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10 Myths About the Arab Spring

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The Majalla Issue 1566

Springonomics
A debate rages inside Egypt and beyond, concerning the next economic step for a country in flux

On Politics
In post-Mubarak Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has found itself in unfamiliar territory, the country's political center stage

Candid Conversations
Joseph Nye examines the Arab Spring in the context of the new power equation emerging in the 21st century

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Editorial

The Majalla editorial team has produced a robust issue packed with our favorite writers and analyses. Our cover story 'Ten Myths About the Arab Spring' has brought together some of the most trusted names in analysis on the Middle East, including Mohamed Al-Rumaihi, Rashmi Singh and Firas Maksad.

We also take a closer look at the wider economic and political impact of the ongoing uprisings across the region in 'Springonomics' by one of the best economists on the topic, Stephen Glain.

The greater Middle East is in a profound period of transition. Analysts everywhere struggle to keep pace with the rapidly changing events on the ground. We hope this issue will give you some of the hard-hitting, indepth analysis that is so needed. Please also visit us on our website http://www.majalla.com/eng/

As always, we welcome and value our readers' feedback and invite you to take the opportunity to leave your comments on our website or contact us if you are interested in writing for our publication.

Adel Al-Toraifi
Editor in Chief

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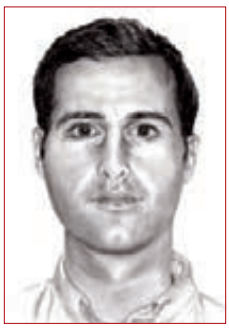

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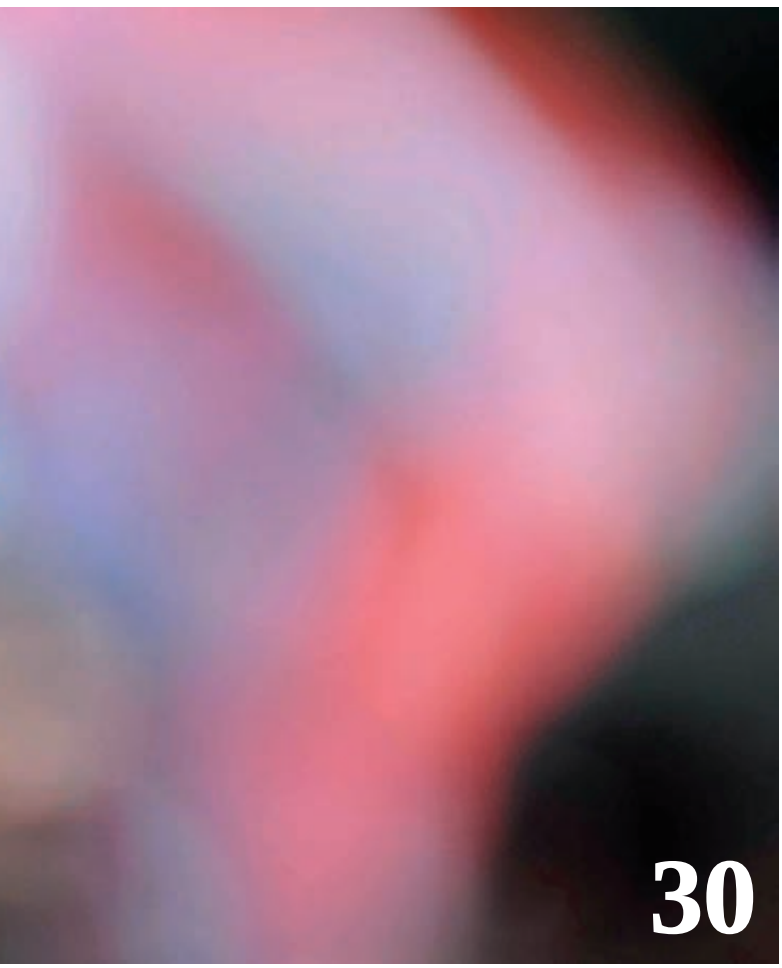

Contents

Quotes of the Month

Images © Getty Images

"What's happening in Syria is not acceptable to Saudi Arabia… Today Saudi Arabia holds its firm historical position towards its brothers, asking them to stop the killing machine, the spilling of blood, and be wise before it's too late."

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, upon withdrawing Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Syria

"The surest way for the bloodshed to end is simple: Moammar Qhadafi and his regime need to recognize their rule has come to an end. Qhadafi needs to acknowledge the reality that he no longer controls Libya. He needs to relinquish power once and for all."

President Barack Obama 22 August 2011, on the fall of Tripoli

"This is the least we can do, we should have done more. The entire country should be participating in this demonstration. In the end, Syrians are not just our brothers, we are the same race."

Firas Ghaleb, a Lebanese activist at a rally in Beirut in support of the Syrian people

"The Armed Forces, on the occasion of this holy month, affirm their loyalty to the nation and their adherence to the principles and values advocated by our religion to defend the homeland and protect of the integrity of its territories. The Armed Forces is the shield of the people."

Leader of the Egyptian Military Council, Field Marshal Tantawi, at the commencement of Ramadan

"The military council proved that they are maintaining the same regime and that nothing has changed except the president. We feel we've been tricked into a soft coup, not a revolution."

Shadi Al-Ghazili Harb, an Egyptian youth leader

"There is an orchestrated plan to upset the stability of the country. Elections will be held as scheduled on October 23 despite everything. I appeal to all political parties and citizens to defend the country."

Tunisian Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi, in the wake of violent demonstrations in Tunis

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Conflict Looms in Kurdistan

Rising Nationalism and the future unity of Iraq in the post-American era

Since the announcement of the US Afghan strategy, there has been a flurry of analyses highlighting the pros and cons of an early withdrawal from Afghanistan. Surprisingly, the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan has received scant attention even though rising nationalistic sentiments in Baghdad and Erbil risk renewed violence once Americans are gone.

Nima Khorrami Assl

Image © Getty Images

In a recent interview with The National, Masrour Barzani spoke of his desire to eventually replace his father, President Masoud Barzani, as the elected leader of Iraqi Kurdistan. As a leading member of the KDP and chief of the Kurdistan Region Security Protection Agency, Barzani junior is confident that Kurds will one day have their own nation because independence is a "dream" shared by every single Kurd. Admitting that the international community is not yet ready for an independent Kurdistan, he believes that the first key step towards independence is to change the perception of "people that we live with" to accept Kurds as "equals." "We are doing our part and now it is the turn of the international community to respond to its conscience and say, OK, maybe we are wrong, maybe the Kurds deserve more," he went on to claim.

This increased assertiveness in Kurdistan has, rather dangerously, been matched with a parallel rise in Baghdad's confidence and power, and thus, the prospect of armed clashes between the Iraqi army and Kurdish peshmerga (Kurdistan's guard force) could rise substantially in post-America Iraq. If anything, history shows that it is only when Baghdad is weak that the Iraqi government agrees to Kurdish demands. Aware of this, many Kurdish politicians have already expressed their hope to at least delay the US departure at a time when it is no longer economically feasible for the United States government, no matter who is in the White House, to commit to/embark upon long-term, distanced military campaigns.

Since 2003, US forces have played a stabilizing and mediating role between Iraqi Kurds and Arabs. Given its troubles back home though, it is not certain that US will be willing to mediate disputes after 2012. In fact, the US may very well be tempted to postpone or avoid the core issues affecting Kurdistan since both Baghdad and Erbil appear content to leave the issues to "whatever understandings currently exist," and to the default option of "managing flare-ups."

Saddam's fall enabled Kurdistan to, in the words of a Kurdish activist, "seize its own destiny." In visiting Erbil, one is helplessly struck by the high level of economic activity that pervades all parts of the city. As important as a favorable investment climate is, the key to this "Kurdish renaissance" has been military security. Assisted by American forces, the Kurdish region has largely remained insulated from the violence that roiled Iraq post-Saddam, and that socio-economic development in Kurdistan has far outpaced that of other parts of the country. Nonetheless, there are still a number of unresolved issues between Baghdad and Erbil to the extent that it will be difficult to identify any single problem over the forthcoming years that is not influenced in some way by Arab-Kurdish relations.

