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what comes next

The Arab Spring One Year On

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Editorial

As Syria's anti-government uprisings enter their second year, elsewhere in other parts of the Middle East, where it all began, they are already entering a phase of adjustment to a new order. In this edition, *The Majalla* looks at those countries one by one, assessing the winners and losers of the Arab Spring while seeking to answer the enduring question: What Comes Next?

For many people it is a reason for celebration, for others it is a cause for concern, but one of the few concrete consequences of the Arab Spring is the unprecedented level of political representation achieved by Islamist parties in North Africa. The success of traditional conservatism has perhaps come as a surprise to those who considered last year's uprisings to be predominantly liberal in orientation, but Nabila Ramdani argues that this apparent endorsement of political Islam in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco can be attributed to the popular rejection of decades of overweening Western influence.

Western influence is of course a perennial topic when it comes to the Middle East and that is no less true today. The potential threat of a nuclear Iran is at the top Washington's list these days and the latest round of punitive sanctions against the Islamic Republic is the most extreme yet. In this context, Mehdi Khalaji discusses the reluctance of Ayatollah Khamenei to countenance compromise on the nuclear issue and the effect this stance may have on the wider region.

As antagonism builds between the US and Iran, the Americans are doing all they can to wind down operations on another front, namely Afghanistan. Sadly the local perception of the US presence in Afghanistan is one of insensitive overlords, a view not mitigated by the recent deaths of 16 civilians at the hands of a rogue US soldier. Helena Malikyar & Tanya Goudsouzian offer recommendations for swift action, before tensions in the war-torn country reach unbearable limits.

All these articles—as well as insightful blogs, reviews and other analyses—can be found online at www.majalla.com/eng. Do pay us a visit and don't hesitate to send us feedback via Twitter or Facebook.

Contributors

Nabila Ramdani

Nabila Ramdani is a Paris-born freelance journalist of Algerian descent who specializes in Anglo-French issues, Islamic affairs, and the Arab World. Her work has appeared in both English and French, in publications such as *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, the *Sunday Times*, *L'Express*, *Le Monde*, and *Le Figaro*. She appears regularly as a commentator on British and French radio and television. The World Economic Forum has named her a Young Global Leader for 2012.

Mehdi Khalaji

Mehdi Khalaji is a Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute, focusing on the politics of Iran and Shi'ite groups in the Middle East. He trained as a Shi'ite theologian in Qom from 1986-2000; he has also served on the editorial boards of two prominent Iranian periodicals and produced for the BBC and the US government's Persian news service. Mr. Khalaji began his journalism career in Qom, first serving on the editorial board of a theological journal Naqd va Nazar, and then the daily Entekhab. He moved to Paris in 2000, where he studied Shi'ite theology and exegesis in the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. He currently writes a bilingual English and Persian blog, MehdiKhalaji.com.

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Tanya Goudsouzian is a Doha-based Canadian journalist who has covered Afghanistan for over a decade. She has travelled to the country numerous times, and interviewed many leading figures across Afghanistan's political spectrum.

Helena Malikyar

Helena Malikyar is a Kabul-based Afghan historian and expert in Afghan state-building. She has worked on numerous governance projects with various international organizations in Afghanistan.

Andrea Gliotti

Andrea Gliotti is a freelancer who was based in Syria for the first five months of the uprisings in 2011. He received his MA in Near and Middle Eastern Studies at SOAS, London, and has worked as a coordinator for LIMES, an Italian geopolitical magazine, gathering articles from Syrian activist authors. Andrea has also written for several Italian newspapers, the Lebanese Daily Star, OpenDemocracy and the New Internationalist.

Back in Business

Arab countries are working hard to revive their tourism industries

50 ***While last year was one of the best on record for global tourism, revolutions and ongoing instability in the Arab worlds has cost the region's tourism industry billions of dollars***

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How the Islamists Took Power

Why did Moroccans, Tunisians, and Egyptians cast their hard-won vote in favor of religious parties?

The recent success of Islamist parties in North Africa was not in the script for armchair spectators of the Arab Spring. Western observers thought they were witnessing an awakening that would ouster authoritarian regimes, and replace them with Westernized liberal governments. Nabila Ramdani explains that a victory for conservatism is as much a reaction to Western influence as it is an endorsement of political Islam.

Nabila Ramdani

How did that happen?" was the question asked by numerous Western commentators as the results of Tunisia's first free elections were announced in October last year. To them, there had been a short, hugely dramatic revolution using new media tools and espousing liberal Western values, and yet the result was an Islamic parliament. Armchair observers, who had viewed the Jasmine Revolution as the 'democratic' Arab world fighting back against the dogma and squalor that had produced everything from the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on America, were particularly alarmed. Surely millions of liberated Tunisians did not want to swap the despotic Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali for the kind of clerical dictatorship that had turned countries like Iran into international pariahs?

The answer, of course, was that Tunisia's Ennahda Party, which claimed victory over the secular Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), never had any intention of re-imposing authoritarian rule in the first country to achieve freedom during the Arab Spring. Rather than living up to the extremist stereotypes created by anti-Muslim propagandists, they were moderates committed to a "unity government" reflecting popular opinion. It was to be the same with other Arab countries over the next few months, as they either shed their dictators or reformed their political systems to stave off rebellion.

Widespread popular support for political Islam actually reflects an abiding frustration with the West's continual portrayal of Muslims as violent extremists. More than 70 percent of votes in Egypt's new parliament went to parties with Islamic links, including the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party. In Morocco, the moderate Islamic Party of Justice and Development (PJD) now controls the new coalition government for the first time in the country's history. It won the largest number of seats for any single party (107 out of 395) in last November's parliamentary elections.

Rather than being the enemies of feminists, Christians, secularists, and a host of other minority groups who want a say in the running of their new regimes, the moderate Islamists in countries like Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia have set about ending corruption, promoting social justice, and making their countries economically viable. In Syria and Libya—the countries that have experienced by far the bloodiest revolutions—it is heavily armed Islamic movements that have been at the forefront of protests. Extremist religious groups also routinely threaten established leaders in countries like Algeria.

To understand why, we only have to look at the recent history of Islamic parties in Arab countries. Syria's Muslim Brotherhood has been banned for almost 50 years, and many of those supporting Bashar Al-Assad's regime do so because they fear a resurgence of Islamic extremism. Assad has, in turn, persecuted the Brotherhood relentlessly. Joining the Brotherhood has been a capital offence in Syria since the early 1980s, and Assad has rigorously enforced the death sentence. Such repression has been replicated in other countries including Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. In all of these countries, most Islamists have been given martyr status because of the repression they suffered at the hand of Western-backed autocrats—a fact that has been an obvious boost to their political ambitions.

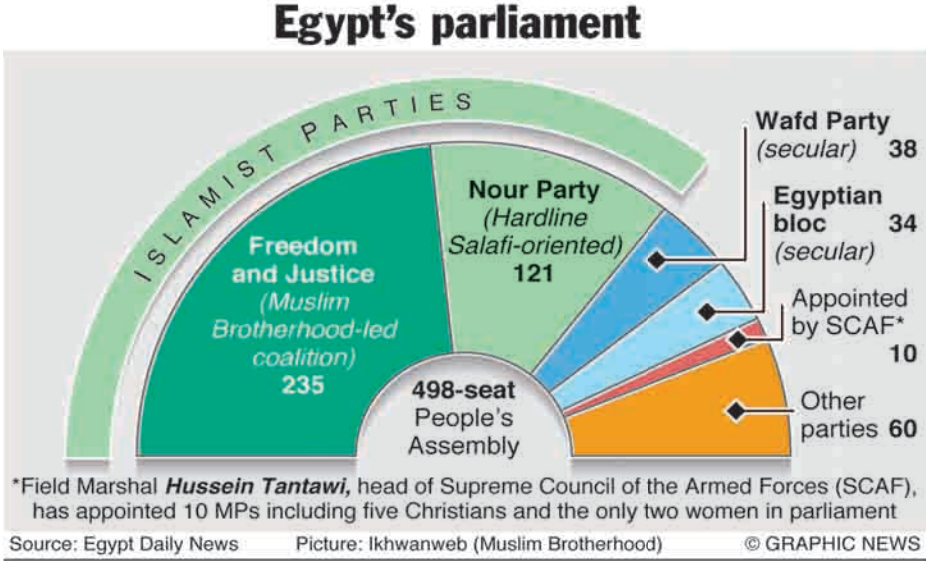


Photo © Getty Images

Widespread popular support for political Islam actually reflects an abiding frustration with the West's continual portrayal of Muslims as violent extremists. The War on Terror, which President George W. Bush began in 2001, led directly to a crackdown on Muslims in their own countries. Accordingly, dictators had an easy excuse to pour millions into state security. The collaboration between the US and its allies meant that 'terrorists' were arrested after Friday prayers, tortured—even killed—while others were forced abroad. For example the Secretary General of Tunisia's Ennahda party, Hamadi Jebali, spent 16 years in prison. The President of the party, Rachid Ghannouchi, spent a total of 22 years in exile. As far as future elections were concerned, this could only have one result: the support of Islamic parties by indigenous Muslim populations.

There is no escaping the fact that Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Ben Ali in Tunisia and Colonel Qadhafi in Libya all regularly bought their weapons, including crowd control and espionage technology, from Western companies, as they kept their own people in line. Meanwhile, these same populations often lived in squalid conditions, sharing none of the revenue acquired from Western oil and energy speculators, or from tourism chiefs who offered beaches and other attractions to rich foreign visitors.

"Rather than being the enemies of feminists, Christians, secularists, and a host of other minority groups who want a say in the running of their new regimes, the moderate Islamists in countries like Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia have set about ending corruption, promoting social justice, and making their countries economically viable"

Hotels and restaurants came to symbolize all that was anathema to the oppressed. Their day-to-day lives were characterized by unemployment, poor medical care, sub-standard education, and in many cases, no basic supplies like running water or electricity. As the dictators concentrated on the super-rich elite, Islamic parties alleviated the condition of the poor, the ill, and the oppressed. Movements like the Muslim Brotherhood invested huge amounts of time, effort and limited funds in providing accommodation, medical assistance and food for all kinds of disadvantaged groups, including rural students who had made their way to big cities. They also invested in women's groups, and provided mass marriage ceremonies for those who would have otherwise found it too expensive to wed. Such philanthropic and charitable work was not forgotten by the electorate once despotic governments were finally overthrown.

Another reason for the rise of political Islam has been a reaction to the greed, violence and conformity many young Arabs associate with the West. Given a choice between military bases and fast food chains, many revert to a conservative preference for traditional Islamic values. In the words of Salah Ibrahim, a 23-year-old IT student from Cairo, "There are very few young Arabs who want to turn into

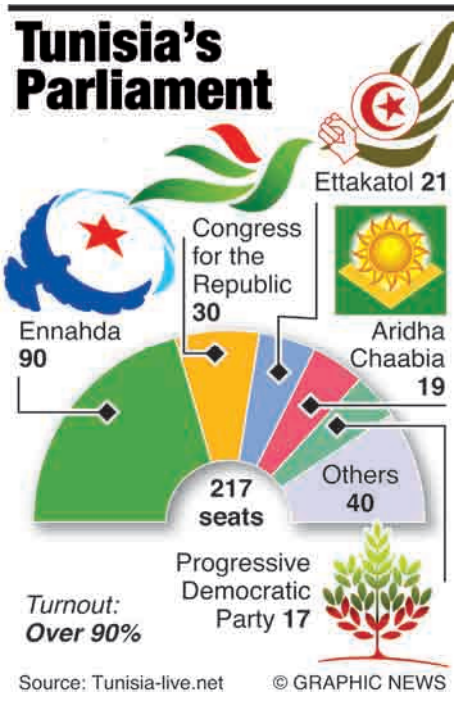
regular Westerners. Despite understanding that we need to use the tools of the modern world like the Internet, Arabs are essentially a conservative, religious people. This has always been the case, and modern politicians who overlook this will have no chance of winning elections." In short, Islamic parties enable them to affirm their identities. Westernized Arabs, who drive everywhere in imported Mercedes limousines and send their sons and daughters to universities in London and Paris, have always been a tiny minority.

Just look at the condescending, dismissive manner in which many in the West greeted the early success of the Arab Spring. At the time the French Foreign Minister, Michèle Alliot-Marie (who had been hosted by the Ben Ali family on her vacation), suggested sending extra tear gas and police advisors to Tunis. The US wanted to supply more rubber bullets to Mubarak in Egypt. Just four years before the start of the Libyan rebellion, President Nicolas Sarkozy invited Colonel Qadhafi for a state visit to Paris, where he was treated as a true 'Brother Leader' as Sarkozy tried to sell him millions of Euros' worth of fighter jets. Around the same time, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair was still 'opening up' Libya to energy companies from the UK and the US, having also embraced Qadhafi as a 'friend.' It was only when the diplomatic tide changed (which in Sarkozy's case meant Qadhafi deciding to buy Russian planes instead of French ones) that France and the UK withdrew their support, effectively signing Qadhafi's death warrant.

More starkly, young Arabs still resent what the West is perceived as doing to fellow Muslims. The daily bombing of Afghanistan by a high-tech military is just part of an onslaught which regularly sees ordinary people becoming 'collateral damage.' Even those without televisions would have been aware of the nightly attacks on Libyan cities by cruise missiles and jets, as Qadhafi's forces were obliterated alongside anybody else who got in the way. In June 2011, for example, 15 civilians (including three children) were killed in a NATO attack on buildings just west of Tripoli. NATO later admitted to a so-called 'weapons failure,' saying the intended target had been a "key Qadhafi regime command and control centre."

Foreign intervention, and particularly the kind of destructive horror which has blighted Iraq, has played a huge part in helping to forge Arab consciousness over the past few decades. Faced with the perceived 'Western values' of easy killing and the destruction of property, conservative Arabs would much rather opt for the safe, trusted option of local religious parties.

Another crucial point about the new Islamic parties is that the successful ones are always likely to be democratic ones. Both the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia have made it clear that technocratic brilliance is needed to solve the endemic economic and social problems of the Arab world. Creating jobs, modern housing, education and health systems, and efficient public services for all will require the kind of joint effort encapsulated by the term 'unity government.' Rachid Ghannouchi has pledged to create up to 600,000 new jobs in Tunisia, which would cut the unemployment rate from at least 19 percent to just over eight percent. Referring to a female graduate jobless rate spiraling above 35 percent, Ghannouchi said, "We want an economic model like Sweden's … we want to strengthen women's rights, on workplace harassment, domestic violence, and better childcare so women can continue their careers."



"By taking on secular parties as allies, parties like Ennahda will be confident of their ability to build their country's infrastructure, encourage business, and control Tunisia's previously corrupt, brutal security services"

By taking on secular parties as allies, parties like Ennahda will be confident of their ability to build their country's infrastructure, encourage business, and control Tunisia's previously corrupt, brutal security services. Tunisian Islamists certainly realize that the secular parties could act as a brake on the kind of extremism that saw Shari'a law enshrined in the new Libyan constitution following the fall of Qadhafi.

