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Sharqiyya is a bi-annual E-Journal published jointly by the ***Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies*** at Tel Aviv University and the ***Middle East & Islamic Studies Association of Israel*** (MEISAI).

Sharqiyya is unique in that it draws on contributions by faculty, graduate students, and independent scholars, who all share a passion for Middle Eastern histories and cultures and whose work is informed by first-hand knowledge of the region's languages and sources.

Sharqiyya opens its platform to contributors from around the world and the MENA region particularly. The Editorial Board encourages faculty, graduate students, and independent scholars, junior and well-established, to offer us articles in English of no more than 3,000 words to be refereed for publication in ***Sharqiyya***. Submissions should be sent by email to sharqiya@post.tau.ac.il. Please feel free to comment or make any suggestion in order to improve the quality of the journal.

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Guest Editor's Forward

Annie Tracy Samuel *

The past year has been one of tremendous change in the Middle East and North Africa. The transformations that have come in the wake of momentous upheavals—now commonly known as the Arab Spring—have a wide and varying significance. For many people in the region, the past year has been one of daring, fearless action in pursuit of far-reaching political change. Their demands induced fear among the long-time, autocratic rulers, which has resulted either in the abdication of long-clung-to power or in brutal resistance and violence against masses of unarmed, pro-democracy protesters. World leaders have found themselves scrambling to protect various vital interests while struggling not to end up on the wrong side of history.

For scholars of the Middle East and North Africa, the transformations have raised many important issues, both about the region and about their own work. To shed light on those issues, the editors of *Sharqiyya* invited experts in the field to offer their insight and assessments of the Arab Spring and have assembled their contributions in the current Special Issue. In the following articles, those senior scholars provide preliminary answers to a number of fundamental questions: Do the changes in the region represent fundamental shifts in Arab societies? Are we witnessing revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, or merely transfers of power that will fall short of profound socio-political change? Why have some countries experienced popular uprisings while others have not? Why did we as experts fail to predict the coming of these transformations? Do we even possess the tools to offer such predictions? Does dramatic change in the region require us to adjust the way we analyze the Middle East and North Africa?

In the first article of this Special Issue, Ehud R. Toledano tackles the broadest of those questions. He diagnoses the state of historical and social science analysis of the Middle East in light of the year's events and prescribes a mixture of humility, patience, and perseverance for zealous and over-zealous scholars alike. Elie Podeh, in an analysis that seems to heed Toledano's counsel, argues that the fall of Mubarak's regime in Egypt should be

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understood as a revolution, at least according to one commonly-accepted definition, and cautions that a definitive assessment of that event is premature. In his article on Syria, Eyal Zisser is similarly careful to refrain from hasty conclusions, especially because, at the time of writing, the fate of the Assad regime remains uncertain. Instead, he explains the emergence and endurance of the Ba'th regime, arguing that at least one conclusion can be drawn with certainty: that the struggle for Syria as a national entity has reemerged with a vengeance. Dror Ze'evi's contribution analyzes a country that has been overlooked in accounts of the Arab Spring—Turkey—and highlights the importance of paying attention to this rising non-Arab, Eastern Mediterranean power. Finally, Daniel Zisenwine offers an assessment of the events in Tunisia, where the Arab Spring began, and the relationship of that country to its larger and more powerful Middle Eastern neighbors.

Together, these articles highlight the reasons why we continue to be fascinated and confounded by the Middle East and North Africa. We have chosen to reserve articles on Libya, Yemen, and Bahrain for a time when the situation in those countries becomes less volatile and scholars can offer more conclusive analysis. In the meantime, we hope that this Special Issue provides new insights into the Arab Spring and its far-reaching repercussions for the region and the world.

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Middle East Historians and the Arab Spring: Early-Days Assessment

Ehud R. Toledano[1]

After the shock, comes the flurry; after the amazement, bewilderment, gasping for understanding, come the soul searching, the recriminations, the blame. The Arab Spring, it has become clear, brought in its wings a major storm to the community of Middle East and North African scholars and analysts. Some would say it is typical academic *hubris*, others would make fun of social science and its predictive presumption. But somehow, most of us expected that we, unlike everyone else, would not be taken by such a huge surprise. Many of us are historians by training; we study the past, explain what already happened, try the best we can to understand events and processes. We are taught how to deal with the sources, evaluate them, assess and assign credibility to them, cross them against each other, and then use them to explain behavior, individual and collective, in a given time and place. Unlike our colleagues in theory-driven social science, we do not predict future outcomes, we do not assess risks and promises, and we are not supposed to believe that the past we think we understand is bound, or even likely, to repeat itself when seemingly similar circumstances occur.

Yet, because we know the languages of the Middle East and North Africa, and have studied the history of their peoples, their cultures, and their political-social-economic structures, "the public" looks to us for commentary and analysis in times of crisis. We are thus put in the perpetual dilemma of area specialists in general: to resist the temptation to predict the course of events and be seen as aloof, esoteric, irrelevant to the needs of the people who fund our scholarly endeavors through grants, tuition, higher education state budgets; or, to succumb to pressures from decision-makers, the media, and various think-tanks, to provide our learned opinions or educated guesses and risk being wrong, misleading, or out of touch with realities. For the many of us who chose the latter option, the riveting events of the Arab Spring have brought a time of reckoning. This did take some time to emerge in full force, but as the following passages show, arrive it has, appropriately, with the summer heat wave in the eastern Mediterranean.

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[1] Professor Ehud R. Toledano holds the University Chair for Ottoman & Turkish Studies and teaches at Tel Aviv University.

One of the early and serious reflections on these questions is Gregory Gause's recent article in *Foreign Affairs*.[2] This article is a strong and sincere *mea culpa*, which criticizes Middle East experts for "underestimating the hidden forces driving change" while they worked instead to explain the unshakable stability of repressive authoritarian regimes. "As they wipe the egg off their faces," he writes, "they need to reconsider long-held assumptions about the Arab world." Candidly, Gause concludes that "academic specialists on Arab politics, such as myself, have quite a bit of rethinking to do." His diagnosis is that analysts have missed the undercurrents of change that were simmering in the Arab states of the Middle East and North Africa because they were committed to the view that the autocratic regimes in the region were well entrenched, and hence immune to change from below in a revolutionary situation.

Therefore, Gause now advocates that we search for the current forces that will shape the new Middle East in the short and perhaps longer terms. The purpose for doing this, in his words, is to "allow U.S. policymakers to approach the Arab revolts more effectively by providing them insight into the factors that will drive postrevolutionary politics in the Arab world." However, herein lie the seeds of the next expert oversight, and the almost inevitable future *mea culpa*. For, hard as it may be to admit, we are not now better positioned to identify those hidden forces and submerged structures than we had been before the Arab Spring. In fact, we might now commit the opposite mistake by overlooking the forces of conservative authoritarianism and their determination to reassert themselves in a different, seemingly more democratic guise. After all, such forces did manage to survive over long decades and repress reluctant if complacent populations. The old power elites learned the power of cooptation and mastered the use of both the carrot and the stick. They are not gone, not even fully dispersed, and their ability to regroup and morph into "new elites" should not be cheerfully dismissed.

Indeed, one of the new features of emerging Middle Eastern realities, according to Gause, is highly debatable. He asserts that "most Middle East scholars believed that pan-Arabism had gone dormant," and that "they thus missed the communal wave of 2011." He then adds that "if any doubts remain that Arabs retain a sense of common political identity despite living in 20 different states, the events of this year should put them to rest." Gause admits that what he calls a new wave of pan-Arabism is quite different from its predecessors, notably the brand marketed by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1960s. However, he is convinced—prematurely I would

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[2] F. Gregory Gause III, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 4 (July/August 2011), pp. 81-90.

argue—that the Arab Spring crossed state boundaries and united the Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East and North Africa. "As a result," Gause concludes, "scholars and policymakers can no longer approach countries on a case-by-case basis."

If instincts serve, I would make a prediction almost to the contrary, i.e., that among the forces most likely to reassert themselves in the region are the interests and *raison d'état* considerations of particular Arab states. This is in no way to deny the fact that the common marketplace of ideas and information has been reinvigorated in the region, and that present-day technologies and social network media have a strong presence that will endure in coming years. However, active cultural exchange has not yet produced common political action or shown any evidence of being a force to contend with. In fact, the most insightful and helpful explanations of the Arab Spring have thus far been precisely those offered on a country-by-country basis. These have demonstrated that we cannot actually understand what is going on in Libya by learning from what has transpired in Yemen, Bahrain, or Syria, let alone by events in Egypt and Tunisia. Accordingly, U.S. policies—whether right or wrong—had (and will have) to be devised on a case-by-case basis, and a common policy towards all would have been (and is likely to be) disastrous.

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The latest issue of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*)[3] devotes an entire section to "Reflections: Middle East Studies at the Barricades," including an introductory comment by editors Beth Baron and Sara Pursley. Here, the views and feelings are more mixed than in Gause's article. Baron and Pursley preempt the mostly self-critical section by pointing out "the few ways in which past scholarship on the Middle East *has* produced insights for understanding the unfolding events" (italics in the original, ERT). The predictive undercurrents that were identified by scholars, argue the editors, are the possible implications of the dynamic "youth bulge," the linkage between the emerging new media and a process of democratization, and the "future prospects" of old autocratic, neoliberal regimes vis-à-vis their pro-democracy opposition. However, and regardless of the editors' lack of enthusiasm to engage in the debate about the arguable failure of Middle East scholars to predict the Arab Spring, it is precisely the latter point that drives the entire discussion: we inevitably fall short if we *underestimate* the outcome

[3] Vol. 43, No. 3 (August 2011), pp. 379-390 (with a related "Roundtable: Rethinking the Study of Middle East Militaries," pp. 391-407).

of any socio-political process (here, the success of the uprisings) even if we *correctly identify* the process itself. This is the inescapable crux of the matter.

