Conservative سيمك
Middle East Council

THE ARAB SPRING

IMPLICATIONS FOR BRITISH POLICY

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FOREWORD

The Rt Hon Nicholas Soames MP, CMEC President

The Baroness Morris of Bolton, OBE, DL, CMEC Chairman

It gives us great pleasure to present CMEC's first published briefing and policy paper: *The Arab Spring*: *Implications for British Policy.* CMEC's work in helping the Conservative parliamentary party understand the Middle East and shaping an intelligent policy response to the remarkable challenges of the region is more important now than ever before.

Every country is undergoing change in its own way and the Arab Spring defies generalisation. The one common theme, however, is the desire for dignity that unites people across the Arab world. This desire is universal to us all; the desire for a job, a future for one's children and the ability to fulfil one's potential.

While the Government has played a very positive and resolute role in Libya, and is doing what it can to help elsewhere, the denouement of the Arab Spring remains unclear. What is certain is that its implications for British policy will continue to be profound. We are extremely grateful for the generous contributions of all fourteen authors.

The Conservative Middle East Council would like to thank
Paul Shea and Dr Magdy Ishak for their generous support of this project.

PREFACE

Dr Mohammed Abdel-Haq
Chairman of the CMEC Advisory Board

For forty years or more the pace of change in the Middle East has been slow, making the events of recent months all the more surprising. Who could have foreseen that the desperate act of a 26-year old street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire in Tunisia in December last year, would have triggered the astonishing train of events we are still seeing unfold?

The underlying desire for democratic reform and the lack of anti-Western rhetoric have been hugely positive factors, but the situation across the region remains unstable. The reason for this can largely be found in the question being asked the world over: 'What happens next?' Whatever has been achieved, future success might be obstructed by the absence of established political structures.

Central amongst these is a constructive, democratic opposition – which legitimises dissent at the heart of a democracy, but does so with a shared loyalty to the state, and thus to the political system. A strong, viable alternative government prevents the untrammelled exercise of power, and all citizens of a country benefit from its existence. Human rights abuses, corruption and intimidation all flourish in countries where dissent is suppressed. A system that not only tolerates but institutionalises dissent is a system that understands the true value of democracy.

I hope recent changes in the Middle East will lead to greater peace and stability that will ultimately improve people's lives. After the high drama of this year's events, I long for a future where excitement will be confined to debate under the domes of Parliaments.

INTRODUCTION

Leo Docherty
CMEC Director

The extraordinary events of the Arab Spring have demanded a dynamic response from CMEC. Our events program continues to bring leading Middle East experts to Westminster and recent delegations have taken parliamentarians to countries across the Middle East, bringing back a profound understanding of the new challenges facing the region.

The Arab Spring has swept away the status quo and our interests in the region must be balanced with our values in a more agile and multipolar manner. The NATO intervention in Libya looks set to be judged a remarkable success – the warmth of the welcome I received in Martyr's Square shortly after the fall of Tripoli was utterly moving. But uncertainties remain: the brutal suppression of protestors in Syria; political challenges of a new pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia; the future of a viable Palestinian state and a secure Israel; reform and dissent in the Gulf states; a newly confident Turkey playing a greater role and, perhaps most significantly of all, the challenge of Iran - riven between domestic discontent and regional ambition.

As the situation evolves over the coming months CMEC will continue to lead Conservative thinking on the Middle East. *The Arab Spring*: *Implications for British Policy* brings together an outstanding group of expert authors, and I am extremely grateful to all of them.

CHAPTER ONE

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Eugene Rogan

Eugene Rogan is Director of the Middle East Centre at St Antony's College, University of Oxford. His BA in economics is from Columbia, and his MA and PhD in Middle Eastern history are from Harvard. He is author of *The Arabs: A History (Penguin, 2009)*, which is being translated in nine languages and was named one of the best books of 2009 by *The Economist, The Financial Times,* and *The Atlantic Monthly.*

There is no consensus on what to call the revolutionary movements that have spread across the Middle East and North Africa in 2011. Drawing on Eastern European precedents, many in the West refer to the 'Arab Spring'. People in the Arab world prefer to speak of an 'Arab Awakening,' an expression with clear antecedents in the social, national, constitutional and even Islamic modernist reforms of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whatever we call the movement, it is clear that the Arab world has reached a historic turning point. The rejection of autocracy that began in 2011 is very likely to sweep the region, and very unlikely to be reversed.

There is a tendency to talk about the Arab Spring as though it were a monolithic phenomenon. It is true that many of the national uprisings have common features. The demonstrations are largely driven by younger citizens, using cell phones and social networking websites to circumvent state controls. There is no visible leadership in many of these essentially grass roots movements. They use the same slogans and tactics as Arab citizens in other countries, learning from the successes of revolutionary movements in other Arab countries.

Yet the experiences of each Arab state have been distinct. In some countries the military defected from the regime (Tunisia and Egypt) while in others part or all of the military has stayed loyal to the president (Libya, Yemen and Syria). Some rebels have succeeded in 'liberating' parts of cities (Tahrir Square in Cairo, Pearl Square in Manama, the University quarter in Sanaa), or in the case of Libya, whole parts of the country. The Syrian authorities have prevented protesters from establishing any such liberated enclaves. While it would appear each popular uprising began as a strictly domestic affair, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), led by Saudi Arabia, intervened in Bahrain and NATO intervened in Libya.

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Arab Republics and monarchies have had very different experiences in 2011. While the republics have faced revolutionary movements seeking the overthrow of the regime, the monarchies have pursued a number of strategies to forestall revolutionary action.

By September 2011, the revolutionary wave had overturned the governments of Tunisia and Egypt. Though Colonel Gadhafi remains at large at time of writing, his regime has been effectively overthrown, and the international community is increasingly recognising the interim Transitional National Council as the de facto government of Libya. Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh's surprise return to Sanaa after convalescence in Saudi Arabia has done little to calm the conflict between his supporters and protesters. The longer he delays the transition to a new political order, the deeper the political vacuum he leaves in that divided country. Only Syria has so far withstood the pressure of popular demonstrations calling for the overthrow of the regime, though Assad's growing isolation and the persistence of nation-wide protests can give his government little hope of survival in the long run. These five partial or complete revolutions represent the most remarkable accomplishments of the Arab Awakening and a total redrafting of the political map of the region.

Among Arab republics, only Algeria, Lebanon, Iraq and Sudan have thus far been spared the threat of a revolution (though each has witnessed popular protests in 2011). These very different states share certain common traits. Each has suffered from intense civil conflict in the recent past that might make their citizens more cautious in challenging the status quo. And, aside from General Omar Bashir, who has ruled Sudan since 1989, none is ruled by the sort of autocratic ruler with dynastic tendencies as governed Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Syria. Yet it is hard to see how even these countries (and we might add the Palestinian Authority to this list, even though it is not formally a state) will long remain immune to the pressures for political reform that are sweeping the region.

The experience of 2011 has been quite different in the Arab monarchies from that of the republics. Among Arab monarchies, the oil rich states of the Persian Gulf faced different challenges, and pursued very different strategies, from Morocco and Jordan, which lack the oil resources to spend their way out of trouble.

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The Arab Gulf states have responded to region-wide demands for accountable government and political freedoms by increased spending on job creation and benefits for their citizens. Some of the smaller Gulf states, like Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE, with wealthier, largely satisfied citizens, have watched events in 2011 from the sidelines. In Oman, Sultan Qaboos responded to labour protests in Sohar and Salaleh by increasing wages, expanding social benefits and pledging to create 50,000 new jobs – measures that by the end of May had stabilised the country's disorders. The Saudi government responded to internal dissent by announcing nearly $11 billion in spending on jobs and benefits for young and unemployed citizens. King Abdullah even pledged to open participation in municpal elections to woman, and allow women to be appointed to the advisory Shura Council, as part of a new reform agenda. The calculus seems to have been that, by increasing the number of citizens with a stake in the status quo, the oil-rich Gulf states could snuff the protest movement before it spread like wild fire.

The situation proved quite different in Bahrain. When the island state's Shia majority demanded political reforms, the protests set off alarm bells in the other conservative Gulf monarchies – particularly in Saudi Arabia. Fears of Iranian influence among Shia in the Arab Gulf states and the threat of revolutionary movements in other Gulf states drove a Saudi-led intervention that has repressed the reform movement without addressing any of its demands.

Government spending in Oman and Saudi Arabia, and repression in Bahrain, have brought short term stability to the states. However, none of these measures are sustainable in the long run. All states in the region recognise that they will need to embark on reform movements to satisfy citizen demands for more accountability and broader public participation in government and law-making. This would mean an evolution towards constitutional monarchy to forestall revolution. But at what pace?

Morocco and Jordan are resource poor monarchies that have responded to the challenges of 2011 by initiating constitutional reforms. Both have announced measures to promote the independence of the judiciary, to establish an elected government with the prime minister chosen by the electorate rather than the monarch, and a legislature with genuine law-making powers. By such means, King Abdullah II of Jordan and King Mohammad VI of Morocco have managed to prevent isolated demonstrations from coalescing into revolutionary movements within their borders.

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Yet reforms in Morocco and Jordan seem to have raised concerns in the oil-rich monarchies of the Gulf as too much, too fast. Were Jordanians and Moroccans to enjoy a full constitutional monarchy, citizens of Gulf monarchies would grow dissatisfied under continued absolute rule. These concerns might well explain Saudi Arabia's extraordinary invitation to Morocco and Jordan to join the GCC, in a move that would turn a regional alliance into a conservative club of kings. While Jordan expressed clear interest in the invitation, Morocco seemed unlikely to accept, and to date no progress has been made in either country's accession to the GCC.

The Arab Awakening has started a process of change that will extend well beyond 2011. Demands for political change will continue in all countries in the region, though change will come at a different pace across North Africa, the Middle East and Arabian Peninsula, according to the specific conditions in each country. While it will take time for democratic forms of government to evolve, it is clear that the Arab world has rejected autocracy and seeks the right to choose and change its leadership by peaceful means. In some countries Islamists may well come to power, but if anything the movements of 2011 have shown the continued importance of secular political actors.

Those countries that achieve the highest degree of political freedoms will serve as the role model for others. Yet the ultimate test facing the new governments in the Arab world will be to provide for the needs of their citizens. The new Arab governments will be judged by their success in fostering economic growth, job creation, and the provision of key services like health, education and housing. Given the Great Recession in the global economy, the real challenge facing the revolutionary leadership of the Arab world will be meeting the expectations of their own citizens.

The British government has played an active role in regional affairs throughout the Arab Spring. The UK has thrown its support behind popular movements for democratic change in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria, has worked with EU and regional partners to try and resolve the crisis in Yemen, and played a key role in the NATO intervention in Libya. Yet, as recognised at the G8 Summit in Deauville, the real challenge will be to assist in investment and job creation in post-revolutionary states in the Middle East and North Africa. Given the real constraints on British aid resources in a time of across the board cuts in spending, it will be all the more important for the UK to work with its regional allies to assist the Arab world to achieve growth and stability in the aftermath of revolution.

CHAPTER TWO

TUNISIA: THE TRAILBLAZER AND THE BENCHMARK

Michael J. Willis

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The startling wave of protests, uprisings and revolutions that have swept across the Arab world during 2011 have left policy-makers, analysts and academics alike struggling to make sense of the tumultuous series of events whose pace seems to continue unabated. Most attention has come to rest, inevitably, on those countries that have experienced and continue to experience the greatest amount of turmoil and bloodshed, mainly Libya and Syria. Very little coverage, however, is now given to the country in which the whole dramatic chain of events began – Tunisia. Despite attracting intense international attention during the heady days that followed the toppling of President Zine al-Abdine Ben Ali in January, Tunisia has almost entirely slipped from the world's headlines as global attention has shifted elsewhere. Tunisia is, nevertheless, still deserving of wider attention for a number of important reasons. Most notably, as the place from which all the other revolts and revolutions have explicitly taken their lead, Tunisia has become something of a trailblazer and thus sets itself as the potential benchmark for what most of those protesting on the streets of the region from Cairo to Misrata, Manama and Homs seek to achieve.

So what has happened in Tunisia since President Ben Ali fled the country on 14 January? In common with most revolutions, Tunisia has undergone a fairly turbulent period as the country has struggled to establish a post-revolutionary political system but is making steady and impressive progress towards what is looking likely to be a recognisably democratic system. In broad terms, this process has taken the form of a progressive purging of the interim government set up in the wake of Ben Ali's departure, with recurrent street protests forcing the government to dismiss and replace former loyalists of the deposed president. The interim government, now made up of a patchwork of technocrats, former and retired ministers, and a sprinkling of members of civil society, is now trying to put together the structures of a new political system.