Islam can be extreme, but no more so than any other form of political expression. To argue otherwise is like saying that conservative values only encompass racism, rather than a patriotic desire for stability, peace and prosperity. Islamic parties will be first and foremost judged on their ability to bring back dignity into the lives of ordinary Arabs. If they succeed they will be re-elected, if they fail they will be rejected. The laws of democratic politics apply to Islamic parties as much as anybody else, and that is why both the Arab World and the West have every reason to embrace them. ■

Nabila Ramdani is a Paris-born freelance journalist of Algerian descent who specializes in Anglo-French issues, Islamic affairs, and the Arab World. Her work has appeared in both English and French, in publications such as The Guardian, The Observer, the Sunday Times, L'Express, Le Monde, and Le Figaro. She appears regularly as a commentator on British and French radio and television. The World Economic Forum has named her a Young Global Leader for 2012.

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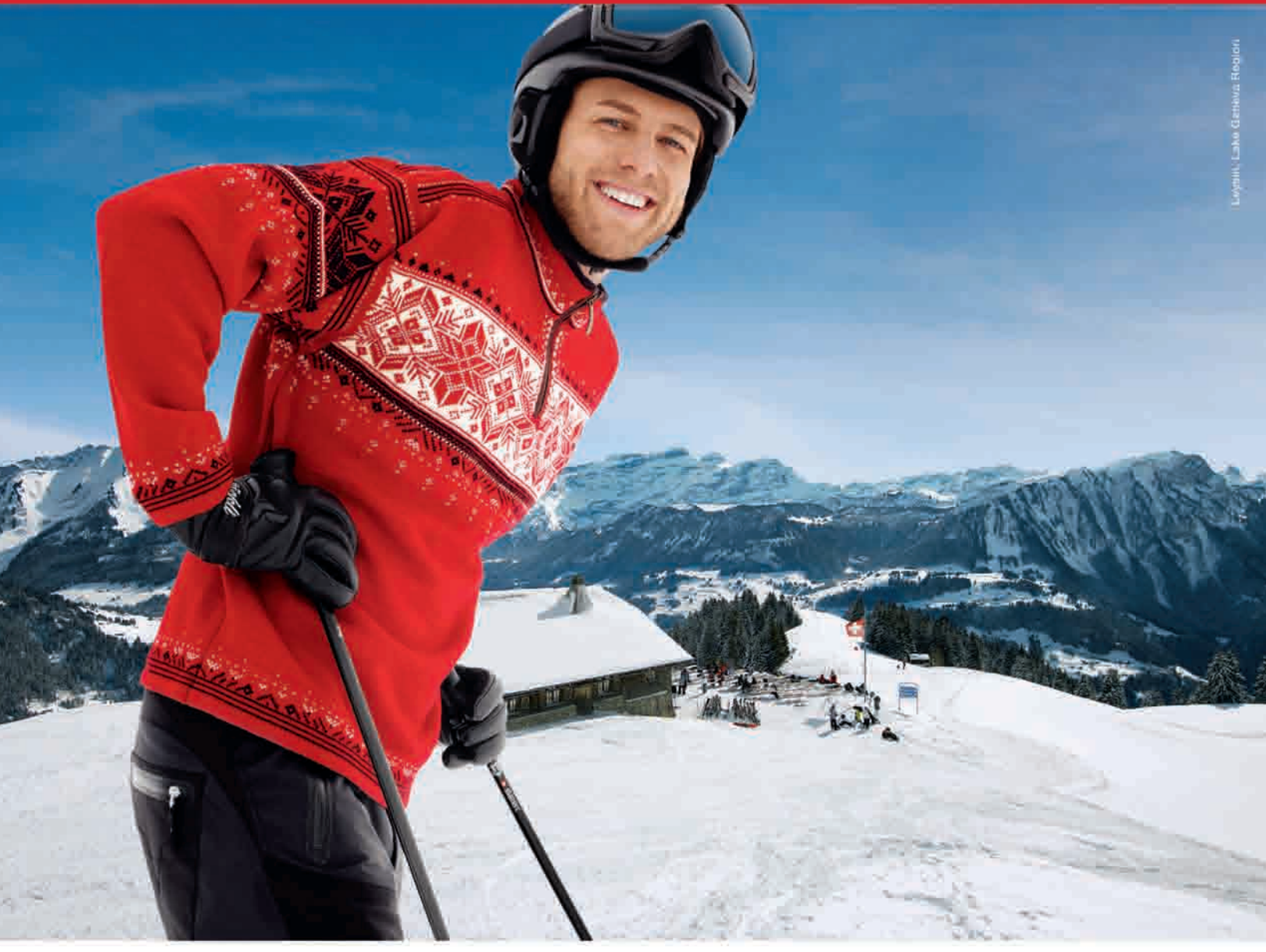

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Voice of the People?

Just another conference for the Syrian opposition

One year has passed since the beginning of Syria's uprising, and Turkey has been providing opportunities for numerous Syrian opposition figures to coordinate their efforts against the regime. However, the results are largely discouraging.

Andrea Gliotti

Sheikh Nawaf Bashir, head of the Baqara tribe from Deyr az-Zour and former member of the Damascus Declaration, acts frustrated when he receives a phone call to organize yet another conference in Istanbul: "Abu Ja'far… another conference! What's this conference for? Why do we keep on organizing conferences, if there is no international support?!"

One year has passed since the beginning of Syria's uprising, and Turkey has been providing opportunities for numerous Syrian opposition figures to coordinate their efforts against the regime. However, the results are largely discouraging: an endless proliferation of rival groups failing to achieve international recognition. The outcome of a conference entitled Friends of Syria, held in Tunis on 24 February, failed to overcome such a deadlock, because no country recognized the major opposition group, the Syrian National Council (SNC), as the unique legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

Having met with representatives of at least four different blocs, there appears to be no consensus on the way the international community should tilt the balance in favor of the uprising. The SNC and the vast majority of committees on the ground call for arming the revolutionaries and establishing a buffer zone to protect civilians and increase defections. In contrast, the National Coordination Committee (NCC), a group of veteran dissidents headed by Haytham Al-Manna and Hassan Abdul-Azim, opposes foreign military intervention and does not exclude dialogue with the regime.

According to activists, the death toll has reached more than 9,000 people, and any bloc still wanting to negotiate is perceived as a tool created by the Government. "The NCC is a bunch of traders of blood, they've been bought by the regime," says Ibrahim Al-Hajj Ali, an activist from Aleppo, who was expelled from the army for trying to form a Sunni Islamist cell. "Haytham Al-Manna called on the demonstrators to return to their houses…We don't want these people back in Syria, even after the collapse of the regime!"

> *"Seventy percent of the SNC have no followers in the Syrian streets; we want a presidential committee elected by Syrian activists to have them in the 'political kitchen'"*

Samir Nashar, a representative of the Damascus Declaration on the SNC's executive committee, holds a more balanced view of the NCC, considering it a representative of the elites tied economically to the regime in Aleppo and Damascus. An NCC member and lawyer from Dara'a, Hassan Al-Aswad, defends Manna's intentions to focus on "those who are scared to participate in the uprising, particularly the minorities." At the same time, Aswad believes that the NCC's insistence on non-violence and dialogue to confront the regime's brutality is remote from reality.

In its bid for support, the SNC is also accused of being driven by power struggles and subject to foreign pressures. Emblematic of this was the renewal of the presidential mandate of Burhan Ghalioun, despite being a council based on replacing its leader every three months. Samir Nashar, the only member of the executive committee who voted against the extension, claims that "a month ago, some were against the re-election of Ghalioun and then they changed their position, due to 'regional influences' possibly coming from Qatar."

The Antalya conference's organizer, Ammar Al-Qurabi, a Syrian human rights activist who is about to launch his own bloc, is proud of having kept himself outside the SNC. He believes that group is divided between Qatari support for Ghalioun and Turkey's backing of the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite trying to shape a democratic body, the SNC seems to lack the required political and financial transparency, according to its members' accounts: "There is a problem when it comes to the transparency of funding," says Nashar, "because so far the support came from businessmen, individuals and not from countries."

The SNC appears to be the formation closest to the streets, counting on the support of various networks of local committees, but its critics claim it should go further, by including activists in decision-making bodies like the executive committee, Al-Maktab Al-Tanfidhi. These are exactly the demands of Nawaf Al-Bashir: "Seventy percent of the SNC have no followers in the Syrian streets; we want a presidential committee elected by Syrian activists to have them in the 'political kitchen.'"

No one really wants to meddle in Syria

After almost one year, what is clear to all sides is the scarce will of the international community to intervene in support of the Syrian opposition. Even the Gulf countries have shown little intention to support the opposition militarily until recently. According to a source close to the Syrian Minister of Finance, Mohammad Al-Hussein, the Assad regime received $500 million from some Gulf States and $300 million from the UAE after three months of bloodshed in Syria last June.

Contrary to some reports published on the Iraqi daily Al-Mada, Nawaf Bashir denies that any sort of contact occurred between Syrian-Iraqi Sunni tribal leaders and the Gulf countries. When asked about the allegations against the Gulf States and the UAE, Mohammad Faruq Al-Tayfur, representative of the Muslim Brotherhood in the SNC's executive committee replied: "I cannot confirm this information, but it could have happened in the beginning, while the Gulf countries were still supporting the regime, mainly to contain the stability of the region." However, during the Tunis conference, Saudi Foreign Minister Sa'ud Al-Faisal finally promised to have Bashar leave "either voluntarily or by force," thus nurturing the SNC's expectations of Saudi military support.

Turkey is praised for having hosted the Syrian opposition both politically and militarily, but the SNC places no hopes on a unilateral military intervention coming from Ankara. Both Nashar and Al-Tayfur are convinced that Turkey will not act without the consensus of the international community, though Nashar still hopes to see Turkish ground forces enforcing a buffer zone, supported by Libyan-style NATO air strikes.

However, following the conference in Tunis, there is growing frustration about the Western—and especially American—stance, as US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton voiced her fears that a foreign intervention could lead to civil war. In that respect, the opposition is united in ascribing America's concerns to the border Israel has been peacefully sharing with Syria for almost 40 years. Nevertheless, for liberals within the SNC, Western support still holds some relevance to contain the Gulf's brand of political Islam, as Nashar notes, "if the intervention occurs under the UN monitoring, it would prevent Saudi and Qatari political interests from prevailing in Syria."

Armed resistance beyond the Free Syrian Army

After one year of massacres, many of the demonstrators who started calling for reforms one year ago consider violence as the only option for a way out. Violence means arming the so-called Free Syrian Army (FSA), whose structure is still unclear to many.

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The SNC tends to recognize the Turkish-based leadership of Colonel Riyadh Al-Asad, but everyone is aware that there are other groups on the ground. The last relevant group to emerge is guided by Brigadier General Mostafa Al-Shaykh, who defected last January. Former officer Ibrahim Al-Hajj belittles the importance of the FSA as a unified structure and stresses the autonomous nature of the armed resistance active in Syria. "There is no such a thing as the FSA, it is only a name for the resistance," confirms Al-Qurabi.

Even the SNC has no clear ties with the FSA according to Samir Nashar, who admits that there is "scarce communication" between them. In order to strengthen this feeble coordination, a group of SNC members have recently set up a National Front for the Support of the FSA, and the SNC has created a Military Advisory Council, a sort of Ministry of Defense based in Turkey. According to Tayfur, this second institution is aimed at reassuring the international community that the SNC is in control of the armed resistance, but the project has yet to meet expectations. Colonel Riyadh Al-Asad rejected the institution, claiming he had not been informed of it beforehand. Outside the SNC, some believe the best strategy to control armed resistance, and violence in general, would be to enhance the power of civilian committees: "The issue of having civilian committees is aimed at controlling the military departments within them, in order to know who the weapons belong to," suggests Hassan Al-Aswad. His model is the local council of Zabadani, a body created when the opposition took temporarily control of this suburb.

War of Egos

Besides the differing views, what is most discouraging about the opposition is the abortive war of egos. "The fact that any kind of opposition has been forbidden for the last forty years had an influence on its current structure," admits Nashar. "It is not institutionalized, the individual still plays a big negative role."

To understand how some figures of the opposition see themselves, one need only quote Al-Qurabi when he said that that when he was "working to support the revolution, most people from the SNC were drinking milk from their mothers."

Another well-known dissident in exile in London, Wahid Saqr, claims that SNC members Fida Al-Majzub and Shaykh Khaled Kamal were in Damascus in January to bargain Ministries with the regime. Are these, as his critics claim, groundless allegations from a former Alawi officer who cannot tolerate the Muslim Brotherhood's influence over the SNC?

Amidst personal resentments, each faction competes with the other in claiming to represent the streets, whilst, in the words of Nawaf Bashir, "leading the revolution from five stars hotels." ■

Andrea Gliotti is a freelancer who was based in Syria for the first five months of the uprisings in 2011. He received his MA in Near and Middle Eastern Studies at SOAS, London, and has worked as a coordinator for LIMES, an Italian geopolitical magazine. Andrea has also written for several Italian newspapers, the Lebanese Daily Star, OpenDemocracy and the New Internationalist.

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No Nuclear Compromise

Is a Nuclear Middle East Inevitable?

As the war of words between Iran and the US (and by extension Israel) becomes ever more heated, an international conference aiming to make the Middle East a WMD-free zone looms. Mehdi Khalaji suggests that goal to be highly ambitious, especially given the reluctance of Ayatollah Khamenei to enter negotiations.

Mehdi Khalaji

A specter is haunting the Middle East: the specter of the nuclear bomb. Iran's potential nuclear capability worries Middle Eastern countries—including its immediate neighbors. Not only does Israel see a nuclear Iran as an existential threat, but also Arab countries—especially members of the Gulf Cooperation Council—consider an Iranian atomic bomb the ultimate factor that would change the region's balance of power to their disadvantage.

This year an international conference will be held in Finland on ridding the Middle East of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD). But the dream of the Middle East as a WMD-free zone is fading fast. Saudi Arabia and UAE have not only tried to acquire more weaponry and equip themselves with cutting-edge military technology, but they are also justifying the idea of launching a nuclear program. Other countries in the region—including Turkey—are also on this path.

The only hope for making the Middle East a nuclear-free zone is to stop Iran from reaching nuclear capability. While Israeli nuclear capability primarily aims to protect a country surrounded by enemies, Iran's attempt to obtain such capability remains unjustifiable in the eyes of the West and its neighboring countries, which have made it a priority to thwart Iran's nuclear ambitions. Without intensive efforts from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries in enforcing sanctions on Iran, the Islamic Republic would not be as economically and politically isolated as it is today. With this year's escalation in sanctions, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states have demonstrated that they are ready to compensate for the loss of Iranian oil to European markets by meeting the shortfall. In this way, harsher sanctions on Iran will have little impact on the oil market, thus paving the way for the sustained isolation of Iran.

The Islamic Republic has many reasons for seeking to obtain nuclear weapons. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, firmly believes that the ultimate goal of the West in pressuring Iran over its nuclear program is not the end of the program itself, but an attempt to

Photo © Getty Images

destroy the regime. For him, the Islamic Republic and the West are inherently at odds. After the decline of Communism in the world, Khamenei held that Iran represented a new pole—political Islam—that would oppose the other pole, namely the West. In his Manichaeism view, the battle of good and evil will continue until good wins. Any compromise with the West, let alone normalizing the relationship, is against the nature of the Islamic Republic.