At the same time, it seems that as Baghdad consolidates its power, it is becoming more willing to "impose solutions" on Erbil's

demands with Prime Minister Maliki now projecting himself as a "defender of [the] territorial integrity of Iraq." This would in turn elicit a violent reaction as was the case in the Khanagin and Ninewa incidents in 2008 and 2009 respectively. As such, a less assertive administration in Washington and the withdrawal of US forces—all of whom are scheduled to leave Iraq by 2012—can only mean that the Iraqi Kurdish leaders are likely to find themselves facing an array of challenges in the coming years.

Kirkuk and other disputed territories still lie outside the de jure control of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), while a hydrocarbons law that would conclusively settle the division of power between Kurdistan and Baghdad over oil resources remains elusive. Situated in a region populated by a mix of Kurds, Arabs, Turkmens and Christians, Kirkuk holds not only cultural significance, but rich supplies of oil and natural gas. Kirkuk's ethnic communities each have contending claims to the area's status and the past couple of years have witnessed the increasing segregation of communities into distinct quarters.

Article 140 of Iraq's constitution specifies that there be "normalization and census" that "concludes with a referendum in Kirkuk and other disputed territories" by December 2007. That deadline has come and gone, but questions remain about whether Article 140 still applies. No Arab leader in Iraq could hope to survive politically if he is seen to surrender Kirkuk to the Kurds, while Kurdish leaders would lose all their credibility if they fail to stand up to an Iraqi army bid to drive the Kurds

out of Kirkuk. This implies that if the current standoff persists, unilateral moves, by either side, will undoubtedly trigger armed conflict once the US security blanket is removed.

Consolidation of autonomous rule and intra-Kurdish politics also pose ongoing challenges inside Iraqi Kurdistan. Since 2003, the KDP and PUK have encouraged tens of thousands of displaced Kurds to return to their places of origin. These people have been generally promised generous compensation and inclusion of their districts into Kurdistan. Assistance and compensation, while forthcoming in certain cases, rarely meet expectations not least because of corruption and nepotism of Barzani and Talabani families.

Meanwhile, a new Kurdish opposition party called Gorran has emerged, which is highly critical of the KDP and PUK failure to achieve what its leader Mohammed Tofiq Rahim calls "Kurdish foreign policy goals" and to tackle corruption. Increased competition between the KDP, PUK and Gorran will probably make it much more risky for any Kurdish leader to appear "soft" on Kurdish claims to disputed territories or other "Kurdish rights." This presents significant problems for the current Kurdish leadership. Having portrayed themselves as the liberators of Kirkuk and the defenders of Kurdistan, they now need to consider how to manage rising public expectations at a time when Baghdad is becoming more muscular.

There is then the status of the Kurdish security forces which is still ambiguous simply because it is part of the broader question of power and resource allocation between Baghdad and Erbil. A key concern is the presence of Kurdish security forces that are accountable to the KRG not the federal authorities. These are the peshmergas, the zerevani, a paramilitary force, the KDP-controlled security police known as asaesh, as well as intelligence agencies called parastin and/or zanyari.

Another question is what to do with Kurdish security forces deployed in areas outside the Kurdistan region, which the constitution considers "disputed." For the Kurdish leadership, they must remain to protect Kurdish populations and to solidify the chances of these areas' eventual incorporation into Kurdistan. By contrast, the federal government and local authorities want to extend their control over these territories to counterbalance Kurdish gains there. This was epitomized in Maliki's call for the establishment of Isnad, or tribal, militias consisting of Arabs, Turkmens and Kurds in opposition to the current Kurdish leadership in 2008.

Finally, relations with neighboring states continue to present both opportunities and grave risks. In spite of major openings by Turkey, Iran, and to a lesser extent Syria towards Iraqi Kurdistan, these states' opposition to the Kurds' demand on Kirkuk remains intact believing that gaining Kirkuk would enable the Kurds to secede from Iraq and declare independence. In the absence of American forces, therefore, a major conflict along the "trigger line" could potentially lead to these states' penetration of Kurdish affairs, which in turn might force Israel to overtly lend its backing to the Kurds. The Israeli government has traditionally considered Kurdistan a "historical opportunity" because it is both resource-rich and non-Arab. In fact, Israel has been heavily involved in Kurdistan since 2003 via training and equipping Kurdish security forces—a key but unnoticed factor behind Turkey's recent activism in Palestine.

Each of these issues requires concessions to be made in an environment that is far from conducive to compromise and consensus. Although neither Baghdad nor Erbil appears to have an interest in armed confrontation, the disputed territories are so fundamental to both sides that a single incident could trigger a dangerous escalation.

Therefore, should Arabs and Kurds fail to achieve a meaningful partnership before the year ends, the situation along the trigger line could dangerously deteriorate, thereby undermining the territorial integrity and the very existence of Iraq as a state. This scenario is imminent, so much so that no other country, with adequate diplomatic and military means, can be expected to assume a mediating role after the US departure.

Aspirations of Statehood

Masrour Barzani, heir apparent to his father's presidency of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, has grown adept at spreading understanding of the Kurdish predicament around the world. Partly educated in America, he has developed some lofty contacts in Washington. This year, during the height of the Arab Spring, the refined 42 year-old reminded Abu Dhabi based newspaper The National that the aspirations of the Kurds have not gone away.

On a future Kurdish State:
"If I tell you that you can find a Kurd that doesn't have a dream of having his own state, I think I wouldn't be telling you the truth. And I think the Kurds deserve to have their own independent state, like any other nation."

On the Kurdish diaspora:
"There are 40-plus million Kurds living in the world. Why wouldn't they have their own country?"

On terrorism:
"We don't believe that innocent civilians should become the target, because we are victims. We know what being a victim means."

On international opinion:
"I think we are doing our part and now it is the turn of the international community to respond to its conscience and say, 'OK, maybe we are wrong, maybe the Kurds deserve more."

On patience:
"If, for instance, tomorrow we declare independence and nobody in the world wants to deal with us, what good would that do?"

Nima Khorrami Assl – Beijing-based writer and researcher specializing in policy and analysis on geo-economics and security development in the Middle East and Asia Pacific. Mr. Assl has carried out a number of projects for both governmental and private clients in the Middle East and has published op-eds in "The Guardian," Open Democracy, and Defence IQ.

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Unfamiliar Territory

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt finds itself in the political spotlight

In the post-Mubarak Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has found itself cast out into unfamiliar territory, the country's political center stage. Where the organization had appeared a monolith in the shadows of the Egyptian political periphery, under the scrutiny of the limelight, cracks and divisions are beginning to show for largely the first time.

Omar Rahman

From a distance, they resemble the ashen crosses that adorn the foreheads of churchgoers on the first day of Lent. But up-close, it is clear that the marks are permanent, abrasions on the skin formed over years of bowing heads to prayer rugs in fervent worship. It has become a badge of honor among the faithful, a testament to their devotion and religiosity. On some, the calluses are so severe as to form protrusions of accumulated scar tissue that are known as zabeebt el-sullah in Arabic, or raisins of prayer.

On any walk through the streets and narrow alleyways of Cairo these marks can be seen everywhere. It is just one sign of the depth that Islam plays in Egyptian culture and why the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's foremost religious organization, resonates among the masses.

Yet, in the post-Mubarak Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has found itself cast out into unfamiliar territory, the country's political center stage. Where the organization had appeared a monolith in the shadows of the Egyptian political periphery, under the scrutiny of the limelight, cracks and divisions are beginning to show for largely the first time.

The main fissure has manifested within the Brotherhood's leadership, where a battle is being waged between those who wish to keep the organization in its comfortable position as a social organization, unburdened by the responsibility of direct leadership, and those who hope to capitalize on the new political landscape where it may be possible to translate its popular support into stewardship of the nation's highest offices.