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The work of the interim government has been hampered by the political vacuum it has been obliged to work in, the lack of defined legitimacy it enjoyed and divisions between moderates and radicals about how deep purges of former regime figures should go. In an effort to overcome these problems, a body - given the less than snappy title of 'The Council of the Higher Authority for the Achievement of the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition' - was constructed from the political parties, civil society and the great and the good to work with the formal government.

Consensus between the interim government and the Council has been reached to arrange a national election to select a constituent assembly that will itself draw up a new constitution for the country. After some initial delays, the election for this assembly has now been fixed for 23 October and it is expected that the elections to the representative institutions it will draw up as part of the new constitution will be held between six and twelve months after that.

The methodical care with which Tunisia is approaching its post-revolutionary transition is therefore striking and reflective of both the high levels of education in the country and the long-established legal and constitutional traditions it prides itself on. Tunisians like to point out that Tunisia was the first country in the Arab world to adopt a formal written constitution back in the nineteenth century.

This is not to say that there are not potential pitfalls ahead or that there are not concerns and anxieties about the future. Many Tunisians are understandably unnerved by the political vacuum that currently exists in the country, with none of the unelected interim institutions enjoying demonstrable legitimacy, and the uncertainty and potential instability that this engenders. There is inevitable concern about the outcome of the forthcoming elections to the constituent assembly that will decide the future political direction of the country. Fears that the Assembly may be dominated by hardline Islamists or by former members of the deposed regime are particularly prominent. The likelihood of either of these outcomes is, however, limited.

The main Islamist party, Al-Nahda, will probably emerge as the largest single party but will likely fall well short of a majority of both the vote and seats in the assembly. The party has made it clear that it wants to establish a 'National Unity' government with as many other parties as possible in the wake of the elections to achieve the broadest possible consensus on the transition.

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Moreover, having long been the most thoughtful and moderate major Islamist movement in the Arab world, the party has fully committed itself to pluralist democracy, has endorsed Tunisia's established liberal social framework and legislation and has pledged not to field a candidate in any forthcoming presidential election. Senior figures in the party stress that the establishment of a fully democratic system is very much in Al-Nahda's own interest: its legal safeguards guaranteeing protection from the savage oppression the party suffered under the previous regime.

As one senior party figure has argued: 'We suffered the most under the Ben Ali dictatorship and therefore have no desire to establish another undemocratic system that may one day be turned against us. In a democracy the worst that can happen to you is that you are out of power for a while and you have to wait until it is your turn again.' Liberal and secularist groups have understandable concerns about the socially conservative views articulated by some members of Al-Nahda, but the party's commitment to civil liberties and democratic processes makes it closer to mainstream socially conservative parties in established liberal democracies, such as the CSU in Germany, than anything more troublingly radical.

Worries that the regime may reassert itself through the elections are also probably overstated. Although significant pockets of old regime figures remain in areas of the government administration, they do not seem to be exercising a dominating influence. The former ruling party, the RCD, was formally dissolved and banned in March and anyone who held a senior position within it over the past decade is now barred from running in the upcoming elections. Unlike the Baath party in Iraq or the Nazi party in Germany, the RCD had no identifiable ideology which could unite its supporters who were primarily attracted mainly by the huge patronage it was able to dispense. With that patronage now gone, there is nothing to hold former supporters together. It is possible that a technocratic party representing the former administrative class may emerge but this is likely to have a democratic orientation and agenda in tune with the overwhelming public mood.

There are other substantial challenges that Tunisia faces. The economy is a major concern. Its weaknesses and imbalances were masked by the previous regime and have been worsened by the, hopefully temporary, collapse in tourism to the country and the strains of dealing with the influx of refugees from neighbouring Libya. Maintaining the confidence and trust of a population used to living in a police state is another challenge. Recurrent street demonstrations indicate the fears of many younger Tunisians that they and their views might be excluded from the revolution they spearheaded, as elite politicians in the capital carve up the political pie between themselves.

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In spite of all of this, the prognosis for Tunisia remains generally positive. The revolution has already transformed the country in many encouraging ways. Political debate, effectively outlawed under Ben Ali, is flourishing in the press, television and in the streets and cafés as Tunisians debate their political future. The overwhelming majority of Tunisians are deeply proud of the revolution. There is particular pride that they, as one of the smallest countries in the Arab world, overturned not only an entrenched dictator but also many of the prevailing assumptions that the outside world – particularly Europe and the United States - had about the Arab world.

Five of these now discredited assumptions stand out. Firstly, that authoritarian regimes in the region were inherently stable. Secondly, that democracy and democratic aspirations were unsustainable in the Arab world because ordinary populations were culturally inclined to authoritarian rule. Thirdly, that any mass organised opposition to the ruling regimes would invariably be Islamist and undemocratic in nature. Fourthly, that the demands and interests of populations in the region were fundamentally different from those elsewhere. Finally, that any meaningful political change would have to be initiated from outside of the region by external actors.

Tunisia now seeks a new relationship with the outside world. Under the previous regime, Ben Ali had sought, and largely secured, international support by portraying himself as a modern, secular friend of the West and a staunch ally in the 'War on Terror.' Like most other authoritarian figures in the region, he played up the threat of Al Qaeda whilst dismissing concerns about democracy and human rights as inhibiting his ability to combat radical Islamism and irrelevant to the economic development of the country.

This approach brought Ben Ali strong support in southern Europe especially France which became Tunisia's main ally. Tunisia's post-revolutionary leaders are now looking to break with this pattern and diversify the country's foreign relationships. Britain is seen as particularly important in this regard: being a member of the EU and NATO, a significant trading partner and using the international language of English. Moreover, a number of now senior political figures in Tunisia spent their political exile in Britain during Ben Ali's rule and are not only grateful for the protection they were given, but also came to admire Britain and its way of life and are keen to strengthen and develop ties between Britain and the new Tunisia.

It is hoped that trade and investment in the country will expand as investors are attracted by the benefits of a well-educated workforce and reduced levels of corruption following the departure of the notoriously venal Ben Ali and his family.

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Many Tunisians also hope that at least part of the country's sizeable international debt may be written off given the fact that it was largely accrued under and by the dictatorship of Ben Ali and would provide a much needed boost to the struggling Tunisian economy and increase the chances of Tunisia making a smooth and full transition to functioning democracy.

The outside world also has compelling reasons to take an interest in and support Tunisia's political transition. Not only does Tunisia provide an important benchmark and example for the rest of the Arab world to follow, but can also play a more vital strategic role in the region. The final collapse of the regime of Muammar Gadhafi in Libya, whilst nearly universally welcomed, is fraught with many more potential dangers than the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt given the country's geography, history and the violence that accompanied the end of the regime.

Tunisia now stands to play a vital stabilising role in Libya. Family and economic ties between Tunisia and especially Libya's more populous western region have traditionally been strong and have been further strengthened by the presence of one million Libyan refugees during the civil war, the Tunisians' reception of whom was one of the most impressive but untold stories of the conflict. In the past, leaders of both countries occasionally dreamed of bringing together Tunisia's educated population and developed institutions with Libya's oil wealth to produce a prosperous and dynamic force in the region. It remains entirely possible that cooperation between the new rulers of both countries, who supported each other's revolutions, can, with help, turn this dream into a reality.

CHAPTER THREE

EGYPT: TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

Tariq Ramadan

Tariq Ramadan is Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at the University of Oxford. He also teaches at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Qatar, Mundiapolis University in Morocco and is a Senior Research Fellow at Doshisha University, Japan. Educated at Al-Azhar and the University of Geneva, he writes prolifically on the Middle East, and the role of Islam.

Some call it the 'Arab Spring', others, the 'Arab Revolutions'; still others, more cautious, use the neutral term 'Arab uprisings'. It remains difficult to ascertain, and to assess, what has happened and is actually happening in the Middle East. An irreversible shift is clearly underway but no one is able to pinpoint exactly what is going on in these mass protests or to predict their ultimate outcome.

There is every reason for hope and optimism in Egypt as well as in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The Arab populations are on the march towards freedom, dignity, justice and democracy. They are determined to gain their political independence and have set their sights on modernity and democracy. 'History is unfolding' says American president Barack Obama. Hundreds of political analysts have predicted a 'happier future'. This is good news: the Arab world is awakening.

The courage and the determination of the people of Egypt were impressive. The dictator has fled; the way towards true and transparent democracy is open. It is now time to implement the basic and immutable principles: rule of law, equal citizenship, universal suffrage, accountability and the separation of powers. Domestic debates have begun in Egypt over the content of the constitution, political parties, elections, etc. Never before, over the last century at least, has such positive social and political energy been so powerfully felt. We are witnessing what may well be the birth of true political independence, even though everything still remains fragile and uncertain.

The ongoing debates in Egypt between the secular trends and the Islamists are tense and worrying. It is as if, since the departure of Mubarak, nothing has changed. Both were united in resisting the dictator, they have succeeded and now they are entering a new delicate stage where it is important to build together not only to resist.

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Yet, these old trends are again falling into the historical trap: neglecting the main common issues (economic stability, education, the role of the army, etc). The secularists and the Islamists are fighting against each other in the name of their respective historical and religious legitimacy. Both the secularists and the Islamists (the Muslim Brothers) are facing internal divisions and the political landscape is severely fractured. Nobody can predict what is going to happen and the army is still playing a critical role behind the scenes. Visiting Egypt recently, the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan pushed the leaders to look beyond these distorted debates and to opt for democracy without being scared of secularism. He created even more controversies among the Islamists.

One should indeed remain guardedly optimistic for these historical changes are not happening in a vacuum. They cannot be isolated from either economic realities or the geostrategic environment. The economic situation in Egypt is grave; there can be no true democratic process without economic stability. But when we analyse events in the light of Western—and especially American and European—strategy, we are tempted to revise, or at least to suspend, our judgment. Political independence can only be achieved with economic reforms that lead not only to stability but also to economic independence.

However, we appear to be heading in the opposite direction: the new US and European involvement in MENA – putting aside decades of support for and complicity with the dictatorship – will deepen Egypt's economic dependency. Western states may prioritise their view of Egypt as a market with great profit potential, rather than as a state in the process of democratisation. This has always been the case, but now the World Bank and the IMF in the post-revolutionary era are also setting up structures of ideological and economic dependency beneath a veneer of democratic freedoms. For the poor countries of the Global South, the adjective 'liberal' does not mean the same thing as it does in the West, whether to describe 'democracy' or 'the economy': the former might come close to 'liberty', but the latter implies inevitable subjugation.

Are we witnessing an unfinished Egyptian political revolution wedded to economic regression? Will the country involved end up as 'controlled' democracy? Or will the revolution continue? These questions are reinforced when we look to the situation in the wider region. The so-called international community praises Tunisia and Egypt, while the oppressed populations of Syria, Yemen and Bahrain seem almost forgotten.

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How are we to explain why the Libyan opposition (including so many new leaders who were previously among the strongest supporters of the dictator Gadhafi) is receiving such unconditional assistance in removing the regime, as NATO forces bomb Tripoli daily? The mass protests and the blood being shed by the newly re-categorised Arabs do not have the same quality and value.

Egypt, even with apparent democratic procedures in place, remains under economic and military control. The regional economic and geostrategic stakes are very high. New forms of dependency are being established and must be taken into account. To provide autonomy and justice, true and effective political and economic reforms require a deep shift in relations between MENA and the United States and the European countries. There are new actors to be invited to participate in regional dynamics. Relying on South-South political and economic partnerships, the future must involve the active participation of the South American countries, Turkey (Prime Minister Erdogan visited with two hundred businessmen), China, Malaysia and even India. There will be no effective 'Arab spring' unless the centre of gravity of the international political and economic order can be shifted both southward and eastward. No one knows when such a shift might take place, but there are indications that it may already be underway. The regional uprising might well presage further upheavals, this time at the international level.

For geopolitical and security reasons, not to mention the Israel-Palestine conflict, it would appear that true and transparent democracy, free of corruption and manipulation, is not on the immediate agenda for Egypt. Everything will be kept under control even if a more open regime than Mubarak's were to emerge. The people will decide whether to keep up the fight for its rights and its dignity. From our vantage point in the West, our obligation is to follow closely and lend our support to popular movements in Africa, North Africa, the Middle East and Asia as they reject dictatorship and repression and seek to live free.

CHAPTER FOUR

SIX LESSONS FROM LIBYA

Shashank Joshi

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The war in Libya has been an unqualified military success: the dissolution of a forty-year tyranny has been achieved with 8,000 strike sorties, comparably negligible civilian casualties, and minimal damage to infrastructure – all within six months.

The following six lessons temper and qualify that assessment in important ways.

LESSON 1: LIBYA MAY BE *SUI GENERIS*

Three conditions enabled the war: legality (from the UN Security Council), legitimacy (from regional bodies, principally the Arab League) and opportunity (Libya's indigenous uprising and the regime's military weakness). Charles Moore, writing in The Telegraph, infers that 'a defensible position about intervention, especially intervention in the Muslim world, is being built up.'