For Iran's supreme leader, what is at stake is regional supremacy. Since the US and its allies have achieved hegemony in the Middle East they are able to squeeze Iran whenever they want, on whatever issue they please. Gaining nuclear capability would change this course and make it harder for the West to impose its will on Iran.

In a speech on 22 February, Ayatollah Khamenei stated:

Iran's future and national interests depend on the scientific and technological advances in nuclear technology . . . If nations can independently achieve advances in the nuclear areas, aerospace, technology, science and industry, then there will no longer be any room for the bullying hegemony of the superpowers. . .The sanctions have been there since the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, but the nuclear issue is a recent development. Therefore, [the West's] main problem is that there is a nation that is determined to become independent, a nation that is not prepared to give in to oppression, a nation that is determined to expose oppressors, a nation that wants to tell other nations that it has achieved this goal and that it will make even more accomplishments.

Compromise is a frightening word for Ayatollah Khamenei. He dislikes such tactics either in dealing with his domestic enemies or in handling foreign policy. In a meeting with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, Khamenei advised that any move that weakens resistance would work against the future of Muslim nations. He reiterated the idea that "it is necessary to constantly guard against the infiltration of compromising elements into the resistance groups." This clearly reflects what he thinks about several issues other than the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the course of the last 23 years, Khamenei successfully sabotaged all efforts to seriously engage with the US, as well as any attempt that aimed to build confidence at a diplomatic level. Former Presidents Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami, who expressed their willingness to solve the nuclear standoff through diplomatic means, have been marginalized and seen as dangerous threats to the authority of the supreme leader. Khamenei has made 'resistance' a sacred word, and has a desire to be regarded in the Muslim world as the ultimate representative of the idea.

Pakistan and Libya provide important lessons for Iran. Libya gave up its nuclear program, and the regime was overthrown with NATO assistance. Pakistan acquired a nuclear program, yet the government is recognized by the West despite all the troubles it makes.

In the 1980's, Iran experienced eight years of war with Iraq that led to hundreds of thousands of casualties. Many groups in the Islamic Republic believe that if Iran had nuclear capabilities thirty years ago, the devastating war would not have happened. Now Iran sees itself surrounded by enemies, and has failed to establish good relations with most Arab countries (except Syria). Arab Sunni powers accuse Iran of trying to proselytize Shi'ism throughout the Arab world, to spread its revolutionary ideology and mobilize Arabs against their governments. Iran rejects these charges and emphasizes that its ideology is not sectarian but rather pan-Islamic. A cold war between Iran and Saudi Arabia is playing out inside and outside both countries. Iran accuses Saudi Arabia of supporting armed groups in the Baloch and Kurdish provinces of Iran, while Saudi Arabia accuses Iran of funding Shi'ites in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia, Saada in the north of Yemen, and also in Bahrain. Rival groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asia, Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian territories benefit from different degrees of support from Saudi Arabia and Iran.

"Iran's future and national interests depend on the scientific and technological advances in nuclear technology… If nations can independently achieve advances in the nuclear areas, aerospace, technology, science and industry, then there will no longer be any room for the bullying hegemony of the superpowers"

Iran's guarded path to a nuclear program increases the possibility of an arms race in the region. In a recent interview with the Associated Press, Prince Turki Al-Faisal of Saudi Arabia—who advocates the idea of five permanent US Security Council members to guarantee a nuclear security umbrella for Middle Eastern countries to join a nuclear-free zone—said the Gulf countries are committed to not acquiring WMDs. "But we're not the only players in town," he remarked. "You have Turkey. You have Iraq, which has a track record of wanting to go nuclear. You have Egypt. They had a very vibrant technology energy program from the 1960s. You have Syria. You have other players in the area that could open Pandora's Box." Obviously Saudi Arabia, as the Prince suggests, would not fall behind in this hypothetical arms race: "What I suggest for Saudi Arabia and for the other Gulf states … is that we must study carefully all the options, including the option of acquiring weapons of mass destruction. We can't simply leave it for somebody else to decide for us."

Under such circumstances, the only hope for a Middle Eastern nuclear-free zone is to stop Iran from reaching nuclear capability. The idea of sanction-based containment may work with regard to Iran, but would not discourage other countries in the region from going nuclear. Such a strategy could not prevent Iran from providing nuclear technology and know-how to other countries. Iranian officials, including President Mahmoud Amadinejad, have reiterated several times that Iran is ready to provide such services to other Muslim countries. Containment might have worked so far with countries like North Korea and Pakistan, but it has not created any impediment for them to smuggle nuclear technology and knowledge to countries like Iran.

The mixed policy of sanctions and covert operations, such as infiltrating computer systems and assassinating nuclear scientists, is the current Western policy. It aims to decelerate the Iranian nuclear program and force Iran to come back to the negotiation table. But there are some difficulties here: sanctions and punitive efforts are perceived by Iran's leaders as the West's strategy to topple the regime by crippling the economy and isolating the country. When this strategy is combined with Western declarations about human rights and the democratic movement in Iran, this leaves little doubt in the minds of senior government figures that the hidden goal is regime change. Ayatollah Khamenei even believes that Western cultural invasion of Iran pursues the total destruction of Islamic ideology and the empowerment of liberal secular forces in Iranian society. Paranoid Iranian leaders even believe that humanities students, academics, journalists, artists, writers, women, human rights activists, and fashion designers are either the West's covert agents or 'unpaid soldiers' of the West's army in its soft war with Iran.

Is the West able to convince Iran that its policy is not to change the regime, but rather to end Iranian nuclear ambitions? As long as Ayatollah Khamenei is in charge of the country, it would be almost impossible for the West to do so. Khamenei may change his perception of the West's goal if the US, EU, and UN sanctions are lifted before any serious negotiations, but this seems very unrealistic. Even more, this may be interpreted by Iran's leader as a deceptive move.

Iran will not be able to survive the existing sanctions, which are unprecedented in targeting the banking system and oil industry. It is a futile attempt to convince Iran's leader that regime change is not Western policy. Whatever the interpretation of sanctions by Iran's leaders is, the world should put maximum effort into enforcing current sanctions. An unbearable economic crisis is occurring in Iran and it would certainly divide the circle of policy makers, especially the influential Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. This would most likely bring significant change to Iran's nuclear policy. ■

Who are the Inspectors?

A closer look at the International Atomic Energy Agency

- Founded in 1957 as a response to the discovery of nuclear energy (and its controversial use in warfare).
- Currently has 153 Member-States.
- In contrast, over 190 states have signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). States that are not members of the IAEA have only minimal external enforcement of their treaty obligations.
- Has five major departments; four of these promote research and development of peaceful uses of nuclear technology.
- A fifth department, the Department of Safeguards, carries out technical analysis of Member-States' nuclear programmes to determine whether military nuclear technology is being developed.
- Acts in a political and diplomatic capacity when nuclear-free zones are established.

"What I suggest for Saudi Arabia and for the other Gulf states… is that we must study carefully all the options, including the option of acquiring weapons of mass destruction"

Mehdi Khalaji is a Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute, focusing on the politics of Iran and Shi'ite groups in the Middle East. He trained as a Shi'ite theologian in Qom from 1986-2000; he has also served on the editorial boards of two prominent Iranian periodicals and produced for the BBC and the US government's Persian news service. Mr. Khalaji began his journalism career in Qom, first serving on the editorial board of a theological journal Naqd va Nazar, and then the daily Entekhab. He moved to Paris in 2000, where he studied Shi'ite theology and exegesis in the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. He currently writes a bilingual English and Persian blog, MehdiKhalaji.com.

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What Comes Next?

The Arab Spring One Year On

It has been just over a year since a Tunisian street vendor set himself alight in protest against the conditions imposed on him by a corrupt authoritarian regime. This man prompted an outpouring of anger that would topple Tunisia's despotic government and inspire copycat protests across the Arab World. Here, The Majalla assesses how affected countries have coped with the onslaught of the so-called 'Arab Spring,' and ask: who has gained and who has lost in the process?

On 14 January 2011, the first president to fall at the hands of protests in the Middle East departed Tunisia. The next twelve months have since become a historic period of profound transition and evolution for the region. It is a movement still in the process of realization.

It all began when, on 17 December 2010, Mohammed Bouazizi—a fruit vendor driven to desperate measures by the corruption and abuse endemic across Tunisia—set the whole region aflame by dousing himself with paint thinner and striking a match. His death two weeks later became the tragic inspiration that rallied Tunisians to continue his protest against unemployment, rising food prices, and an autocratic government that was seemingly indifferent to the suffering of ordinary Tunisians.

Funerals for those killed in clashes with the armed forces became flashpoints for more battles. More and more clashes occurred in small towns similar to Bouazizi's home of Sidi Bouzid. In the beginning, it was being called the 'Jasmine Revolution.' Acts of defiance like Bouazizi's would occur all over the region over the subsequent weeks.

Egypt would turn the Jasmine Revolution into the 'Facebook Revolution' when protestors—organizing themselves on social media—made Cairo's Tahrir Square the new flashpoint to watch. When Mubarak resigned on 11 February, the jubilation was as contagious as it was short-lived.

One month later, fighter jets sweeping Benghazi, Misrata, and Brega in Libya brought a heavy sense of dread to the once-hopeful outburst of resistance. The movements in Yemen and Libya tested the endurance of protesters—protesters who became rebels, who eventually formed armies. A NATO intervention and tens of thousands of lives lost in Libya brought Western powers front and center in the Arab Spring.

After Qadhafi's dramatic and televised demise and Saleh's departure, the violent face of the Arab Spring was unmasked: peaceful protesters with placards were now rebels with rocket-propelled grenades. Meanwhile, Syria's long and bloody standoff continues to claim lives as the world waits to see who will triumph in the struggle between Assad's government and its opponents.

It was a long road the Middle East traveled down in 2011. One year later, the question of what comes next has no definitive answer. In this piece, The Majalla asks who won and who lost. Country by country, we review the Arab Spring and bring you our predictions and highlight the things we will be watching this year.

Written by The Majalla with the contribution of Mohammed Al-Rumaihi.

TUNISIA

The Little Country that Could

What has happened to the little country that started it all?

Despite moderate progress in Tunisia since the ouster of President Ben Ali, the country still faces extreme difficulties. The poor economic situation that initiated anti-government protests has yet to be adequately addressed, and the rise of political Islam has yet to be properly accounted for.

TUNISIA	
Status	Moderate progress
Achievements	Parliamentary elections Appointment of a new President and Prime Minister Establishing a temporary constitution
Failures	Lack of civil reconciliation Ailing economy Domestic discontent over jobs
Winners	Ennahda Party
Losers	People of Sidi Bouzid The youth movement
Recommendations	Presidential pardoning of former members of the ruling party because most of them are qualified technocrats and the country needs them A referendum to confirm the secular achievements of the past in matters of women and family issues

Despite the widespread hyperbole that has generally surrounded events in Tunisia this year, it is more proper to urge caution and consider that only moderate progress has been made in the country since the ouster of the former president, Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali.

It is true that the relatively efficient organization of national elections contributed to the establishment of a national assembly, and in good time a new constitution ought to help the country flourish. The appointment of President Moncef Marzouki, a competent politician and calming influence, has given cause for hope. Likewise, the appointment of Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali has brought stability.

Despite these successes, the ailing national economy and extreme discontent over unemployment—a root cause of the January uprising—have not been adequately addressed. What is more, Tunisia must now bring about civil reconciliation in order to move on from the trauma of a year in which over 300 Tunisians died.

The country must also come to terms with the ascendancy of the Islamist Ennadha party, the group which has gained the most from a turbulent year and which topped the polls in October elections. The amorphous youth movement might well be disappointed that their idealistic voice has not carried far. Likewise, the people of Sidi Bouzid—so vociferous in dissent—have not seen their situation change a great deal.

A sound policy for the future would see the new president issuing a formal pardon to those associated with the old regime. This would both aid the reconciliation process and help the country get over its economic slump by taking advantage of the expertise of former members of the old ruling party. To guard against the religious overtones of the new dominant party, it would be wise to acknowledge and affirm the secular achievements of the past. Tunisia is rightfully proud of its status in matters of women's rights and family law, and it would be a backwards step to diverge from that path.

Photo © Getty Images

LIBYA
A Long Road from Ruin
Not yet out of the woods

Qadhafi may be gone and fighting ended, but the peace is increasingly fragile. Less than halfway into an envisaged 18-month transition plan, regional tensions are already surfacing. Libya lacks the basic political and administrative capacity commensurate with the most basic standards of popular legitimacy and good governance. With oil production resuming at a staggering pace, macroeconomic recovery is on track, but the pace of job creation is less clear.

LIBYA	
Status	Crisis Ongoing
Achievements	Appointment of Prime Minister Resumption of oil production
Failures	Securing weapons Transition timeline Torture and detention without trial Regional split
Winners	National Transitional Council, Britain, France, NATO
Losers	Civilians (30,000 killed; 50,000 wounded) Economy (-28 percent GDP growth)
Recommendations	Disarm militias Improve transparency in oil sector Promote national unity

Libya is not yet out of the woods. Qadhafi may be gone and fighting ended, but the fragile peace that followed Qadhafi's demise is increasingly strained. The appointment of a provisional government under Prime Minister Al-Keib has given structure and stability to the transition plan—but even if all aspects of the transition stay on schedule and if all the volatile factors in play remain within manageable limits, Libya still won't see elections for at least eighteen months. And those are big 'ifs.'

It is doubtful that Libya can endure in this power vacuum for another six months, let alone a year or more. Last October, wartime Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril voiced his concerns about rivalry between rebel factions, and in November advocated shortening the transition period to a mere six months. Jibril's concerns have proven warranted. Rival militias have fought sporadically in Tripoli, and several have consolidated their strongholds outside the capital. Fears of regional fragmentation also seem to be coming true: leaders in Libya's eastern province, Cyrenaica, recently declared it autonomous of central government control, prompting the head of the National Transitional Council (NTC) to threaten to use force to bring it back into the fold.

After 42 years of misrule, it will take far longer than six months to build a political infrastructure that meets even basic standards of popular legitimacy and good governance, two of three measures by which Al-Keib's government wants to distinguish itself from the Qadhafi regime.

The third measure is economic performance. Here, the challenge is not simply generating economic growth—a relatively easy task given that Libya is unconstrained by foreign debt and its vast oil and gas reserves are a stone's throw from European markets. Rather, Libya's economy must produce jobs that will stimulate domestic demand and inject cash into local economies. But there are supply-side issues that must be addressed. Al-Keib's government is keenly aware that Libya's chronic shortage of affordable housing—an important contributing factor in the uprising—has been made worse by the fighting and counts among the medium-term flashpoints that could galvanize protests once again.

Undoubtedly convincing militias to disarm and join a unified national project is the most pressing immediate challenge. Yet looking ahead Al-Keib's government must grapple with several dilemmas. Militias must be coaxed into laying down arms and supporting the government, but the impression of political favouritism must be avoided. The power vacuum must be filled as soon as possible, but it takes time to build a legitimate political infrastructure and negotiate a new constitution. The economy needs kick-starting, but care must be taken to ensure economic growth is inclusive and the wealth generated is shared equitably. Growth without job creation would spell disaster.