Most of the ten contributors to the "Reflections" section, however, seem to share the sense of a missed opportunity to show the world that understanding the Middle East and North Africa entails also a capacity for predicting the main political directions in the region. Some of them celebrate the collapse of prevailing notions about the stagnation of Arab culture, Islamic fanaticism, and the unchangeable nature of Middle East polities.[4] Middle East and North African exceptionalism and particularism are happily pronounced dead,[5] and a premature downgrading of Islamist politics and its future impact are in evidence, in one form or another. "A striking feature of these movements," opines Laurence Louer, "is that they depart from Islamist identity politics" and no longer attribute all the woes of the Arabs to their betrayal of their Muslim religious identity.[6] In the early days of the demonstrations in Tahrir Square, one of the young men proudly told a Western reporter on camera: "Look, this is an *Allahu Akbar*-free revolution!" But already at this point in the game, it seems that his hopes and Louer's observation might be premature.

In any event, the sentiments that prevail in all the reflective pieces in *IJMES* are of great admiration and enthusiasm for the Arab Spring uprisings and a strong identification with their declared goals to bring down the tyrants and install democracy in the region. It is hard—and unnecessary—to deny the appeal of these movements or to temper the well-deserved respect that they arouse in most of us, keen students of the region's societies, cultures, and politics. This sentiment reminds me of a candid statement intimated to me by a senior and highly respected scholar in the field way back in the 1980s. A supporter of various Arab causes who occasionally engaged in mild activism on regional issues, he confessed that, as a committed member of the Left, he found it easy, even natural, to identify with Arab regimes who professed socialism in one form or another. However, as Islamic politics and movements gained power or increased in stature, and with the language of politics in general becoming more religious, identification became to him more difficult, less natural. Somehow, I think, Middle East scholars are now jubilant also because the new movements—appearing secular and democratic—hold the hope that identification with regional causes could become natural yet again.

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4 Asef Bayat, ibid., p. 386.
5 Bayat, Nathan Brown, and Malika Zeghal, ibid., pp. 386, 388, and 390, respectively.
6 Ibid., p. 389.

In the annual lecture delivered at the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies in March 1993, Fred Halliday discussed Edward Said's *Orientalism* and its critics.[7] Describing his own background and the influences it had on his career, Halliday stressed the experience of being a student in the 1960s at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London, with momentous, formative events taking place before and during that period in the Middle East and the world at large: "The Middle East was, in this context, part of a broader pattern of third world revolt—not just Algeria after 1954, Iraq in 1958, or Yemen in 1962, or Algeria, or Palestine after 1967, but also Cuba, South Africa, Vietnam." He was thus impressed by the role of imperialism and "the forms of resistance that developed to this, on national and social bases, and the way in which economic and social factors, not least class, affected these societies." Halliday goes on to say that

> [I]n a sense, it is that agenda of the 1960s, now nearing thirty [and at present fifty, ERT] years in duration, which has preoccupied me in the analysis of the region: the questions I would ask are how forms of domination are maintained; how and why they are resisted; why states fail to maintain control; how those who come to power succeed, or fail, in constructing alternative domestic and international orders.

In fact, one could easily write the same lines today, half a century after the upheavals that changed the Middle East and North Africa and set their countries on a path that is now undergoing yet another major transformation. Halliday asked in 1993 almost precisely the same questions that we are asking today, and puzzled over the same issues that amaze us at present. His search for explanations sent him then to the deeper structures that underlie the processes, that are hidden from the naked eye, that then, as now, seem to elude the most knowledgeable and discerning observers. Gause and the contributors to the "Reflections" and "Roundtable" sections of *IJMES* are searching for the same undercurrents, groping for the same intractables. So, the question is where do we go from here? Are we, Middle East scholars of all disciplines, doomed to be relegated to the same position in a decade or two, or three, yet again?

For me, watching closely the riveting events of the Arab Spring has been, first and foremost, a humbling experience. As historians, I strongly believe that we need not concern ourselves with forecasts of the future; rather, we are and must remain committed to understanding and explaining the past. Even

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[7] *British Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1993), 145-163. The quoted passages are from pp. 146 and 147.

Gregory Gause concedes that "[i]t is impossible for social scientists to make precise predictions about the Arab world, and this should not be a goal." This is of course true for experts working on the non-Arabic speaking world, but if we were to accept this unreservedly, it would mean denying a very strong intuition that exists among scholars, namely, that our intimate familiarity with the culture and socio-political realities of the past and, to a lesser extent, the present, leads us—and "the public"—to believe that we might know more about the future than other people, those who do not possess that kind of knowledge.

It is this lack of intellectual and scholarly modesty that lures us, time and again, into the same trap. Only a few weeks ago, Nobel Laureate in Economics Joseph Stiglitz wondered publicly why all the top macro-economists in the world failed to predict—and perhaps prevent—the global financial crisis of 2008.[8] These masters of economic science gathered for one of the Lindau Conferences only a month before the collapse of international markets and did not even mention such a possibility, he added in wonder. Sovietologists were similarly clueless before the downfall of the Soviet Union. And so, we must admit, the Arab Spring is our Berlin Wall, or Wall Street. Instead of looking for the hidden structures and movements that we missed, I therefore propose a somewhat more modest, philosophical approach. If we zoom out and look at the big picture, perhaps we will be able to understand what is knowable and acknowledge what will remain inaccessible to us regardless of how well we come to know our subject matter.

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Does this mean we need to abandon all hope for models and theories that can provide insights into socio-political processes, even if these ultimately fail to predict the outcome of such processes? Most certainly not. An immediate example that comes to mind is Theda Skocpol's theory of social revolution (as distinct from political revolution), which was used by Juan Cole in his treatment of the Egyptian Urabi revolution in 1882, an event that other scholars, most notably Alexander Schölch, see as a "mere" revolt.[9] For

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[8] Joseph Stiglitz on the Deficiencies of Macroeconomics (lecture video), posted to the website of *Social Europe Journal*, 28 August 2011. Stiglitz wrote in the abstract of the lecture he delivered at the 2011 Nobel Laureate Meetings at Lindau: "The standard macroeconomic models have failed, by all the most important tests of scientific theory. They did not predict that the financial crisis would happen; and when it did, they understated its effects" ("Imagining an Economics that Works: Crisis, Contagion and the Need for a New Paradigm," The Nobel Laureate Meetings at Lindau, 2011 - 4th Meeting in Economic Sciences: http://www.lindau-nobel.org/AbstractDetails.AxCMS?AbstractID=1277).

[9] Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Juan R.I. Cole,

example, Skocpol's concept of *conjunctures*—"the coming together of separately determined and not consciously coordinated (or deliberately revolutionary) processes and group efforts"[10]—helps us understand what we are witnessing in the Arab Spring. Such conjunctures occur when an unanticipated political impact in one social sector is being transferred to another social sector. However, this is not enough for a revolution to occur, she argues, as all three components that create social revolutionary situations must be present: the autocracy of the old regimes, contradictions within the class system, and a set of political conjunctures that can trigger a revolutionary process.

All these would be easily recognized by observers of the Arab Spring: autocratic regimes that ruled for decades using a wide array of repressive measures; growing social inequality as a result of the concentration of capital in the hands of ruler-backed military and civilian elites; and then, the ability to use social networks as a platform to channel political protest from one sector to another, rapidly and effectively. Skocpol also envisages the conflict that could emerge within elites, that is, between reformists and conservatives, both facing revolutionary action from non-elite groups that forces them to take sides. Skocpol's approach is also flexible enough to allow for development over longer periods of time (though conjunctures are short in duration), and it bypasses structural requirements of effective organization and leadership, which for the most part did not exist in the Arab Spring. But even Skocpol's historians-friendly theory is driven by the past and is *post facto* by nature, as it cannot predict *if* conjunctures will occur nor *when* they are *likely* to occur. So, once again, we are forced to accept the limitations of our abilities.

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Thus, the title given to a recent *New York Times* piece by Anthony Shadid—"After Arab Revolts, Reigns of Uncertainty"[11]—also suits quite well the current predicament of Middle East scholars. As much as we would like to come up with quick explanations about what happened, is still happening, we need to do what is most difficult—to reserve judgment, to sit back and simply admit that we really do not know how things are going to develop. Shadid's opening paragraph, which is as sensitive and insightful as it is modest and unpretentious, also deserves our attention. Writing from Djerba, Tunisia, he says (the italics are mine for emphasis, ERT):

Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 3-6.

[10] Skocpol, p. 288.

[11] 24 August 2011.

> The *idealism* of the revolts in Egypt and Tunisia, where the *power of the street* revealed the *frailty of authority*, *revived* an Arab world *anticipating change*. But Libya's *unfinished revolution*, as *inspiring* as it is *unsettling*, illustrates how *perilous* that change has become as it unfolds in this phase of the Arab Spring.

This encapsulates so much of what we hope and fear at the same time: the idealism and revival with which it has been so easy to identify; the unexpected power of the street and the surprising frailty of the dictators; the inspiration and anticipation of change; but no less the strong sense of peril and the unsettling effect such upheavals can have upon both those who experience them and those who watch from afar on television and computer screens. Major socio-political transformations entail both hope and fear; you cannot have one without the other; and yes, one must let the dust settle, the tremors and after-shocks recede. Political scientists need answers, explanations, and models right now, while the earth is still moving under our feet, but historians can and must wait for the calm to arrive before they offer their learned interpretations of how events fit into processes.