But it must be understood that these conditions are unlikely to recur for generations. A consensus may develop around action in weak sub-Saharan countries outside the Arab world and outside the Chinese sphere of influence, but even these may not escape a Security Council veto.

LESSON 2: LIBYA DOES NOT REPRESENT A NEW MILITARY MODEL

The early phases of bombing greatly degraded the regime's strength but had little strategic effect. Only when the campaign adopted the so-called 'Afghan model' – the injection of special forces, enabling close air support to indigenous ground forces, in addition to the equipping and training of rebels – did the military stalemate break down.

Extrapolating this 'model' to other conflicts would be dangerous. Western states used the rebel stronghold of Benghazi as a staging point for supply and direct liaison with rebels. By contrast, one of the greatest mistakes made in rendering assistance to the anti-Soviet mujahedeen in Afghanistan was to do so through Pakistan's intelligence service, precluding accountability. Working through proxies carries great risks, some of which cannot be mitigated as they were in this case.

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LESSON 3: LIBYA IS NOT IRAQ

The Transitional National Council's (TNC) planning for the aftermath exceeded that which was undertaken by allied forces in 2003. Many of its decisions – such as preserving the regime's police forces and bureaucracy – reflect lessons learnt eight years ago. Tripoli has avoided mass civil disorder and systematic reprisals against loyalists. Public utilities are being restored rapidly. That this has been done with a negligible Western footprint makes it all the more durable.

Libya's post-conflict fragility does present risks. Loose stocks of small arms, Grad rockets, ballistic missiles, and portable anti-aircraft weapons are severe proliferation risks. SA7 anti-aircraft missiles have reached Mali and are likely to enter Algeria, both countries in which Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has been active. The cross-border flow of weapons would also destabilise Tunisia and Egypt just as they enter sensitive periods of post-revolution transition.

But in the longer-term, there are also reasons for cautious optimism.

- The transitional authorities are experienced bureaucrats. Their draft constitution is an impeccably liberal document that goes as far as to bar members of the TNC from standing for subsequent election.
- Islamist militias are playing important roles, but they have little resemblance to the warlord-led groupings of 1990s Afghanistan; key members have indicated that they will acquiesce to a parliamentary process.
- In Egypt and Tunisia, powerful and independent national armies might – as has historically occurred in Turkey or Pakistan – limit the transition to democracy. Libya lacks such a constraint. More broadly, Libya is an institutional *tabula rasa* – a situation of high risk, but also considerable opportunity.
- Oil export revenues, in concert with a small population, mean that Libya's per capita income is five times higher than Egypt – and the return of the skilled diaspora community will greatly boost human capital.
- NATO's aversion to 'shock and awe' tactics, and the extreme accuracy of its urban bombing, means that Libyan infrastructure is in comparably good shape.

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LESSON 4: NATO IS UNDER STRESS

The Libyan campaign did not cause, but did bring to the fore, the erosion of the alliance's cohesion.

- Two states at the heart of NATO vigorously opposed its use in Libya. Germany abstained on UN Resolution 1973 and then pulled its crews out of jointly-owned NATO AWACS aircraft. Turkey, whose foreign policy is shifting toward building influence in the Arab world rather than Europe, denounced intervention as an oil grab. Out of 28 NATO members, 14 committed military assets but just eight were prepared to fly ground-attack sorties.
- More broadly, of NATO's European members only France, Britain and Greece are spending the requisite two percent of GDP on military spending. Over the past two years, European defence spending has shrunk by $45 billion (equivalent to Germany's military budget).
- The US' refusal to lead operations and commit unique capabilities (like ground attack aircraft) had benefits – it forced European leadership and lessened popular Arab opposition to Western action. But, as former US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates warned during the war, it portends a 'dim if not dismal future' for an alliance seen as increasingly irrelevant in Washington.

LESSON 5: PLUMBING MATTERS

British defence debates in the UK have focused on big-ticket items, such as Harrier jets or aircraft carriers. This obscures the integrated nature of modern warfare, which relies on the less prominent but no less vital 'plumbing' of war, encompassing support capabilities like intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance as well as refuelling aircraft.

The war has shown that European forces simply cannot project power without American support.

- The US supplied 30 out of the 40 aerial tankers on which strike missions, flown from Italy, depended.
- It supplied nearly all the cruise missiles for suppressing Libya's air defence systems, whereas Britain came close to running out of Brimstone missiles and used perhaps a third of its Tomahawk missiles.
- US electronic warfare aircraft protected and guided European strike missions.

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SIX LESSONS FROM LIBYA

These are not optional extras – they are necessary conditions of prosecuting an expeditionary war. Other uniquely American capabilities, like battlefield imagery from satellites and armed drones, were crucial to the assault on Tripoli.

For some of these support tasks, Britain drew on assets – like Sentinel reconnaissance aircraft and Sea King helicopters – that are due to be retired. This raises the question: is the UK content to assume that US scaffolding will always support British military operations, or are there plausible scenarios in which independent action might be required? Libya has shown the possibilities of cooperation with new allies like Qatar, whose special forces were active in frontline roles. Yet only the US can underwrite a major campaign.

LESSON 6: KEEP THINGS LIBYAN

Libya is a strategic backwater containing no vital British interests. But its collapse would be detrimental to British security and prosperity – by creating welcome space for international terrorists, pushing a flood of migrants to Europe, and generating prolonged insecurity in energy markets at a time of economic vulnerability. Libya's best prospects for stability lie in a government that is perceived as legitimate.

Britain should continue providing assistance in a low-key way that ensures Libyan ownership of the revolution. French and Italian ministers have already publicly articulated expectations that they ought to benefit from commercial and energy deals. Such statements are enormously damaging to the transitional authorities. An indigenous political opposition is one of Libya's greatest assets. It will be delegitimised by the appearance of non-transparent quid pro quos or unacceptable foreign influence. The unelected TNC is already facing political competition from local groups such as the Islamist-led 'Tripoli council' or the (non-Arab) Berber minority that played a decisive role in the fighting.

European powers should coordinate as much as they can to avoid a counter-productive struggle for influence at the expense of the stability of the interim authorities.

CHAPTER FIVE

SYRIA: REVOLUTION AND REPRESSION

Marwa Daoudy

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CONTEXT: ARAB SPRING

Two outcomes have emerged from the recent Arab Spring. On the one hand, the cultural paradigm erected by neo-Orientalists has proven to be blatantly wrong. No one can argue anymore that inherent features of the Arab and Islamic cultures make them incompatible with democratic values. Massive popular protests have shaken the region since the dramatic suicide of Mohammed Bouazizi in Tunisia; they have remained non-violent, secular, and focused on dignity, social justice and freedom. On the other hand, the successful revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia have been clear rejections of the failed war-imposed 'democratisation' projects which have led to the destruction of a country such as Iraq.

SOCIAL JUSTICE, FREEDOM, DIGNITY AND HUMAN SECURITY

In the case of Syria, the regime's response to five months of popular uprising was to opt for survival strategy: responding by violence and threatening the population with chaos and civil war in the event of its demise. The objective was to launch a war of attrition by playing on time to wear out any internal revolt. It chose however the wrong combination of brutal repression and gradual concessions. The result was a crisis of confidence which was too deep to be overcome by mere calls for national dialogue and reform. The death toll is estimated at 2,700 civilian casualties (including hundreds of children), and 500 members of the security services.

BACKGROUND: FAILED REFORMS

Bashar al-Assad's personal popularity since 2000 had also allowed the regime to limit the scope of internal reforms and preserve the power of the security services over society. The 'Chinese model' of neo-liberal economic shift with no political reform was adopted in 2005.

The liberalisation of the economy followed steady progress with public-private partnerships in the oil and transport sectors; private banks, media and universities were legalised, and more space allocated to the private sector.

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However, no defined policy or adequate tools were adopted. The Baath Party and secret services were given increased power in administrative and economic decisions, and new monopolies controlled and established by governmental elites. Further crackdowns were carried out on intellectuals, activists and the private press.

As a consequence, Syria remains a developing country with a weak economy and poor results in sectors such as housing, education and employment. One third of the Syrian population lives on two dollars a day or less; 65 percent are under the age of thirty; and food insecurity and youth unemployment are major problems. Events have unfolded dramatically since mid-March. The trigger was the arbitrary imprisonment and torture in the small town of Deraa of school children for drawing graffiti inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions.

TODAY

The situation has now reached a stalemate. Neither side appears to be able to defeat the other. Protests are rallying major urban and rural centres, including Damascus and Aleppo in the last weeks, Hama, Homs, Lattakia, the Idlib province, and continue to be met with massive military assaults and house to house arrests. The cities of Homs, Hama and Deir ez-Zor have been brutally besieged by the regime's armed forces; about 400 civilian casualties have fallen since the start of the holy month of Ramadan in early August. In Deir ez-Zor, the regime was met with strong resistance by local tribesmen, including the leading Baqqara tribe who joined the opposition movements.

Besides sporadic demonstrations, most people in Damascus and Aleppo have remained silent, waiting to see the turn of events. The country's economy has suffered considerably with the drastic decrease in tourism and external trade. And pressures on the regime from within the business community are expected to grow in the coming months.

WAY FORWARD

Events can turn in any direction and the next months will be crucial. A long-term and responsible vision is much needed at this stage to prepare for sustainable and peaceful transition. To secure legitimacy, the opposition movements will need to focus on the internal front. A combination of backward and forward looking approaches could help in establishing a viable new regime. The battle can be won from the inside while preserving the country from chaos and insecurity in an inclusionary rather than exclusionary process.

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All religious and ethnic components of the population, including the Alawite community, should be included in the process. Syria is one of the few states remaining in the region which has successfully managed to build a secular state with a strong national identity transcending ethnic or religious affiliations. So far, protestors have remarkably resisted the regime's attempts at framing the unrest along confessional lines, by calling for national unity. Minorities, such as Christians, Alawites and Druze, continue to actively contribute to the uprisings in the provinces of Deraa, Homs and other parts of the country. Defections from lower ranks of the army are also increasingly reported.

The defected officers and soldiers appear to have constituted a Free Syrian Army. If given guarantees for the post-revolution phase, the 1200 Alawite officers with hundreds of men under their command could be drawn in the transitional phase leading to political pluralism and the rule of law; otherwise, they might resist to the bitter end.

Prosecution should be sought against the ones who have perpetrated crimes. But the bulk of the army (with approximately 200,000 soldiers and officers) will need to somehow be integrated. All this presumes that control of military and security affairs is effectively handed over to civilian rule in the transition to democracy.

GEOSTRATEGIC ORIENTATION

Having improved coordination and strengthened its outreach, the Syrian opposition still remains scattered and weakened by struggles of power and ideological differences. A significant step forward was reached with the establishment of a Syrian National Council, including several respected opposition figures under the presidency of a highly respected Paris-based academic, Dr Burhan Ghalioun. Whilst some members of the Syrian opposition now openly state their will to distance themselves from the Iran-Hezbollah nexus, this choice is not shared by all.

Many Syrians consider Egypt, Turkey and Iran as their natural partners in the region for the future. The regime has indeed lost any internal legitimacy previously drawn from its foreign policy but the Syrian population would not settle for any foreign policy realignment which would not secure the full return to Syrian sovereignty of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

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EXTERNAL ACTORS: NO MILITARY INTERVENTION

International condemnation and continuous scrutiny of the repression is much needed to mobilise and increase pressure over the regime. An oil embargo and ban on European investment in the Syrian energy sector have been decided by the United States and the European Union. With 95 percent of Syrian oil exports usually ending in European countries, this latest move will be felt harder in Syria than the previous, largely symbolic, US ban on Syrian oil imports or earlier European sanctions on the assets of regime figures.

Wider energy sanctions to strangle and weaken the Assad regime however are ill-advised as they imply collective punishment of a population already under severe economic and political hardship. Foreign military intervention is also firmly rejected by the majority of the Syrian population and opposition movements. Local Coordination Committees have asked, at most, that the international community dispatch international human rights monitors to prevent any further massacres.

Syrians are now extremely worried about the fragility of their country and the dangers that lurk around the corner. Being in a web of strategic networks, the consequences of instability and insecurity in Syria would potentially be far-reaching. On the regional level, the discredited US-sponsored Middle East peace process has entrenched occupation in the Palestinian Occupied Territories and failed to reach any viable agreement between Israel, the Palestinians and Syria.

The British Government now has a unique opportunity to start a new chapter and act as an 'honest' peace broker in collaboration with the European Union and the United States. New partnerships should be reached with the region's populations to strengthen emerging democracies and develop what should be perceived from the region as balanced economic and strategic relationships. This would pave the way towards effective and lasting regional stability.