These dilemmas require careful management, but it is too early to say with certainty whether Libya is making progress towards that end.

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Egypt
The Military With a State
The changing of the chiefs

It has never been so clear that Egypt's military is almost inseparable from the state. Mubarak's administration came to a dramatic end, but the de-militarization of Egypt's government is a long way off. While the generals and the people face off, the economy is in critical condition: it has been practically frozen. In reconstruction, however, there may be an opportunity for innovation—if given half a chance.

EGYPT	
Status	Poor Progress
Achievements	Parliamentary Elections Held Resumption of natural gas production
Failures	Transfer of Power from Military Authority (SCAF) to civilian government Slow progress on constitutional reform Massive economic losses
Winners	Islamist parties including the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party and the Salafist Hizb-Nour Party
Losers	Free Speech (Egypt ranked three in the list of most dangerous place for journalists to work) Economy (The Egyptian GDP dropped 4.5 percent in 2011-half of that is attributed to losses in tourism)
Recommendations	Quick timeline for transition Removal of Military enforced order (to be replaced by civilian police until presidential elections held) Economic growth through the restoration of order on streets and development outside of the capital Truth and reconciliation commission for past crimes of Mubarak and Tantawi administrations

It appeared for a while that Egypt would quickly bounce back from the upheaval that ousted President Mubarak from 30 years of rule. After 18 days of heated battles that transformed the major Cairo thoroughfare, Tahrir Square, into a pile of rubble, Egyptians thought there would be peace. They came out in full force the morning after Mubarak's resignation to clean the streets and wipe graffiti from walls: a new day had come.

One year and three prime ministers later, the speed of progress exhibited in cleaning the city has not been echoed in the restoration of governance. In late October, Coptic Christians clashed with the Egyptian military, resulting in the deaths of dozens of demonstrators. In November, the tension reached its height when protesting Egyptians reclaimed Tahrir Square and fought bloody battles against the Egyptian military—once heralded as the guardians of the people's revolution.

The electoral success of Islamist parties in December was greeted as a triumph by those who praised the democratic process, but was met with caution by those who fear that conservative ideologies might form a barrier to progress in a destabilized country.

At the center of the challenges facing Egypt's stabilization has been growing antagonism towards Egypt's military. The arrest, trial, and imprisonment of popular activists by the army led to demands for the immediate end of military control. In February, the grave scenes at a football match between Al-Ahly and Al-Masry in Port Said, during which 74 people lost their lives, sparked a resurgence in street protests across the country with widespread anger directed towards the army.

With new images of street violence in Egypt emerging daily, the country's once-booming tourism industry is now reporting losses of 40 million US dollars a day. Nevertheless, opportunities remain to encourage growth as—outside of the most famous attractions—there exist untapped opportunities for tourism and entrepreneurship.

BAHRAIN
Regime Support from the People

Events of February and March 2011 led to severe sectarian tensions in Bahrain, as well as economic downturn. Since then, the country has witnessed tangible progress in all fields—especially politically and legally. The political leadership acted to restore social cohesion by building confidence between the government, (mainly) Shi'ite political groups, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

BAHRAIN	
Status	Moderate Progress
Achievements	Holding supplementary Parliamentary elections Expanding the powers of Parliament Restoring confidence between government and some opposition political parties
Failures	Economic downturn Many citizens have lost their jobs, due to the withdrawal of some financial and real estate corporations from the market
Winners	King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society
Losers	Small investment companies Some retailers and small service providers Residents of some poor villages due to stopped development and modernization projects
Recommendations	Referendum to confirm the achievements of the constitutional amendments Accelerating the amendments of economic laws to reassure and protect domestic and foreign investments Compensation for business owners, especially small merchants Accelerating the work of the designated committees to implement the recommendations of the independent international committee, close all debated issues, and enable all opposition parties to participate in the political process

Bahrain's uprising was quickly misrepresented by those with external loyalties, who have transformed the people's demands into sectarian calls that threaten the unity of the state and its social fabric.

Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, the most prominent Shi'ite party, has contributed to the protest movement. It has managed, despite being criticized for sectarian tendencies, to become the biggest political winner. This has meant losing the support of Sunnis moderate Shi'ites, due to mixing of popular and sectarian demands.

The Bahraini King, Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa formed an independent international committee to investigate the events, their consequences and solutions, and accepted all its findings. The king also established a second neutral and independent committee (including respected figures from the government, political parties and NGOs) to implement the recommendations of the first committee. He announced that there would be constitutional amendments to expand the powers of the Bahraini Council of Representatives. Reforms would also free the judiciary from governmental restrictions in order to oversee the application of law, investigate human rights violations, and form a compensation committee to assist victims of the protests.

Bahrain's economy is based on providing services: many large and important financial services corporations have conducted business in the country because of its liberal economic policies and the likelihood of high profits. The country has lost many investments in the private sector because recent protests have raised fears of financial instability in the future. However, after restoring stability, confidence has returned along with the investments. Bahrain's economy will be affected if it does not become more open to the world. It needs to attract foreign investments that could activate the state's economy.

Notably, the government has adopted a policy of forgiving the protestors, and has decided to reinstate people who were dismissed from their jobs as a result of their participation. It has also agreed on a compromise between the government and the opposition addressing the country's social, economic and political issues. This policy targets relieving the political and sectarian congestion, establishing confidence between government and opposition, completing the national reform charter, and restoring social cohesion.

Photo © Getty Images

"Bahrain's economy is based on providing services: many large and important financial services corporations have conducted business in the country because of its liberal economic policies and the likelihood of high profits"

SYRIA
Assad Runs Down the Clock Waiting for a game changer

Assad underestimated Syria's vulnerability to the uprisings in the region. The opposition has dug in and armed up, and it looks like both sides are in for a long haul. Will Assad find a way out through the Arab League, or will outside actors like Turkey and Iran speed up the end of his tenure?

SYRIA	
Status	Civil War
Achievements	End of Emergency Law Local Elections Constitutional Reforms
Failures	Ongoing, escalating crisis 9,000 dead Sectarian conflict Economic stagnation Crimes against humanity
Winners	Russia and China Iran and Hezbollah
Losers	The people of Syria Ba'ath Party Iran and Hezbollah Assad family? The Arab League
Recommendations	A timetable for a democratic transition is set out that involves all of Syria's communities Truth and Reconciliation Commission is formed

Unlike Egypt or Tunisia, which had both experienced full-scale change by February 2011, Syria initially appeared to be immune to the Arab Spring. In February, the conditions in Syria did not seem comparable to those in Egypt or Tunisia. There was a relatively youthful president compared to Hosni Mubarak or Ben Ali; he even had a reformist image. Syria also lacked civil society of the sort used to initiate the other protests—but by March, the first unrest had erupted.

This assessment clearly shaped President Bashar Al-Assad's thinking. In an interview with The Wall Street Journal on 31 January 2011, Assad confidently pronounced, "We have more difficult circumstances than most of the Arab countries but in spite of that Syria is stable. Why? Because you have to be very closely linked to the beliefs of the people. This is the core issue."

Assad stubbornly underestimated Syria's vulnerability to the changes sweeping the region. Despite often stressing the centrality of Syria in the Arab world, the idea that the scenes in Cairo and Tunis could inspire a similar Arab awakening in Syria did not appear to worry the young president.

When the unrest erupted in Dara'a last March and subsequently spread, Assad confidently assumed it could be managed through cosmetic reforms. In his conversations with the press, Assad often stressed that he was open to reform, as long as he could manage it on his terms.

Assad also had no qualms about using his state's security apparatus to stifle dissent. While some analysts have tried to explain this incongruity between reform and terror as a sign of his own lack of authority, Assad has clearly drawn a line very early on how far he is willing to reform, even if such reforms have failed to dampen dissent, and he has no interest in crossing that line.

Assad has consistently ignored calls by his Arab neighbors, the European Union, and the United States for more substantive reforms and rejected a proposal by the Arab League (whose observer mission inside the country proved to be a failure). A recent veto by Russia and China of a UN draft Security Council resolution that urged Assad to step down was described as a "travesty" by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. She has proposed an international coalition to support Syria's opposition.

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In his interview with Barbara Walters in mid-December 2011, President Assad claimed that if he could survive isolation once in the early years of the Iraq War and the withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, he could do it again. In this regard, Assad has shown not just his own proclivity to put his family and sect's interests above Syria's wider national interest, but also his own personal assessment of the situation. Even with 5,000 people killed, an increasing number of army defections, and sectarian fighting, Assad has largely stuck to his original position.

This stubborn consistency may seem illogical or irrational to the observer looking at the events in Syria. But, Assad has made a bet that time is on his side. With Damascus largely quiet—despite security forces wrestling with the Free Syria Army for control of Damascus' suburbs—the President hopes that he will be able to survive 2012 through sheer perseverance. Relying on a combination of military power, fear and limited reforms to keep a majority of the population off the street, Assad hopes the uprising against his rule will eventually lose its momentum. Will this be the case?

YEMEN

The Longest Day

Will Yemen find a unique resolution to its crisis?

Installing an opposition-led National Unity Government and electing a new president have slowed Yemen's slide towards anarchy. Political infighting and exclusion of key constituencies raise grave doubts about the coalition's capacity to lead and the durability of the transition process.

YEMEN	
Status	Failure
Achievements	Transfer of president Saleh's powers to vice president Hadi National unity government sworn in Presidential elections date confirmed
Failures	Perception of elite pact Ongoing insecurity
Winners	President Saleh's party, the General People's Congress Joint Meetings Parties (JMP)
Losers	Youth movement Southern separatists
Recommendations	Clearer mechanisms for incorporating extra-parliamentary opposition groups into transition process Greater clarity about the transition process beyond presidential elections Steps to reduce tensions between armed rival groups

After nearly a year of protests, violent clashes, and military skirmishes between loyalist troops and army defectors, in late November Yemen's main parliamentary parties agreed to a two-stage political transition. Following the swearing-in of a new National Unity Government, the first stage culminated in late February with the election of Abd-Rabbu Mansour Al-Hadi as president. The second stage will involve a national dialogue, which should lead to constitutional and electoral reforms.

The transition plan holds out a promise that the past year's slide towards anarchy will be halted. The swearing-in of an opposition-led national unity government bodes well for the future. Yet political infighting threatens to undermine this show of unity and raises questions about the coalition's durability. At the same time, government critics—particularly northern Houthis, southern separatists, and the nascent youth movement—wonder whether the transition plan goes far enough. They suggest the plan amounts to a pact among the elite.

Much will depend on the national dialogue during the transition's second stage, although quite what this will entail is still unclear. The first phase culminated in a presidential election that saw President Saleh removed from a post he had held for 33 years while sparing him the humiliation of being forced from office. This, and the fact that Hadi was Saleh's vice president, the unity government's consensus candidate, and the only candidate contesting the poll, gives credence to criticism that the election was a stage-managed process designed to prevent a power vacuum while the difficult work of fostering a political atmosphere amenable to constitutional negotiations is deferred.

Arguably, the first phase has probably made time for workable political processes to develop, but tensions remain high and there have been alarming out breaks of violence by militants claiming kinship with Al-Qaeda in the south of the country. One attack in March left over a hundred soldiers dead.

There are also equally worrying developments on other fronts. Arguably these will be more decisive in shaping the political context in which the second phase will be implemented. The ceasefire is tenuous between loyalist army units, defectors, tribal militias, and forces loyal to the main opposition party Al-Islah. The humanitarian challenges facing Yemen are growing. Unicef recently issued dire warnings about childhood malnutrition, while the supply of safe drinking water is increasingly strained. Yemen's economic situation is getting worse. It was reported in January that Saudi Arabia would relieve Yemen's oil shortages, the second time in six months this lifeline has been cast, although this time it is only enough to cover demand for two months. Combined with political and military rivalries, economic hardship makes the task of limiting the influence of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula considerably more difficult, as both Saudi Arabia and the US are acutely aware.

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MOROCCO
Calls for Jobs, not Change

Upon taking the throne in 1999, Morocco's King Mohammed VI promised to implement reforms. After proving his credentials as a reformer he has exceeded expectations in the past year, dealing with the destabilizing influence of a protest movement and promoting measured constitutional reform.

MOROCCO	
Status	Success
Achievements	Constitutional Reforms Tenable progress through some stability Berber language acquires official status
Failures	Demands for reform continue
Winners	King Mohammed VI The Islamist Justice and Development Group Business and tourism
Losers	The February 20 Movement
Recommendations	Steady progress on promised reforms Increasing authority being passed to prime minister and the parliament

Morocco is home to some of the greatest income inequality in the Arab world. After a year of protests demanding, among other things, an end to pitiable standards of living, the country unveiled a new mega-mall in Casablanca in December 2011 to more than a few raised eyebrows. Developers argued that the mall's designer shops would align Morocco more closely with the developed world. Others saw the project—which is unlikely to be frequented by the average Moroccan—as a vain endeavor of a country that often appears mindless of its economic troubles.

Upon taking the throne in 1999, Morocco's King Mohammed VI promised to implement reforms. He has since delivered on these promises, most notably in the case of changes to the Family Code in 2004, which improved the status of women. In 2011, the monarch was given the opportunity to exceed his reformist tendencies. Morocco was not immune to the popular protests that swept the Middle East and North Africa following the Tunisian uprising, but King Mohammed VI reacted quickly to events.

On 20 February 2011, an estimated 37,000 Moroccans took to the streets in Rabat, Casablanca, Tangier, and Marrakech. They demanded a new constitution that would promote democracy, an end to corruption, better economic opportunities, education reforms, improved health services, and a state benefit system to assist with the rising cost of living. Shrewdly, on 9 March 2011, the King announced his decision to undertake a comprehensive constitutional reform aimed at improving democracy and the rule of law.

> ***"The results of the national referendum demonstrate that most Moroccans still hold the monarchy in high esteem"***

The swift suggestion of constitutional reform initially quelled the weekly protests, and robbed the opposition movement of momentum.

However, in mid-March of last year dozens were injured in Casablanca as Morocco witnessed a crackdown against mass demonstrations. An estimated 35,000 citizens participated across the country on 20 March, and the protests continued despite the measured response of the government. On 5 June, nearly 60,000 demonstrators took to the streets in Rabat and Casablanca, carrying a picture of a protester reportedly killed by police brutality.

The constitutional reforms were unveiled on 17 June 2011. These were rejected by leaders of the February 20 movement, who called for a mass boycott of the referendum. The majority of Moroccans supported the proposals, which were subsequently passed—giving the prime minister and parliament more executive authority and the Berber language official status.

The King brought elections forward, and on 25 November 2011, the long-established opposition Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) won at the polls, with their leader Abdullah Benkirane taking the position of prime minister. Activists have criticized the elections as undemocratic, saying the majority of power is still in the hands of the King, who remains the military commander-in-chief and retains his position as the chair of the Council of Ministers and the Supreme Security Council. However, the results of the national referendum demonstrate that most Moroccans still hold the monarchy in high esteem and regard it as a symbol of unity for the state.