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Farewell to an Age of Tyranny? The Egyptian Spring as a Model

Elie Podeh[1]

When Husni Mubarak looked out of his palace window on 25 January 2011 and saw demonstrators on the street below him, he turned to his advisor and exclaimed: "My God! It's a revolt!" "No, my President," the advisor answered, "that is a revolution." True, this fabled quote is attributed to French King Louis XVI, who is said to have uttered it on 14 July 1789.[2] Yet, judging by the mild response of the Egyptian police forces to the demonstrations, it appears that, like Louis XVI, Mubarak did indeed underestimate the significance of the events unfolding before him. Furthermore, the parable draws our attention to the important distinction between a revolt, a takeover, and a coup on the one hand, and a revolution on the other.

The events in Tunisia, Egypt, and other Arab countries caught many observers of the Middle East by surprise. Few predicted the possibility of popular uprisings leading to the downfall of entrenched, authoritarian regimes.[3] The aim of this short paper is to analyze the main reasons for the events in Egypt that led to the demise of the Mubarak regime and their implications for other parts of the Arab world. While many Arab countries witnessed upheavals following those in Tunisia and Egypt, others were little affected or completely bypassed by this revolutionary fervor. The reasons for these differences call for further explanation.

Scholarly assessments of revolutions tend to fall into one of two categories: those that measure a revolution by its successes and achievements; and those that emphasize the revolutionary process rather than its outcome. For the purposes of our analysis, I adopt Michael Kimmel's definition of revolution, which posits that "revolutions are attempts by subordinate groups to transform the social foundations of political power."[4] This definition is useful

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1 Professor Elie Podeh teaches in the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

2 The story opens Michael S. Kimmel's *Revolution: A Sociological Interpretation* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990), p. 1.

3 For some rare exceptions, see John R. Bradley, *Inside Egypt: The Land of the Pharaohs on the Brink of a Revolution* (London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2008); David Ottaway, *Egypt at the Tipping Point?* Occasional Paper Series (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center, 2010).

4 Kimmel, *Revolution*, p. 6. For other definitions, see, for example, Lawrence Stone, "Theories of Revolutions," *World Politics*, Vol. 18 (1966), pp. 159-176; Michael D. Richards,

for several reasons: it differentiates between revolutions and other forms of social change, such as coups and rebellions; it includes successful and unsuccessful revolutions; it embraces a large number of sequences over various time spans; and it includes both violent and peaceful modes of change.[5] Such a definition suggests that the events in Egypt and Tunisia, and perhaps in other Arab countries, can be classified as revolutions.

Regardless of the theoretical debate over the meaning of revolution, the events in Tunisia and Egypt constituted the first time popular uprisings have brought down regimes in the Arab world. In contrast to Iran, the Arab world has witnessed regime change solely through military coups (*inqilab*), which took place mainly during the 1950s and 1960s. Though these coups were described as revolutions (*thawra*), the fact of the matter was that they usually represented only a change in the governing elite. In certain cases the coups initiated a process of profound political, social, and economic change that eventually culminated in a revolution (Nasser's Egypt being the primary example).

Arab intellectuals and media pundits were quick to describe the current events as an Arab Spring or an awakening of the underprivileged classes. The fact that the movements could be described as "revolutions" earned a positive image for their leaders. For example, Rashid Khalidi, Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies at Columbia University, wrote: "Suddenly, to be an Arab has become a good thing. People all over the Arab world feel a sense of pride in shaking off decades of cowed passivity under dictatorships that ruled with no deference to popular wishes."[6] Another proud statement was offered by Sajida Tasneem:

> The 'chaotic', 'irrational', 'weak' and 'politically inept' people of the Orient, once deemed incapable of bringing 'order' and considered 'incompatible' with democracy, have now not only managed to topple a dictator and pave the way for crucial political and constitutional reforms, but just as significantly they have also managed to achieve this by themselves without the help of the charitable hand of the West.[7]

Revolutions in World History (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-11; Noel Parker, *Revolutions and History: An Essay in Interpretation* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 1-12.

5 Kimmel, *Revolution*, p. 6.

6 Rashid Khalidi, "The Arab Spring," *Agence Global*, 3 March 2011.

7 Sajida Tasneem, "Democracy, Egyptian Style," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, No. 1039, 17-23 March 2011. See also el-Sayed Amin Shalabi, "We're Not That Different After All," ibid. The same idea was voiced by the Turkish foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, "We in the Middle East Have Replaced Humiliation with Dignity," *The Guardian*, 15 March 2011.

A revolution, according to Kimmel, occurs as the culmination of three temporal moments: *preconditions*—the "longer-run, structural shifts in the social foundations of the society"; *precipitants*—the shorter-run historical events that "allow these deeply seated structural forces to emerge as politically potent and begin to mobilize potential discontents"; and *triggers*—the immediate historical events that set the revolutionary process in motion."[8]

With the wisdom of hindsight, we can see that Egypt witnessed these three historical phases. The first precondition is the existence of an authoritarian regime beginning in the 1950s and ending with Mubarak's thirty-year rule. During that period, the military-civilian elite consolidated its power and guaranteed its survival by certain institutional mechanisms, such as the Constitution, the Emergency Laws, and Parliament. The regime allowed only limited political activity and freedom of expression, while overt expressions of opposition were dealt with harshly. The second precondition is the dramatic increase in Egypt's population. Since 1950, Egypt's population has quadrupled, growing from 21.4 to 83 million people. Although it succeeded in lowering the birth rate from 2.8% to 1.9% over the past three decades, the birth rate remains quite high and the regime has had to provide for an additional 1.6 million people each year. The long-term implications of this process entailed growing unemployment, deterioration in health and educational services, and an uneven social structure in which at least one third of the population remains below the age of fourteen.[9] Both these preconditions that were responsible for the creation of a revolutionary situation in Egypt are also present in other Arab countries.

The issues that precipitated the revolution in Egypt were numerous. The first was the question of Mubarak's succession (*tawrith*). While certain amendments to the constitution in 2005 seemingly opened the way for a more democratic election process, Mubarak secured a sixth term as Egypt's president that year. During that period he groomed his son, Gamal, as his successor. Gamal's possible "enthronement" turned Egypt into a kind of monarchy, which Egyptian scholar and activist Sa'd Eddin Ibrahim aptly termed a *gumlukiya*—the combination of a republic (*gumhuriya*) and a monarchy (*malakiya*).[10] Many Egyptians considered this kind of "dynastic republicanism" an affront to their national dignity. One popular group that tried to prevent this eventuality was the Egyptian Movement for Change or

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8 Kimmel, *Revolution*, pp. 9-10.

9 For data, see Onn Winckler, *Twentieth Century Political Demography in the Arab World* (Ra'anana: Open University, 2008), pp. 38, 46, 48, 83. [Hebrew]

10 This phenomenon was relevant also in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. See Larbi Sadiki, "Whither Arab 'Republicanism'? The Rise of Family Rule and the 'End of Democratization' In Egypt, Libya and Yemen," *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 15 (2010), pp. 99-107.

Kifaya ("Enough"), established in 2004. Jason Brownlee, a political scientist at the University of Texas at Austin, was right, therefore, to conclude that "each step that brings Gamal closer to the presidency… gives way to the potential for dramatically new developments, from an army coup to an Islamist takeover."[11] Further increasing the regime's unpopularity were the repeated rumors of excessive corruption associated with the Mubaraks and their cronies.

The second precipitant was the results of the November 2010 parliamentary elections, which were not monitored by impartial observers. In contrast to the composition of the 2005 parliament, which included 88 members affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood (out of 454 seats), the post-November 2010 parliament included no members associated with the Brotherhood (out of an enlarged parliament of 518 seats). The virtual elimination of the opposition (the parliament included only 15 members from various opposition parties) attested to the corrupt nature of the elections.[12] Moreover, a voter turnout of only ten percent signaled public apathy and distrust of the electoral process.

The third precipitant was the broad-based popular protest movement that had spread throughout Egyptian society since 2004. According to data from the Egyptian Human Rights Organization, about 1,900 strikes and demonstrations took place between 2004 and 2008, with the participation of some 1.7 million people.[13] Other figures cited by Joel Beinin indicate that about two million workers participated in 2,623 factory strikes between 1998 and 2008.[14] These strikes and demonstrations were often violently crushed by the security forces, leading to deaths and injuries. The main reasons for these strikes were the workers' fears of the adverse consequences of the privatization process, the desire to improve their living conditions, and rising unemployment (which soared beyond the official eight percent rate). The strikes were also a result of the rising cost of living and declining salaries, caused by changes in the global market. Between 1997 and 2007, food prices rose by twenty-five percent while wages remained stagnant. While the average wage is estimated to have increased by sixty percent between 1978 and 1988, prices soared by three hundred percent during that decade. The typical monthly wage of a textile worker is 250-600 Egyptian Pounds

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[11] Jason Brownlee, "The Heir Apparency of Gamal Mubarak," *Arab Studies Journal*, Vol. 15/16 (Fall 2007/Spring 2008), pp. 52-53.

[12] *MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis Report*, No. 653, 28 December 2010.

[13] Land Center for Human Rights, http://www.lchr-eg.org/.

[14] Joel Beinin, "Workers' Protest in Egypt: Neo-liberalism and Class Struggle in 21st Century," *Social Movement Studies*, Vol. 8 (2009), p. 449.

(equivalent to 45-107 US dollars), which is below the World Bank's poverty line of two US dollars a day (for an average family of 3.7 people).[15]

The closure of the political system to these agents of change—workers and educated, unemployed youth—led to the emergence of the "6 April" movement, named for the date in 2008 when a large strike in a textile plant in Mahala al-Kubra was launched, and the National Movement for Change led by Muhammad El-Baradei (al-Barada'i), former Director General of the UN International Atomic Energy Agency. These new movements gathered supporters through social media networks on the internet, particularly Facebook. With tight government control of the press and TV, this new technology liberated the new generations by allowing them to operate almost freely in this virtual reality. In the words of Egyptian scholar and journalist Abdel-Moneim Said, "the Facebook youth gave Egypt a new face."[16] The rapid emergence of these civil society forces indicates that Egyptians have become more sophisticated in the art of protest.