CHAPTER SIX

YEMEN'S YOUTH REVOLUTION

Kate Nevens

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Yemenis, like the rest of the world, watched with baited breath as they witnessed Egypt's Hosni Mubarak being swept from power in a wave of mass protests. Within hours of Mubarak's departure, thousands had gathered in cities across Yemen announcing a peaceful revolution against their own president of 33 years, Ali Abdullah Saleh. Another domino, it seemed, was set to fall.

Yet in the weeks and months that have passed since the Yemeni revolution began, the President's regime has clung on and the protestors have faced sporadic and increasingly ferocious crackdowns. Thousands of Yemenis have been killed and injured as Saleh's security forces target them with snipers, tear gas, batons, swords, water cannons and, most recently, shelling and rocket-propelled grenades.

In early June, Saleh was badly wounded in an attack on his presidential palace and evacuated to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment. Authority was nominally transferred to the vice-president, Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi. The GCC, together with the US, UK and others have been working hard to try and negotiate a more conclusive transfer of power, but to date, Saleh and Saleh's family remain very much in the game, proving their reputation for political brinkmanship. In Saleh's absence, the presidential palace has been occupied by his son, Ahmed Ali, and his three nephews, Yahia, Amar and Tariq - who also happen to control Yemen's elite security and intelligence units.

President Saleh's divide-and-rule policy has left Yemen the poorest country in the Middle East, and the protracted political negotiations and conflicts are taking place against a backdrop of a failing economy, high unemployment rates, mass poverty and hunger. Living conditions are getting worse day by day, and a fuel, water and food crisis – exacerbated by the current political situation but with much deeper structural causes – threatens to induce a nationwide humanitarian disaster.

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YOUTH AND THE DRIVE FOR A CIVIC STATE

At its peak in early May, the protest camp in the capital Sana'a covered approximately a square mile, housing over 10,000 people. Probably around half of the camp's residents represent Yemen's youth movement, a vibrant grouping of young pro-democracy activists who see themselves as unaffiliated to any traditional political alliance, organising coalitions but so far shunning the idea of nominating leaders or forming political parties.

The youth are well networked across the country, with a presence in all Yemen's major cities, leading marches and sit-ins. While inspired by the Arab Spring, the youth are in fact expressing long-standing grievances about corruption, weak and illegitimate governance, and lack of political and economic opportunities in Yemen.

The youth's demands are not limited to the removal of the current regime: the call is for a comprehensive change to the entire political structure of Yemen, a move away from an elite patronage system headed by the President's family towards a modern civic state. The movement has clear and well articulated goals, set out in a charter by the Civic Coalition of Revolutionary Youth, an umbrella group which brings together Yemen's four main youth organisations. A comprehensive list of demands includes establishing a parliamentarian system in Yemen and adopting an electoral system based on proportionate representation. Their vision, they say, is 'to lay the ground for a civic, modern and democratic state which can interact with the realities of the modern world on the basis of equal citizenship, human rights, social justice, a plural political system, [and] the freedom of expression and opinion.'

ELITE DYNAMICS AND THE POLITICS OF OPPOSITION

The youth protestors share their turf – if not their vision – with Yemen's formal opposition parties and Saleh's elite political rivals, who are also vying for an end to Saleh's regime.

Competition between Yemen's three rival elite factions – Saleh's family, the al-Ahmar family and the now-defected General Ali Mohsen – has been brewing for several years, particularly as Saleh has been concentrating more and more power around his immediate kinsmen. In May, this rivalry came to a head and fighting broke out between Saleh's regime and the al-Ahmar faction, ending abruptly when the president was airlifted to Riyadh. Conflict resumed in September, when Saleh's security forces once again opened fire on protestors and General Ali Mohsen's First Armoured Division fought back. In one of the bloodiest days of the uprising, more than 60 protesters died in the crossfire, with hundreds badly wounded.

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Both the al-Ahmar family, who head the powerful Hashid tribal confederacy, and General Ali Mohsen, once Saleh's closest ally, are aligning themselves with the protest movement. Yet the youth are suspicious of the personal motivations of these 'strong-men' who belong to Yemen's entrenched political system of privileged elites and patronage. For the pro-democracy youth, a mere 'reshuffling' of those at the top would not be a satisfactory outcome for the revolution: what is desired is a new system, not a new face.

Yemen's formal opposition, the Joint Meeting Parties (largely dominated by the Islamic party Islah, of whom Hamid al-Ahmar is a leading figure), are met with similar skepticism and frustration. The established political parties are very much seen as a continution of the old system, out of touch with the needs of the Yemeni people. Confusingly, Islah in particular are present in large numbers in the protests, heavily involved in coordinating protest activities and divisions are appearing within the camps, with different groups setting up separate stages. Many independent youth are concerned that the old parties are trying to co-opt the revolution for personal gain.

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT: THE SEARCH FOR A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT AND A SECURE YEMEN

Yemenis resent the international community for their 'weak' response to the events in their country. They have watched as the UK, US and others have frozen assets and provided assistance to the rebel forces in Libya, imposed sanctions on Syria and made bold(er) and more progressive statements on Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere in the region. Repeated calls from the US State Department for a 'peaceful and orderly transition' in Yemen or an 'impartial investigation into the causes of violence' seem hollow in comparison.

The international community's primary concern in Yemen has in fact been to try and facilitate a political solution to the current crisis. The US and the UK have put their weight behind a GCC-led deal, designed to broker a transfer of power from Saleh to an interim government, schedule elections and give the President and his family immunity from prosecution. After months of almost getting pen to paper, and a number of modifications later, on 12th September Saleh declared that his deputy, Hadi, was authorised to sign. As I write, Saleh has just returned to Yemen and it is still unclear if and how the deal might be enacted.

For the pro-democracy youth, however, the GCC deal was flawed from the outset. Neither the youth, nor other disenfranchised groups in Yemen (such as the Houthi rebels or the southern secessionist movement) were involved in the negotiations or the design

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of the transition plan. It is perceived as an intra-elite deal in which the international community are supporting a transfer of power within current regime elites, rather than a more inclusive political settlement or a more fundamental change to state-society relations.

Another underlying issue for the relationship between the international community and the protest movement is security. The headquarters of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) are located in Yemen, and for the last few years several Western governments have been providing military aid and assistance to Yemen's security and intelligence apparatus - run by President Saleh's son and nephews – to help combat the terror threat. This counterterrorism partnership makes it hard for the West to fully isolate President Saleh and his immediate family – a fact the family are fully aware of. The sons and nephews who have been acting as counterterrorism partners are now leading the crackdowns against protestors. The common perception in Yemen is that, through this support, the Western 'supporters' have helped, and continue to help, Saleh's regime maintain its position in Yemen.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Yemen faces multiple, severe and protracted crises: political, economic and humanitarian. However, the current situation also presents an 'open moment' to create a far more legitimate, responsive and inclusive system of governance. In a speech in April, Yemen's former prime minister and long-time presidential adviser Abdul Kareem Al-Eryani said: 'I believe that the youth revolution has already produced a tremendous change in the political and perhaps social system in Yemen… I think the youth revolution has now succeeded in making change imperative. The change is coming.'

With this in mind, the UK should:

- Realign its desired 'end goal' for Yemen as political legitimacy rather than political stability, and resist the temptation to push for a fast transition process at any cost.
- Support the inclusion of youth and other previously disenfranchised groups in any mediation and negotiation efforts, without requiring them to nominate leaders or conform with externally-determined political models.
- Reassess its relationships with Yemen's traditional power elites and 'strong-men' and ascertain new ways of working on counterterrorism, including seeking local community partners and engaging with underlying grievances at the grassroots level.
- Balance the need for short-term results with the need for long-term strategies which address corruption, employment and equal access to resources for all Yemenis.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GULF STATES: THE CHALLENGE OF REFORM

Salman Shaikh

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Since the nineteenth century, the British have used tribal structures in the Gulf to increase their influence there, negotiating treaties with powerful families and thereby conferring legitimacy upon them. In an effort to solidify these families' control, the British introduced the concept of territorialisation of land, and with that the borders of the modern Arabian Gulf emerged. With the discovery of oil in these territories in the twentieth century, the British were in an ideal position to take advantage of the new situation.

Influential families in the Gulf have retained their power, with families like the Al Khalifa in Bahrain, the Al Sabah in Kuwait, and the Al Nuhayyan in the UAE, having ruled for over 200 years. When the GCC states gained independence in the twentieth century, these historically high-ranking families consolidated their power, largely by strengthening ties with the West and sharing the spoils of massive oil wealth with their citizens. Nonetheless, as described by my Brookings colleague Suzanne Maloney, these states' location at the critical chokepoints of the world's foremost energy transit corridor and in the shadow of historically predatory regional and world powers, has created among them a 'persistent existential insecurity.'

The momentum for change throughout the Middle East has exacerbated this sense of insecurity in the Gulf states. Perhaps in large measure because of their comfortable economic standing due to impressive oil reserves, the GCC kingdoms have seemed more immune to calls for change, though they are increasingly seen to be making concerted attempts to keep the Arab Awakenings at arm's length.

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Indeed, protests outside the Gulf have led to a fundamental realignment of the relationship between the citizen and the state, holding once politically immune leaders responsible for citizens' needs. For Arabs, theirs is a struggle for social justice and personal freedoms. Though many of these protests have been borne out of economic grievances, calls on the street have persistently demanded political reform, particularly more representative systems of government.

Meanwhile, in the Gulf states, pressure is also mounting to redefine the social contract between ruler and ruled. The GCC nations have long been impervious to popular demands, as they have managed to quell unrest by distributing their massive oil wealth to their citizenry. Though some Gulf states have embarked on political reform, the overall response to the Arab Awakenings has been economic, with rulers attempting to expand the rentier system by granting additional financial benefits to citizens. Yet calls for political reform persist.

In Saudi Arabia, the government faces pressure for political and social reform, with small-scale protests taking place in the Shia-dominated Eastern Province and with women demanding social change, particularly the right to drive. Such movements exacerbate age-old tensions between the Kingdom's conservative interior and more cosmopolitan coast. However, with the reform-minded but ageing King Abdullah in decline and the Kingdom facing internal and external threats. The Al Saud family's alliance with the Wahhabi religious establishment, which began in 1744, seems to be stifling political and social reform.

Throughout the Arab Spring, rulers have responded quite disappointingly - from Mubarak to Saleh to Assad - yet the Saudi King Abdullah's 18 March speech was one of the most disappointing. As a relatively popular ruler not threatened by a major political crisis, King Abdullah was well positioned to announce reforms, particularly in granting greater political power to the Shura Council and in the area of education. His speech instead announced a series of payouts totaling $130 billion, mostly to the religious and security establishments. Though the king announced the creation of an anti-corruption body, his speech fell far short of expectations which presumed that a cabinet reshuffle would be announced.

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In the UAE, the second-ever elections for the Federal National Council (FNC) will be held on 24 September. In this year's election, 129,000 people will be allowed to vote, repre-senting a notable expansion from the 6,000 who were granted the vote in the first elections in 2006. Nonetheless, the Emirati government has also attempted to curb political debate, arresting five prominent bloggers who called for greater oversight powers to be given to the FNC and for a more representative government.

In Oman, political changes were announced in response to a spate of protests that began in early February. Among the most significant reforms were granting the consultative Council (Majlis) of Oman legislative and audit powers, in addition to restructuring the Council of Ministers through an extensive reshuffle. In addition, Sultan Qaboos created a new body to manage the country's economy and promised 50,000 additional jobs for citizens, which will cost over $1.3 billion in 2011 alone. However, Qaboos, an absolute monarch who has ruled since 1970, has not taken any steps to grant powers for even low-levels of political activism in the Sultanate.

Kuwait, the GCC nation with the oldest and most powerful parliament, remains stilted and dysfunctional in terms of political decision-making, with various coalitions and ideologies competing for power. In May, thousands protested in Kuwait City, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Mohammed Ahmed Al Sabah, who has been accused of misusing public funds and has refused to come under questioning in parliament. Limited protests were also staged in February among the bidoon, those who live in the country yet do not benefit from the advantages of full citizenship. While protests have not been sustained, political battles have manifested themselves largely within the parliament, making decision-making painfully slow.

In Qatar, while the Emir broke new political ground in 2005 by holding national elections with full suffrage and passing a constitution that guarantees political freedom and the separation of powers, this has still not come in to effect. He has likely been influenced by a widespread belief that citizens are seeking stability in these turbulent times. Instead of enacting reforms, then, the government granted staggering 60 and 120 percent pay hikes to civil servants and defence employees in September, which will add some $8.1 billion to government costs.