The fading influence of the protest movement was shown on 19 December 2011, when the Islamist Justice and Development Group announced their withdrawal from the continued weekly protests because of a split in the movement. Though waning, the February 20 movement continues to organize pro-reform demonstrations. There were reports of 3,500-strong gatherings in Casablanca and Rabat on 25 December. Despite having lost some ground in recent months, Omar Radi, a prominent member of the February 20 movement, has warned that, "The movement will continue because all the reasons for the anger still exist in Morocco."

On the whole, Moroccans are satisfied by the changes they have witnessed so far—they are also glad to have avoided the bloodshed seen elsewhere in Arab World over the last year. Morocco's transitions have passed with relative smoothness due to the monarchy's quick response. ■

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The Other Side of Justice in Afghanistan

Has Time Run Out for Afghanistan and the US?

The massacre of 16 Afghan civilians by a US soldier has struck a chord deep within the Afghan psyche. Now far reaching implications loom for Afghan US relations should swift action not be taken.

Tanya Goudsouzian & Helena Malikyar

When in October 1879 General Fredrick Roberts, commander of the occupying British army, delivered a condescending imperialist speech and ordered the public summary executions of Afghan rebels in front of the Bala Hissar Fortress in Kabul, he was employing a time-tested colonial tactic that had proved successful in neighboring India. But those public hangings, which were meant to quash the Afghan rebellion, only served to embolden the resistance, and as such, triggered the outbreak of the second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1880), arguably the 19th century's bloodiest showdown between British imperialist forces and armed Afghan tribesmen. The war concluded with a swift withdrawal of all British troops and the closure of Her Majesty's embassy in Afghanistan.

Foreign powers, time and again, have erred in equating the character of the Afghans with those of other nations. With entrenched codes of honor, conduct and justice that have governed their lives for millennia, the Afghan nation has proven to be a force to be reckoned with by the world's most powerful armies throughout history. It is, more often than not, mundane events, which stand for countless past incidents built up over a period of time, that galvanize Afghanistan's tribesmen to rise up against an oppressor in a matter of weeks, sometimes days.

The case of the as yet unnamed US soldier who went on a shooting rampage in Panjwai district of Kandahar on 12 March 2012, may become just such an incident if Washington and Kabul do not take swift, collective and decisive action in the coming days to quell the flare of popular emotion. Hot on the heels of the Quran burning episode, this latest incident, which resulted in the senseless massacre of 16 innocent Afghans, including nine children and two women, has struck a chord deep within the Afghan psyche. Many are angry, while others are disappointed. A careful reading of the public mood across the country may be summarized in these terms: "They have usurped our sovereignty, denigrated our religion, and now, our women and children are slaughtered in their beds by a foreign gunman."

Photo © Getty Images

Contextualizing the fury

To appreciate the gravity and explosive potential of this incident, it is important to contextualize the fury of the Afghans as news of the incident spread. The Quran burning episode, less than a week before the shooting, was never explained to the Afghans. Numerous civilian killings have been dismissed by NATO and the US forces as "collateral damage." Video footage of US soldiers urinating on Afghan corpses was quickly placed in abeyance and the results of US "investigations" into such occurrences were never shared with the Afghan public.

Today, few Afghans have faith in the American justice system. Suspicions run rampant that this soldier, like they have witnessed many others before him, will become an object of sympathy in US courts, be depicted as a brave young man who lost his mind fighting for his "homeland" overseas, and finally, let off with a slap on the wrist. Or worst yet, the soldier will walk free after pleading "temporary insanity", as has happened in many cases before.

Was it not only three years ago when a US soldier who shot dead an unarmed Afghan man, mutilated his body and sliced off his ears, was acquitted by jurors at Fort Bragg? Or more recently, last August, when a British soldier who killed a Taliban fighter, mutilated the corpse, and cut off his fingers as a souvenir to take back to his barracks, was handed a measly three year prison sentence? Was an Afghan life that cheap, just a pittance, and why was anyone astonished by the reaction of angry Afghans?

Moreover, there is the issue of US troop withdrawal in 2014 and America's sudden shift in policy from fighting the Taliban to making peace with them. The cruel irony of America's about-face is not lost on the average Afghan. For over a decade, the people of Afghanistan were asked to endure war and uncertainty for the sake of eradicating the scourge of the Taliban, with the promise of a stable, prosperous and democratic future. Ironically, and incomprehensibly for most, they are now asked to refrain from asking too many questions as the United States tries to broker a quick deal with the very "scourge" it failed to defeat, and if possible, to lead it back into power.

The people of Afghanistan no longer have faith in any American goodwill. Indeed, Washington's cavalier attitude to numerous egregious incidents of civilian deaths have fueled the popular Afghan perception of Americans as imperialists no different from Britain's General Roberts not so long ago.

In fact, the systematic alienation of the Afghan people, most notably those in the volatile south, would inevitably result in the empowerment of the Taliban. Armed with greater leverage in the Qatar negotiations, the Taliban, now a legitimate bargaining partner, will have no trouble in discrediting the feeble Afghan government and the entire post-Taliban system. Consequently, few ought to be surprised when the nation is provoked to rise up against the US and the international community, and chaos may well ensue with dire consequences for average Afghans. It would not be unreasonable to foresee a Vietnam-style scenario, with soldiers hanging on the sides of helicopters as US troops and personnel flee Afghanistan, leaving the country once again to become a safe haven for militant international terrorist groups. In essence, such a possibility would mark the start of a denouement that would bring Afghanistan back to square one.

Damage control

Given such dangers, a heartfelt apology from US President Barack Obama is hardly enough when the patience of the Afghan nation is saturated and the United States is increasingly viewed as an enemy rather than an ally. In certain quarters, Afghans have been invoking Islamic justice, i.e "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth". Others have called for the US soldier to be tried on Afghan soil, in Afghan courts, in the hope of obtaining a death penalty.

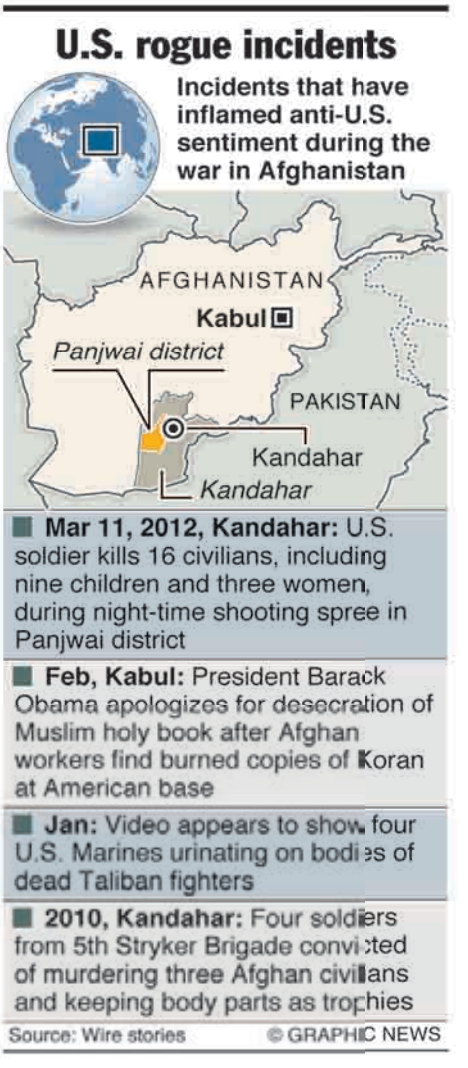
If the fallout from this latest incident is to be limited, the US and Afghan governments must act swiftly and decisively. Afghan President Hamid Karzai and his government must work cohesively to dispel popular Afghan illusions that the trial of the soldier can be held on Afghan soil, as this contravenes US military law. Karzai has, on numerous occasions in the past, delivered anger-provoking rhetoric as his personal relations with Washington have taken a turn for the worse, but it is not the time now to adopt this approach.

Both the US and Afghan governments must wage a multi-pronged campaign to appease the public and quell rising anti-American sentiments. The US government, for its part, must waste no time in holding a very public and transparent judicial process, if, as Washington professes, it genuinely seeks to control the potential fallout from this act of brutality.

Time is of the essence, for unlike past instances, justice must no longer be a dragged out affair, with results announced months or years later. What's more, a public trial ending with the maximum punitive sentence within US law for such a crime must be upheld to assure Afghans that Washington values Afghan lives just as much as any other.

A day after the shooting, there were already protests sweeping across southern and eastern Afghanistan, the most volatile regions of the country. Rogue elements abound throughout this war-ravaged country and neighboring states are waiting to grasp the opportunity to foment further unrest and expedite NATO's withdrawal.

As the American President and the British Prime Minister meet in Washington for talks, it might be useful to look back on the legacy of General Frederick Roberts in Afghanistan and the perils of repeating mistakes of the past ■



Tanya Goudsouzian is a Doha-based Canadian journalist who has covered Afghanistan for over a decade. She has travelled to the country numerous times, and interviewed many leading figures across Afghanistan's political spectrum.

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Self-Defense

Mohammed Riad Al-Shaqfa: Assad's regime doesn't understand any concept but force

In an extensive interview with The Majalla the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, Mohammed Riad Al-Shaqfa, insists that compromise with Assad regime is untenable and advocates the arming of opposition fighters.

Roshan Kasem

The Majalla has met with the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, Mohammed Riad Al-Shaqfa. In an expansive interview, Shaqfa expressed dissatisfaction with the vacillations of international actors over how to best resolve the Syrian crisis. Crucially, he insisted that the Assad regime cannot be a part of any political solution, as a consequence of the year-long violent crackdown organized by the government.

Frustrated by the lack of any action to meet the international condemnation of Assad's brutal tactics, Shaqfa asserted that "humanitarian corridors and safe zones have become an urgent necessity to protect the Syrian people." He also called for the Syrian opposition groups to be supplied arms: "The Syrian regime doesn't understand any concept but the use of force. This should, in turn, be met with force and the Syrian people have the right to obtain weapons to defend themselves."

While playing down the potential role of the Muslim Brotherhood in a potential post-Assad Syria, Shaqfa claimed that myriad rifts within the sprawling opposition are not too great to be healed. In fact, he was optimistic that all the various elements of Syrian society can peacefully coexist in the future.

In what direction is the situation in Syria going while the international community is confused and unable to take a stance on the regime?
The Syrian people have spontaneously made the revolution, relying on God and themselves, due to decades of injustice. Today they are determined to topple the regime no matter what sacrifices are involved. The international community holds an ethical responsibility to support the revolution, but instead they hesitate. This indecisiveness will lead to more bloodshed.

What is the significance of the mission of the UN-Arab League joint special envoy to Syria, Kofi Annan?
I believe the visit will be insignificant as long as the Syrian regime does not cooperate with those international and humanitarian efforts. It seems that such means are not useful with this regime, which only understands the language of force. The people are determined to topple the regime.

Are you still convinced of the need for humanitarian aid, the international efforts to deliver aid and the creation of safe zones or the imposition of an international ban?
The international community's stance is still weak and is not yet equal to the sacrifices of the Syrian people. We do not hear anything except statements; in reality nothing happens. We believe that safe corridors and safe areas are now an urgent necessity in order to protect the Syrian people.

Are you concerned about the repetition of the Libyan scenario in Syria?
We don't believe the Libyan scenario will be repeated in Syria, as we stress our demand for the protection of civilians, which is an international legal and humanitarian obligation.

The international position has become clearer since the end of the conference in Tunisia: there is no possibility of a military solution, which implicitly means that we have to search for political solutions with the regime. Do you agree?
The Syrian regime can't be part of any political solution after its insistence on using military force and killing. The regime has killed more than ten thousand martyrs, and tens of thousands of men, women, elders and children have been wounded, lost, or detained. We believe the Syrian people are capable of ending the battle in their favor if protection is provided. The people have decided to continue the revolution until the regime is toppled. The international community should carry out its duty to protect civilians, and this should be done at the lowest cost [in lives].

What is the most likely replacement for the regime in Damascus?
The replacement will be a pluralistic, democratic and civilian regime in which all members of the Syrian people will take part. Domination will not be seized by one party or one sect: our people are tired of individualism and exclusion.

Will there be Syrian divisions inspired by the Lebanese experience?
Those efforts don't worry me, and I believe that the Syrian condition is different from that of Lebanon. I believe that the Syrian society, even with all its sects, is capable of understanding and coexisting despite the attempts of the Syrian regime to make them frightened of each other.

Gulf State Involvement

There has been a significant Arab influence on the development of the Syrian crisis. How far has the position of the opposition moved from alignment with Europe to reflect the influence of the Gulf States?
From the beginning, the opposition sought Arab and regional assistance; particularly

as the Western position didn't exceed mere rhetoric. Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar, took practical steps and began to finance the opposition in order to support the Syrian people. We hope to use this support to fulfill the ambitions of the Syrian people to topple the Syrian regime.

People in Saudi Arabia and Qatar have properly assessed the situation: that the Syrian regime doesn't understand any concept but force and it should be faced by force. The Syrian people have the right to acquire weapons to defend themselves. The Syrian people appreciate their support.

Why didn't the National Council withdraw from the Friends of Syria conference, just as Saudi Arabia did?
Although the resolutions of the conference were not up to [our] expectations, we see them as a significant development in international attitudes. The withdrawal of the National Council would have caused the failure of the conference, though we understand the action of the Saudi delegation, which withdrew from one of the sessions—not the conference.

Did Turkey really change its attitude when Tehran warned Ankara against any settlement at the expense of the Syrian regime?
I believe that Turkey's stance is tied with the international situation and not with the Iranian one, and it awaits an international resolution through which it could play its role.

Is it correct that Turkey proposed that the Syrian authorities give the Muslim Brotherhood four ministries, and that Syria accepted this proposal but refused to include a key ministry in the deal?
This information is not correct: Ahmed Dawood Oglo denied that. I believe that Turkey was pressing Assad to make reforms and to stop violence to spare Syria the crisis it has since experienced. Assad doesn't accept advice.

Turkey supports the demands of the Syrian people and all opposition parties; it advised the opposition to unite and supported the National Council, which combines most of the opposition groups. Turkey's stance has nothing to do with its relationship with the Brotherhood.

Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid Al-Moualem, said that "the dispute over the Muslim Brotherhood pushed Syrian-Turkish relations to a point of no return." What made Turkey sacrifice Syria for the sake of the Brotherhood?
What the Syrian Foreign Minister said has no credibility, particularly after he erased Europe off the world map. Syrian-Turkish relations were pushed to the point of no return because of the crimes committed by the Syrian regime against its people and because of the ethical stance of Turkey to support the Syrian people against the regime's crimes.

How do you see the opinion of Haytham Manna and his concerns over the Islamism of the revolutionary movement and the militarization of the revolution?
The Syrian people and the revolutionaries have condemned Haytham Manna's relationship with Iran because of its absolute support of the Syrian regime's crimes. His stance is the same as that of the Coordination Authority, which was rejected by the Syrian people who declared that it didn't represent them.

Who backed the agreement with the Coordination Authority, and are there parties inside the Council who want to be open on Iran?
The dialogue with the Coordination Authority is old, as many parties of the National Council participated in it. I believe that the stance concerning Iran is unified inside the Council.