The trigger that set off these preconditions and precipitators was the mass demonstrations in Tunisia, which began on 14 January 2011 when a fruit seller named Muhammad Bouazizi set himself ablaze, and which ended with the collapse of the Zayn al-'Abidin Ben 'Ali regime. It should be emphasized, however, as many Egyptians later admitted, that when the date of 25 January—celebrated in Egypt as Police Day[17]—was fixed for the popular demonstration in Tahrir Square, no one could have predicted that the protests would lead to the downfall of the Mubarak regime. That outcome was facilitated by two additional factors. First, the fact that Mubarak was slow to react and unwilling to violently crush the riots—perhaps another sign of his deteriorating health—encouraged more people to join the protesters. Second, al-Jazeera's provocative coverage of the events further inflamed the masses. In fact, the global communication revolution—the introduction of cell phones, the internet, Facebook, and Twitter—facilitated the quick transfer of the revolution from one country to another.

The downfall of the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes quickly inspired many civil society groups in other Arab countries. Demonstrations demanding

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15 Bradley, *Inside Egypt*, pp. 40-41.

16 Abdel-Moneim Said, "National Consensus Candidate Needed," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, No. 1036, 24 February – 2 March 2011.

17 Police Day was declared an official holiday in 2009 to commemorate the massacre of over fifty policemen in Isma'iliyya by British forces on 25 January 1952, which triggered widespread demonstrations and riots in Egypt, leading eventually to the military takeover on 23 July 1952. The day of 25 January 2011 was deliberately chosen as a day of protest against the brutal measures employed by the police and security forces against the demonstrators in recent years.

reform or regime change were held in Yemen, Libya, Syria, Algeria, Jordan, Bahrain, Oman, and Iraq. The spillover effect was hardly surprising: The Arab world is a regional subsystem, consisting of several "proximate and interacting states which have some common ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social and historical bonds, and whose sense of identity is sometimes increased by the actions and attitudes of states external to the system."[18] The fact that many Arabs viewed themselves as a distinctive group with its own unique patterns meant that a change at one point in the subsystem affected its other points. This Arab inter-connectedness is facilitated by the emergence of an intra-Arab dialogue in new media outlets—satellite TV stations such as al-Jazeera and al-Arabiyya and pan-Arab London-based newspapers such as *al-Hayat* and *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, as well as many Arab internet sites.

Arab countries can be divided into four categories according to how the revolutionary process has progressed in each. The first group includes states that have already passed through the first stage of revolution—Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and, probably soon, Yemen. The second encompasses states that are in the midst of the revolutionary struggle—particularly Syria and perhaps Bahrain. The third group includes states that have witnessed some sporadic demonstrations but where protests have not yet reached the masses—Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. Finally, the fourth includes states that have so far remained unaffected by the events—Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Sudan, and Palestine. Naturally, this is not a rigid division and states may move from one category to another at almost any time.

What are the possible reasons for the different reactions in the Arab world? It should be emphasized that not every Arab country was or is likely to witness a revolution. For example, military coups in the 1950s and 1960s succeeded in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, and Libya but failed in Jordan and Lebanon and did not occur at all in most North-African or Gulf countries. It seems that five elements affect the chances that a revolution will occur. First, geographical proximity has some influence; it cannot be a coincidence that three of the major revolutions occurred in North Africa. Second, the existence of a heterogeneous society may exacerbate tensions leading to public protests. Third, the reaction of the security forces to the challenge posed to the regime undoubtedly affects its continuation: a mild reaction encourages the protesters while a harsh reaction discourages them. Still, the brutal reaction of the Qaddafi regime in Libya did not deter the demonstrators there. Fourth, certain regimes—particularly those in rich, oil-producing countries—possess

[18] Quoted in Elie Podeh, "The Emergence of the Arab State System Reconsidered," *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 9 (1998), p. 51.

enough financial resources to appease potential agitators. Finally, there are states that are occupied with other domestic problems (Palestine, for example, is focused on the desire to end Israeli occupation) or are haunted by memories of previous civil wars (Iraq, Lebanon, Algeria, and Sudan).

The coming months will show how the revolutions in Egypt and the neighboring Arab countries are to unfold. According to sociologist Rex Hopper, the revolutionary process runs in four stages: the preliminary stage of individual excitement and unrest; the popular stage of mass or collective excitement and unrest; the formal stage when *esprit de corps* is solidified and issues and organizational structures are defined; and, finally, the institutional stage of legislation and societal organization through which the "out-groups" legalize and organize their power, thereby becoming the "in-group of the structure of the political power."[19] Tunisia and Egypt, and perhaps Libya, have reached the final stage of institutionalizing the achievements of the revolution. This is the most crucial stage, which determines the degree of success of the revolution. Since forces in favor of maintaining the status quo have not been completely eliminated (e.g., the army and the bureaucracy), the possibilities for setback, impasse, and even counter-revolution should not be ruled out. Fears of such scenarios are voiced in the Arab press.[20] In this respect, perhaps the revolutions in Europe in 1848-1849, when progress and regression went hand in hand, are the best analogy to the Arab revolutions. In 1849, according to journalist Anne Applebaum, "many of the revolutions of 1848 might have seemed disastrous, but looking back from 1899 or 1919, they seemed like the beginning of a successful change."[21]

The next stage of the revolution in Egypt will involve the formation of a new balance of power between three elements: the army, which is keen to preserve its security and economic interests; the Islamists (mainly the Muslim Brotherhood); and the more liberal-secular youth. This is an uneven triangle, with disparate aims and modes of operation.[22] All this may settle into one of three scenarios: the continued rule of the old political and economic elite, led by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF);[23] the formation of an Islamic state resembling the Turkish model; or the emergence of a new kind

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[19] Rex Hopper, "The Revolutionary Process: A Frame of Reference for the Study of Revolutionary Movements," *Social Forces*, Vol. 28 (1950), pp. 270-279.

[20] Dina Ezzat, "A Justified Fear?" *Al-Ahram Weekly*, No. 1040, 24-30 March 2011.

[21] Anne Applebaum, "In the Arab World, It's 1848 – Not 1989," *The Washington Post*, 21 February 2011.

[22] The United States and the West also played an important role in these revolutions. Libya stands as a prime example, but there are indications that the United States may have coordinated with the Egyptian army in the toppling of Mubarak.

[23] With regard to Egypt, Ellis Goldberg called this scenario "Mubarakism without Mubarak." *Foreign Affairs*, 11 February 2011.

of revolution, a hybrid model that would combine religious and secular elements. The coming elections for both parliament and the presidency will determine the nature of the emerging model.

The Arab revolutions were, to a large extent, "faceless"; no charismatic leader has yet emerged. In the near future, it is expected that new leaders will appear; their absence will no doubt damage the revolution's ability to achieve its aims.[24] On the whole, this transitional period may witness instability and possibly the use of violence by underprivileged tribal, sectarian, or religious groups, particularly in heterogeneous societies. The civil war in Libya is a case in point, and there are indications that Syria is following Libya. Some Arab countries may weather the storm by initiating a set of reforms. The result would be a "refolution," a term coined by historian Timothy Ash with regard to the events in Eastern Europe in 1989, which would involve a hybrid transformation including both reform and revolution.[25] In his famed satire *Animal Farm*, George Orwell wrote that under the devastating impact of Communism and Fascism, "all revolutions are failures, but they are not all the same failure." The Arab people hope to see their revolutions as successes, though they will certainly not be the same success.

The precise political outcomes of the revolutions are still unclear. So far, no new social contract between ruler and ruled has emerged in Tunisia or Egypt. Yet, it is safe to assume that Arab rulers will have to be more responsive to their people; relying on sheer, brutal force to maintain power will not suffice in the long run. The social forces unleashed by the revolution—the young, lower-middle-class, either liberal or Islamist—will return to the street if other avenues of expression are blocked by the regime. In addition, the new language of Tahrir Square—the discourse of human rights, democracy, and pluralism—will strike roots. In light of these developments, it can be said that the "Arabs came together to bid farewell to an age of quiescence."[26]

The fact that a revolution occurred in Egypt—historically the most important Arab country that has in the past led the processes of modernization, anti-colonial struggle, and the emergence of military-led regimes—means that we will continue to witness its effect on other Arab states given their structural, historical, and cultural similarities. In Fouad Ajami's apt description, "when

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[24] Thomas L. Friedman, "Hoping for Arab Mandelas," *The New York Times*, 26 March 2011.

[25] R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century – and After*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 407; John Keane, "Refolution in the Arab World," *Open Democracy*, 28 April 2011, http://www.opendemocracy.net/john-keane/refolution-in-arab-world.

[26] Fouad Ajami, "How the Arabs Turned Shame into Liberty," *The New York Times*, 26 February 2011.

the revolt arrived in Cairo, it found a stage worthy of its ambitions."[27] For the first time since the days of Nasser's charismatic leadership, Egypt has returned to the vanguard of the Arab world, once again serving as an inspiring model.

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[27] Fouad Ajami, "Egypt's Heroes with No Names," *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 February 2011.