Bahrain faces a much bigger crisis than its neighbours, as the Kingdom's political system has been unable to keep pace with demands for representation from its majority Shia population. The government has responded to calls for representation with an iron first and half-hearted attempts at dialogue. Such a government response is radicalising Shia youth, which, as seen elsewhere in the Middle East, could have a destabilising effect on the Kingdom.

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There is an urgent need for a new power-sharing arrangement in Bahrain. If one is not reached, continued conflict, which would further exacerbate regional tensions, particularly between Sunni and Shia and between the GCC and Iran, is likely.

On the regional scale, a Saudi-led GCC has advanced counterrevolutionary efforts, quashing peaceful protests in Bahrain and attempting to include two other Arab kingdoms (Jordan and Morocco) in the council. There are also persistent reports that Saudi Arabia has been providing military assistance to President Saleh's forces in Yemen to aid their violent crackdown on the anti-Saleh protest movement. Such actions have burnished the GCC's image in the region, and its agreement to provide Oman and Bahrain with a $20 billion aid package similar to the Marshall plan shows its tendency to shy away from political change in favour of quick and easy economic disbursements.

Overall, the Gulf states have tended to use economic payouts to stem the tide of popular discontent. In 2011 alone, the GCC nations have committed to spending a whopping $160 billion in payouts, yet it remains to be seen whether this approach is sustainable. While such payouts are currently possible with high oil prices, new Iraqi and Libyan oil will likely stabilise prices, raising questions as to how long Gulf states will be able to sustain such spending. Moreover, there is increasing research evidence to show that oil wealth is no guarantee against internal unrest, despite what leaders may believe.

Events elsewhere in the Middle East have proven the fragility of the status quo. The social contract needs to be reformulated, yet leaders' hesitance to reform has suggested that top-down changes will not be made without outside prompting. It has therefore become urgent for proven friends of the leaderships of Gulf states, such as the UK, in partnership with other allies like the United States, to redouble efforts for political, social, and economic reforms in these states. Mechanisms like the Arab Partnership can facilitate reform in the Gulf, a region which has funds for reform projects yet needs external assistance in formulating them. A reset modern-day social contract between the rulers and their citizens will then become possible.

CHAPTER EIGHT

BAHRAIN: UNRESOLVED DIVISIONS

Jane Kinninmont

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The small state of Bahrain has been less in the media spotlight in recent months, as Western attention has moved on to Libya and Syria. Yet the situation there continues to pose dilemmas for British policymakers, both because of Bahrain's strategic importance, as home to the main US military base in the Gulf and to an important offshore banking industry with close connections to the City, and because the UK seeks to balance serious concerns about human rights and long-term stability with the desire not to alienate a longstanding ally.

The local situation is further complicated by the regional dimension. Bahrain's uprising was driven by longstanding local grievances that go back decades. However, an on-going competition for influence between Iran and Saudi Arabia has contributed to making what is, at heart, a local dispute about the distribution of power and wealth into a sectarian issue with regional ramifications. Moreover, while much has been written about the Iranian angle, the crucial role of Iraq has been neglected. Tensions between the Gulf Arab monarchies, most of which are led by Sunni rulers, and post-Saddam Iraq, with its elected Shia-dominated government, have both contributed to and been exacerbated by this year's crisis in Bahrain. These regional aspects pose additional challenges for a British government seeking to maintain good relations with both the Gulf and Iraq, to contain Iranian influence, and, at the same time, to gain some credibility for its statements of support for democracy in North Africa.

So far, the UK's policy towards the Gulf does not appear to have changed greatly as a result of the Arab spring. Relations between the governments remain close and appear still to be driven largely by commercial imperatives, defence and security cooperation, and longstanding diplomatic alliances. While the UK is placing more emphasis on its relations with 'the people' in Egypt and Tunisia, for instance through civil society outreach and Arab Partnership initiatives, in the Gulf there is scant engagement with civil society and a greater focus on engaging with ruling families, large state enterprises and commercial elites. In the case of Bahrain, while the British government has expressed concerns about this year's crackdown, it has been constrained by pressure from the ruling family and by the strong support that other key Gulf allies, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have lent to the Al Khalifa (the Bahrain ruling family).

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Quietly, however, some differences have emerged - particularly over the role of Iran. Both US and British policymakers (along with others in the West) have said that they do not have any evidence to suggest that Iran was a driver of the protests in Bahrain, other than by providing moral support for the opposition with broadcasts on Iranian TV channels. Meanwhile, the head of the Bahrain Defence Forces, the national army, which has a long history of cooperating with Britain and sending officers for training in Sandhurst, was quoted in an Egyptian newspaper as saying that Iran and the US had conspired together to organise protests in Bahrain.

Incredible as this sounds to British (or American) ears, this conspiracy theory has become fairly widespread among elements of the pro-government Sunni population in Bahrain. It reflects anxieties about the political changes in Iraq since 2003; some in the Gulf, seeing Iran as the main beneficiary of the Iraq war, and being more inclined to accept conspiracy than cock-up (using the tempting but unreliable 'who benefits?' approach to conspiracy theorising), assume the explanation is a deliberate, secret coordination between Iran and the West. Saudi Arabia in particular has struggled to accept the change of government in Iraq. For Bahrain, the rise of a Shia government there is particularly concerning, as Bahrain's Shia majority, which is mostly Arab, has always been more closely connected with Iraqi Shia than with their co-religionists in Iran, a non-Arab country. Religious Shia Bahrainis are more likely to seek spiritual guidance from Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani in Iraq than from Iran's Khamenei. There are also numerous family, business and cultural links.

However, there is a high risk that either Iran or Iraqi militant groups will be able to capitalise on the increased sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shia in Bahrain, and some observers fear that a minority of disaffected young Shia men could seek external support for militant attacks in the future if there is no progress on a peaceful political solution. A turn to violence would probably only set their cause back, but repression and torture may fuel a desire for vengeance.

Within Bahrain itself, the opposition uprising is not over. Protests are no longer taking place in the central business district, but they've been suppressed rather than resolved, and as of September, there were protests and clashes with police on a daily basis in the Shia-majority villages around the capital, with police using tear gas, rubber bullets and sound bombs to disperse crowds. Levels of violence have diminished compared with the three month 'state of national safety' declared in March, but by any measures, the political situation, social tensions, human rights and the economy are all far worse than a year ago.

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As yet, there are no signs that any of the uprising's root causes - grievances over political and economic inequality, unfulfilled promises of reforms, corruption, perceptions of sectarian discrimination, anger over a history of police brutality, and dissatisfaction with living standards - are being addressed. Indeed, perceptions of sectarian discrimination and the problem of unemployment have got worse since several thousands were dismissed from their job for taking part in - or merely being suspected of possibly taking part in - demonstrations and strikes that were largely peaceful.

These grievances go back decades; many are detailed in the archives of the British colonial period. The scale of the uprising was largely thanks to inspiration from Egypt and Tunisia (there have been some contacts between Bahraini and Egyptian youth activists). However, the date of 14 February was set to coincide with the ten-year anniversary of a royal charter that promised a parliament, in which, the king pledged, elected MPs would have legislative power while an appointed upper house would only be able to advise. This charter was welcomed by an overwhelming majority of the Bahraini people in a referendum, but was never fully implemented.

The protests were youth-led rather than being led by any established opposition movements, but the youth leaders struggled to organise themselves to take part in negotiations, especially as protestors became torn between those calling for full-scale democracy and those calling for reforms under a constitutional monarchy. Another weakness was that the protests were mostly, though not exclusively, Shia and pro-government rallies were quickly called, sending messages to Sunni Bahrainis to suggest they were under threat. The Crown Prince and the mostly Shia political party Wefaq held secret talks, but neither of them were fully representative of the two sides concerned, and as time dragged on, it seems that the opposition's miscalculated focus on the removal of the prime minister - 40 years in the job - encouraged the prime minister and his supporters to seize the initiative.

After a month of protests, the army and police dispersed crowds violently, killing several and, according to numerous independent witnesses, obstructing medical professionals from tending to the wounded. Crucially, Saudi Arabia and the UAE sent reinforcements under a GCC collective defence agreement. While these were not needed on the street, and were officially there to protect vital infrastructure, they sent a strong symbolic message both to the protestors and to the West. The balance of power in the ruling family appears to have shifted away from economic reformists and towards security hardliners.

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A key signal to watch in the near term will be the findings of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, a royally appointed commission of senior international human-rights lawyers mandated to investigate the extensive allegations of human rights abuses and torture that have emerged since February. Early press statements by its head, Cherif Bassiouni, suggest the commission may focus more on lower level officials rather than criticising senior members of the ruling family. Yet the commission is at least an opportunity to establish facts about the human rights situation, and at best it could be a springboard for much-needed reform of the various security services – something that the UK should support. Bahrain's GCC neighbours will be an important factor in any political settlement and any British efforts to mediate will need to take these into account. Bahrain's economic dependence on Saudi Arabia, which already provided the vast majority of its oil, has only intensified this year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The tensions in Bahrain will not be resolved by security measures and will ultimately require a political solution. This will require a serious dialogue, possibly with third-party mediation, involving a representative spectrum of different groups in Bahrain. While sectarian polarisation is now severe, the idea that there are two political 'sides' is a vast oversimplification of the diversity of political opinion among the various opposition groups, the government and the government's supporters. It should back the call made by US President Barack Obama to ensure that peaceful oppositionleaders are released before a real dialogue starts.
- There will inevitably be some scepticism among those who believe they will lose from political reform, but the UK should emphasise the need for a long-term political and security strategy, based on broad-based legitimacy. It should alsooffer support for institutional reforms such as much-needed judicial reforms.
- The UK should engage with the other GCC states to find a regional solution, bearing in mind the different foreign policy, domestic and economic interests of each GCC state.
- It should support the reformists within Bahrain's government but not to the extent of over-praising initiatives that there is little real confidence in. Britain tends to focus on 'strong private messaging', but a mismatch between private and public messages can send the wrong signals to ordinary members of the public who are not privy to the nuances of diplomacy.
- On the human rights front, press for release of people detained for peaceful political activities, and emphasise the degree to which this is damaging Bahrain's reputation and ability to attract investment. A clear, transparent and fair judicial process is a better solution than royal pardons.
- On the trade side, be cautious about cooperation with state agencies or state owned companies, and be aware that continued efforts to promote arms exports are creating anti-British anger on the streets.

CHAPTER NINE

ISRAEL-PALESTINE: NEW PRESSURES FOR PEACE

Daniel Levy

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Any thoughts of the Arab awakening 'proving' that Palestine was in fact a marginal concern in the region were unequivocally banished in recent weeks. To imagine that a popular Arab push for democracy, freedom, and dignity would ignore Israel's denial of those same aspirations for Palestinians was a flight of fancy. The opposite is unsurprisingly proving true - Arab democracy will be less tolerant of Palestinian disenfranchisement than was Arab autocracy.

A SNAPSHOT OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN REALITIES

Israel-Palestine will continue to be a central policy challenge in the region for the UK government. Here are five defining features of the current Israeli-Palestinian landscape.

1) First of all, there is the regional context referred to above. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become both more pressing and more complex in the context of the so-called Arab Spring. The UK has taken a quite forward-leaning and consistent position based on values and interests in support of Arab freedom, democracy, and self-determination, and has even led a military campaign to advance those goals in the Libya context. All of this will make the appearance of pursuing a different line when it comes to Palestinian rights, freedoms, and self-determination a very problematic and ill-advised position to find oneself in. The quest for dignity at the core of the Arab Spring is focused on domestic socio-economic issues but also relates to the foreign policy arena, and the Palestinian grievance is central to the sense of indignity carried by the Arab Street.

This is likely to lead to a less forgiving and more confrontational Arab stance toward Israeli mistreatment of the Palestinians. The more democratising regimes will do this in response to public opinion. The more status quo regimes will act similarly as a legitimacy conferring posture. If Israel does not adapt and reset its regional relations by demonstrating real progress with the Palestinians, then its allies – the UK included – will be increasingly torn between competing interests and allies.

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2) The realities on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territories continue to undermine the prospects of any viable two-state solution being on the horizon and to undermine belief on both sides in the feasibility of that outcome. The Israeli civilian population living beyond the Green Line now numbers significantly in excess of a half million, meaning that about one in 14 Israelis are technically settlers. Palestinians continue to be denied access to 60 percent of the area of the West Bank, and for all the economic success written about the Palestinian Authority (PA) state-building effort led by Prime Minister Fayyad, its remit is extremely confined geographically and its results, economic and otherwise, are considered to be unsustainable over time absent political progress towards de-occupation. Even the outposts constructed over the past 15 years have remained in place despite repeated Israeli commitments to evacuate them. Settler radicalism has become a serious concern, notably for Israel's own internal security services (the Shin Bet) and Palestinians are increasingly exploring non-violent civil resistance options and pursuing a rights-based rather than statehood approach.