It had appeared for some time in the aftermath of the revolution that the Brotherhood's cautionaries had carried the day. A political party, Freedom and Justice, was established, which they insisted would have no direct ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. Freedom and Justice declared they would only run for a third of the seats in the Parliament's upcoming election. And most of all, leaders from the party said they would not run a candidate for the position of president, allaying fears of

a comprehensive Brotherhood takeover. For those who had predicted Iran à la 1979, many anxieties were put to rest.

Leaders of this camp cited valid concerns that the Muslim Brotherhood would raise domestic and international fears with serious consequences if they were to push for too much of a role in the government too quickly. Issues such as the Egyptian economy—already made extremely vulnerable by the revolution—and Egypt's foreign relations were brought to the forefront as reasons the Brotherhood should remain prudent in the country's national interest.

Others, however, appeared willing to face the potential consequences in order to take the Brotherhood a giant leap forward, in control of the Arab world's most influential country. In point of fact, not long after having announced a contestation of a third of the Egyptian Parliament, the number was upped to fifty percent. Moreover, although the Brotherhood has said they will not run a candidate for president, that has not stopped prominent members within the leadership of staking a claim outside the formal party policy.

Indeed, Dr. Abdel Moneim Abou el-Fotouh, a high-ranking member of the Muslim Brotherhood, was recently expelled from the organization for placing his hat in the ring as an independent. An official statement released by the Brotherhood accused Abou el-Fotouh of 'defying' the organization's pledge not to take part in the presidential election.

This, however, will most likely not stop the rank-and-file of the Muslim Brotherhood from supporting one of their own in the race, especially party-youth. Ideologically, Abou el-Fotouh still espouses many of the views of most Muslim Brotherhood adherents, while also catering to the political center. He represents an easily digestible form of Brotherhood ideology capable of gaining support from a large portion of the Egyptian electorate.

There are now also two breakaway parties from the Brotherhood that could be serious contenders, the Hizb al-Wasset (Party of the Center), and Al-Nahda (the Renaissance), both representing a more progressive voice within the Brotherhood movement. These parties are likely to take support from a Brotherhood youth that is reportedly discontent with many of the decisions of the organization's traditionalist elements, including the ouster of Abou el-Fatouh.

If it does not end up splitting the Brotherhood vote, these breakaway parties may very likely be natural coalition partners capable of gaining more than the Muslim Brotherhoods's fifty percent of the Parliament, intensifying the pressure on the Brotherhood's cautionary elements.

With elections slated for September, this could translate into serious gains for a Muslim Brotherhood led-coalition that is facing a political landscape of fractured secular parties struggling to make a name for themselves in the less-than three months that remain. Outside of cosmopolitan Cairo, where the majority of the country resides, new parties face a significant challenge.

There are other prevailing fears that elections could take place before the adoption of a new constitution, ostensibly allowing the winners to play a deciding role in shaping the outcome. For a democracy, which has not reached representative maturity so quickly after the political process was opened, this could be a significant issue going forward, especially as sectarian strife between Egypt's Coptic and Salafist contingencies continue to seethe.

What does all this mean for a country with an uncertain future and an organization that is struggling to define itself in the face of unprecedented potential to decide its role in the future of Egyptian political life? As Egypt's nears election time, the balance the Brotherhood leadership are trying to strike could become ever more delicate. The future of Egypt and its revolution may very well lie in the outcome of the internal politicking of this organization.

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There are now also two breakaway parties from the Brotherhood that could be serious contenders, the Hizb al-Wasset (Party of the Center), and Al-Nahda (the Renaissance), both representing a more progressive voice within the Brotherhood movement

10 Myths About

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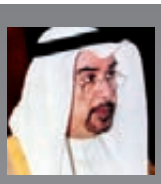
the Arab Spring



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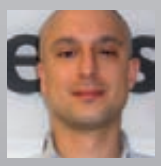

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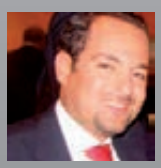

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Fred Halliday, the late scholar of international relations and the Middle East, once observed that the opening lines of Charles Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities capture the atmosphere and the uncertainty of revolutions. Dickens wrote, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way. "

In many senses, Dickens' words describe the Arab Spring. While many commentaries have sought to convey these events in the radiant glow of past revolutions, the dual nature—the light but also the darkness—of the Arab Spring has been often overlooked and must be given due consideration.

When popular dissent in Tunisia ultimately led to the ousting of the long-term president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, many in both the West and the Arab world did not foresee this unrest spreading beyond Tunisia's borders. Confidently assuming that Tunisia was a case of its own, leaders from Cairo to Baghdad believed that change would not threaten their firmly established regimes.

But, in the past six months, no country has been immune to the wave of uprisings challenging the autocratic status quo in the region. The Arab public, "the street," finally gained a voice of its own that could not be silenced, dismissed and ignored as it had been for decades. Public opinion has traditionally been a

1 A Media Uprising?

One of the paradoxes of the Arab revolutions this year is that almost all observers and commentators viewed the regimes in a state of paralysis and their communities, boiling under the surface, were coming close to the point of explosion. However, no one, including western countries and intelligence services, could expect what happened later in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria.

What happened took everybody by surprise, including print and broadcast media in the region and the wider world. No one expected that Ben Ali's regime would collapse under a popular uprising. When the spark extended to Egypt, not a single commentator imagined that popular protests could topple a regime that seemed very strong in just 18 days. These regimes themselves had not realized what was happening. Even Colonel Qadhafi and issued a statement that revealed his confidence and his strong grip on power, where he denounced the Tunisians for not allowing Ben Ali to complete his term. Then, Qadhafi much to his own surprise found his people revolting against him.

The same took place in Syria. When Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad supported the events in Egypt, he considered Syria different and far from the revolution. Nevertheless, he found his people revolting against him despite his bloody repression. Just as the Arab Spring came as a surprise to the regimes and western officials, it shocked the media particularly in the Middle East region. It was not prepared for the events, and its confused coverage has shown this. Though the satellite broadcast media has played a significant role in broadcasting and covering the events, there has been inefficiency and blatantly false coverage by the local television stations of the countries during protests. Tunisia and Egypt are a case in point.

one-way conversation for these states' rulers, a soliloquy based around weak concepts of Arab nationalism and resistance to Israel. As sections of the public came out on the street demanding their voice be heard and responded to, "the street" suddenly returned as a force of its own in the politics of the Middle East.

Commentators and politicians in the West seized on these changes as signs that a new democratic Middle East was forming in their midst. As the events shook the region, popular slogans emerged to describe the unrest: Islam and democracy are perfectly compatible; the Arab world strives for the same democratic, secular values and political systems that form the basis of Western societies; and established foreign powers stand to benefit from a new Middle East.

Despite this wild optimism, the Arab Spring so far has not met these high expectations. Tunisia and Egypt represent media success stories for the Arab Spring, while Yemen, Syria, Algeria, Bahrain, and Libya illustrate where a Spring has turned into a Winter of long-drawn out conflicts where neither change nor the status quo are guaranteed. Even in Egypt and Tunisia, traditional elites and established opposition groups have moved into smother the young activism of the Tahrir Square generation. The military, more than any other force in Egypt and Tunisia, will likely write the story of these new "post-revolutionary" states.

The day after the "Revolution", a newly emboldened public has found their world largely unchanged—in stark contrast to the new world streaming on the popular satellite television channel, Al Jazeera. The economic failures, the authoritarianism, the sectarianism, the elites of their former regime still confront them in their daily lives, but with the added instability of uncertainty.

This certainly does not diminish the fact that the Arab Spring has dispelled some of the stagnant political malaise that has hung over the Arab world for decades. It has produced notable changes, most importantly in the relationship between the public and their rulers, and the unsettling of the established political order in states such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. The Arab World has become a more politically active place since the Spring blossomed, and many of the old assumptions about the region cannot be taken as doctrine any more. The Spring has also had a seismic impact on many of the strategic calculations made by western powers towards the region.