The Renewal of the "Struggle for Syria": The Rise and Fall of the Ba'th Party

Eyal Zisser[1]

Several days before the fall of Egyptian President Husni Mubarak's regime, when it appeared that its days were numbered, Syrian President Bashar Assad (Arabic, al-Asad) granted an interview to *The Wall Street Journal* in which he talked for the first time about the momentous events taking place in the region. With a self-confidence bordering on arrogance that soon proved to be thoroughly unjustified, Assad assured his concerned interviewers that "…we [Syrians] are not Tunisians and we are not Egyptians," and explained why the earthquake rocking the Arab world would bypass Syria:

> We have more difficult circumstances than most of the Arab countries but in spite of that Syria is stable. Why? Because you have to be very closely linked to the beliefs of the people. This is the core issue. When there is divergence between your policy and the people's beliefs and interests, you will have this vacuum that creates disturbance….
> …Why is Syria stable, although we have more difficult conditions [than Egypt]? Egypt has been supported financially by the United States, while we are under embargo by most countries of the world. We have growth although we do not have many of the basic needs for the people. Despite all that, the people do not go into an uprising. So it is not only about the needs and not only about the reform. It is about the ideology, the beliefs and the cause that you have.[2]

Assad's words depict a regime in perfect harmony with Syrian society; a regime that championed a widely popular ideology, provided for the needs of its people despite the many obstacles, and generally reflected the beliefs and sentiments of Syria's diverse inhabitants. The Ba'th regime, according to Assad, represented the end of the struggle over Syria's political and social identity that dominated the country's history. Though the young Ba'th regime of the 1960s and 1970s was indeed representative of Syrian society and brought respite from decades of struggle, it did not mark the termination of that struggle. Despite the views expressed by Assad in his interview, the

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1 Professor Eyal Zisser is the Dean of Humanities and holds the Yona and Dina Ettinger Chair of Contemporary Middle Eastern History at Tel Aviv University.

2 *The Wall Street Journal*, 31 January 2011, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703833204576114712441122894.html

failure of the Ba'th regime to conform to the changes within Syrian society produced a breach between the regime and the people in which the struggle was lying in wait.

For many years the Assad regime had focused on another struggle, the conflict with Israel. Following his interview with *The Wall Street Journal*, the Syrian media echoed their president's views. Several sources attributed the fall of the Mubarak regime to its peace treaty with Israel, suggesting that it was Egypt's relations with Israel that brought the masses onto the streets of Cairo and other Egyptian towns. The implication of this assertion was that Syria's commitment to the resistance (*muqawama*) camp was a major factor in ensuring that the Assad family and the Ba'th party would maintain their strength and popularity.[3]

A few weeks after Assad's interview his case for Syria's exceptional stability appeared baseless. On 15 March 2011 demonstrations broke out in several Syrian towns. At first it appeared as if the demonstrations would be far less extensive than those in Egypt. While hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people were taking to the streets in Egyptian cities, only hundreds or at most several thousand demonstrators took part in the Syrian protests. Further, the demonstrations in Syria were confined to peripheral areas such as the town of Dar'a in the south and the small towns and villages nearby.

However, within several weeks the disturbances spread from Dar'a to the rural areas around Damascus and then to the capital itself. Riots also broke out in the towns along the Syrian coast. In this case, commentators attributed the disturbances to the persistent friction between the Sunni Muslim majority living in the cities of Jabla, Banyas, Tartus, and Ladhiqiyya and the 'Alawite villagers who had immigrated to the formerly Sunni-dominated coastal towns.[4]

Something here should sound quite incongruous to anyone familiar with Syria's recent history. It was precisely the peripheral areas of Syria that had constituted the stronghold of the Ba'th Party and then the Ba'th regime after it was established in the revolution of 8 March 1963. Dar'a, the dreary town in southern Syria where the uprisings began, is the birthplace of both Faruq al-Shar', Syrian vice president and former minister of foreign affairs, and Faysal al-Miqdad, Syria's deputy foreign minister. Similarly, the town of al-Tall, located in a rural area near Damascus, witnessed demonstrations despite its

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3 See, for example, *Al-Watan* (Damascus), 30 January 2011; *Tishrin* (Damascus), 12 February 2011.

4 *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), 27 March 2011; Syria Comment 26 March 2011, http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/?p=8789.

ties to the Ba'th regime. 'Abdallah al-Ahmar, who serves as assistant to the general secretary of the Ba'th Party National Command (al-Qiyada al-Qutriyya) and who is regarded as second only to Assad in the party and state hierarchy, was born in al-Tall. In the town of al-Rustan, not far from Hims, demonstrators destroyed a statue of Hafiz Assad, the regime's founder and long-time ruler, in April. Al-Rustan is also the birthplace of the Talas family, whose members fill key positions in the Ba'th regime. Mustafa Talas served as minister of defense for over three decades and was known for his close personal relationship with Hafiz Assad. His son, Manaf Talas, is known as one of Bashar Assad's close associates and serves as one of the commanders of the Republican Guard, an elite force tasked with protecting the regime.[5]

The demonstrations in Dar'a, al-Tall and al-Rustan reveal how politics in the Syrian periphery have changed. The areas that supported the Ba'th Party for years, the areas from which the Ba'th regime drew its strength and its leaders, have turned against the regime. This change is the culmination of a long process, extending over several decades, during which the regime allowed the support it enjoyed among the popular bases to decline and dissipate.

The Syrian Ba'th regime that was established following the 8 March 1963 Revolution and consolidated following the November 1970 seizure of power by Hafiz Assad (in what was known as the Corrective Movement, al-Haraka al-Tashihiyya), reflected the changing social realities of the 1950s and 1960s. Specifically, the new regime reflected the emergence of the minority religious communities and the Sunni Muslim residents of the Syrian periphery. While Syria has continued to change since the 1960s and 1970s, the regime and the Ba'th Party have not adapted accordingly. It is in this gap between the Ba'th Party and the regime that rules in its name, on the one hand, and a Syrian society that has undergone social and economic transformations in recent decades, on the other, that we must seek the sources of tumult the country has experienced since March 2011.

Respite: The Ba'th Regime of Hafiz Assad

For several decades, the Syrian Ba'th regime was a personal affair whose various and at times conflicting components were held together by its founder and long-time ruler, Hafiz Assad. The regime drew its support from the Assad family, whose members played a central role in the state, and from other members of the Kalbiyya tribe from which it hailed. The regime also

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[5] For more see Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of its Lesser Rural Notables and their Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 178-180. See also Eyal Zisser, *Decision Making in Asad's Syria* (Washington: the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), pp. 17-27.

had a sectarian character, as it relied on the support of the powerful 'Alawite community to hold together its various elements. In this respect, the Syrian regime reflected the rise to prominence of the 'Alawite community during the second half of the twentieth century.

Despite Assad's centrality, the regime he established in Syria was multifaceted. At times it showed a personal face, and at others a family, tribal, or communal face, each in accord with the circumstances and challenges it confronted. The regime also showed the face of the Ba'th Party, a central component of its identity, and that of the military, since its survival was based upon the support of the military and security forces. When judging this protean regime, we must conclude that it was first and foremost the product of the social and political transformations that took place in the country following the Ba'th revolution of 8 March. As such, the regime reflected the social, economic, and political order that was established in the wake of that revolution.

Further, it should be emphasized that the Ba'th revolution was an important step toward ensuring the survival and durability of the Syrian state. The revolution inverted the governmental pyramid and, in practice, the former social and economic orders. For hundreds of years, an urban elite hailing from the Sunni Muslim community had dominated the political, social, and economic life of Syria. As a result of the Revolution, its place was taken by a new coalition of rising political and social forces that had emerged from the dispossessed sectors of Syrian society, members of the minority communities living mostly in rural and peripheral areas.

At the heart of the new order stood a coalition of four main forces. First, at the center were the members of the 'Alawite community, particularly those close to the Assad family. The 'Alawites were the dominant factor in the coalition: their power over the other elements ensured its cohesion and continued existence. Second were members of the Sunni Muslim community from the rural and peripheral areas of the country. They became, as a group, a senior partner in the post-8 March coalition. Most of the public figures in the top echelons of Syrian politics come from this sector. Third were members of other minority communities, including Christians, Druze, and Isma'ilis. These groups viewed 'Alawite dominance in the country as a factor guaranteeing their own status and personal and economic security. Fourth was the Sunni Muslim economic elite living in Damascus. This last group was gradually absorbed into the ruling coalition over a number of years beginning in November 1970, when its members began to take advantage of the policies of

economic and political openness adopted by the Assad regime at that time and even more so from the beginning of the 1990s.[6]

These four groups supported the Ba'th regime in the struggle against its opponents, in part because they saw it as Syria's best option. For example, the Islamic insurgency against the regime from 1976-1982 was confined to several of the large towns in the north of the country, at first to Aleppo and its surroundings and afterwards to the town of Hama, scene of the well-known 1982 massacre. The rural regions and the capital Damascus were generally marked by quiet.

Respite to Renewal: Bashar Assad and the Antecedents of Struggle

Syrian President Hafiz Assad died on 10 June 2000. He was succeeded by his son and heir, Bashar Assad. Upon his rise to power, Assad the son made promises to institute far-reaching political reforms. However, it quickly became clear that the new president remained committed to his father's legacy and the political system his father left behind.[7] That system, however, had become increasingly estranged from the country's society. In contrast to the period following the 8 March revolution, Syrian society no longer found its interests expressed in the structure, institutions, and worldview of the Ba'th regime.

Indeed, in the decades following the revolution Syrian society experienced extraordinary transformations. During the 1970s and 1980s, Syria witnessed dramatic population growth, the result of one of the highest birth rates in the world (3.5-3.8%). When Hafiz Assad took power in 1970, Syria's population numbered about 6 million people. In 2011, its population had grown to nearly 23 million.[8] The dramatic increase in population led to a process of accelerated urbanization that turned Damascus, Aleppo, and other towns into large cities with millions of residents, many coming from rural and peripheral areas and seeking a better life. However, these immigrants encountered numerous difficulties in their efforts to integrate or even to find a place for themselves at the margins of urban life. The percentage of urban residents in Syria rose from 37% in 1960 to 43% in 1970 and to 55% in 2000. A study published in May 2002 revealed that the population of Damascus had grown

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6 For more see Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy: Syria in Transition* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 29-35.