3) The existing peace process is clearly woefully inadequate to the task at hand of somehow breaking through the impasse. In September 2010, direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations resumed and were then abruptly shut down, representing the longest build-up to the shortest round of negotiations. Direct negotiations are too asymmetrical to produce results. In perhaps overly simplistic terms, the Israelis are too strong and the Palestinians are too weak. The key external arbiter, the US, subject to its own domestic political strait jacket, plays a role that exacerbates rather than ameliorates this asymmetry. The quick fix two-state solution, which might have been possible in the 1990s, has taken too long, and constituencies on both sides opposed to the well-known parameters of that two-state bargain are now more organised in their opposition. All of this, and not least American paralysis for the foreseeable future, pose challenges to European and British policy.

4) The Palestinian national movement continues to bear an unhelpfully keen resemblance to humpty dumpty. Absent a national leadership with sufficient coherence, legitimacy, and control, it is very unlikely that there will be an ability to take major decisions, or even chart a new strategy. Despite a Fatah-Hamas reconciliation deal in Cairo in May, implementation has stalled and the division between the West Bank and Gaza continues to entrench itself. The ongoing atrophy of the Palestinian national movement has failed to be reversed either by the PA institution-building effort or by the inspiration of the Arab Spring.

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Diaspora refugee communities, as well as the Palestinian-Arab community within Israel, are both re-emerging as more salient players in the Palestinian political arena.

5) Israel itself has changed in profound ways over the past two decades. Israel's ultra-orthodox, national religious, Sephardi traditional religious, Russian, and Arab communities now make up a substantial majority of the Israeli population. The traditional secular, Ashkenazi elite is in retreat. The basic rules of the democratic game are no longer a consensus. Increasingly harsh, anti-democratic legislation is finding its way into the statute books. These demographic trends are certainly not making it easier to build a consensus or a constituency in favour of territorial withdrawal and genuine Palestinian sovereignty next door to Israel. An anti two-state parliamentary majority appears to be stabilising, and the settler-aligned national religious sector is now well over-represented in the Israel Defence Force young officer class and is working its way through the ranks. What is more, Israelis perceive there to be no cost or consequence for the status quo or for continued occupation.

POSSIBLE CONTOURS FOR A UK GOVERNMENT POLICY RESPONSE

1) Attempt to insulate regional responses and relations from the fallout of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Managing the UK's relations with the Egyptian transitional regime, with Turkey, and with others in the region through an Israel prism – as tends to characterise Washington's policy – will be an exercise in frustration, futility, and ultimately failure. The UK should be attentive to genuine and pertinent Israeli security concerns, but should avoid overburdening its regional relations with Israel-centric requests. The Israel relationship should not be an excuse to hold back democratic reform in Egypt or to buttress the role of the Egyptian military command, or to allow a deterioration in regard to relations with Turkey.

2) If a two-state solution can still be pursued, then for the time being the focus procedurally should be on maximum coordination with other members of the EU3 (Germany, France and the UK) (and perhaps other loose coalitions of Europeans and others) and substantively on delineating and implementing a border between Israel and Palestine. If there is to be even a partial filling of the void left by American self-marginalisation on this issue, then the UK and other key Europeans will have to up their game in the coming period. There is not a prospect

on the horizon for a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian agreement laying to rest all claims and the weighty issues of Israel's creation in 1948, refugee dispossession, the Jewish character of the state, and probably Jerusalem's holy sites, hence a possible focus on territorial division. This should include where possible creating European incentives and crucially disincentives for the protagonists.

Beyond this, the UK should begin a strategic and more honest conversation with all parties on alternatives to the current two-state paradigm, which may have the effect either of refocusing minds on that two-state outcome or of taking seriously the need to prepare for future scenarios.

3) The UK should consider ways of creating distance, not from Israel itself, but from policies that could be seen to support the maintenance and perpetuation of the occupation. Unless and until a new border is agreed, the UK should enact policies that demonstrate a stricter adherence to drawing a distinction between Israel inside the Green Line and occupation beyond it - and to do so in public and demonstrative ways.

4) Where necessary, the UK will have to break with Washington in its approach to Israel-Palestine. The words of Foreign Secretary William Hague should certainly be applied in this arena – that a healthy transatlantic alliance requires a relationship that is 'solid, not slavish'.

5) Support efforts to recreate a central and legitimated Palestinian national address, including reconciliation along reasonable lines between the two major factions, Fatah and Hamas, which also represent the geographical divide between Gaza and the West Bank. Considering the role that various branches of the Muslim Brotherhood will be playing in the post-Arab spring reality, the UK should explore further options for exchange with Hamas. The UK should also consider the long-term efficacy of funding toward the PA and Palestinian state-building in the absence of a serious political horizon.

CHAPTER TEN

IRAN: DOMESTIC DISCONTENT AND REGIONAL AMBITION

Ali M. Ansari

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Iranians greeted the advent of the 'Arab Spring' with considerable enthusiasm, reading as they did aspects of their own history into the events shaking the Arab world. Depending on one's political perspective of course, that reading proved quite different. The government enthusiastically proclaimed that a new wave of Islamic Revolutions were gripping the Middle East with popular uprisings overthrowing Western backed dictators in favour of an empowered Islam. It was an unfolding of a divine plan which would effectively place the Arab Middle East well within the Iranian sphere of influence.

Opposition leaders in Iran however had a somewhat different interpretation of events. For them the Arab spring was nothing less than an extension of the long hot, 'Persian Summer', during which a resurgent Iranian opposition had unsuccessfully challenged the theocratic consolidation of power in Iran in the person of Ayatollah Khamenei. Certainly as events unfolded in the Arab world and the demands of the protestors became clear, the latter reading of developments appeared more in tune with reality than that of the Iranian government. Indeed as protests moved from Tunisia and Egypt, towards Libya and Syria, the official response from Iran became less certain and a good deal more anxious. Perhaps the best reflection of this anxiety can be seen as an absence of any practical response to the events in Bahrain, the one country in the region where Iran could claim both historical and sectarian interests. In actual fact, barring a few verbal protests, the Iranian government has been conspicuous by its silence.

There are good reasons for this. The situation in Iran is just as if not more fragile than that facing many Arab states, and the government is acutely aware of the continuing tensions throughout society. That a new wave of protests has not gripped the country is in large part due to the sheer exhaustion of the opposition following the six months of protest from June 2009, and the systematic and comprehensive state repression that followed. Moreover Iranians, haunted by the consequences of 1979, are not enthusiastic in pursuing a path in which the endgame is unclear. Be that as it may, there is no love lost between state and society and both sides are aware that what exists is an uneasy truce, not a state of peace.

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The fundamental reason for this is that the social contract which had existed – flawed as it may have been – was shattered by the events of 2009, and to date no effort has been made to reconstruct it. In order to better appreciate the depth of this political fissure one has to understand the nature of the crisis which affected the Islamic Republic and recognise that it swiftly moved beyond an electoral crisis to one of profound theological and by extension constitutional, significance.

One of the curiosities of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran is that it reflects a forced marriage between two distinct principles of government. On the one side stood the 'republic' modelled in its own way on the separation of powers familiar to Western constitutions most obviously that of the French Fifth Republic. On the other side stood the Islamic and revolutionary organs of government personalised by the office of the Supreme Leader. One sought its legitimacy from the 'people', the other from God. This marriage of (in)convenience was negotiated by arguing that sovereignty belonged to God who had in turn entrusted it to the people. The role of the Supreme Leader was to provide ethical guidance and to convey theological opinions on the great political matters of the day. In practice this uneasy balance was constantly being rocked by both events and personalities and while some argued for the primacy of the republic others argued quite the opposite. In 2009, these conflicting mentalities finally came to a very public confrontation.

Faced with allegations of serious fraud, which had seen the incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad win more votes with a higher turnout than any other politician since 1979, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei moved swiftly to confirm the result as a blessing from God. This only served to enrage the public more, since they felt that Khamenei had circumvented the constitutional process for the ratification of an election result. As the crisis deepened and the public ignored Khamenei's demand that people accept the result, the authorities increasingly argued that the electoral result was of secondary importance to Khamenei's authority and once the Supreme Leader had spoken, that should be considered the final word.

This clearly made a mockery of any pretence of democratic practice and as tensions mounted the decision was made by the authorities to consolidate their political base at the expense of the wider public. By August 2009 therefore it was being argued that Khamenei was God's representative on Earth and obedience to him was the equivalence of obedience to God. Although such arguments may have reassured the regime faithful, for a great majority of devout Iranians, for whom 'democracy' was at best an ambivalent concept, such religious justifications was regarded as dangerously close to blasphemy.

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Matters came to head following the unexpected death of Ayatollah Montazeri in December 2009 – one of a number of senior clerics who had opposed such theological justifications and the spiritual head of the opposition movement – and the funeral ceremonies that were heavily disrupted by the authorities. For many people therefore, the clash was not simply one of democratic values but of theological convictions, and the authorities' decision to move in this direction has added another highly complicating dimension to the political struggle.

The failure of the governing elite to construct a new consensus has been disguised in part by the articulation of increasingly hysterical millenarian views which combine radical national exceptionalism with Shia eschatology. But in a practical and immediate sense, it has been ameliorated by healthy oil revenues which have allowed the government to increase its patronage to key social allies.

Mismanagement and rampant corruption are however ensuring that this is a finite resource, and with the consequences of the subsidy reform only now beginning to impact society at large, the regime faces the prospect of serious discontent in the near future. The problem they face, is that given regional developments and their own failure to engage in a constructive dialogue at home, the opposition to the regime next time round is likely to be considerably more radicalised and aggressive in pursuit of its aims. This polarisation of political opinion is pregnant with serious consequences for the stability of the country though the choices for the Iranian government are unenviable given the vacuum in trust that currently exists between themselves and the people at large.

Continued intransigence and a state of denial will only exacerbate problems while indications of compromise will likely be read as weakness by an opposition anxious for revenge. It will require leadership of particular courage and conviction to square this political circle and at present none exists in Iran.

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In such a political environment, British policy needs to tread carefully especially in light of the history of Anglo-Iranian relations and the determination of the governing elite to seek culpability among the British whenever possible – a trend that has been growing alarmingly since 2005. Indeed in many ways the government of Ahmadinejad has defined his foreign policy against the British as much as the Americans in part because with a diplomatic presence the British offer a more immediate target.

Given this reality British engagement with the challenge of Iran will require an acute and nuanced appreciation of cultural and historical issues. It will be crucial to understand the importance of history but not to be haunted by it, nor to be shy of responding to some of the more extraordinary allegations thrown at the British government. British policy should reflect the differences between the Iranian government and broader society, and maintain where appropriate, a clear distinction between the two. Above all, policy should avoid any gratuitous insults to the 'nation' and the civilisation of Iran, which should be viewed as distinct from the state and government. Robust, well-articulated engagement which makes clear that British policy will not neglect wider issues of human security, while being acutely aware of the cultural baggage which must always accompany relations, remains the best approach for the immediate future.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ISLAMISM: EXTREMISTS OR DEMOCRATS?

Maha Azzam

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RECENT LEGACY

The issue of Islamism has been a prominent feature of the politics of the Middle East and a major international security concern for over three decades. In general, Islamism is a term that has been used to describe two very different trends; first, the non-violent quest for an Islamic friendly society based on the 'principles of Islam' which can involve a more liberal application of Islamic teachings and tradition or a more strict interpretation. Second, Islamism is also associated with violent extremism, most notably that of Al Qaeda in the promotion of terrorism which will not be addressed in this paper. However it is important to note that the Arab Spring has further demonstrated the marginalisation of Al Qaeda's ideological and political appeal although it still represents a global terrorist threat.

The repressive state apparatus in much of the Middle East persecuted Islamist groups for decades. Their history of activism in opposing dictatorship and their social and charitable work won them many adherents. It is frequently argued that it is due to their organisational skills and the disarray of their secular opponents that they have succeeded in galvanising popular support. Their organisational skills and the commitment of their leadership and cadres does stand out but perhaps their most important asset is their religious and ideological appeal that emphasises Islamic values which have a strong resonance in societies where religious belief matters.

The key factor here is that Islamist parties are on the way to having an important role and a voice in the future political landscape of many countries in the region, once the political process becomes open to all political groups. This is only a fair outcome given the reality on the ground and the choices that the public should be allowed to make.

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THE ARAB SPRING

The Arab Spring has thrown open the opportunity for Islamist groups to win seats in parliament and the prospect of them forming a government. As the political space has opened up, the jockeying for power has begun. Free and fair elections promised for October in Tunisia and November in Egypt will reveal the real level of support that Islamist parties have in society. In Libya where Islamist sentiment may also prove to be a key political factor in the post-Gadhafi era. In Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood have deep roots in resistance to the Baathist state and a democratic Syria one day will most probably see them have a share in power.

