations. However, the structural challenges do not stop here. The need to prioritise other structural challenges also came from additional considerations.

The potentially adverse impacts of climate change represent a long-term security challenge for Egypt.

According to climate change data, North Africa is likely to suffer negatively in the decades to come. For example, the International Panel on Climate Change notes that the states of North Africa will be strongly affected by climate change, with regional temperatures set to increase by 2.5°C during the winter months and 4°C during the summer months.¹⁰ Meanwhile, precipitation levels are set to decrease by 20–30% during the winter and by about 40% during the summer.¹¹ In this context, it is also likely that North Africa will experience more extreme weather events (note for instance that during December 2014, parts of North Africa were coated in snow).

As the challenges of population growth, increasing energy costs and changing climate systems merge and overlap, further social tensions could easily mount as a result. Although it is hard to imagine the citizens of Egypt demonstrating against their government for climate change issues, new political items on the agenda will arise. Linked to the structural challenges already discussed, food and water security challenges will rise on Egypt's security agenda. For example, Egypt's agricultural sector is very vulnerable to changes in natural precipitation. With a warmer climate this vulnerability is set to increase and less freshwater will be accessible. Since the water-intensive agriculture sector accounts for 85% of Egypt's annual water use, limited access to freshwater will pose a significant challenge to its food production.¹² With increasing water scarcity, the future looks bleak.¹³ In essence, then, all these long-term scenarios are unwelcome news for a state struggling with domestic costs and profound social tensions, as its resources are already overstretched.

Summary and Conclusion

Having been entrenched in the Arab Spring turmoil, current as well as future regimes in North Africa will need to reshape the security agenda from hard security concerns to more profound and long-term security challenges. This is key – not only for Egypt, which simply serves as one example, but also for countries such as Tunisia, Libya and the other states in this part of Africa. To draw a telling parallel, the Ebola virus epidemic in West Africa demonstrates how quickly new security concerns can enter as priorities on the political and economic agenda. Without making tough choices (for example, on national reconciliation) and making the right political priorities, minor crisis management challenges can easily turn out to be significant security concerns, threatening the sovereignty of the state and the social strata living within it.

Developments in North Africa have been turbulent and are likely to continue to be so in the years to come. The fourth anniversary of the epic turn taken by the freedom and dignity-aspiring citizens of North Africa will be held in a milieu of continued geopolitical uncertainty. However, as suggested in this article, a new analysis is needed for those scholars and concerned practitioners who wish to understand

what challenges North Africa faces. While much emphasis is placed on current political and economic transition processes, the conventional hard security paradigm through which these developments have been understood needs to be rethought. A new security paradigm is needed that takes into account some of the more structural security challenges that North Africa is likely to face in decades to come. **A**

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FOUR YEARS AFTER THE FALL OF GADDAFI: THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN STABILISING A FRACTURED LIBYA

BY CANDICE MOORE



GALLO IMAGES/REUTERS

Introduction

Like other articles in this special issue of *Conflict Trends* taking stock of what has been achieved in the wake of the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011, this contribution examines what has transpired in Libya over the last four years. The United Nations (UN) Resolution 1973 that authorised a no-fly zone over Libya was widely criticised for its implementation by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Given its substantial role in the downfall of Muammar Gaddafi's government, the international community – including multilateral and regional organisations – bear some responsibility for what has transpired since. As predicted by a key international observer

in 2011, during the throes of the early part of the civil war, "Libyans' hopes for freedom and legitimate government... depend() on how and when Qaddafi goes."¹

In February 2011, spontaneous street protests commenced in a few Libyan cities, sparked by the arrest of a human rights campaigner in the eastern city of Benghazi. These occurred in the aftermath of similar popular protests – which occurred for different reasons – in Tunisia and

Above: In 2011, the initial spurt of popular unrest, protests and instability in Libya quickly morphed into a fully-fledged armed conflict.



North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) airstrikes destroyed the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's Bab al-Aziziyah compound in Tripoli and forced him into hiding (April 2011).

Egypt. This initial spurt of popular unrest and instability in Libya quickly morphed into a fully-fledged armed conflict. Resisted by Gaddafi and his forces, the protests and resulting conflict rapidly descended into a months-long civil war, and culminated in the capture and killing of Gaddafi on 20 October 2011. This period saw intense deliberation and action by global actors in attempts to curtail the violence that was raging through Libya. The African Union (AU) became immediately concerned with the situation rapidly unfolding in Libya, and its first discussion on the crisis occurred at the Peace and Security Council (PSC) meeting on 23 February 2011. Its 10 March 2011 meeting, also at the level of heads of state, saw the crafting of a definitive response to the crisis. This involved a 'roadmap', encapsulated by the following: "The current situation in Libya calls for an urgent African action for: (i) the immediate cessation of all hostilities, (ii) the cooperation of the competent Libyan authorities to facilitate the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to the needy populations, (iii) the protection of foreign nationals, including the African migrants living in Libya, and (iv) the adoption and implementation of the political reforms necessary for the elimination of the causes of the current crisis."² At the time, this approach was deemed indecisive, and a key weakness was its failure to spell out an exit strategy for Gaddafi.³ The roadmap was, unfortunately, immediately sidelined. In the UN, United Kingdom (UK) and France, and to a lesser extent, the United States (US), sought to act decisively to assist the

rebel forces. The UK, as chair of the UN Security Council at the time, drafted Resolution 1973.