7 See Eyal Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 19-76. See also David W. Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus: Bashar al-Asad and Modern Syria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

8 *Tishrin* (Damascus), 19 October 2000; *Al-Thawra* (Damascus), 10 August 2002.

from about half a million residents in 1960 to 5.5 million in 2002. Of those 5.5 million, about 3.9 million had emigrated in recent decades from rural areas.[9]

With this increase in residents, cities expanded geographically by absorbing rural areas. However, these areas are not classified as urban in official statistics. The urban population in Syria is therefore even greater than those statistics reveal. The Syrian regime has found it very difficult to deal with this accelerated growth in the urban population, as demonstrated by the proliferation of squalid slums around the urban centers. Urbanization presented a serious challenge to the Ba'th regime in another way. In the early years of its rule the regime cultivated support among minority communities and the Sunni Muslims living in rural areas and the periphery. The regime guaranteed this support through an extensive network of institutions and organizations. It integrated minorities and residents of rural areas into the mechanisms of the regime, including the ranks of the army and the security services, the institutions of the state, and even the highest echelons of the regime. However, little by little the regime abandoned the rural areas and the periphery. At the same time, it did not win the trust and loyalty of the recent immigrants from the villages to the big cities.

For a time, the Ba'th Party succeeded in maintaining its ruling position, a status that was also anchored in Article 8 of the Syrian Constitution, which grants to the Ba'th Party leadership of state and society. The party even registered a dramatic growth in its membership. A report published on the occasion of the Sixth Congress of the Ba'th Party, held immediately after the death of President Hafiz Assad in June 2000, stated that the party had 1,409,580 members, of whom 406,047 were "active members" (sing. *'udw 'amil*), the highest ranking membership, followed by "candidate members" (*murashshah)* and "supporting members" (*nasir)*. In 1971, the party had 65,398 members, in 1981, 374,332 members, and by 1992, 1,008,243 members.[10] However, the growth in the size of the party did not accurately reflect the degree of support or popularity it enjoyed among the population at large or the degree to which its ideology was attractive or relevant. Rather, the increase in membership seemed to reflect the desire of the new members to take advantage of the opportunities for social, economic, and political advancement that the party provided.

Indeed, while the party grew in numbers, the ideology upon which it had been built was collapsing. The fall of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe from the late 1980s through the 1990s and the subsequent crash of the Syrian

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9 *Al-Thawra*, (Damascus), 22 May 2002 and 21 January 2011.

10 *Al-Nahar* (Beirut), 16 June 2000.

economy proved Ba'th socialism to be a failure. Syria's willingness to advance the peace process with Israel and engage in dialogue with the West weakened its commitment to Arab nationalism and unity. Further, the regime's leadership began to focus on Syria's own separate interests and political identity. Bashar Assad alluded to this new outlook during discussions at the June 2000 Ba'th Party Congress when he said: "The party's survival is dependent upon the extent of its ability to adapt itself to the situation prevailing today in Syria and to the developments in the various areas of life in the state."[11] However, it has now become clear that despite Assad's apparent recognition that the Ba'th regime must actively adapt to changing circumstances, a sensibility he expressed to his *Wall Street Journal* interviewers, his regime's failure to do so meant that the struggle for Syria would emerge sooner or later.

It seems that instead of adapting, the Syrian regime, like other dictatorial regimes in the Arab world, survived by erecting around itself walls of fear. One wall was solid and tangible, personified by the security forces, whose task it was to protect the regime and to suppress any effort to weaken or overthrow it, whether in word or deed. The other wall was just as high and solid, but much less tangible. It consisted of the intimidating belief planted in the hearts of Syrians that there was no alternative to the Ba'th regime, and that its fall would be followed by anarchy and bloodshed. Standing in the shadow of this wall and lending it support were the public sector employees, whose numbers swelled in an unprecedented manner. These government officials constitute a significant proportion of the work force in Syria and many other Arab states and are inclined to remain loyal to the existing regimes that provide their livelihood.

The fear of what might ensue if the present regime were to fall is particularly perceptible in Syria, especially considering the country's history of conflict, its disjointed social structure, and the experiences of its neighbors, Lebanon and Iraq. Those two countries offer frightening scenarios to the people of Syria. Iraq descended into an abyss of anarchy and civil war after the overthrow of Saddam Husayn's regime. Lebanon, which does not enjoy the stability of a dictatorial regime, is constantly on the verge of civil war. Syria's geopolitical proximity to Iraq and Lebanon make those neighbors more relevant models than Tunisia or Egypt. Still, following the revolutions in Tunis and Cairo and the unrest that spread to Libya, Yemen, and even Jordan and Bahrain, Syria's turn also came. The wall of fear erected by the regime and its agents has apparently collapsed. It now remains to be seen whether the other wall of

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[11] Radio Damascus, 18 June 2000. For more on the Ba'th Party see Kamal Abu-Jaber, *The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party: History, Ideology and Organization* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966).

fear, the fear of the unknown, will also fall, allowing the various socio-political communities in Syria to make the final move towards regime change.

The Struggle for Syria

The current conflict taking place in Syria is best understood as part of an ongoing struggle within Syrian society and its political community that has characterized much of the country's history in the twentieth century. This struggle has been fought over the state's identity, political orientation, and independence, but perhaps mainly over the issue of political authority and hegemony.

This is the picture painted by Patrick Seale, correspondent in Damascus for the British newspaper *The Observer*, who in 1965 published *The Struggle for Syria,* a book that continues to be one of the most important sources for studying the history of Syria.[12] Seale constructs an image of Syria as a weak and unstable state embroiled in a constant struggle among contending forces for power and the ability to determine the path the state should follow and the identity it should assume. Seale sees Syria as a passive player who can help its allies attain leadership and hegemony in the Arab world but who can never itself attain that status. It is no accident that Seale ended his book in 1958, the year Syria "commit[ed] suicide" by combining with Egypt in the United Arab Republic (UAR). By this union, the Syrian state temporarily lost its independence and merged with its "elder Arab sister," as Egypt was called.

In Seale's second book on Syria, published in 1988 and entitled *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East*, the author describes the leadership of Hafiz Assad and Syria's emergence as a pivotal player in regional and intra-Arab affairs. To Seale at the time, it seemed that the "struggle for Syria" had been brought to an end. As a result, the Ba'th regime was turning its attention to the struggle for the Middle East. Indeed, when Seale asked Assad how he wanted his period of rule to be remembered, the Syrian dictator replied that he hoped it would be remembered as one in which "the struggle continued."[13]

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[12] Patrick Seale, *Struggle for Syria*: *A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965). For more on the power struggles in Syria in 1946-1963, see Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994); Michael H. Van Dusen, "Intra- and Inter-generational Conflict in the Syrian Army" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, John Hopkins University, 1971); Andrew Rathmell, *Secret War in the Middle East: The Covert Struggle for Syria, 1949-1961* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994).

[13] Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988), p. 495.

Though Assad was referring to the struggle against Israel and the West, it is now clear that the struggle over the character and image of the Syrian state and society, which appeared to have been resolved during Assad's reign, has come to life once again. Given strong impetus by the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, the Syrian people have instigated a new struggle to reshape the character of the Syrian state.

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Turkey and the Arab Spring

Dror Ze'evi[1]

Over the past decade, the Arab world has become the focus of intense political activity in Turkey and the cornerstone of its new geo-strategic outlook. With a new elite coming to power in Turkey, the connection has acquired a religious-ideological character and the region has also become a major target for economic expansion. However, the flowering relationship now faces a serious challenge as a result of the current instability in the Arab world. This article examines the possible effects of the Arab Spring on Turkey's regional game plan. In order to accurately assess those challenges, we should begin by identifying the structural, non-political elements sustaining Turkish-Arab relations.

Strategy, Economy, and Faith in Motion

Turkey's attempt to attain a new and improved strategic balance embraces all its neighbors, from the Balkans and the Black Sea region to central Asia and even to the Far East and sub-Saharan Africa. Turkey's reengagement with the Middle East, however, seems to be the linchpin of its by-now well-known policy of "strategic depth" as designed by current Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu.

This new policy stems primarily from an attempt to redefine Turkey's strategic role in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and to counter Europe's reluctance to admit it to the European Union. It sees a new role for Turkey as a world power, connecting Europe and Asia, sitting astride some of the world's major thoroughfares, and successfully merging Islam with European culture.

In addition to the strategic importance of the Arab world, economic pressures have been a major factor in the new policy. Turkey's burgeoning service industries and reinvigorated manufacturing capability were in desperate need of new markets. Europe offered limited possibilities for growth; the Balkans, recently released from Russia's yoke, were embraced by their neighbors to the West; Central Asia and the Caucasus were already saturated to some extent. The Arab neighbors to the south were a major accessible market.

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Turkey and the Arab World

As data recently prepared by Professor Nader Habibi and Dr. Joshua W. Walker show clearly, Turkey's trade with the Arab world has grown almost tenfold since 2000.[2] This growing market seems to have offset a slow, long-term decline in exports to Europe. The UAE is currently the main Arab importer of Turkish goods and services by far, but trade with Syria and northern Iraq is growing rapidly. Imports into Turkey, most importantly of Iranian oil and followed by Iraqi and Algerian oil, also grew, but at a much slower pace.