But, it has not so far produced the changes that many of its most vocal proponents have predicted. The dark side of the Arab Spring: the violence from Damascus to Tripoli, the rise of sectarian clashes, and religious forces attempting to tear away many of the secular and liberal foundations of these states, has negated the assumption that liberal democracy is on the march in the Middle East.

Looking back on these six months, The Majalla asked ten writers to critically examine 10 popular myths about the Arab Spring that have captured the world's attention. In doing so, we hope to provide a more nuanced picture of these events. As the leading Arab political affairs magazine, it's only appropriate that this discussion begin now in the Arab world. It's too early to write the conclusion to the Arab Spring, but hopefully, this piece will shed some important light on its current trajectory.

The Arab satellite channels covered the protests in Tunisia with an air that nothing would come of them. The scene in broadcast and even print media, Arab and western, has been similar to someone waking up to hear shouting and fighting and try to understand the situation. It took them weeks to understand what has been going on.

When the various media realized the real situation in Tunisia, the protests in Egypt erupted. Egypt's events can be said to have received the broadest coverage by Arab or western media, including sending their anchors and assigning long coverage time for the protests. Being an open stage for Arab and foreign media for a long time has made it easier for the media to cover the events in Egypt.

However, the challenge faced by the media was the new players it knew nothing about and had not dealt with before: the protestors. All of us remember confused and provoked reporters hosting young people from Tahrir Square as representatives of political entities, but the guests on the news shows insisted that they did not represent the people in the Square and were not speaking on their behalf, adding to the reporter's annoyance. Yemen has been a similar experience for the media.

Meanwhile, Libya is different. Reporters have entered the liberated parts that have come under the rebels' control. Syria has been the most distinct for the media, as media are not allowed to move on the ground. In covering the uprising, the media has had to rely on the internet and YouTube for the story.

An interesting effect of the Arab Spring is the new local media environment in the countries where the so called protestors succeeded, especially in Egypt. From a complete stagnation to totally flooding the society with politics, there are dozens of political talk shows and new channels. Even the former official media, which has found itself despised by the people, wants to correct their mistakes, so it has become more daring than unofficial media.

However, both official and unofficial media provide the audience with more talk and confusion. The Arab Spring is confused due to a main reason: most of the revolutions have been popular but without a leadership or political parties with structures, programs, and cadres to fill the vacuum immediately after the ouster of the regime. Naturally, media performance, especially the local media, has appeared confused; it has become more free and daring but still lacks accuracy. In short, everybody, including the media, is learning by experiencing such exceptional events.

Ali Ibrahim

2 The Arab World's 1989?

On first look, the revolts sweeping across some of the Arab countries appear to be a new chapter of the wave of democratization that emerged in Eastern Europe in 1989. Previously disenfranchised and politically suppressed people are rising up not only against their rulers, but also against the elites and structures through which they were dominated and kept under guard. In 1989, the people of Eastern Europe were rebelling against a system that tightly controlled them and left them in a stagnant position both politically and economically. The malign outside forces that had so long justified the Soviet regime's rule and suppression were no longer seen as the enemy, and so the uprisings that took place brought out on the streets the long silent majorities.

The sense of frustration and stagnation, of corruption and nepotism, of an illusion that could no longer be sustained, had been brewing in small private gatherings for a long time, both in the period before 1989 and 2011. When the pressure had reached a high point the ruling elites in Eastern Europe decided to either abandon the sinking ship or to try to stand their ground by bringing the army out of their barracks. In 1989, in a number of countries the people were able to drive a wedge between the rulers and their henchmen, and the same is found in 2011.

Yet despite these similarities there are profound differences: For the people in Eastern Europe in 1989 there was a great idol, an existing and radiating example they had in view—the liberal capitalist democracies of Western Europe. From blue jeans to rock n'roll, bananas and Hollywood, free elections and the aspiration to a middle class life with a house, a car and foreign travel. Here was a way of life that worked as an example for the people.

In 2011, this is absent. There is no great example that can serve for the people of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya or Syria and many other countries in the Arab World. The liberal democracies of Europe are seen as decadent and lacking a cultural and religious unity; their political systems are seen as corrupt and focused on the same moneymaking interests as the Arab regimes they so happily dealt with for the sake of "stability."

Justice—socially, economically, and politically—is the demand so often heard in the current revolts. But there is no society that can serve as a guide on how to reach those grand aims. On second look, the ideals of the Arab Spring in 2011 are so very different to those of Eastern Europe in 1989, that it does not make sense to see the current uprisings and their aftermath as the Arab World's 1989.

Christian Kramer

3 A coup d'état or a revolution?

Within days of Hosni Mubarak's ouster in Egypt, memorabilia of the popular anti-regime protests that preceded his downfall went on sale in Tahrir Square, the scene of the largest demonstrations. Pin badges and T-shirts, embossed with Egyptian flags proudly boasted of the "2011 Egyptian Revolution," reinforcing the narrative already adopted by the international media that a popular revolution had toppled the Egyptian president, just as it had his Tunisian counterpart a month earlier. Yet such an analysis glosses over the back-room politics and shifting alliances among the elite and their international backers that actually transformed popular unrest into regime change. As has since been seen in Syria and, to a lesser extent, Yemen, in the months after Tahrir, widespread anti-regime popular unrest alone may prove incapable of toppling dictators if it lacks the support of key sections of the elite, notably the military.

The involvement of the military in the ousting of the only leaders to be toppled thus far, raises questions about how "revolutionary" the Arab Spring has actually been. Among the many frustrations voiced by activists who took to the streets against Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak, has been the amount of power wielded by the military in the post-ouster states. Though both the Tunisian and Egyptian militaries have fashioned themselves as the "guardians of the revolution," activists have subsequently complained that the army has hijacked popular unrest to safeguard their own privileged posi-

tions. In Egypt, since Mubarak's ouster on 11 February, the army has broken up further demonstrations and arrested hundreds, the same as the Mubarak regime did in its final days. With the interim government, guided by the supreme military council, pushing for constitutional changes and elections that aren't as deep or as transformative as ardent democrats demand, the situation in Egypt appears at times more of a coup d'état than a revolution.

However, it remains too early to write off the revolutionary potential of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt or elsewhere. That departed leaders were ousted by military coups, albeit under popular pressure, does not delegitimize claims that a revolution has taken place. Many celebrated revolutions in history were the result of coups rather than widespread popular unrest, such as Egypt's own in 1952, Iraq's in 1958 and, further afield, the Bolshevik's October 1917 Revolution. What makes them revolutionary or not is the extent of the political, social and economic change that follows rather than the exact method of regime change. For the Arab Spring it is too early to say. Perhaps the elites of the old regimes will remain in place, under the protection of a military that seeks to pay only lip service to the democratic changes demanded by the street. Alternatively, after this adjustment period, the old pillars of the deposed regimes may be gradually whittled down as widespread political and economic transformations take place.

Christopher Phillips

4 Democracy vs. sectarianism

It is not uncommon for foreign pundits to fall short in their understanding of developments in the Arab world. After all, the prism through which an individual views the other is often colored by cultural differences and varying value systems. And while the thirst for democracy is an essential element in the uprisings currently sweeping across Arab countries, it is not the sole driver. Other, more primal factors at play include deeply entrenched, and often antagonistic, ethnic and religious identities. It's essential not to overlook the communal component, which has been the primary engine of Middle Eastern politics for centuries, or we may wake up to a rude surprise.

Take Syria for example, where one can no longer ignore the people's thirst for freedom and their brave determination to achieve it. Yet one would be equally mistaken to ignore the communal dynamics governing the political equation, where an authoritarian regime dominated by religious minorities has ruled over a Sunni majority for over four decades. While some in the Allawite, Christian, and Druze communities also yearn for greater freedoms, many have chosen to remain silent for fear of retribution should the regime collapses.