A full week after the release of the AU Communiqué on 10 March 2011, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1973 that authorised a no-fly zone over Libya. This measure, implemented by NATO, aided the cause of the National Transitional Council (NTC) that ultimately overran Tripoli in August 2011, storming Gaddafi's compound and sending him into hiding. Not long after this, the AU joined 60 countries in recognising the NTC as the rightful occupant of the Libyan seat in the organisation.⁴ In fact, the NTC had already been recognised by the International Contact Group (ICG) on Libya as the legitimate authority in the country as early as July 2011. The ICG is a gathering of 21 countries and representatives of various states, regional bodies and global multilateral organisations. After its inaugural meeting on 13 April 2011, it declared that "Qadhafi and his regime had lost all legitimacy and he must leave power allowing the Libyan people to determine their own future".⁵ It should be noted that not one member of this group is an African state, with Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan and Tunisia, along with the AU, accorded observer status.

Power struggles within the NTC, competition for oil riches and a lack of agreement on the way forward on national reconciliation have all hampered Libya's transition from post-Gaddafi rule. This article provides an overview of events in Libya since the NATO intervention, and examines the varied responses to the conflict from the international community.

Libya in Transition

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in 2010 Libya ranked 53rd out of 163 countries in the UN's Human Development Index. Classified a high human development country among the countries of the Middle East and North African region, Libya's population of 5.6 million boasted an adult literacy rate of 88.4%. The gross national income (GNI) per capita was US\$12 637.⁶ It was thought that structural features of the country such as "ethno-religious homogeneity, ample oil revenues and robust infrastructure suggested a less contentious transition than elsewhere".⁷ According to the UNDP, with demographic changes over the last three decades in Libya, a current feature of the country's population pyramid is that it is characterised by a 'youth bulge' or a large proportion of 25- to 29-year-olds, which includes a substantial number of young men who are unemployed. The crisis was fed by this demographic feature, as "(y)outh were the main building block of the revolution and women played a key supporting role in food and healthcare supply to the fighters, information and transport/smuggling of arms".⁸ This and other challenges, including the ready availability of weapons and a lack of agreement among key actors, have rendered Libya's transition slow and, at times, violent.

The Security Transition

Among the key grievances against the Gaddafi regime were the inequitable distribution of oil revenues and violations of human rights. While the NATO operation

aided the NTC in defeating Gaddafi's regime, the Western coalition chose a side with such speed that the requirement of building a united and comprehensive front to oppose Gaddafi and constructing a new Libya after the uprising was not met. This was in spite of a call by the ICG on Libya for "an inclusive political process so that the Libyan people can determine their own future".⁹ The anti-regime militias that opposed Gaddafi had organised themselves into three confederations, determined by their geographical origins: Eastern Libya, Misrata and the Nafousa Mountains. By the time of Gaddafi's demise, these militia groups numbered some 1 700 – a total of 231 000 registered fighters.¹⁰

The NTC and Libya's first elected government in 2012 struggled to attain a monopoly of force, one of the key characteristics of state authority. The vast numbers of fighters who were engaged in the battle against Gaddafi had to be disarmed and reintegrated into Libyan society. The interim NTC and the first democratically elected government sought to manage this challenge in three main ways: co-opting militias to bolster security in key areas; attempting to transfer fighters into the state's official, rebuilt armed forces; and demobilising and reintegrating militia forces. All these measures required significant resources and time to implement. Unfortunately, the continuing inability of Libya's post-Gaddafi governments to realise a monopoly of force represented an opportunity for 'entrepreneurs of violence' to enter the scene and utilise the security vacuum to their own ends.¹¹



Libya's population demographic is characterised by a 'youth bulge', which includes a substantial number of young men who are unemployed.



A Libyan militia brigade commander gives a speech during a handing over ceremony of the brigade's base to the army and withdrawal from Tripoli (1 November 2013).