A Pan-Islam for the 21st Century

But where the Arab Middle East is concerned, there were other factors at play. Turkey's new leaders have intimate ties with the Arab world that go back several decades. The current president, Abdullah Gül, worked for many years as an employee of the Saudi Islamic Development Bank; Foreign Minister Davutoğlu lectured at universities in the Arab world, and many senior politicians, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, were part of the Islamic youth movements of the 1970s that were guided by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. After their long struggle to take over the state, these leaders were eager to develop closer ties with their erstwhile acquaintances.

Turkey's relations with Syria are a case in point. From enmity bordering on war with Assad the father in 1998, Turkey has moved to make Assad the son a close ally upon his succession in 2000. In short order the countries solved their water disputes, opened their borders, and established a virtual economic free-trade zone. Tellingly, in a recent move to create a regional visa union between Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, Prime Minister Erdoğan suggested calling the visa "Shamgen," a play on the European Schengen visa and on "Shām," the common name for Greater Syria in the Ottoman and earlier eras.

Such snippets offer a glimpse into the way Prime Minister Erdoğan and members of his political circle think. The visa program is a perfect illustration of the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) ambitions. The party has replaced the old idea, harking back to Sultan Abdülhamid II, of unifying the Muslim world under the aegis of a sultan with an updated and improved pan-Islamic vision, a union of independent Islamic states in which Turkey plays a leading political and economic role, similar to that of Germany in Western Europe.

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[2] Nader Habibi and Joshua W. Walker, "What is Driving Turkey's Reengagement with the Arab World," *Middle East Brief* 49, (Crown Center, Brandeis University, April 2011).

Israel: From Asset to Liability

As Turkish-Arab relations improved in the mid-2000s, it became increasingly clear that Israel, once a coveted ally in a hostile environment, was becoming a liability. For many years Turkey's friendly relationship with Israel, which focused on military and intelligence cooperation, stood in the way of improved relations with the Arab world. However, a series of interconnected events has more recently made this cooperation redundant and has given Turkey the opportunity to distance itself from its former ally.

First, Turkey's perception of military threats has changed dramatically. The collapse of the USSR and its satellite republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia has made Turkey the major viable military force in the region. Second, having convinced Syria to deport Abdullah Öcalan, the leader the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), in 1999 and to drop its historical claim to the Antakya (Hatay) region, Turkey removed a major military threat on its southern border. Finally, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 obliterated the well-equipped Iraqi army, allowing the Turks to scale down their military deployment in eastern Anatolia. Under these new conditions, the special relationship with Israel was no longer seen as essential.

While the regional balance of power should be seen as the main driving force behind the ebb and flow of relations with Israel, it was a succession of specific events that precipitated their breakdown. These are well known and need only be mentioned here in passing. They include the Turkish sense of betrayal when Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert failed to inform his Turkish counterpart of his plans to invade Gaza in the midst of Turkish-mediated negotiations with Syria; the invasion of Gaza itself during Operation Cast Led and particularly the intensely hostile coverage it received in the Turkish media; and finally, the Mavi Marmara flotilla affair, which the Turkish government seems to have abetted and in which nine Turkish citizens were killed and dozens wounded, brought relations to an all-time low.

Coupled with critical geopolitical factors—the reduction of military threats and the growing economic and political ties with the Arab world—this series of events could not but lead to a breakdown in relations. Furthermore, even if Israel and Turkey find a way to overcome the immediate political crisis, the structural elements delineated above will still hamper any chance of restoring relations to their former level.

Flies in the Ointment

It may be in Turkey's interest to maintain strong relations with its Arab neighbors for the foreseeable future. It would be safe to assume that these economic and political ties will be maintained and deepened even if the AKP is ousted and a more secular government elected in its stead. Still, the Middle East is a complex political arena, and several problems loom on the horizon for Turkey. In the short run, the region will be increasingly unstable. Close allies such as Syria, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, and Libya face a long period of civil strife, unstable governments, and serious economic woes. Some of the countries in the region already feel the brunt of this economic crisis as oil production falters and shipments are delayed. Turkey may face an economic downturn as a result of its considerable investments in these volatile countries.

But even if the situation stabilizes and the economy picks up, Turkey will still have to cope with serious challenges. One major stumbling block is its relationship with Iran. As the Islamic Republic inches closer to nuclear capability, the pressure mounts in countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia to find a way to deal with a nuclear Iran. When the Saudi and Gulf regimes had a taste of the Arab Spring, they became increasingly worried about a powerful Iran meddling in their affairs. Recently, Ankara has taken several steps that place it squarely in the Sunni camp and alienate it from Iran: It has denounced Iran's main ally, the Assad regime in Syria, deployed the NATO X-band radar in Eastern Anatolia to detect Iranian missiles, and closed its air-space for military transport between Iran and Syria. Ankara's way of dealing with this tension will have an impact on the other deep cleavages splitting the Middle East, mainly on that dividing Iran and its allies from countries aligned with the United States.

Turkey's most recent interactions with the Arab world—including improved relations with Mahmud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority and Prime Minister Erdoğan's recent visits to Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya—indicate that the Turkish government has moved away from its one-sided support of Hamas and is attempting to position Turkey less on the side of the radical axis and more on the side of the "moderates." This may be a welcome step from the American and Israeli points of view, but it clearly narrows Turkey's room for maneuver in the region.

Four years ago, Turkey was still perceived by all sides as an honest broker between Syria and Israel. Today, Israel clearly does not have faith in Turkey's integrity in this matter. The same holds true for negotiations between Fatah and Hamas, and even between rival parties in Lebanon. The Turkish government seems aware that this may eventually lead to a loss of prestige

and relevance as a regional actor, although at the time of writing its Prime Minister was still being buoyed by the fleeting cheers of the Arab crowds.

The struggle for leadership in the Middle East is bound to intensify. In recent years under President Mubarak, Egypt was left to stagnate and decline, and its influence in the region waned as a result. States such as Syria and Saudi Arabia attempted, with partial success, to fill the political vacuum. Recently, Turkey joined in, championing Islam and the Arab cause and leading the struggle against Israeli occupation. Now that Mubarak has been ousted, Egypt's younger generation is determined to restore its country to a position of leadership. It may take time, but in the process Turkey will be perceived more as a rival than as a benevolent friend. Both countries will vie for the role of main power broker in the Arab world.

Conclusion

In the last decade, Turkey has fundamentally changed its relations with its Arab neighbors. From a source of conflict and enmity, it has become a model for Islamic democracy and a vital economic partner. The deterioration of relations with Israel was part and parcel of this process, albeit one accelerated by the current bungling leaderships in both countries. The new relationship with the Arab world is critically important for Turkey, and will remain so. Any Turkish government in the foreseeable future will be expected to maintain and improve its ties with the Arab world in order to reinforce Turkey's new regional strategic role and promote its burgeoning industries.

Yet, now that the heady days of an unconditional honeymoon with the Arab world are over, current and future governments in Turkey will have to take into consideration the challenges that the new Middle East presents. Turkey's support in the region is expected to shrink considerably as its stance on some critical questions is revealed: Will it side with the new and disappointing regimes or with the people? Will it place itself squarely in the Sunni camp? And will its special blend of religion and secularism be embraced by the suspicious Islamists? They will also have to contend with economic setback, at least in the short and medium-term. These tensions, already raising doubts about Turkey's aims in the region, will intensify in the near future as it is forced to take sides in the Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations and as it considers an armed invasion of the Kurdish areas in northern Iraq following the rapid increase in PKK attacks in eastern Anatolia.

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Ahead of the Curve?
Tunisia's "Jasmine Revolution"

Daniel Zisenwine[1]

Since January 2011, after successfully overthrowing its autocratic president Zayn al-'Abidin Ben 'Ali, Tunisia has become, rather atypically, a source of inspiration for other Middle Eastern and North African societies. Historically, Tunisia was not a center of ideological and intellectual ferment that motivated revolutionary movements, alternative leaders seeking to take control of political life, or new political, social, and economic structures. This relatively small North African country remained largely immune to such upheavals, displaying a remarkable degree of stability that has underpinned Tunisia's public life since it regained its independence from France in 1956. But the events of early 2011 have shifted the spotlight to Tunisia. Protestors and commentators from Cairo to Sana'a to Damascus have repeatedly invoked the Tunisian example of overthrowing a detested leader by popular protest. These protestors and observers, along with many in the West, now frequently refer to Tunisia as a model for an emerging political order in which democracy and civil liberties will prevail. This unusual interest and hype surrounding Tunisia warrant a more in-depth look at recent events there. What exactly happened in Tunisia? Does Ben 'Ali's removal reflect a genuine shift in the country's politics, or will it merely redesign and endow with new legitimacy, reproducing a similar system of government? And to what extent can the Tunisian example, with its unique socio-economic characteristics, be emulated by other countries in the region?

At the outset of this discussion, an acknowledgement of the extraordinary nature of the recent events in Tunisia is very much in order. The developments in Tunisia have been dramatic by any standard and, as already mentioned, have created a cascading effect throughout the region. Even if the final outcome of Tunisia's current turmoil is not "good" in the sense of creating a new, pluralist political order, Tunisia will stand as the first country in the Middle East and North Africa to remove an autocratic dictator from his position in a relatively peaceful manner. This precedent is even more remarkable considering the fact that such a development was viewed by most observers in Tunisia and abroad as highly unlikely—if not impossible—just days before its occurrence. But despite such accolades, there are many looming questions concerning what has become known as Tunisia's "Jasmine

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Revolution," which makes the aromatic jasmine flower, common throughout Tunisia, the symbol of recent events there.