Egypt is a case in point where, despite overwhelmingly supporting the revolution, the Coptic community has come under repeated attack since. Extremist elements in any society will try to take advantage of the ensuing power vacuum and turbulence involved with uprisings to further their agenda. As observers, we must remain mindful of the heavy costs associated with abrupt change and disorder.

Bahrain is perhaps the clearest example of an uprising where the communal element is a primary motivator. That does not mean that Bahrain is not in desperate need of reform, or that there is not the need for greater political inclusion for a vast element of Bahraini society. Bahraini Shi'as are deserving of a greater say in their country's future. Giving the community a greater stake in their political system would be the best guarantee against Iranian meddling in the country's affairs. But all being said, lets call a spade a spade. This is about identity politics first, and a struggle for liberal ideals a distant second.

Whether the events in Syria, Egypt, Bahrain, or elsewhere are evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, change is the best guarantee against sectarian violence rearing its ugly head. The onus however is not on those who have been oppressed and have finally risen, but on the archaic political systems that have not allowed for gradual political reforms, reforms that would foster citizenship, rather than centuries-old identity politics.

Firas Maksad

5 Regional power play or domestic eruptions?

What are the reasons that made people in many Arab countries "revolt" against their regimes and call for change? The ultimate answer won't be determined until some time and the answers vary according to different given premises. The next question is whether the motivations of change are domestic or foreign. It seems that it is already answered. Demands of change have been basically pushed from inside, while some regional powers have benefited from them, and are trying to employ them, succeeding in some places while not succeeding in others.

To sum up the reasons that have stirred the uprisings in the Arab streets, at the heart lies the gap between expectations and hopes of a new Arab generation that aspire to cope with the world, on one hand, and stagnant political regimes that lack political mechanisms to reconcile between expectations and reality, on the other. It is the governments' disastrous failure in modern management and the absence of political awareness that when combined with the demands of the new generations and the current developments in the world, in regards to the technological revolution expanding worldwide, that fuels these changes.

Whoever analyzes the internal or external factors is facing a divided Arab public opinion on what is happening. Some people support change in some countries and consider it a domestic action, while oppose it in others and think that it is directed from outside. Many Arabs, for example, agree with the change in Libya, but oppose it in Syria. From another side, if you ask an average-educated Arab citizen to explain what is going on, he will eventually point to an "American conspiracy" being behind all these events. This plot is explicitly mentioned by politicians who are opposing change, especially in the countries that are facing demands for change or are expecting them.

A better explanation is that the West, which was surprised by the events at the beginning, has been quick in putting its media and political weight on the side of the demands of change. Then, it has offered its military support (as in case of Libya) to push change forward, either to satisfy its people, to achieve economic interests in the future, or to apply its own ideals. Anyway, this process of change would be less costly for the

West than the money spent on its wars on terror!

Also, other powers have benefited from what happened in some areas. Iran has tried via its Arab allies to use the popular protests in Bahrain in the struggle for its revolutionary Shi'a theory and expansion in the region. It has intervened in the demands for reform in Bahrain by encouraging some of its followers to raise the ceiling of the demands—to the extent of calling for a change of the regime into a republic that is governed by the ruling jurist.

It has been easy to sell the idea of active western intervention in the current events to a broad sector of the public, given historical accumulations. For instance, it has been said that the US has trained some Egyptian youth to hold sit-ins and gather the masses. Here also appears the name of Wael Ghoneim, the marketing official in Google who has ties with American circles. Such narratives are believed by some people. Some regional powers have also tried to limit the negative consequences of the events. The Gulf Cooperation Council has intervened in Yemen and the Turks in Syria, and even Yemenis have sought the help of Turkey to find a political solution.

Mohamed Al-Rumaihi

6 A Secular Uprising?

As the Arab spring unfolds without loud and explicit calls for the establishment of Islamic states or modern-day Caliphates across the region, commentators and policymakers alike appear relieved by the apparent secular nature of the protests. Yet this emerging consensus on a "secular uprising" is both wrong and dangerous.

It is wrong for three reasons. First, those regimes that are being swept away by the current winds of change (from Egypt to Tunisia, Yemen, Syria and Libya) were, or are, all rooted in some sort of secular nationalist or socialist ideology. In their wake, Islam will likely play a more central role in the political and social life of these countries. Islamist movements, like the Muslim Brotherhood and others, appear the most organized to compete in upcoming elections in Egypt and Tunisia, for example.

In Libya the Transitional National Council, a sort of government-in-waiting, is a mix of secular liberals and Islamists. In Iran, which the somewhat misconceived term Arab Spring leaves out, the Green Movement's demands for greater accountability and democracy are still framed within an Islamic conception of the state. While Iranian-style religious dictatorship is rarely the model to which protesters across the region look at, neither is the ultra-secular democratic France. Indeed, it is the Islamist infused Turkish republic that seems to have the most traction on the Arab and Persian streets.

Second, many have hailed Twitter and new media as the emblem of secular modernity's impact on the uprisings. However, it

is the Friday of prayers, such as Cairo's "Friday of rage," that has truly pulled people together, becoming the catalyst for the largest protests across the whole region. Between the mosque and the internet, religion more so than technology provided much of the social hardware for people to connect and mobilize together.

Thirdly, religious factors seep into the growing sectarianism that runs parallel to the current upheavals. Think about the targeting of Copts in Egypt or the national and regional implications of Shia-Sunni divisions in Bahrain and Syria. The destabilizing effects of identity politics across religious lines should not be underestimated and overlooked.

The sigh of relief that many throw at the supposedly secular nature of the uprisings is also a dangerous reflex. Such a view is the product of a Eurocentric mindset that portrays religion as an irrational force incompatible with democracy, against the backdrop of a secular rational and tolerant modernity. This stereotype regularly clouds the vision of commentators and policymakers on what is most important for the region's prosperity and stability. And that is regime type.

Indeed, there are highly religious countries, such as the US or Turkey, which are successful democracies. And there are secularist regimes, such as Tunisia under Ben Ali or North Korea, which are hugely oppressive. Western policymakers should keep their focus, not on whether it is secularism or religion that produces instability, but on whether it is democratic or autocratic regimes that do so.

Gregorio Bettiza

7 The Twitter revolution?

A Syrian Rap song has been circulating among my friends; it cynically and brilliantly criticizes the Syrian regime's repression of protesters. Similar to other pictures and media that capture the protests and its related dynamism, the song has been widely shared on social networking sites.

We express what we think, for example in a status on Facebook, because we simply need to exist not to be silent. And, that is exactly what the Arab protestors have done. Most of them are youth with high-tech skills who share the eagerness for change; the kind of change that the Syrian rap band seeks. The band combined the song lyrics with photos exposing the crackdown on protesters, while highlighting the emptiness of the official rhetoric.

Arab demonstrators, from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria have been able to change their accustomed perception of images and media. They take to streets with the knowledge that they may not come back.

Through Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, not only are they expressing their thoughts about death and pain, but sharing their debates, their jokes, their mocking of themselves and the tumultuous world in which they live. Undoubtedly, the telecommunications revolution we are witnessing right now is an achievement that many in the US are proud to have taken credit for. But social media has not provided protesters with thoughts or the bitterness they have developed under their regimes for many decades.

The Arab revolutions have relied upon a difficult-to-disarm weapon; social media. However, although this technological medium originated initially in the US, protesters in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Libya were not on the American diplomatic agenda. The US has often turned a deaf ear to the dictatorships and corruption of these regimes.

Today, generalizing the idea that what happened is just a social media revolution seems shallow and silly. Western culture has offered protesters the means, but it didn't provide them with frustrations about their regimes' despotism and corruption. The West cannot take credit for these changes. Those protesters instead have forced the world to listen to their voice and it's up to them to determine their future.