What are the details of the Iranian offer and why did you reject it?
There was no actual Iranian offer. However, there was an attempt by some mediators to start a dialogue with Iran. The Muslim Brotherhood rejected the offer because of Iran's support of the Syrian regime and its anti-revolution stance.

How do you explain Europe's recognition of the National Council even before the Arab countries did?
[There is] no doubt that the stance of the European Union concerning this issue is advanced. Most of the Arab countries [already] deal with the National Council. I believe that the official recognition will take place soon.

Is the Brotherhood afraid of the military power of the Free Army?
On the contrary, we support the Free Army of Syria, we coordinate with it and we support it as much as we can. We seek its development to perform its duty of protecting the Syrian people and to beat Assad's gangs.

It was said that there were disagreements between Riad Al-Asaad, the commander of the Free Syrian Army, and the defector General Mustafa Ahmed Al-Sheikh. Is this true?
Yes there were some disagreements and they have been resolved. The agreement has been reached and we had a positive role in that.

Are you comfortable with General Mostafa Ahmed Al-Sheikh?
We welcomed—and we still welcome—all honorable officers who favored and are still favorable to the revolution of the Syrian people. We don't suppress the opinion of anyone and we focus on supporting the revolution of our people and easing their suffering. We are not competing with anyone.

To what extend are your efforts aimed at unifying the opposition?
Opposition groups inside the National Council agree on visions and targets, however, it disagrees on intellectual and political orientations, which is normal and which doesn't harm the opposition. However, we agree with the opposing parties outside the National Council on most issues and I believe that understanding and coordination with them is possible and we seek to achieve that.

How is your relation with Kurds and what's your stance toward forming a Kurdish council?
There is a representation of our Kurd fellows inside the National Council, and we seek to develop this representation through dialogue. I believe that they have the right to form a council that expresses their stance and private issues.

Chaldean Catholic Bishop Antoine Audo of Aleppo said, "Christians are the most threatened minority by the civil war." Do you agree with him?
[The term] 'civil war' is a scarecrow used by the regime to frighten the Syrian

people. The regime is trying to drag the country into the swamp of sectarianism and civil war, but the awareness and the consistency of the Syrian people prevents this and this is a waste of time.

What is the reality of Al-Qaeda's presence amongst the revolutionaries?
Reports about the existence of Al-Qaeda in Syria are made up by the Syrian regime to frighten the world of the forthcoming new government.

What about the sectarian dimension within Muslim Brotherhood in Syria?
The Brotherhood has issued a paper about the social structure in Syria and our stance on sectarianism, which the regime tries to provoke in order to promote conflict between different sects of Syrian society. We asserted in the paper the principle of equality and partnership among all citizens. Relationships amongst people are based on the principle of citizenship, according to which all are equal in duties and rights.

The Brotherhood also took part in a workshop on the criminalization of sectarianism in Cairo, with numerous personalities who represent the different aspects of the Syrian people. We issued an additional statement about this issue.

How do you evaluate your power in Syria and inside the National Council?
We don't exist as an organization in Syria because of the declared war against us by the Syrian regime and due to Law 49/1980, which provides for the execution of any member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite this, we are present through our moderate and intermediate Islamic thought and the broad audience who supports our thoughts and orientations. We are part of the moderate Islamic trend in Syria, and the strength of every national trend will be identified in the ballot boxes. But our representation in the Syrian National Council doesn't exceed 20 percent.

Some fear the regime will do anything before it collapses, including igniting a comprehensive sectarian war, so Bashar can say, "It's us or nothing." Are there plans to face this danger?
It is obvious that the regime is willing to commit the most offensive crimes to stay in power, nothing stops it from besieging the cities and destroying their innocent civilian residents. The regime prevents water, food and medicine from reaching citizens and stops relief for wounded people; moreover, it attacks them in hospitals. The regime attempts to prevent the funerals held for martyrs and massacres the people attending those funerals.

To stay in power, the Syrian regime attempts to ignite civil and sectarian war, to provoke citizens, and to turn sects against each other. But those attempts failed to a large extent due to the awareness of our people of all sects.

We rely on the awareness of our people, their ability to coexist, and their recognition of the danger of the impasse that the regime tries to drag them into. We trust our people's capability to do that.

Does the Turkish experience appeal to you? Will you try to introduce it into Syrian society?
Each society has its own nature and we can't clone others' experiences. I believe that the Turkish democratic experience is characterized by the admiration and appreciation of the Syrian people. Syrians also have their own experience of democracy during the age of freedom before this regime, and they are capable—God willing—of updating their experience with the benefit of others' experiences.

What is the principle of citizenship in light of your beliefs about 'Islam of the state' and 'Islam of the society'?
The Charter of the National Honor, which was issued by the Brotherhood in 2001—and also the political project that was launched in 2004—both assert the principles of freedom, justice and equality. They call for the establishment of a civil, pluralistic, devolutionary institutional state in which all citizens enjoy equal rights and duties, and which is based on the citizenship principle that governs the relationships among citizens equally.

We also assert that our political project and reform program, despite their Islamic reference, are regarded as human endeavors that could be right or wrong, and subject to dialogue, discussion, amendment and correction. We don't impose our views and programs on anyone. Every citizen has the right to choose the method and the program he wants without compulsion.

What is your stance on secularism?
'Secularism' has no single meaning to have a single stance on. Past secularism in Turkey is different from the current one and it is different form that in France, Britain, and the United States. We believe that the civil state we seek guarantees freedom, dignity and equality for all citizens.

Do you see a problem of religious and racial minorities?
There is no problem in Syria of religious and racial minorities. The Syrian people with all their races, religions and ideologies have coexisted since the oldest ages. But the Syrian regime tried to stir disputes among those sects; it deluded them that it is the protector of the minorities and frightened them of each other. The Muslim Brotherhood has previously stated its stance on this issue through its view of the Kurdish case and its vision about the social structure and the sectarianism in Syria, and both are approved by the group.

Identification of responsibilities for men and women, from the point of view of some Islamic parties and movements, may stir concerns of feminist organizations that seek to advance women's rights. How does the Muslim Brotherhood see women's rights?

Our political project stresses woman's role in the society and her complete rights according to the principle that women are partners of men and they have the same rights and duties. It stresses the necessity of liberating women from traditions and legacies that limit their freedom and rights, which have nothing to do with the provisions of the Islamic legislation.

Are you prepared for the period after Bashar? How will the Brotherhood participate in Syria's future?
We are part of our people, we back them in their revolution and we will not give up on them during their ordeal. We will take part in establishing our country, a new Syria, after overthrowing a corrupt and oppressive regime; side by side with people, of all sects and trends. ■

Roshan Kasem is a Syrian-Kurdish writer based in Northern Iraq

Man on a Wire

Tunisian Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali

Outwardly cheerful, but in possession of keen political instincts and patience and determination forged in years of imprisonment and exile, Tunisia's new prime minister must walk fine line if he is to play a successful role in guiding Tunisia towards democracy.

Photo © Getty Images

Tunisia's Prime Minister, Hamadi Jebali, has committed himself to reconciling his party's ideology with safeguarding a stable democratic transition for Tunisia. If he succeeds he may well help blaze a trail for the region to emulate. If he fails, detractors will claim it as more proof that political Islam is incompatible with democracy.

As prime minister, Jebali works in partnership with the recently elected President, Moncef Marzouki. They form the head of the Tunisian government. Both Jebali and Marzouki can boast deep roots in the opposition movement to Ben Ali. As the secretary general of Ennadha, however, Jebali is the man who brings political Islam to the table. Throughout his career he has fought against the oppression of the government's religious opponents in Tunisia and spent many years in jail as a consequence.

In 1992, as the editor of Ennahda's newspaper Al-Fajr (The Dawn), Jebali was sentenced to one year in prison for publishing an article critical of the Ben Ali government. His sentence was summarily extended another 16 years as Islamists gained political ground. He reportedly spent more than ten years of his sentence in isolation, and was eventually released in 2006.

Despite his tie spent in solitary confinement, he emerged a leader with an easy-going, jovial demeanor. He is frequently photographed laughing and smiling, even at state events. He is well dressed, with a trim beard and fluent in French. This has helped him build a strong rapport with the press, no doubt assisted by his own experience working in the media. Sofiene Ben Fahrat, editor of the Tunisian daily La Presse, told AFP that Jebali "has always had good press, is well connected, and has a fat contact book."

Jebali was born in 1949 in the port of Sousse, Tunisia's third city, which is known as the Pearl of the Tunisian Desert thanks to its ancient olive groves. Today, the town relies heavily upon tourism and in 2011 it was the arena for one of the major flashpoints of the Tunisian uprising. Jebail left to study engineering in Tunis, followed by a masters in solar energy generation in Paris. By the early 1980s, Jebali was making his name as a journalist and was among the founders of the Islamic Tendency Movement: the group that would become Ennahda.

Since then, he has been a major figure on Tunisia's political scene. Jebali was at the forefront of confrontation with the government of Habib Bourguiba in the 1980s, who carried out a repressive campaign against Islamists and cleared the way for Jebali's rise in the organization by jailing its leaders.

After the revolution that toppled Ben Ali in January 2011—and in the wake of his nomination for prime minister by Ennahda—Jebali's first trip abroad was to the United States in order to put to rest foreign fears concerning his politics. He made clear that Ennahda's priority was democracy in Tunisia, not theocracy.

Nevertheless, on issues such as the sale of alcohol in Tunisia and the right of people not to fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, he has hinted at the Islamist priorities of his party. "We do not have the right to interfere in people's personal affairs, but everybody must respect the consensus and the national identity," he told AFP in an interview last April.

On October 18, 2011, Ennahda secured an outright victory in Tunisia, in landmark elections that were the first of the so-called Arab Spring. After Ennadha's victory in Tunisia—with the eyes of the watching world upon a new Islamist government—Jebali took his time before appointing fellow Ennahda members to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice—all critical posts. He appointed an independent candidate to head the Ministry of Finance.

Since October, Jebali has played the role of statesman consummately. He received the Italian Foreign Minister, Giulio Terzi Di Sant'Agata, acknowledging Italy's historically close ties with Tunisia. Significantly, this meeting took place only one day after Jebali was photographed walking hand-in-hand with senior Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. The meeting fuelled speculation that Hamas was searching for a new headquarters in Tunis, due to the upheaval of the continuing Syrian crisis—a rumor that Jebali denies.

Jebali, though composed, cheerful and relaxed in public, is managing Tunisia's transition while walking a tightrope, keeping his party's core tenets of political Islam intact while he works towards institutionalizing democracy in Tunisian life. So far he has been able to keep his balance, but has not yet faced a serious clash between his party's professed religious ideals and the demands for compromise arising from running a modern state. Tunisia's Constituent Assembly has only just begun its work of drafting a new constitution, and all sides will have to compromise on their vision for Tunisia's future if the process is to be successful. All that is certain is that Jebali will face challenges. It remains to be seen whether he can meet these challenges and keep his good humour intact. ■

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Things Stopping Saudi Aid

Saudi Arabia is blaming procedural matters for the delay in financial assistance to Egypt

Doaa El-Bey

The aid that Saudi Arabia pledged to Egypt last year seems to have been delayed over procedural matters. Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal said last week that his country would honour a $3.75 billion pledge in aid to Egypt. "The kingdom pledged to support Egypt in meeting the challenges facing its economy through a series of financial commitments totalling $3.75 billion," Al-Faisal told the Saudi Press Agency.

His remarks came in a press conference in Riyadh in response to a question regarding public complaints by Egypt's Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri that donor countries were failing to respect their commitments.

Al-Faisal said Riyadh paid $500 million of its total commitment to Cairo's Central Bank in May last year when the aid was promised.

The fact that the Saudi government honoured part of its aid indicates that the delay could be due to organisational or procedural matters that could be settled via coordination and consultation between the two states, said an economist who talked on condition of anonymity. "However, Riyadh and other Gulf countries should stick to a schedule to give much needed aid to Egypt," she told Al-Ahram Weekly.

Meanwhile, she added, it is not a healthy sign that El-Ganzouri stands in parliament and complains that other countries had failed to help Egypt. "We should look for other options on the internal and external levels."

Egypt's Ministry of Finance described Al-Faisal's statement as "diplomatic" which was not followed by implementation. Minister of Finance Mumtaz El-Said was quoted by newspapers this week as saying that the Egyptian government had not received any aid from Saudi Arabia except the $500 million given in May 2011 to help support the budget.

Photo © Getty Images

Regarding the rest of the promised aid, the delay seemed to be over procedural matters, Al-Faisal explained in the press conference. He said the second tranche of $1.45 billion to finance a number of projects by the Saudi development fund was the subject of a memorandum of understanding still awaiting the go-ahead from the Egyptian government. A memorandum was signed earlier with the Egyptian Ministry of International Cooperation to identify the projects that require funding in order for the Saudi fund to assess them.

The rest of the Saudi assistance includes another transfer to the Central Bank and the purchases of treasury bonds. Saudi Arabia has in addition supplied Egypt with 48,000 tonnes of liquefied gas.

The promised Saudi package is likely to support Egypt's general budget, the Central Bank, other projects and bond purchases. The aid was promised by Saudi King Abdullah and announced last May by the head of the ruling military council Hussein Tantawi.

The Egyptian economy has been set back since the start of the 25 January Revolution. Cairo has been asking donor countries to contribute to reducing the budget deficit of some LE144 billion which analysts expect to increase because of widespread instability.

As a result, the government decided to borrow $3 billion from the IMF. The loan, which involved less interest rate, was initially rejected by the Egyptian government in March.

Egyptian-Saudi relations have experienced ups and downs after the revolution due to the belief among many Egyptians that Saudi officials were opposed to the revolution and are linking aid to the release of Hosni Mubarak who was forced to step down as president at the height of the nationwide revolt on 11 February 2011. Mubarak is currently in police detention. However, Saudi Arabia has repeatedly denied the charge.

In their statements, both Al-Faisal and Al-Said underlined the strong brotherly relations and the historic ties between the two countries.

This in itself would resolve any differences, facilitate procedures and guarantee that the aid will arrive in Egypt soon, said the economist.

In a separate development likely to boost Egyptian relations with some other Arab states, Assistant Foreign Minister for Consulate Affairs and Egyptian Expatriates Ahmed Ragheb visited Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE this week to help resolve the problem of Egyptian detainees or prisoners in the countries and tackle all other problems facing Egyptian expatriates. Ragheb was accompanied by a high-level delegation which included officials from the ministries of foreign affairs, defence, manpower, interior and education. ■

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Back in Business

Arab countries are working hard to revive their tourism industries

While last year was one of the best on record for global tourism, revolutions and ongoing instability in the Arab worlds has cost the region's tourism industry billions of dollars. Forecasts for global tourism are optimistic, but popular destinations in North Africa and the Levant face an uphill battle to lure back visitors. In the meantime, other regional destinations, particularly in the Gulf, are benefitting.