Tunisia, geographically smaller in size than its North African neighbors, boasts several distinguishing features. Its population stands at 10.6 million people (Morocco and Algeria both have populations of well over 30 million each). Moreover, its population growth is less than one percent annually, the result of an ambitious family planning program initiated by the Tunisian government in the 1960s. Women in Tunisia play a unique social role. They are well integrated into society and the economy, as well into the country's political life. This, too, distinguishes Tunisia from other Arab countries, where women remain marginal and suffer from diverse forms of legal and social discrimination. Tunisia's social composition is rather homogenous. It is almost completely Sunni Muslim and does not have religious or ethnic minorities that could potentially weaken the country's national unity. Although Tunisia lacks natural resources, it has been successful in developing its economy. Tourism is a key sector that contributes significantly to the country's GDP (up to one-sixth according to some estimates). Tunisia is one of the few Arab countries with an identifiable middle class, which occupies a prominent position in Tunisian society. Although this group may differ in income from their Western counterparts, it has traditionally oriented Tunisia towards more moderate political and social positions. Unlike neighboring Algeria, Tunisia's recent political history has been relatively stable. Since 1956, only two individuals have held power: Habib Bourguiba, the country's "founding father," ruled until his failing health led to his removal in 1987 by Ben 'Ali, who governed Tunisia until early this year.

The road to the "Jasmine Revolution" effectively began on the morning of 7 November 1987, when Tunisians awoke to the news that Bourguiba had been removed from power in a bloodless coup and replaced by his prime minister Ben 'Ali. Speaking to the nation that day, Ben 'Ali pledged to remain loyal to his predecessor's policies. As he set out to consolidate his rule, the new president indicated that he intended to increase political freedom in Tunisia and restrict the president's political power by limiting his terms in office. Most Tunisians were initially supportive of the new president and were eager to see whether Ben 'Ali would live up to their expectations. Negotiations between Ben 'Ali and various political parties, including the leading Islamist al-Nahda Movement, led to a "national pact" that was expected to usher in a new era in Tunisia's public life.

However, this was not to be. Over time, the Ben 'Ali regime became increasingly repressive and authoritarian, abandoning its early pledges that it would install a more open political system. Efforts to clamp down on Islamist

activity (which was effectively silenced by Ben 'Ali after 1991) were initially tacitly accepted by many people in Tunisia's middle class. They tolerated the regime's measures in exchange for political stability and economic development, and were grateful for Tunisia's improved conditions, especially in contrast to the raging domestic strife in neighboring Algeria in the 1990s. Observers often referred to this silent contract between civil society and the regime as the "devil's compact." But as time went on, Ben 'Ali's regime seemed to reject any form of political dissent and increased repression of any political alternative to the ruling party.[2] These political measures were exacerbated by an economic downturn. The Tunisian government was less successful in attracting foreign investment after 2000 as the country's economy suffered from the effects of various world financial crises. Although Tunisia's economy served as a model for other Arab countries—the result of its liberal economic policy, reduced budget deficits, low inflation rates, and high volume of foreign trade—problems became apparent. Above all, persistent unemployment, reflecting a weakened private sector, was a grievance of many young Tunisians.[3] Many suffered from rising economic hardship, which embittered their view of the ruling regime. Allegations of corruption among the country's highest political echelons, and specifically among Ben 'Ali's family members, further tarnished the regime's image.

All these developments, however, do not necessarily lead to political upheaval. For all of its deficiencies, Ben 'Ali's regime was not "evil" as was, say, Saddam Husayn's rule in Iraq. Ben 'Ali was well aware of the need to provide an effective social welfare system, which could quell anti-government ferment and reduce the possibility of a strong political opposition. For most Tunisians, such policies were very much appreciated. So long as Tunisians steered away from politics and refrained from becoming involved in opposition groups, they could confidently go about their daily lives with little concern. How then, did the public end up rising against the government?

As in similar cases, it was a symbolic event that led to the outbreak of widespread anti-government protests. In the Tunisian case, it was the self-immolation of a young, unemployed Tunisian man from the peripheral town of Sidi Bouzid (about 200 kilometers southeast of the capital Tunis), Mohamed Bouazizi, that triggered the public outrage. On 17 December 2010, Bouazizi set himself on fire in a desperate protest against local authorities who reportedly harassed him for selling fruits and vegetables from an

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2 Kenneth J. Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 185-212.

3 Paul Rivlin, *Arab Economies in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 266-286.

unlicensed pushcart. Bouazizi, who succumbed to his wounds and died several weeks later, was embraced by Tunisian protestors as a martyr who took his own life in order to pave the way for a better society. Though Bouazizi did not complete his high school studies, he was described on various web-based social networks as an unemployed university graduate—a social profile that many young Tunisians could easily identify with, even if Bouazizi's life did not precisely resemble their own.[4] Despite these inconsistencies between myth and reality, Bouazizi's act unleashed unprecedented anti-government protests which swept across the Tunisian countryside and made their way within a fortnight to the capital.

Although the protests were a first in Ben 'Ali's Tunisia, in which any form of anti-regime activity was met with an iron fist, they did not inherently suggest that the country was on the eve of a political transformation. Security forces actively pursued the demonstrators and did not initially hesitate to open fire. Over 200 people were killed in the clashes. News of the protests, along with photos and video footage transmitted over the internet and satellite television stations, increased the resolve of the many Tunisians who joined the grassroots protest movement. Indeed, one of the leading features of the Tunisian protests was that they were not organized by established political parties or social movements. In hindsight, this may have led Ben 'Ali and his close advisers to dismiss the protestors and to feel confident about their ability to ride out the storm.

Early calls for political reform and an end to governmental corruption quickly gave way to a slogan that has since become the mantra of protestors throughout the Middle East: "The People Want/Demand the Regime's Removal." Without any planning, Tunisia effectively found itself in early January moving towards what Charles Tilly and other theorists have deemed a "revolutionary situation," in which a government under the control of a single polity becomes the target of effective, competing claims of distinct polities. In such cases, the polity becomes fragmented into two or more blocks.[5] Although one can argue that Tunisia was on the verge of a revolutionary situation, events on the ground do not necessarily support the notion of a brewing revolution. As noted, the protests lacked a recognized leadership and organizational structure. Moreover, although the level of violence intensified as the protests continued, the country was not on the verge of a total breakdown. Tourists continued to frequent Tunisia's resorts, and there were no reports in early January of foreigners trying to flee the country. These contradictions, weighed against the backdrop of unfolding

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4 See Frida Dahmani, "Sidi Bouazizi," *Jeune Afrique*, 26 February 2011.

5 Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978), pp. 190-204.

domestic unrest in Tunisia, underscore the "Jasmine Revolution's" complexity and the difficulty of labeling a fluid political situation.

By 13 January the protests reached the capital and calls for a massive demonstration in the city center on the following day were circulating. Seeking to avert further unrest, Ben 'Ali delivered a televised address to the nation, one of several made during the crisis. Unlike his earlier appearances, the embattled president this time seemed rattled. "I understand you," he told his citizens, and promised to inaugurate widespread reforms and expand civil liberties. He also announced that he would not run in the upcoming presidential elections. Notwithstanding his shaky appearance, there was no indication that Ben 'Ali or his close associates felt they were losing control of the situation. But by then the regime had lost any remaining credibility among the public, which continued with its planned protest the next day. Less than twenty-four hours after his televised speech, Ben 'Ali boarded a plane for Saudi Arabia, effectively ending his rule.[6]

Ben 'Ali's departure shocked Tunisians. Although the anti-regime protests had intensified, few at home or abroad envisioned such an outcome. The circumstances behind Ben 'Ali's abrupt flight remain unclear. Some speculated that Ben 'Ali was effectively overthrown in some form of an internal coup by his close advisers. Others opined that it was the Tunisian military, which reportedly refused to clamp down on the protestors, that forced Ben 'Ali out of office. This seems rather unlikely, given the military's small size and the fact that the army has traditionally kept its distance from politics, unlike in Egypt, for example. Another explanation for Ben 'Ali's sudden departure held that he and his family were more concerned about preserving their personal wealth than clinging to political power, which they felt was slipping away. Accordingly, they opted to flee the country rather than face the prospect of being overthrown by force. All these explanations remain highly speculative. Clearly, researchers will need more time and information in order to understand what transpired among Tunisia's top political echelons on 14 January 2011.

In the weeks that followed Ben 'Ali's departure, Tunisia embarked on what will be a long process of political reconstruction. While international attention on Tunisia waned as the spotlight moved to events in Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Syria, Tunisia has attempted to return to its much vaunted internal stability. Protests in the country have continued, as some Tunisians have demanded a complete dismantling of the former regime. After some

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6 See Marwane Ben Yahmed, "Ben Ali: fuite et fin," and Abdelaziz Barrouhi, "Suicide en direct," *Jeune Afrique*, 16 January 2011.

hesitation, the country's interim government, which consisted largely of Ben 'Ali's former ministers, was dissolved in early March. Political parties have been busy preparing for the upcoming elections for a new assembly which will draft a new constitution, scheduled for 2 July, but since delayed (at the time of writing).

Many questions concerning Tunisia's future identity (in particular, the role of the now legalized Islamists) remain unclear and will undoubtedly require some time to be sorted out. While many obstacles could potentially hinder the country's progress, the prospects for a more open, pluralistic political system seem promising. Much of the country's middle class is intent on establishing such a system, and even Islamist groups have voiced their support. In that sense, Tunisia's unique features could once again set it apart from other Arab countries, where the prospects for such developments seem less likely.

Another question is whether former officials of the Ben 'Ali regime will continue to wield influence and power by reinventing themselves within the new political framework. If that happens, it will be difficult to consider the "Jasmine Revolution" a genuine transformation of public life in Tunisia, at least according to the prevailing theoretical definitions of revolution. How all this will play out is yet to be determined. If there is a definitive conclusion from the events in Tunisia so far, it is that even small, less central countries warrant close watching and analysis, even if they may not become leaders in the unfolding political events sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa.

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