Diana Moukalled

8 Defeat for Al Qaeda?

The notion that somehow the Arab Spring has defeated Al-Qaeda (AQ) and undermined its ideology is not only simplistic and problematic but also deeply misleading. First, the argument that the Arab Spring somehow challenges the global AQ threat by providing the people of the Middle East an unprecedented opportunity for legitimate political expression reverts back to the empirically unfounded argument that a democratic deficit is what engenders terrorism. However, a closer look at the evidence suggests that exactly the opposite may hold true. It is unstable democratic states and weak authoritarian states that tend to provide conditions most conducive to an upsurge in terrorist activity.

Why? For one, the very process of democratization can embolden terrorists instead of pushing them towards participating in democratic processes thereby making such states exceptionally vulnerable to terrorist activity. For another, the capacity to suppress dissent is of crucial importance in an authoritarian state and a capability that weak autocracies lack. Based on this logic then the Arab Spring should, in reality, empower and embolden AQ and the fact that it has not suggests that we need to probe deeper. This brings me to my second point: the idea that somehow the Arab Spring has weakened AQ's ideological grip on the Middle East is predicated on the logic that it exercised such a hold in the first place.

To begin with this vastly misrepresents threat posed by AQ and its philosophy by portraying it as somehow all-encompassing instead of viewing it as what it was, and continues to be, i.e. a radical and violent ideology supported by a minority of individuals across what is a vast and deeply diverse region. This idea is also deeply problematic because it essentially reduces the people of the Middle East to a sort of homogenous democracy-deprived monolith and in doing so, frames them as, either active or passive, supporters or sympathizers of AQ and its particular brand of radical Islam.

Last but not the least, crediting the Arab Spring as a burgeoning democratic movement that has in one sweep uprooted and undermined AQ's ideology not only unashamedly and mistakenly privileges liberal democracy as the only system of governance that can bring security, peace, and development to the people of the Middle East but also simultaneously ignores the decades of interventionist western policies in the region which engendered the wide-spread discontent contributing to the rise of an organization like AQ in the first place. Unless we recognize and address this key problem, all the Arab Springs in the world will not eradicate the appeal AQ's ideology may hold for sections of the population in the Middle East.

Rashmi Singh

9 The American moment in the Middle East?

As the Arab Spring swept across the Middle East shaking and unsettling one long-standing ally of the US after the other, Barack Obama, caught off guard, stood indecisively as the decades old security architecture in the region that safeguarded America's interests and position in the Middle East collapsed around him.

Torn between America's proclivity for stability and its values, Obama haphazardly wavered between supporting the existing political order and embracing the change on the street. A President, known more for his inspiring rhetoric than substantive policies, failed to articulate a way forward for the United States.

In a reckless act, Obama publicly pressed Hosni Mubarak to step down after decades of acting as a critical bulwark of America's interests in the Middle East. This pivotal break underscored how little the President understood the gravity of the changes sweeping the region, and affirmed to America's other long-standing partners in the region that Washington will not always be a loyal friend.

Instead of seeing these changes as America's Suez moment, Obama became enchanted by the images streaming live on Al-Jazeera of protestors on the streets from Tunis to Manama calling for change. America's future in Middle East once again became defined in terms of promoting and supporting democracy in the Arab world.

Obama failed to see that America's friends are not among the thousands on the street calling for change, especially the well-organized religious and sectarian elements, but instead, in the regimes that are being torn away by these popular uprisings. The President never entertained the darker reality that unstable, autocratic regimes inimical to America's national interests are the more likely outcome of the Arab Spring.

As the months have progressed, Obama belatedly has tempered his once vocal support for this Arab Spring, by notably backing away from criticizing the sectarian situation in Bahrain. But, Obama acted too late and has ensured that this moment in the Middle East is not America's; instead it is for the spoilers of America's position in the region.

The US, similar to Britain after Suez, faces a region turning away from it. As Henry Kissinger cautiously warned recently, "I don't have any specific nightmares, but I could imagine a growing irrelevancy of the United States in the region." Without a strategy that takes into account this changing environment, the American moment in the Middle East will inevitably be in its twilight not its rebirth as the President so confidently has predicted. Obama must move in to fortify America's allies in the region before it is too late, and help guide those states experiencing transitions down a path that encourages measured reform but not a departure from their alignment with the United States.

Andrew Bowen

10 It's the economy stupid?

One of the most memorable images of the protests in Tunisia, which marked the beginning of the Arab spring, is one of a man facing a row of riot control police. He genuflects in a cloud of smoke and tear gas, aiming a baguette at the police as if it were a rifle.

The imagery of protestors wielding baguettes as weapons points to the importance that economic difficulties played in mobilizing the population against Ben Ali. Indeed when Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire after having his vegetable cart confiscated, the economic grievances of Tunisians, and later, Egyptians and Libyans became the focus of the media coverage of the Arab spring.

Certainly the revolutionary uprisings that took the world by surprise had an important economic dimension to them. After all, rising food prices and chronic unemployment were referred to constantly by protestors. Youth unemployment and graduate unemployment was, and remains, a very serious problem for the region. In 2008 for instance, youth unemployment in North Africa ranged from 18 percent in Morocco to 30 percent in Tunisia, compared to a global average of 12 percent. And that is just the tip of the iceberg.

Poverty has also caused considerable anxiety in the region and undoubtedly contributed to the popular demand for change. Egypt for instance, a country of 80 million people, has 32 million living under 2 dollars a day.

Despite the influential role that the troubled economies of these countries played, the economy in and of itself is not responsible for the Arab spring. Rather, the economy illuminated the unsustainable nature of the Arab patron state, not solely because these countries were failing to deliver on their economic promises through the provision of jobs and affordable food, but also because endemic corruption, and uneven distribution of wealth exacerbated feelings of injustice amongst the population—rupturing the social contracts that had formerly held these regimes in place.

The virtual lack of a political voice, coupled with the economic disenfranchisement of the majority of the populations, were important catalysts of the uprisings. It was not only poverty that brought down long-term rulers of the likes of Mubarak, but the blatant mismanagement of these countries (including the economy) that led the people to say enough is enough.

In January 2011, as Tunisians awaited the rigging of another presidential election and Egyptians bitterly remembered how their parliamentary elections had been stolen, these neighboring countries became increasingly willing to take the management of their countries into their own hands.

Paula Mejia

Shrewd Successor

First President of The Republic of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit:"War is also politics, except for the bloodshed"

Salva Kiir has served a long apprenticeship over the past few decades, playing an influential role in the saga of South Sudan's secession from the North. Now, as South Sudan's first president, the military man is faced with diplomatic challenges that the whole world hopes he can meet.

Cutting a distinctive figure, Salva Kiir resembles the gun-toting underdog of a cowboy flick. But aside from the rugged beard, trademark Stetson hat and straight-to-the-point eloquence, Kiir's real trademark is his consistency, and a determination to see any commitment through to the end. He once told a South Sudan crowd "the upcoming referendum is a choice between being a second class [citizen] in your own country, or a free person in your independent state." On 9 July 2011, The Republic of Southern Sudan officially celebrated its full independence from the North—under Kiir's presidency.

Having spent more than two decades focusing on military maneuvers in order to lead his new nation, avoid war and ensure that the South receives its share of Sudan's natural resources, Salva Kiir must now also show skill in careful negotiations with former adversaries, to deliver his people from five decades of conflict with North Sudan—a bloody episode during which some1.5 million were killed.

Born in Bahr El-Ghazal in 1951, Kiir is from the Dinka ethnic group—as was his predecessor as the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), John Garang, though Garang was from a

Image © Getty Images

different clan. Kiir was thrust into the political arena following Garang's sudden death in a helicopter crash in 2005. Even today, some say that despite his obvious commitment, on an international level Kiir lacks the diplomatic experience and the charisma of his forerunner. His strengths however, are his consulting skills, his patience and ability to listen. Although he will need to learn how to play politics fast in order to guide the nascent South Sudan, he is usually met with affectionate cheers when speaking in public—and observers say that it is precisely his quality as a conciliator that has kept the South united.