Daniel F. Rivera

The World Tourism Organization recently reported that tourist operations worldwide increased by 4.4 percent in 2011 and forecasts around one billion tourists will be traveling in all continents in 2012. While last year was one of the best on record for global tourism, the tourist industry in the Arab world has lost billions of dollars since the Arab Spring began in Tunisia last year.

The optimistic global forecast may help tourist industries in the Middle East and North Africa to recover from some of the catastrophic economic consequences of successive revolutions. But first perceptions of continuing instability and risk must improve. And while tourists avoid previously popular destinations in North Africa, other regional destinations, particularly in the Gulf, are benefitting.

Before the uprisings, tourism was the leading industry in the services sector of several national economies. In 2010 tourism contributed significantly to GDP in countries like Tunisia (6.5 percent), Egypt (8 percent), Morocco (10 percent), Palestine (12 percent in 2007), Lebanon (9.6 percent), Jordan (12.4 percent), Syria (12 percent) and United Arab Emirates (16.6 percent). In Egypt and Tunisia, tourism accounted for 11 percent and 15 percent of total employment respectively, according to a World Bank report on the Middle East and North Africa published in May 2011.

Overall, however, 2011 was a disastrous year for tourism in several Arab countries. Since the Arab Spring began, the number of tourist visitors to the MENA region has declined dramatically, by about 12 percent and 8 percent in North African and the Middle East respectively.

The decrease in tourist numbers is a major setback for economies struggling to cope with a precipitous drop in consumption accompanied by high unemployment brought on by the political turmoil.

In Egypt, unemployment has risen to 11.8 percent from 8.9 percent in the third quarter of 2011. Over 337,000 workers have lost their job, according to the Egyptian state agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics in that period. Rashad Abdou, an economics professor at Cairo University, says the biggest job losses have been in the tourism industry, where "workers have either lost their jobs or had to accept a halving of their salaries."

The collapse of tourism has been disastrous for countries like Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, but for Gulf states like Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Kuwait, and Qatar, tourism has maintained steady growth. Analysts argue Gulf Arab states are benefiting from perceptions of peace and stability compared with their regional neighbors.

Samir Hamadeh, director of sales and marketing at Alpha Tours Dubai told a local newspaper: "Being one of the safest destinations in the world, Dubai is always the first option for tourists to divert to and seek as an alternative." The 2011 Travel & Tour-

Photo © Getty Images

ism Competitiveness Report forecasts average growth of the sector's contribution to the GDP in United Arab Emirates will be more than 8.1 percent annually from 2011 to 2020.

Unsurprisingly, Tunisians and Egyptians, especially those who rely on tourists for their income, want to restore their status as first-choice destination for sun-seekers vacationing abroad. Tunisia's Minister of Tourism, Elyes Fakhfakh, recently signed a cooperation agreement with the UNWTO to host the International Conference on Mediterranean Tourism in April on the holiday island of Djerba. Egyptian representative of the Ministry of Tourism in Fitur, Hisham Zaazou, argued recently that despite the terrible year endured by Egypt's tourism sector, there are signs that the situation is improving since "Exports rose by 18 percent in 2011 and the rate of growth is expected to be 3 percent in the fiscal year 2011 to 2012."

"Egypt's tourism sector has previously demonstrated its resilience following earlier crises, such as the 2005 terrorist attack in the Egyptian resort town of Sharm Al-Sheikh or two separate bus accidents in 2010 in which 16 tourists were killed and 43 injured"

There is historical reason to be confident too. Egypt's tourism sector has previously demonstrated its resilience following earlier crises, such as the 2005 terrorist attack in the Egyptian resort town of Sharm Al-Sheikh or two separate bus accidents in 2010 in which 16 tourists were killed and 43 injured.

What is true for Egypt is also true for the MENA region more generally. The tourism sector was in good shape before the Arab Spring began and there are no reasons to think it will not recover. But the extent of recovery is contingent on the relative success of the political transitions now ongoing in several countries. In the meantime, Gulf States will continue to benefit as visitors to the region seek alternative destinations. ■

Daniel Rivera is an Arab philologist and translator. He is currently a EU-PhD candidate at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

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East Meets Middle East

Cai Guo-Qiang's explosive exhibition at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art

Looking beyond the relationship between the East and West in contemporary art, award winning artist Cai Guo-Qiang explores the little-known but long-standing relationship between the Arab world and China in SARAAB, a dramatic exhibition at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, Qatar

Juliet Highet

The exhibition opened explosively—literally—over a vast stretch of open land in Qatar.

The ominously titled Black Ceremony exploded in a progressive series of ten scenes using over 8,300 black smoke shells embedded with computer microchips. The first looked as though drops of ink had been splattered across the sky, from which black flowers bloomed, followed by a thunderous noise. Then more smoke shells were ignited to form a black pyramid standing above the earth like a vast, silent tombstone. Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang, the 'Master of Ceremonies' of this extraordinary large-scale event, was exploring themes of 'Death' and 'Homecoming'.

An eye-witness described the dramatic atmosphere: "The build-up among the audience, the sounds and smells, and in the case of the 'Fireball' scene—the heat, then the slow dissipation of the smoke after each explosion—it was a full sensory experience so hard to capture in photographs." The event was the opening of a spectacular exhibition titled Saraab, meaning mirage in Arabic at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, in Doha.

In the Upper Gallery at Mathaf, other videos and slideshows of examples of Guo-Qiang's past work illustrate his creative process, including experiments with gunpowder, fireworks and public 'performances' of explosion events. One of these was his Black Fireworks series, created in response to 9/11. Guo-Qiang is clearly fired up by—as he puts it, "The uncontrollability and spontaneity of gunpowder building anxiety and expectation. I find this quality alluring and the transformation of energy, the beauty and effect it creates cannot be replaced by other materials." Gunpowder was, of course, a Chinese invention.

So what is all this about in a time of such global volatility and with attention still riveted on the Arab Spring, with all its potent possibilities? The dual theme of 'Homecoming' in Black Ceremony indicates the exploration of the little-known but long-standing relationship between the Arab world and China, dating back to the ancient maritime Silk Route. It connects the multi-layered history of Guo-Qiang's hometown of Quanzhou to that of Qatar and the Arabian Gulf's seafaring culture. Since his youth, Guo-Qiang had been curious about the traces of Islamic influence in his hometown, including a rather grand Ashab mosque and cemeteries containing many Arabic-inscribed tombstones. Some of the earliest Muslim missionaries are buried in the city's Holy Mausoleum.

Quanzhou was a significant maritime centre on the Silk Route, exporting not only silk, but spices, tea, porcelain and gunpowder westwards via the Arabian Gulf. In turn Arabian dhows took precious substances like frankincense to the East.

More than 50 works have been installed throughout the Museum, of which 17 are new commissions. They explore the historic and contemporary iconography of the Gulf, as well as the Islamic heritage of Quanzhou. The remaining works are part of a mini retrospective on the upper floor. In keeping with its title, Saraab (Mirage), Guo-Qiang's art addresses the ambiguity of Qatar and China's affiliations with each other, questioning whether the process of cultural interaction is in fact illusory, unobtainable. Frankly, he said, "These works embody my contemplations on the relationship between the Middle East and the world, as well as my confusions."

Saraab is a double first for both Mathaf and Cai Guo-Qiang. It is the first single-artist exhibition presented by the Museum since its opening in December 2010. Mathaf's

mission is to present an Arab perspective on modern art, and part of its commitment is to turn eastward towards Asia, exploring historic and contemporary links. As Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Director of Mathaf and Curator of Saraab, said, "It is the first time we have considered the dynamics of cultural exchange between our region and China. By re-imagining Asian connections in this way, Saraab can help viewers to look beyond an 'East/West' relationship in contemporary art." In addition, he commented on the collaboration with Guo-Qiang, saying, "This show is a journey of personal and artistic discovery that demonstrates the emotional breadth of Cai's work from the intimate to the spectacular."

For Guo-Qiang, Saraab offered the opportunity to explore the complex web of conceptual and material connections between China and the Arab world. He said, "Although Qatar is one of the smallest nations in the region, it acts big and dares to take on ambitious projects. From the 2006 Asian Games in Doha and the World Cup in 2022, to the Qatar Museum Authority, and Mathaf in particular, Qatar repeatedly makes appearances on the world stage. It is exciting to be part of this larger context with Saraab."

"This show is a journey of personal and artistic discovery that demonstrates the emotional breadth of Cai's work from the intimate to the spectacular"

Qatar seems fast to be rivalling Abu Dhabi as a regional arts hub. As Qatar Museums Authority Chairperson Her Excellency Sheikh Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani stated, "Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art is the first institution of its kind in our region and a major new centre for art and education throughout the world. Mathaf, and the entire Museums Authority, are expanding people's ideas about art and culture in this region. With this exhibition by Cai Guo-Qiang, we open fascinating new territory for the artist and our audience to interact and engage in exciting new ways."

Guo-Qiang is insistent on the importance of working with other artists and volunteers, including on the 17 new pieces commissioned by the Mathaf. "Through the collaboration and exchange with volunteers… and by opening the creative process to the public, I had the chance to work together with young artists, and discuss how to transform traditional mediums and cultural symbols into contemporary concepts and art forms."

With over 50 works, ranging from drawings through a mini retrospective to large-scale installations (and the explosive opening event, Black Ceremony), Saraab is Guo-Qiang's biggest exhibition since I Want to Believe at New York's Guggenheim in 2008. He is a major international artist, crossing multi-media, exhibiting in premier venues globally and winning many awards, including the position of Director of Visual & Special Effects for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. Originally trained in stage design, he lived in Japan for nine years, simultaneously exploring the properties of gunpowder and Eastern philosophy. Although drawing on contemporary social issues as a conceptual basis, the evocative, gentle titles of some of his exhibitions demonstrate another duality. Consider Fallen Blossoms, Transient Rainbow and I Want to Believe.

This same surrealist juxtaposition is apparent in the current works at Saraab, so many executed in the symbolically dangerous medium of gunpowder, yet suffused with tender poetry, as in his Fragile series, in which he has used gunpowder calligraphy applied to elaborately sculpted, infinitely delicate porcelain panels. The result is breathtakingly exquisite (and also vast). The 480 panels were made of Dehua porcelain by traditional craftspeople from near Quanzhou; they were historically traded by sea to the Arab world and beyond.

Saraab begins outside the museum with Homecoming: 62 large granite rocks selected at Quanzhou and installed along the visitor's route into the museum's atrium. Inscribed with Arabic calligraphy before their journey, the fragmentary inscriptions mirror those on historic Arab tombstones in Guong-Qiang's hometown, enigmatic and evocative phrases: 'The present life is but the joy of delusion,' and in a more sombre mood, 'Every soul shall taste of death.'

Guo-Qiang comments: "These cautionary words remain relevant today, whether in China, the Arab world—or perhaps across the entire world—as society becomes caught up in the relentless pursuit of materialism." The journey of the rocks to Doha, and laying them out according to principles of feng shui, symbolise a homecoming for the souls of Arab ancestors who died in distant lands and are now offered solace and closure, as they are welcomed home.

Two machines—one for making gentle waves, the other for creating atmospheric fog—are used to create the high tech exhibit Endless. In contrast, three traditional wooden boats sway eternally in an extensive pool of water. One is a fishing boat used for countless centuries around Qanzhou; the other two are Gulf-region Houri vessels. Are they travelling, or are they at rest? Are they real or imaginary? A mirage? Such constantly intriguing ambiguity also sets the scene for Route, a vast gunpowder drawing on paper laid on stones collected from the desert plain of Qatar.

In the style of a Chinese woodblock print, Guong-Qiang has augmented the gunpowder trail with ink to create a modern map using the format of a 17th century Chinese nautical chart of the maritime Silk Route, the Haidao Zhinantu or Seaway Compass Diagram.

For the Miniature Series, Guo-Qiang opened the creative process to the public. Eight panels were prepared of stencils inspired by Islamic miniature paintings and samples of the embroidered trim on Qatari women's abayas, on which gunpowder was then ignited. Again we see the dichotomy of exquisite creation wreaked by destruction or de-construction of rich textile ornament and painted finesse.

99 Horses is a cosmic installation in which drawings of horses galloping across the desert towards a searing sun were exploded onto paper with gunpowder. Apparently galloping in space, small gold-leaf resin models of horses create lyrical floating shadows on the already-fluent backdrop. Horses have, of course, been hugely important in both cultures. The number '99' in Chinese heritage symbolises infinity, while in Muslim terms it recalls the Ninety-Nine Names of God.

Shot on location at Al-Shaqab, the Emir of Qatar's breeding and training facility for horses, the eponymously-named video installation at Saraab celebrates the value of Arabian horses in cultural identity, and also shows how developing equine technology has advanced horse breeding and husbandry. Viewers of Al-Shaqab sit in a recreation of a majlis, the traditional Arabian guest reception room, on cushions covered with Qatari sadu weaving.

Flying Together is a more-than-curious suspension of belief, in which two more icons of Arabian culture—falcons and a camel—fly together in the air (suspended from the ceiling). Falcons—yes—but a flying camel? Or are the falcons dragging the lone camel upwards attacking it, or are they helping it to escape? It's all a fantastic mirage, just like Saraab.

Saraab at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar, ends on May 26th 2012. ■

Juliet Highet is a writer, photographer, editor and curator, Juliet Highet specializes in Middle Eastern heritage and contemporary culture. Ms. Highet is currently working on her second book, Design Oman, having published her first book, Frankincense: Oman's Gift to the World, in 2006

Once Upon a Lost Time in Turkey

Once Upon A Time in Anatolia

In a film that takes place in the context of a single night and morning, Director Nuri Bilge Ceylan explores Turkey's darker past

Nicholas Blincoe

Acclaimed Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan recently said, "I like to create to mislead people." Everything about his extraordinary, Palme d'Or-winning film Once Upon A Time in Anatolia seems designed to send its audience in the wrong direction.

The film begins with a party, as three jolly men drink in a roadside mechanic shop. Then the mood abruptly changes to a kind of bleak, CSI-type recast with quarrelsome Turkish men. The story follows four policemen, a prosecutor (the Turkish equivalent of a District Attorney), a coroner, and a pair of military gendarmes through the night on their search for the grave of one of the men. The drinking party evidently turned murderous, but why? One cop observes that unexplained crimes always revolve around women.

After a long night, we at last meet Gülnaz, the young, veiled wife of the murdered man. Her name identifies her as Kurdish, and what may have been merely a story of jealousy or even a family feud takes on a political dimension. As the characters go to breakfast or bathe, before regrouping for the murdered man's autopsy, we realise that we have spent a night travelling into Turkey's recent troubled past, without Ceylan actually mentioning it.

Ceylan's title is a bold reference to the trilogy from Italian director Sergio Leone that begins with Once Upon A Time in the West (1968) and ends sixteen years later with Once Upon A Time in America (1984). Leone was not American, although he made America his subject through three operatic stories about cowboys, revolutionaries and gangsters. His trilogy explores the way that myth becomes history.

For Leone, the most powerful genre is the elegy, the tribute to a dead man or a lost time. Ceylan shares Leone's love of epic landscapes and passing time, though Ceylan is characteristically playing games with us. His film takes place over a single night and morning, and never strays further than 37km from its starting point. This fact is obsessively mentioned by a gendarme, who is concerned his force should take over from the cops if the dead man is found beyond the city limits.