Among the Islamist groups in the Middle East which may soon have a substantial number of parliamentary seats are Al-Nahda in Tunisia, whose leader Rachid Ghannouchi, has argued for years about the compatibility of Islam and democracy. Al-Nahda says it does not want to impose Sharia law, the wearing of the hijab or an alcohol ban. However, there have been mixed signals on these issues from certain Islamists who see these as necessary for an alternative long term agenda.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt with its newly established political party, the Freedom and Justice Party, has embraced pluralism and non-violence. It is estimated that they can win anything between twenty to forty percent of the vote. Whatever the outcome, elections will force these groups to engage openly with other political forces and work within state institutions with greater transparency.

For Islamist parties in the Middle East, democracy offers not only an opportunity but also a turning point that will test the Islamists commitment to democracy, as well as their ability to govern. The indicators so far are positive. Moderate Islamist parties have participated in parliamentary elections in Morocco (the Party for Justice and Development), Jordan (the Islamic Action Front) in Yemen (al-Islah), Kuwait (Islamic Constitution Movement) or as independents in Egypt. Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) offers a leading example of a party with strong Islamist roots that is committed to democracy.

One of the main areas of contention between Islamists and secularists in the transition period in Egypt and Tunisia has been over the issue of holding parliamentary elections before drafting a new constitution. The fear for many liberals and leftists has been that the Islamists will ultimately shape the new constitution because they will form the majority in a new parliament. However as far as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is concerned the issue was decided in a referendum on 19 March when an overwhelming 77 percent voted 'yes'. The public approved that a commission draft a new constitution following the parliamentary election. The ongoing debate

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over the possibility of a set of overarching principles, a 'Bill of Rights' is perceived by Islamists as a means of countering the decision of the majority of Egyptians by a secular lobby.

Islamist groups have had to play a game of survival for many decades and this has contributed to making them experienced and astute political players. They have evolved over time and have come a long way by openly accepting democracy as a political process and not as a tool, although this can only be really tested after elections. Islamist parties face internal challenges from a new generation of youth who are sometimes more in tune with secular activists who want to proceed fast with radical change in society. At the same time they also have to maintain the support of more religiously conservative elements.

Furthermore, Islamist parties, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, have tried to appeal to the middle ground and to middle class Egyptians by stressing the need for stability and moderation. They have gone so far as to undermine their position among some, by continuing on a gradual and cautious path to change, which has meant that in this transitional period they have been unwilling to confront or criticise the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in Egypt. However, they have clearly stated that they want a rapid transfer from the military council to civilian authority. They have stressed the importance of sticking to a timeline for the transfer of power to a democratically elected authority. For the Muslim Brotherhood the path to representation has been a long one and they are unwilling to jeopardise the prospect of establishing a democratic system which they now view as the best guarantor of their rights and from which they can gain the most.

There are also increasing pressures from more religiously conservative elements, namely, the Salafis. The Salafis are a movement with grass roots support that has been overlooked in the assessment of many observers because they were not visible as a political force up until the opening up of the political process. They have now formed political parties (Al Nour, Fadila and Asala) and have a united candidate list and platform which will compete for all 504 seats in the upcoming parliamentary elections in Egypt. Tens of thousands Salafis gathered in Tahrir square on 29th July in a show of strength that overwhelmed secular forces that had agreed to gather for a 'Day of Unity'. The Salafis who called for the implementation of the Sharia in their slogans highlighted the increasing polarisation between Islamist and secular/liberal forces in Egypt and the need for the Muslim Brotherhood to steer a course that would allow them to work with secular parties and at the same time not alienate the Salafis, or be seen by them as having compromised too much on their Islamic credentials.

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The grievances that gave rise to protests were both political and economic. They brought about a revolutionary moment in the history of the region and saw the removal of dictators. Yet the challenges of economic disparity and unemployment could give rise to a new wave of protests, 'a second revolution' which may not be as peaceful. The Islamists are aware of this and are attempting to balance the fears of the middle classes, foreign investors and at the same time respond to the populist and nationalist mood in their countries that are critical of the free market economics which is associated with the economic pain and corruption of the previous regime. How Islamist parties or secular ones are going to deal with the issues of high government subsidies, institutionalised corruption, budget deficits and a high national debt remains a major challenge.

THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AGENDA

One of the main concerns of western policy makers has been the position of Islamist parties in regards to Israel, the US and the West in general. There has been a general consensus that a more antagonistic policy would emerge from such parties in a position of power than their secular counterparts. The ongoing developments in Egypt are an interesting test case of a fast evolving situation. Developments in that country will not be mirrored throughout the region but they may provide something of a trend. They also reflect sentiments in a pivotal country in the Middle East.

Although the protests that brought down Ben Ali and Mubarak did not focus their anger on the US or Israel, nevertheless anger at Israel has begun to be expressed more openly on a popular level. The storming of the Israeli embassy in Cairo on 9 September was an expression of nationalist and popular anger and was not spurred on by the Islamists.

The Muslim Brotherhood has repeatedly said that it will abide by international agreements in an attempt to allay fears that if in a position of power it would annul the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. Significantly, the Muslim Brotherhood has condemned the unrest Egypt has witnessed over the attack on the Israeli Embassy. The momentum from the street for a more belligerent attitude towards Israel will ease the way for Islamists to have an even colder peace with Israel if in a position of power. The Gulf states are likely to be leading donors and investors in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. The unanswered question is whether Islamist parties may be more attractive partners for the conservative states of the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia, however it is more likely that the Gulf states would prefer to finance ideologically less committed groups, ideally secular ones with a free market agenda. For now the Islamists are trying to offer a mixed and somewhat unclear program of free market economics and Islamic social values.

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The vision of mainstream Islamist parties for their societies is one of independence but also one of integration into the international system. They do not want to be isolated politically or economically. They want to see a more equitable relationship between their countries and the outside world. They say they will create their own model but if there are any comparisons to be drawn; then they would rather be akin to Turkey and definitely not Iran.

A NEW RELATIONSHIP?

The United Kingdom along with its western allies has for nearly half a century backed different authoritarian governments in the Middle East. Today the UK government has pledged its support for democracy in the region. This commitment needs to be consistent and not selective. Democracy is still far off for many countries in the region and needs to be continually encouraged and supported. A democratic system in the countries of the Middle East will provide a level playing field for Islamists and secularists.

The old rhetoric and practice of suspicion and exclusion of Islamists is counter-productive. Maybe, it is also time to shed the term Islamism altogether and speak of political parties in terms of their political and economic agenda. In such an environment communications with different political and religious parties is important in order to promote 'best practices' and to encourage transparency. Islamist parties like secular ones want technical assistance for their countries and this needs to be encouraged so that they do not turn to non-democratic societies for that assistance. There is an urgent need for practical economic policy advice. One of the main challenges for Islamist parties as for others is how to deal with a bloated public sector in their countries.

At this critical juncture it is important that Human Rights organisations should encourage Islamists to abide by democratic rules. The newly formed Freedom and Justice Party (the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's political party) has one thousand co-founding members who are women, reputedly more than any other political party in Egypt. Women's participation and leadership needs to be encouraged through greater engagement with various organisations in the UK.

As the political system opens up, we will hear both the voices we like and those we dislike. The struggle for the governments and societies of the Middle East and their friends, will be to ensure these voices equal rights and protection after decades of repressive and unrepresentative regimes. There needs to be consistent pressure on governments in the Middle East, whatever their ideological orientation, to uphold the rule of law, to respect human rights and to ensure that economic development reaches the people who need it most.

CHAPTER TWELVE

ECONOMY: THE ROOT OF THE UPRISING

Rodney Wilson

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The events of the Arab Spring have not only profound political implications but also have significance for the economies of the Middle East and their trading partners. In the short run the political uncertainty and lack of law and order has damaged economic activity, but in the long term the Arab Spring could prove beneficial for the region which has seriously underperformed other emerging markets. How can partners such as the United Kingdom help ensure a positive economic outcome from the Arab Spring rather than continuing economic meltdown if domestic turbulence continues?

ECONOMIC FRUSTRATIONS

It was of course an economic grievance that triggered the revolution in Tunisia when Mohamed Bouazizi, a market trader, set himself on fire as a result of being prevented from selling his fruit and vegetables because he did not have a licence to operate in the location where he set up his stall. The suicide was interpreted by many, rightly or wrongly, as an act driven by his desperation in being prevented from making a living by a corrupt regime.

On paper countries such as Tunisia and Egypt were actually experiencing higher rates of economic growth prior to the Arab Spring than they had a decade earlier, with growth being a respectable 5 percent per annum, low by the standards of China or India, but well above European rates. The problem was in the widespread perception that it was a small, politically well connected, minority that were benefiting from the growth. Not only were the poor seeing no improvement in their living conditions, but even the middle classes were being squeezed, with the young believing that they could not even hope to attain the economic status of their parents.

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INEFFECTIVE REFORMS

Much of the Arab World has been reforming for decades, the reforms supposedly being to facilitate economic liberalisation with an increased role for the private sector and freer markets. In reality states have been reluctant to cede economic powers, fearing that this would undermine governments and their powers of economic patronage. The Mubarak regime introduced structural adjustment policies in the early 1990s at the behest of the IMF, but privatisation progressed at a leisurely pace. The private sector which emerged exhibited the worst features of crony capitalism, with government procurement and licensing favouring a small number of leading businessmen, the most notable being the President's son Gamal; now in prison pending the investigation of corruption charges.

The poor implementation of reforms in Egypt contrasts with Turkey whose economy has been much more successful in recent years, not only in terms of economic growth, but also in generating jobs for its expanding population in small and medium sized businesses. Turkey's rulers are of course democratically accountable for their economic policy making, unlike the authoritarian regimes of Mubarak and his peers elsewhere in the Arab World. It is this accountability that has given the reform process urgency; as if the government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan had not delivered economically the Justice and Development Party would not have been re-elected.

EGYPT AS THE PIVOT

Free and fair parliamentary elections are promised for Egypt in November but the outcome is uncertain. Any new government is likely to be a loose coalition and agreement on future economic reforms will be difficult. Nevertheless there is reason for optimism, not least as there is a sense of liberation, a new 'can do' culture and a strong desire amongst the well-educated youth for Egypt to regain its place as the leading Arab economy. Currently its GDP is lower than that of the United Arab Emirates, and since the 1970s Saudi Arabia has been the region's dominant economy because of its oil resources.

Egypt's future lies in manufacturing, as its agricultural resources are limited and a country of over 80 million inhabitants cannot live off tourist earnings. Engineering skills are much respected in Egypt, but at present industries such as vehicle production are largely geared to the domestic market. There are opportunities in information technology, and Cairo already serves as the software capital of the Arab World, but poor management and corruption have deterred investors.

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ECONOMY: THE ROOT OF THE UPRISING

At present Egypt's main exports are oil and gas, but the country has limited resources in comparison to Saudi Arabia. In the late nineteenth century Egypt was the world's largest cotton exporter. There is scope for the industry to be revived, with Egypt enjoying a reputation for cotton textiles comparable to that which Turkey has for leather goods.

WHEN WILL SPRING ARRIVE FOR SAUDI ARABIA AND THE GULF?

Although the royal families of the Gulf have extensive interests in business and transparency is an issue, corruption is much less than in the Arab Republics. Reform is seen as less urgent in the Gulf, not least as governments have considerable powers of patronage through their control of oil and gas revenues. There has been some economic diversification, notably into petrochemicals and energy intensive industries such as aluminium smelting. Oil price falls have a limited short term impact as the countries have substantial overseas financial assets, the income from which can sustain government spending.

The existing development model is however unsustainable in the long run, with most local nationals employed in the public sector and foreign migrant labour dominating in the private sector. In the Gulf economies with small populations the model can last for decades, but in Saudi Arabia, with a population of over 22 million, not everyone can be absorbed into government employment. There have been many measures to encourage the employment of local nationals in the private sector, including employment quotas, but all have failed to date.

Bahrain and Oman, the poorest of the Gulf economies, have seen demonstrations inspired by the Arab Spring, but the situation now seems to have calmed. In Bahrain the demonstrations became predictably sectarian, but timely intervention by the Saudi Arabia military and the UAE police brought the situation under control. Concern about further disruption has however caused long term damage to Bahrain's position as a regional financial centre, the main beneficiary being Dubai which aspires to play a similar role.

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IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM'S FOREIGN POLICY

The Arab Spring poses more opportunities than threats to British commercial interests most of which are centred on the Gulf rather than countries such as Egypt, Syria, Lebanon or Tunisia. Although the economic benefits of deepening relations with the countries of North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean are likely to be long term, now is a good time to build commercial relations.