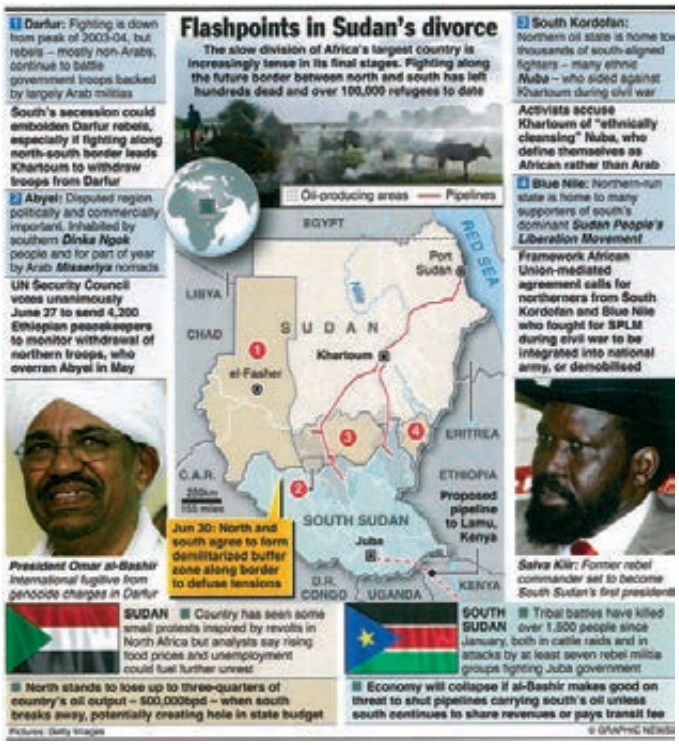
South Sudan's population is mostly Christian and follows ancient traditions, while the North has a Muslim majority. Kiir is a Catholic and speaks regularly at the Roman Catholic cathedral in South Sudan's capital, Jiba. He is fluent in both Arabic and English, the two languages of the North and has been described as genial, unassuming and modest—characteristics that have bolstered him in the eyes of the people of the South, especially those who begrudge the SPLA's domination by the Dinka group.

On 9 July 2011, The Republic of Southern Sudan officially celebrated its full independence from the North

As a teenager in the 1960s, Kiir joined the Anya-Nya rebel movement and took part in the 1955-72 First Sudanese civil war. After the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement guaranteed autonomy for the Southern region and ended the conflict, Kiir became involved in the Sudan Armed Forces. He later rose through the ranks to become lieutenant colonel, an exceptionally senior position for an ex-rebel.

When, in 1983, former Sudanese President Gaafar Al-Nimeiry abrogated the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement and began dividing up the South into separate regions, Garang, who had been sent to quell an army revolt in his hometown of Bor, instead joined in and encouraged the rebel movement, along with Kiir and other Southern leaders. They subsequently became founding members of the SPLA against the Khartoum government, with Garang at its head.

Since Garang had insufficient military ground experience, he depended upon the more distinguished skills of the Anya Nya veterans, including Kiir, a graduate of the Sudan Military College, to carry out the combat. Later Kiir rose to be chief of staff and, by working and fighting in different regions of the country, gained a deeper knowledge of the South's ethnic and regional complexities. When internal dissent split the SPLA in the 1980s and 1990s, Kiir stayed loyal to Garang. By 1988, he was technically his second in command. At the inaugural Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) national democratic convention in1994, Kiir was confirmed as Garang's deputy.



Though Garang usually took care of the political issues, Kiir showed his ability for conciliation when in 1999 he pressured him over a peace agreement that would end seven and a half years of tribal fighting between the two ethnic groups of Nuer and Dinka. Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that formally ended the war between the southern rebels and the government in January 2005, Kiir was appointed vice president of Southern Sudan. Just two days after Garang's death on 30 July 2005, he was chosen by the SPLM to succeed him as First Vice President of Sudan and President of Southern Sudan. Kiir was then re-elected in April 2010 with 93 percent of the vote, and formed a government that integrated many of the SPLM's former enemies and competing factions. Despite this conciliation, the new Republic of Southern Sudan may be less democratic than hoped, as there have been complaints that Kiir intimidates his opponents.

The Dinka domination of the SPLM often prompts complaints. The politics of Southern Sudan are complex given that there are more than 200 ethnicities, each with their own language, tribe, region and party affiliation. Kiir has proved to be a master in the art of appeasement and shrewd delegation, which helps to heal and avert rifts, both within the SPLM and among Southern ethnic groups.

Illustratively, in a bid to reassure the Nuer ethnic group, Kiir retained the Nuer Vice-President Riek Machar as his running mate—despite the two having well-known differences—and successfully managed to restrain the organizer of the largest rebel faction of the SPLM, Paulino Matip Nhial.

Additionally, despite the Bari of Central Equatoria being one of the loudest critics of the government's Dinka domination, Kiir has won the support of many, including the popular Bari politician, house speaker James Wani Igga—one of his leading advisors. Notably, the presence of John Garang has not totally left Kiir's side, since Garang's wife, Rebecca, is close at hand. She is now the president's advisor on gender and humanitarian affairs—despite publicly criticizing his government.

Northern Exposure

An excerpt from The Majalla's analysis of how North Sudan might cope with southern secession.

The Bahr el-Ghazal River runs the gamut of the North-South border brought into being through the split of the Sudan on 9 July. Moreover, it spans the lower regions of South Kordofan state and the Abyei region, whose final status, together with that of Blue Nile state, was left undefined by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and subject to the semantic vagaries of diplomatic interpretations of "public consultation processes," with regard to Blue Nile and South Kordofan, and an ill-defined referendum to resolve Abyei.

As Sudan's secession drew near, the unresolved status of Blue Nile, South Kordofan and Abyei states exploded as the Misseriya rode their herds South into Abyei. Like dominoes set to fall, local conflicts quickly escalated into a full Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) military occupation, backed by rhetoric citing Southern aggression, SPLA duplicity, United Nations impotence and the age-old double speak of belligerence.

The Abyei conflagration soon exacerbated tensions in the contingent communitarian pressure cooker of the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan, home to battle hardened veterans of various Sudanese conflicts spanning generations. This led to a massive SAF assault that displaced hundreds of thousands of Nuba peasants amid Antonov (aircraft) bombing raids and allegations of scorched-earth war crimes.

While donors and charities flock to the South, the immediate future of the North and the limbo of peoples living in Abyei, South Kordofan and the Blue Nile looks increasingly bleak.

The full article can be read online at www.majalla.com in the Humanity section

Illustratively, in a bid to reassure the Nuer ethnic group, Kiir retained the Nuer Vice-President Riek Machar as his running mate—despite the two having well-known differences—and successfully managed to restrain the organizer of the largest rebel faction of the SPLM, Paulino Matip Nhial

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Springonomics

How the post-revolutionary economy will decide Egypt's fate

A debate rages inside Egypt, and beyond, concerning the next economic step for a country in flux. However, mistrust of previously vaunted neoliberal principles and a political climate that demands very ambitious reforms puts the country's interim government in a difficult position.

Stephen Glain

On a recent Tuesday evening in Cairo, more than 200 people filled a conference hall at the Egyptian Bar Association to hear rival politicians—a liberal, a leftist, and an Islamist—talk about their vision for a country with political coordinates that shift by the day. Meetings like this are, in their own way, historic. Freedom of assembly was one of the many rights denied Egyptians until February, when Hosni Mubarak was ousted in a popular revolt. Now, as if shaking off the rust of authoritarian rule with the catharsis of free speech, the attendees were indulging in an open debate that at times bordered on virulence, particularly when it came to the economy.

During the question and answer session, a woman accused the liberal at the dais of being a stealth capitalist for his support of Mubarak's privatization program, which is deeply unpopular for the corruption it engendered along with rising unemployment. A labor leader demanded to know why the panelists had not yet demanded Egypt's military-led interim government impose a minimum wage on employers. Even the Islamist among the group, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is known for its medieval embrace of market economics, endorsed federal subsidies for bread and cooking oil.