The director is noting the passing of old Anatolia, but as dawn finally illuminates this landscape we realise with shock that his old Anatolia is a battlefield. This corner of southern Turkey, near the city of Diyarbakir, is where the gendarmerie battled Kurdish separatists for three decades. This undeclared war has now subsided, but its effects are felt everywhere. Gendarmes escort the cops for their protection. The cars have extra gas tanks in the trunks to ensure the police never run out of fuel in hostile country. The lone non-Turkish policeman, from the minority Arab population, is the only man in this travelling bureaucracy who actually knows the roads, though they are only minutes outside the city. A small hamlet is actually a fortified garrison where the mukhtar's sons all joined the police, while his daughters married policemen.

Despite its staunch loyalty to the Turkish state, the village is dying. The children have emigrated and the mukhtar's last dream is, in a darkly comic moment, to build a morgue. With no farmers left, the richly-watered fields are almost empty. This vision of Anatolia is as familiar to Ceylan as America was to Leone. The murdered man's grave is too far outside the city for Ceylan to ever have contemplated visiting in the old days. Yet he has made it his own, by slyly shouldering its burdens.

In Turkish political mythology, Anatolia is the national heartland. Ataturk moved the capital from European Istanbul to Asian Ankara, a town previously known only for its eponymous Angora wool. Yet, in truth, ordinary Anatolians were forgotten or ignored by Turkey's subsequent leaders who trumpeted their liberalism but ran the country through military law and security courts.

Prime Minister Erdogan's AKP represented, for many, a new start: after eighty years of Turkish nationalism it was now possible for the new, urban middle class of Anatolia to promote class and religious interests over old-fashioned and unhelpful nationalism. It even seemed that the Kurdish and Arab minorities could be reconciled with this modern, mildly conservative secular Islamic state. It is a political model with appeal beyond Turkey's borders and Erdogan has been keen to export it in what is sometimes branded a policy of Neo-Ottomanism.

However, many Kurds have grown disappointed with the AKP's pace of change in opening up Turkey. And as Ceylan's brilliant film shows, the cumbersome old Turkish state is still mired in the old war zone just beyond its cities. That's what is in the grave, the dead hand of the past dragging everyone back. ■

Nicholas Blincoe is an author, critic and screenwriter living between London and the Palestinian city of Bethlehem. He was a founding member of the New Puritans literary movement and writes regularly for The Guardian and The Telegraph.

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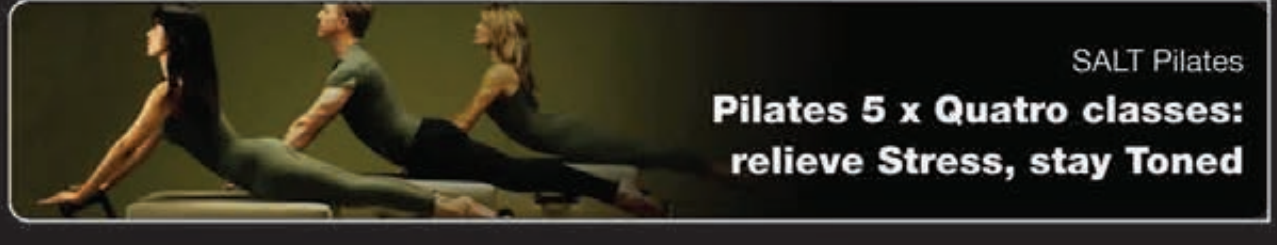

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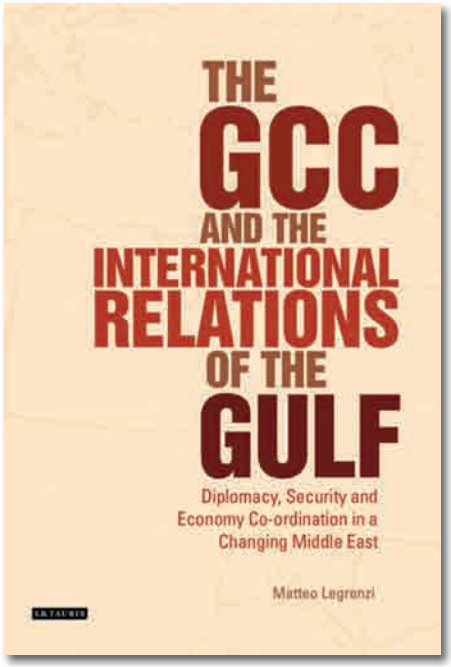
A Simple Plan

The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf: Diplomacy, Security and Economic Coordination in a Changing Middle East by Matteo Legrenzi

I B Tauris, 2011

Matteo Legrenzi's book demonstrates that there is no real mystery to the workings of the Gulf Cooperation Council. It is a thorough work, useful to the expert and general reader alike.

In spite of the extreme turbulence and near-unprecedented uncertainty in the Middle East, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) remains resolute, steady as an oil tanker in a fearsome storm. The GCC has earned a reputation, not least in the past year, as one of the most resilient sub-regional organizations in the world. It is certainly the most successful one in the Arab World. In writing about the history and politics of this unprecedented organization, Matteo Legrenzi has managed the difficult task of balancing the widely-held (but highly skeptical) view of the GCC as a notional council and more excitable suggestions that the GCC has brought about a monumental shift in Gulf diplomacy.



An associate professor at the University of Venice, Legrenzi is a well-respected a specialist on international relations. His phenomenal achievements in writing this book are made very clear by the reviews the book has received from luminaries in the international relations field. Gary Sick, Gregory Gause, and Eugene Rogan (amongst others) have heaped praise on *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf*; Gause even goes so far as to say that "it is the best book on the topic."

This book presents timely, thorough and comprehensive account of what the Council has—and has not—accomplished. Using a variety of sources in several different languages, the author constructs a unique guide to the recent history and politics of the Gulf. It is evi-

Diplomatic Dead End

In Heavy Waters: Iran's Nuclear Program, The Risk of War and Lessons from Turkey

International Crisis Group, 23 February 2012

This report provides a bleak and all-too-realistic appraisal of the current standoff between Iran, the US and Israel, and how attempts to break the deadlock face serious obstacles.

This report is an excellent tool for anyone who wishes to understand the current crisis over Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology, and the attempts of the US and Israel to stop it. Nonetheless, it also makes for depressing reading, conceding that a comprehensive diplomatic solution is a distant prospect.

Regarding the current American approach to Iran and its pursuit of nuclear technology, it offers a bleak picture of the prospects of success for the current policy. It points out, correctly, that sanctions to date have been completely ineffectual in achieving their main purpose: deterring Iran's leaders from investing in and developing its technology in this field. Iran went from having no operational centrifuges in 2006 to having several thousand in two enrichment sites, a sophisticated nuclear infrastructure, and a stockpile of enriched uranium today.

Its conclusions on possible Israeli military strikes are also illuminating, especially at a time when tensions are high and every day seems to bring a new statement from Washington or Tel Aviv that a nuclear Iran is "unacceptable" and that "all options are on the table" to prevent this. The report points out that it is impossible to simply destroy Iran's nuclear facilities with a brief airstrike, which would be a repetition of the Israeli raid on the Osirak reactor in Iraq in the early 1980s. The dispersal of the Iranian facilities, the fact that Iran could reconstitute its program afterwards, and the depth and intensity of Iran's air defense network would make this a long, costly and difficult business that is probably beyond Israeli capabilities.

The report also offers useful insights into Israeli strategic thinking. It highlights a duality that has confused some observers and continues to add a dangerous element of uncertainty to the situation. Israeli officials and politicians have been warning of the threat from a nuclear Iran since 1982. But decision-making in Israel's national security establishment is at times opaque, with mixed signals about the necessity and desirability of striking Iran's nuclear program before it reaches a 'point of no return': is it a serious threat, a means of applying pressure to Washington and the West to deal with the situation, or both?

In terms of recommendations for solving what seems to be an insuperable problem, the report advocates looking to Turkey and its approach to Iran for inspiration. As a result, its authors spend some time delving into the bilateral ties between Iran and Turkey, a relationship that will become increasingly important in the future. It describes how Turkey has sought to use the good relationships it has with both the US and Iran to play a moderating role over the last two years. Based on its analysis of Turkish-

dent throughout the book that he has privileged access to influential policy makers and high-level dignitaries; these sources allow him to develop his thesis beyond mere dry, analytical critique. Indeed, Legrenzi is at pains to point out that it was only through immersing himself in the region—spending a significant amount of time there—that he could transcend the more common and superficial analyses that surround his specialty subject.

One of the book's great strengths is that the GCC is studied as an organization at face value, ignoring the common accusations that it is an artificially created body. By virtue of this simple approach, the author is able to draw persuasive conclusions about the merits of the Council's real contributions at the regional and international level.

Similarly, Legrenzi takes a back-to-basics approach in another area of mild controversy. Utilizing a clear empirical method, the author is able to demonstrate how the formation of the GCC has had subtle (but important) effects on the distinct societies of the Council's constituent members. These societal changes have added a layer of complexity regional identity within the Gulf—another issue Legrenzi takes in a fascinating direction.

Ultimately, *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf* leaves the reader with a clear understanding of how cooperation within the Gulf works in practice. In this way, Legrenzi makes an important contribution: he has written an account of the GCC which does not simply rely on the kind of long-winded documents that are the inevitable product of diplomacy (and the focus of too many academics). With his clear presentation and engaging writing style, Legrenzi has produced a guide that will satisfy both the regional specialist and the lay observer. Within the context of the rise of Iran, the boom years of economic liberalization, and the shifting currents of regional diplomacy, this is no small feat. ■

"One of the book's great strengths is that the GCC is studied as an organization at face value, ignoring the common accusations that it is an artificially created body"

Iranian ties, it suggests taking a leaf out of the Turkish book and advocates taking a deep engagement strategy, interacting with all of the power centers in the byzantine Iranian political system—not just the president and the supreme leader—in an attempt to gain maximum traction.

But is this a realistic option? The report goes into detail in its description of the links between the two states, especially the growing economic ties, but also discusses how the relationship has not been without friction. Turkish attempts to mediate led to it "stumbling" into a "controversial role", and its success (together with Brazil) in reaching a deal on nuclear fuel with Iran reportedly surprised even the officials who brokered it.

The report's authors admit that Turkey's intervention came "from the sidelines:" the center of gravity of the dispute is the Iranian-American-Israeli triangle, and the links between these three states are of a different nature between those of Iran and Turkey, links which made its diplomacy possible in the first place. This suggests that Turkey's model of engagement may not be replicable on a larger scale. The report also concedes that much of the tension between Iran and the US has its roots in domestic politics in both states, and it is not at all clear that this situation makes a deep and sustained diplomatic offensive possible

Despite these issues, it is a useful and timely piece of research that deserves to be widely and carefully studied, both as a warning and a guidebook. Its core conclusion is undoubtedly correct: diplomacy is the only solution. Worryingly, the report also demonstrates that those best placed to pursue diplomacy with Iran are trapped on the sidelines. ■

Messages of Love and Hate

Adel Al-Toraifi

The recent leaked emails of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his wife, as published by the press recently, can be considered an exceptional incident. In fact, this is the first time the world has been able to see the thought process of a president who uses excessive force to confront his people's uprising against his rule. Whilst it is true that the accuracy of these emails cannot be verified conclusively, for the majority of them have been redacted or refined, they do offer us a rough vision of what is going on inside the al-Assad house, and they provide us with a rough diary of the regime in Syria following a year-long revolution. The press focused extensively on the lavishness and extravagance of the presidential couple - as seen in their online shopping, as well as the inner circle of female confidantes. However, what is of greater significance is the political and strategic side of the more than 3,000 emails. This is because, for the first time, we can view the decision-making mechanism within the regime, and the means and ways it uses to manage the crisis.

It might require dozens of specialized researchers and several months to analyze the full contents of these documents and draw up a complete summary. Further leaks may emerge in the event of the al-Assad regime being toppled, but for now at least we can come up with general remarks, most notably that the regime, contrary to what we all thought, seems calm and even cool in its handling of the crisis. The regime, as reflected by the leaks, does not seem to be greatly concerned about the possibility of its downfall, nor does there seem to be a "plan B" in place should the regime's tactics fail. Al-Assad seems more coherent than his opponents think he is. His television appearances are well orchestrated and the regime's statements are ornate and free from any noticeable confusion. The regime manages its media discourse itself and never allows any senior state official to issue statements. At a time when nearly 50 military officials are defecting from the regime on a daily basis, Bashar al-Assad, who is known for his love of modern technology, spends most of his time surfing the internet, listening to modern music, consulting with young female confidantes, and listening to advice and recommendations from outside the official channels of the state.

Some observers explain al-Assad's behavior as that of a psychopathic character who – along with his family – lives under a dangerous illusion and is completely detached from the bloody reality his people are experiencing. However, there are those who believe that al-Assad's state of coolness and coherence displays his ability to persist with confrontation, no matter how long it takes, as the current crisis requires each party to exercise patience for as long as possible. In a statement to the Financial Times in March 2012, Jerrold Post, a professor of political psychiatry at George Washington University, says that although Bashar al-Assad does not seem to be in direct contact with the crisis in Syria, he seems " more put together" than someone like Gaddafi. According to Post, this can be explained by al-Assad's background; "[he was] not a born leader, he was also not destined for the presidency, reaching it only because his brother Basil, the presumed heir, died in a car accident".

Perhaps, this is the source of the danger – or even the weakness of Bashar al-Assad as a president. He relies primarily on the history of his father and the advice he receives from his inner circle. Yet, according to Post, "this was not part of his psychological calculations, he wasn't schooled in the intricacies of managing a totalitarian state." According to al-Arabiya TV, perhaps it is for this reason that none of the leaked emails contained messages from senior officials in the government, the ruling Baathist party, or even al-Assad's family members such as his brother Maher, or his brother-in-law Assef Shawkat, who were not mentioned at all. This means that the regime's official institutions do not use this particular email address to correspond with the president. Nevertheless, these emails can at least give us a brief view of a president who is detached from the current crisis in his country, and who is preoccupied with how to improve his stature and portray himself in a better light, without promoting a sense of weakness or having to retreat.

Bashar's case is a complex one, he is obsessed by – and even believes in – his view of the situation, exactly as his adherers want him to see it. When reading what Bashar says, one recalls Al Pacino in the movie "Scarface", where he played a gangster who strongly believed in his own destiny and his ability to overcome any crisis by displaying excessive challenging or confrontational behavior. Hence, the Syrian regime's future seems to be a repetition of the tragedies of a gang that failed to confront its rivals and competitors. If you think that al-Assad is managing the crisis, you would be mistaken, because he is nothing more than a failed heir to a historic gang that has provoked hostilities with its opponents and rivals. Therefore, on the day that the al-Assad regime falls, Bashar al-Assad will remain standing alone, believing that both his destiny and his people are on his side.

In a message Asma al-Assad sent to her husband in late December 2011 – indicative of the level of stress which the couple was facing at a time of intense international pressure being mounted on the regime to prompt it to end its violence - she said "If we are strong together, we will overcome this together… I love you". ■

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