Military challenges to the state's authority emerged first in June 2012, when jihadists organised a military rally in Benghazi. This was followed a year later by a federalist challenge, in July 2013. Recognising the glaring weaknesses in the state's ability to impose military control over the country, veteran jihadists (those who had previously fought in Afghanistan against Russia in the 1980s, among others)¹² who had played a role in the 2011 revolution began to flex their muscles in the eastern town in which the anti-Gaddafi uprisings commenced. Capitalising upon the state's inability to manage this challenge, federalists, also in the east, sought a decentralisation of political power to address decades of meagre benefit from Libya's oil wealth, in spite of two-thirds of Libya's oil reserves being situated in the east.¹³ Although it enlisted the assistance of militias to quell these threats, the government could not depend on their loyalty, and it made some critical errors, costing it victory over the new armed threats, and legitimacy among the Libyan population. The government's resistance to the twin challenges reached a stalemate by the end of 2013, but still, Libya's further descent into conflict and lawlessness was not inevitable.¹⁴ This was precipitated by an equally complex series of political crises.

The Political Transition and the 2014 Crisis

Gaddafi's demise left Libya in political limbo. After decades of divide-and-rule, simmering tensions boiled over and communities took up arms against each other. Yet local authorities, through their appeals to keep the country whole and to uphold Libyan identity and Islamic values, retained a

valuable role in seeking to end fighting quickly and initiating negotiations that could lead to lasting ceasefires. At times, Libya seemed to be one of the success stories of the 'Arab Spring', holding elections in June 2012 in which voter turnout was recorded at 62%.¹⁵ This election, while widely heralded as a great triumph for the Libyan people, took place under tense circumstances. Extreme federalists in the east refused to participate, leaving them marginalised from the eventual elected national assembly and unable to voice their interests in the legislature. Simmering tensions within the NTC boiled over into clashes in Benghazi in January 2012. NTC officials in the eastern town launched a campaign for greater autonomy two months later in March. Meanwhile, the government also struggled to maintain control over local militias in Zintan, in the west of the country. Nonetheless, elections were held, ushering in a moderate coalition, as the largest party of the newly formed General National Congress (GNC). Unlike the outcomes in Egypt and Tunisia, the Muslim Brotherhood secured only 17 seats in the Libyan election. Mohammed Magarief was elected the interim head of state by parliament, later to be replaced by Libya's first elected prime minister, Ali Zeidan, a liberal and opposition envoy during the 2011 conflict. A new constitution remained to be drafted and approved. It would serve as the basis for new elections by February 2014.

Due to a number of challenges, including inefficient state bodies and the security situation, these events did not materialise and the mandate of the interim Constituent Assembly was reluctantly extended by a year. During this



The June 2012 Libyan elections saw a large voter turnout in tense circumstances.

time, Zeidan faced a number of challenges, ultimately leading to his dismissal. Businessman Ahmed Maiteg was elected his successor in March 2014. This transition in leadership presented a chance for the self-styled Libyan National Army renegade, General Khalifa Haftar, to rally elements in the armed forces to oppose what he argued was an Islamist-controlled legislature under Maiteg. Haftar's forces launched attacks on Tripoli and Benghazi in May 2014. Meanwhile, the GNC speaker, Nouri Abusahmain, called upon the Libyan Shield Forces (LSF) to defend the legislature. A Shura Council¹⁶ was formed in Benghazi to unite formerly disparate Islamist militias, in response to Haftar's attacks. These battles caused untold infrastructural and institutional damage.¹⁷

In a bid to repair the latter, the GNC finally held elections in late June 2014, with a promise to convene in Benghazi to appease the east. Election turnout was low, compromising the legitimacy of the results. To add to matters, Islamists suffered heavy defeats, resulting in an outbreak of hostilities between those loyal to the old parliament and forces defending the new parliament. Given the protracted violence in Benghazi, the GNC was forced to meet in Tobruk. This did not sit well with those parliamentarians, including from Misrata and Islamist parties, who saw Tobruk as a Haftar stronghold. They refused to participate in parliament in Tobruk and joined forces in Tripoli with those members of parliament who had not been re-elected, to form a 'rump parliament', which voted against the newly elected parliament.¹⁸ The parliament elected in June 2014 was subsequently ruled unlawful by the Libya Supreme Court, whose impartiality was questioned by

some due to its location in Tripoli, which is currently, at the time of writing, under the control of Islamist forces.

The situation descended to new depths in mid-2014, with the withdrawal of foreign diplomats, UN staff and other foreign workers, as well as the takeover of Tripoli airport by Libya Dawn, a group based in the city of Misrata, in September 2014. Another group, Ansar al-Sharia, which had previously enjoyed little popular support in the aftermath of its attack on the US embassy in September 2012 that claimed the life of the US ambassador, seized control of most of Benghazi by the end of July 2014.