An opening up of financial markets in the region could be helpful to British financial institutions. Retailing and branding is underdeveloped in North Africa and Syria and British companies can replicate there the success they have enjoyed with franchising in the Gulf. There, stores such as Debenhams serve as anchors in many shopping malls and Harvey Nichols sells upmarket merchandise.

In the Gulf the United Kingdom can take advantage of its special relationship with India. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century the Gulf economies were administered from British India. Today the Indian company Tata is the largest employer in manufacturing in the United Kingdom. A triangular partnership involving Britain, India and the Gulf economies can bring benefits to all parties, including for jobs in manufacturing in the United Kingdom.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DEMOCRATISATION: UPRISING, VIOLENCE AND REFORM

Katerina Dalacoura

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2011 has been a year of tremendous, unprecedented popular mobilisation in the Arab Middle East. Developments are on-going and the future is open-ended and uncertain. Nevertheless, we can already discern how the uprisings are beginning to transform the political landscape and, in particular, how they may affect the prospects for democratisation in the Arab world.

Each one of the 2011 Arab uprisings must be treated on its own merits but, for the purposes of exploring the prospects for democratisation, we can divide them into three broad types or categories. In the first, mass civic revolts led to the peaceful overthrow of powerful dictators; this was the case of Tunisia's Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak. In the second category, uprisings led to internal fracture, violence and even civil war. In the case of Libya, revolt invited foreign military intervention and ultimately led to the overthrow of Muammar Gadhafi. In Bahrain, the uprising was brutally suppressed. In Yemen, there has been political confrontation and a simmering crisis. In Syria a popular revolt is continuing but the regime is attempting to suppress it. The third category comprises Arab states which did not experience major upheavals. The partial exceptions are Morocco and Jordan where ruling monarchs, faced with a degree of popular challenge, tried to forestall an even bigger one by offering political concessions.

The reasons behind the uprisings and the factors which determined their success or failure are closely linked to making judgements about political change.

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An explosive mix of socio-economic and political grievances lay behind all the uprisings. Poverty is not in itself an explanation – Libya and Tunisia where rebellions occurred are relatively better off than other Arab states – although the successful provision of economic benefits inoculated some regimes from trouble (for instance in the Arab Gulf states).

At the heart of the matter are relative deprivation, a fall of standards, and a clash between expectations and reality. Youth unemployment, corruption and dropping living standards intensified in the years of economic crisis following 2008. It would be a mistake, however, to see the uprisings as being driven primarily by economic grievances. Socio-economic and political discontent are impossible to disentangle but the demands articulated by the uprisings appear to be of the latter kind – if not democracy at least for 'dignity' and 'freedom'.

The articulation of these political demands during the uprisings will be an important driving force for the future. Another issue, which will be relevant to the region's prospects for democratisation, is the extent to which popular mobilisation was the achievement of pre-existing civil society and political opposition groups. Prior to 2011, there was a consensus that these were weak and unable to challenge authoritarian structures throughout the Arab world. It may be that, in some cases, this judgement was wrong; in Tunisia, for instance, the country's main trade union (UGTT) was instrumental in organising the demonstrations which overthrew Ben Ali. But in Egypt it seems (to this researcher at least) that, although civil society and opposition groups did play a role in the uprising, they were not the primary movers of a largely spontaneous event. The lack of strong pre-existing opposition structures in the case of Egypt, and even more so in other places such as Libya, will make it difficult to channel the popular uprisings into institutionalised political groups and institutions.

Accounting for the success or failure of the uprisings, where they occurred, requires us to look at two other factors (which will also influence the prospects for democratisation in each given case). The first is the degree to which regimes were able to retain the support of key institutions, most notably the army. In the case of Tunisia and Egypt the army moved against the presidents. In Syria, Bahrain and Yemen it did not, and the regimes have not fallen, at least for now. In the case of Libya it took foreign intervention to achieve the ousting of the dictator. The second factor is the degree to which regimes were able to retain support of significant social groups. In Tunisia and Egypt they were not able to do so. In the cases of Libya, Syria and Bahrain and Yemen they did and, as a result, the revolts lacked the all-engulfing nature of the Tunisian and Egyptian events.

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The above analysis of the uprisings' causes and consequences helps us to think about prospects for the future and demonstrates that there will be no uniform outcome with regards to democratisation. The first category is the most hopeful. In Tunisia the combination of long-standing state institutions, a historically vibrant civil society and political class (which Ben Ali did not manage to eradicate) and widespread consensus in seeking the ouster of the dictator, render its prospects excellent. In Egypt the worst excesses of the previous regime will be reduced, and there will be improvement in the protection of civil and political rights, but the continuing dominance of the army and the enduring strength of the political and socio-economic establishment mean that change will be limited.

Prospects are not good for societies in the second category. In Libya, the overthrow of Gadhafi's regime will almost certainly not have happened without foreign intervention; moreover, Libya's weak state institutions and civil society do not readily lend themselves to democratisation. In Yemen, regime change may mean state collapse; in Bahrain suppression of the movement has put an end to hopes for a democratic opening in the short to medium term; and Syria is in the throes of civil war. In our third set of cases, change will be superficial. In Morocco and Jordan constitutional amendments will perhaps permit a greater degree of political contestation but Kings Mohammed and Abdullah respectively have not allowed their powers to be restricted.

The role Islamist movements will play in these processes is an important consideration. However diverse they were, one generalisation can be made about the uprisings: None were led by Islamist movements and in none of them was an Islamic state a primary demand. Nevertheless, the uprisings will affect the Islamists' position. In cases of on-going violent conflict, as in Syria and in Libya, more extreme versions of Islamism, alongside secular extremist movements, may come to the fore. In Morocco and Jordan, mainstream Islamists will not deviate greatly from their stance of being 'loyal oppositions'.

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The most interesting developments will occur in Tunisia and Egypt, where Islamists are taking part in emerging political processes. Overall, they may benefit from the opening up of political systems and their support will increase. However, they will not achieve electoral majorities. In the long run, they will lose out politically because they will fail to deliver concrete ideological alternatives to their citizenry, concentrating (as they do) on moral and social issues. The experience of Iran, where a purportedly 'Islamic' system has in fact failed to deliver the goods to its population and has become profoundly unpopular with its own people, will be replicated in those parts of the Arab world where Islamist movements engage in political processes or achieve power.

Looking ahead through a policy lens, the emergence of stable democracies in the Arab region, where they occur, may or may not give rise to pro-Western regimes or at the very least solid and reliable interlocutors for Western governments. In the short term, the uprisings are causing instability. This is a price worth paying if it leads to some positive developments in future. In any case there is nothing that Western governments can do to prevent it (just as they played no role in causing or shaping the course of the uprisings, with the exception of Libya), even though the democracy promotion bureaucratic machines are already being put in motion to help out with democratic 'transitions'.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BRITAIN AND THE MIDDLE EAST FROM 9/11 TO 2011

Rosemary Hollis

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The 9/11 crisis marked the beginning of a distinct new phase in British relations with the Middle East. In the previous half century, Britain had accommodated to the end of empire and established a niche role in the region, while the United States emerged as the new regional hegemon. After 9/11 Britain joined the US in the invasion of Iraq and thereafter was regarded as Washington's junior partner in this and other facets of 'the war on terror'.

In ideological terms, prior to 9/11 the New Labour government of Tony Blair, which came to power in 1997, had sought to reposition Britain as 'a force for good' in the world and champion of liberal interventionism. Under this rubric Blair took a leading role in instigating the military intervention in Kosovo and sent British forces to effect regime change in Sierra Leone. After 9/11 the emphasis shifted from 'promoting the good' to 'combating evil'.

From 9/11 to the end of Blair's third term as Prime Minister in 2007, British foreign policy was dominated by the pursuit of the war on terror, and combating Islamist-inspired terrorists in particular. The Middle East assumed centre stage. No.10 took the lead in decision-making, while the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence concentrated on policy implementation.

THE IRAQ WAR

In the name of combating terrorism, solidarity with Washington and eliminating the weapons of mass destruction that Saddam Hussein was presumed to retain, Britain was alone among US allies in committing troops to the initial invasion of Iraq in 2003. British efforts to obtain a specific UN mandate for the use of force did not bear fruit.

The ensuing war, that not only toppled Saddam's Baathist regime but also unleashed horrendous sectarian bloodletting across Iraq, transformed the regional balance of power. The principal beneficiary was Iran, whose two main enemies – the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq – were removed and the new government that came to power through elections in Iraq was dominated by Shia elements with strong ties to Tehran.

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This turn of events caused consternation among America's and Britain's closest regional allies, notably the Arab Gulf states, Egypt and Jordan. For Israel too the results of the war were unsettling, since Iran, along with Syria, was the main supplier of money, weapons and ideological inspiration to the Shia party Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Sunni Islamist movement Hamas in the Palestinian occupied territories.

Two further wars ensued, one between the Israelis and Hezbollah in summer 2006 and another between the Israelis and Hamas in the Gaza Strip in 2008-09. British efforts in the margins of the Iraq war to impress upon the Americans the importance of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the interests of regional stability, were little heeded. The administration of George W Bush was determined to shun Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat as a proponent of terrorism.

THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

Following Arafat's death, Britain joined other EU members in pushing for new Palestinian legislative elections. They were unprepared for the Hamas victory 2006 and when the Quartet of powers formed to manage the peace process – the US, UN, Russia and EU – agreed to boycott the Hamas administration, Britain went along. The requirements set for Hamas by the Quartet at a conference in London in 2006 were never likely to meet with Hamas agreement and given the prior designation of the movement as a terrorist organisation by the US and EU (and Britain), it was denied the EU funding upon which the Palestinian Authority depended.

Following a shoot-out between Hamas and its Fatah rivals in the Gaza strip, the latter fell under total Hamas control and was blockaded by the Israelis. Britain, along with other EU members protested the legality and consequences of the blockade, but with US concurrence the Israelis persisted in the isolation of Gaza. In the West Bank a new technocratic administration was formed and the British joined the US and other allies in helping it establish and train a new police force and set up quasi-state institutions, albeit under continued occupation.

On leaving office in 2007 Tony Blair was appointed Quartet representative with responsibility for developing the Palestinian economy. Blair ended up simply negotiating the removal of some of the Israeli roadblocks in the West Bank that impede normal movement and economic activity in the Palestinian territories.

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RELATIONS WITH ARAB ALLIES

Throughout the decade following 9/11, British relations with the Arab Gulf states were shaped by two main concerns in addition to the preservation of longstanding friendships and lucrative trade relations. One consideration was the war in Iraq, for which the British, as the Americans, needed the logistical support and operational cooperation of the Gulf Arabs. The other concern was the need to confront and defeat the destabilising repercussions of that war. In particular this meant supporting the efforts of the Saudi government to contain, apprehend and rehabilitate Al Qaeda recruits and sympathisers in the Kingdom.

In the wake of 9/11 the Americans and the British removed such troops as they had previously based in Saudi Arabia and made greater use of the bases and facilities in the smaller Arab Gulf states. The Saudi government was unhappy about the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, but even more anxious about the potential for regional sectarian strife and confrontation with Iran as a result of the Iraq war. However, when Al Qaeda struck inside the Kingdom in a series of attacks targeting Arab as well as other foreign nationals and Saudi installations, Western and other expatriates began to flee the Kingdom.

Eventually the Saudis instituted a new security crackdown on extremists within. Among those who stayed put during this crisis were workers from BAE Systems for whom Saudi Arabia was and remains too important a defence market to lose. The Al Yamamah and successor contracts first forged between the Saudi and British governments in the 1980s helped to keep the Tornado aircraft production lines running before the Typhoon came on stream.

British constancy was eventually rewarded with a new Saudi contract. However, to safeguard this and Saudi intelligence cooperation, the Blair government called off an investigation by the Serious Fraud Office into allegations of corruption in the forging of previous defence deals.

IRAN

Appearing before the Iraq Inquiry, Blair blamed the Iranians for interference in Iraq. His government's earlier attempts to obtain Iranian cooperation on both Afghanistan and Iraq foundered after 2003. Meanwhile British diplomacy in conjunction with France and Germany (the EU3) also failed to reach a compromise agreement with Tehran over the nuclear issue.

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ARAB REFORM

Notwithstanding the diversions of the Iraq war and the destabilising repercussions for the region, the British have pursued the goal of political and economic reform in the Arab states since the mid-1990s. However, quiet diplomacy with regimes like those of Egypt and Jordan could not achieve much in the context of the war on terror, when maintaining security cooperation with autocratic regimes took precedence over democracy promotion.

In conclusion, the British have talked to Arab rulers about the need and benefits of accountable government, political freedoms and human rights, but have not been a driving force for change, except in so far as they were involved in regime change in Iraq. It remains to be seen whether British reactions to the Arab revolts of 2011, including the intervention in Libya, will rectify Britain's reputation in this respect.

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