A new development is the arrival of the Islamic State (IS) in Libya. According to news reports, the extremists seized control of the port of Derna in eastern Libya in October 2014. The Libyan army has regained some initiative in Benghazi and has sought to roll back the victories of IS in Derna and Libya Dawn in western Libya. Meetings in Geneva at the start of 2015 saw UN efforts to hold talks between the belligerents rewarded, with the declaration of a ceasefire in January.

The Conflict and the International Community's Response

UN Resolution 1973 authorising a no-fly zone over Libya on 17 March 2011, while it acknowledged the AU's efforts to develop a roadmap to peace through political reform among other things, sought mainly to end the Gaddafi regime. The subsequent efforts of members of the international community, such as the ICG for Libya, also predicated all of its discussions upon the conviction that no progress could be



Nouri Abusahmain, the head of Libya's General National Congress (right) meets with Bernardino Leon, the United Nations Special Representative for Libya in Tripoli (8 December 2014).

made while Gaddafi remained in power, regardless of how cornered he was. The implementation of the armed measures against Gaddafi's regime, while they assisted greatly in bringing the initial conflict to a speedy conclusion, had the unintended effect of handing victory to a loose coalition of militia groups with no unified political vision for the country, and with far less in common.

The AU, for its part, sustained a beating to its reputation for decisive responses to crises, because of the manner in which its well-intentioned roadmap was perceived and reported upon in the Western media. This prompted former AU Commission chairman, Jean Ping, to release a terse defence of AU policy on Libya later in the year, which clarified many misconceptions.¹⁹ Many questions were also asked of Africa's three non-permanent Security Council members – South Africa, Nigeria and Gabon – which, if they had only abstained, as Germany, Brazil and India did, would have forestalled the resort to force by external actors in Libya – a course of action ostensibly in line with the stated position of the continental body.

The conflict has potentially wide-ranging impacts on a variety of actors. The proliferation of arms and militias in

Libya as a result of the 2011 conflict, and their easy transport through the Saharan region of southern Libya, has already been cited as a contributing factor to the uprising in the north of Mali in January 2012.²⁰ Weapons looted from Gaddafi's stockpiles have also reportedly surfaced in Egypt, Gaza, Chad, Lebanon and Syria.²¹ The easy availability of arms has also been linked to the failure to consolidate the rebel fronts, as splintering was facilitated by access to arms.²²

While discussions between the main protagonists in the conflict have been convened in Geneva, starting in early 2015, major international players appear slow to learn from past mistakes in picking favourites on the Libyan political scene. There has been muted response to the Supreme Court's decision to declare the 2014 parliament unlawful. This may be interpreted as tacit support for the anti-Islamist parliament that sits in Tobruk. While this may be in accord with certain Western interests, it may not be the best way to keep the key actors at the negotiating table in a bid to initiate a long-overdue national dialogue.

THE GROWING PRESENCE OF MILITANTS IN LIBYA IS DRAWING THE COUNTRY'S NEIGHBOURS, ESPECIALLY EGYPT, INTO THE COMPLEX SECURITY DILEMMAS LIBYA FACES


The Geneva talks have been convened by the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), in the context of a rapidly worsening security situation. Libya Dawn has thus far refused to participate in the peace talks, while the presence of IS in Libya is growing – appearing to be capitalising on the lack of authority and order in the governing of Libya. January 2015 saw a bold attack on a Tripoli hotel, followed in February by the reported beheadings of some 21 Coptic Christians on a remote Libyan beach, purportedly by IS. The growing presence of militants in Libya is drawing the country's neighbours, especially Egypt, into the complex security dilemmas Libya faces.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of Gaddafi's capture and murder in October 2011, some critics asked whether it would not have been better for him to be captured, rather than killed. There is now the realisation that the manner of Gaddafi's departure does have far-reaching implications for long-term peace and stability in Libya. Soon after Gaddafi's death, the law hastily proclaimed that no person linked to the Gaddafi regime may hold office in the new administration, and revealed how shallow the roots of reconciliation were upon which the new dispensation would be based. This law was repealed in February 2015.

The spontaneous and sporadic nature of the initial protests and armed uprisings has given the conflict a

remarkably local and splintered nature, necessitating the rebuilding of the country from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, hence the involvement of municipal and council leaders in the Geneva talks. This should be seen as a constructive measure that, if implemented four years ago, may have initiated Libya's road to recovery far sooner.

Much now hinges upon the extent to which the international community places Libya's reconstruction at the top of the agenda. With the historic plunge in the oil price since the end of 2014, Libya's reconstruction and efforts at post-conflict peacebuilding hang in the balance. Payments to co-opted security forces and to both parliaments, along with the replacement of infrastructure destroyed during the conflict, may be threatened by diminished oil revenues. This will further harm the prospects for peace and potentially create new humanitarian crises. However, new security developments in Libya, including the arrival of IS forces, may finally focus minds on initiating significant efforts at building lasting peace in the country. 

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