The subtext was clear: Egypt is all but slamming the door on the neoliberal reform plan engineered by Mubarak's technocrats. It is not hard to understand why. Though widely credited with vastly improved growth rates, six years of liberalization under Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif did little to reverse the country's declining living standards. Instead, deregulation is associated with a yawning income gap between a tiny class of well-connected elites and a growing population of have-nots, the mushrooming of slums, the plundering of national assets by foreign investors, and the failure to create enough work to accommodate the estimated 800,000 new job seekers who enter the labor market each year.

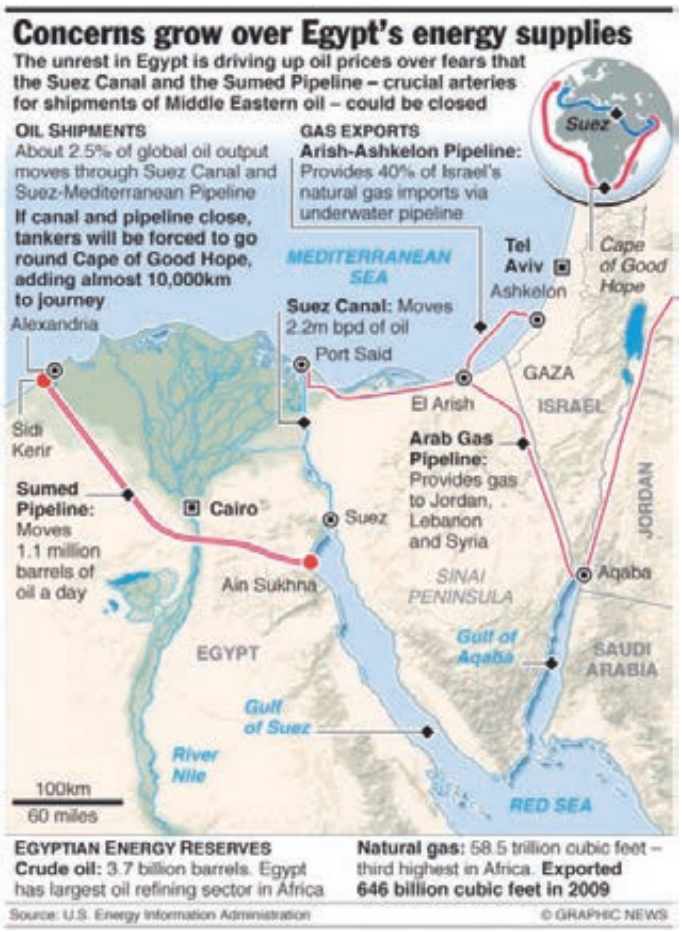
The backlash against neoliberalism and its architects has been so dramatic, say economists, that Egypt is in danger of losing its top industrialists, financiers and economic planners. "A lot of investors have left because of this," says Ghada El Gohary, an adviser to Rachid Mohammed Rachid, the former Minister of Trade who was forced to flee the country as the Mubarak regime crumbled. "This is the worst thing that could have happened."

While economic disarray by itself does not pose an existential threat to Egypt—the Suez Canal, which generates a steady stream of revenue, and the abundant Nile will always guarantee the country a stable means of subsistence—unchecked unemployment and sluggish growth could eventually strangle the nation's infant democracy in its crib. Already there are tensions between revolutionaries on one side, in conflict with the military over who will define the terms of governance, and merchants on the other who simply want to declare victory and get back to business. While the former claims that the very essence of the revolution is at stake, the latter argues—not without reason—that a revolution absent a viable economy on which to build is not only unsustainable but irrelevant.

The debate is complicated by the fact that Egypt, unlike the developing countries of East Asia, has in the post-war era failed to settle on a growth model that works. Having nationalized the economy during the 1950s and 1960s under strongman Gamal Abdel Nasser, only to privatize it in the twilight of one-party rule, Cairo has administered the extremes of economic therapy for a country that has yet to recapture the prosperity of its colonial era. Economists and pundits, including the young bloggers who led the eighteen-day rebellion that prevailed over the ancién regime, talk about the need for "social justice" and advocate a "Swedish model" for growth, meaning capitalism brought to heel by strict regulations and offset by state-provided social services, from health care and paternity leave to unemployment insurance. Until Egypt can generate the income to pay for such commitments, however, the Swedish model remains more aspirational than a viable prophylactic against the next rebellion or barracks coup.

"We keep telling the army that security is the key to restoring the economy," says Galal Amin, a professor of economics at the American University in Cairo. "But everyone is talking about progressive tax reform and social justice. Why? Egyptians haven't had social justice for thousands of years and they don't pay taxes in the first place."

Egypt's neoliberal cadre may have failed to deliver jobs, but they certainly delivered growth. From 2004 to 2008, the economy grew from 4.5 percent to 7.2 percent before slowing to a respectable 5.2 percent in 2010. Soon after Nazif took over, the government introduced new banking laws that streamlined and privatized much of the country's clunky, state-owned financial sector. Currency reform helped reduce interest rates and revived foreign exchange and commodities markets. Import duties were lifted, a welcome move among manufacturers reliant on foreign-built components for their wares. Foreign investment rose sharply, from a little more than $1 billion in 2004 to $12 billion three years later, while foreign reserves swelled from a few months worth of imports to $36 billion.



Already there are tensions between revolutionaries on one side, in conflict with the military over who will define the terms of governance, and merchants on the other who simply want to declare victory and get back to business

It was largely due to the Nazif-era overhaul that the Egyptian economy survived the global financial meltdown as well as it did. As late as 2010, the World Bank ranked Egypt at the top of its worldwide Doing Business Report. Largely in response to Egypt's example, the reforms launched in Cairo were embraced by other Middle Eastern states, from Tunisia to Saudi Arabia, and for a while it was fashionable to think authoritarian regimes in the region had successfully copied the Chinese paradigm for growth: opening the economy while keeping a lid on political expression. As the events of the last eight months have showed, however, that model does not translate into Arabic. The millions of people who demonstrated against Mubarak and his ruling circle on January 25 did so largely out of frustration with chronic joblessness and runaway corruption. A recent survey by the Washington-based International Republican Institute showed that two thirds of the citizens who participated in the Egyptian revolt

Beyond the Veil

Galal Amin is a Professor of Economics at the American University in Cairo, whose broad intellectual interests were showcased in his 2004 book Whatever Happened to the Egyptians?, considered a classic of barbed social criticism in a country that relishes ironic humor. Much of his commentary relates to the question of Egyptian identity, a subject that has been redefined by the revolution that cast President Hosni Mubarak from office in February and leveled, at least for a time, societal and cultural barriers along religious and class lines. Amin spoke with The Majalla at his home in the historic Cairene suburb of Maadi.

How hard has the revolution been on the Egyptian economy and what will it take to revive growth?
All the indicators are grim—tourism, remittances, output, foreign investment. There are 700,000 to 800,000 new entrants into the job market but there are no jobs for them. The tourist industry is important but unstable. Foreign direct investment projects are capital intensive, not labor intensive. What we need is growth in manufacturing. Why is there not more investment in industry? The answer, I suppose, is that we inherited bureaucracy from the 1960s and it continued for another forty years. The restrictions are too prohibitive. Plus there is corruption. You cannot over-emphasize corruption as an impediment to growth.

How is it the reforms introduced by the government under Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif did not produce jobs when the economy was growing at rates of 5 percent to 7 percent?
I never regarded what the Nazif government did as reform. The rank and file did not see growth because the policies were not right. If you have the right policy you can accommodate any demographic. Under Nasser, the government played a big role in the economy, though he was lucky because back then the Persian Gulf was booming and our surplus labor emigrated there and remitted their wages back home. Then the oil boom ended in the 1980s and we've been in decline ever since.

So is the solution to restore Nasser's policy and hope for another oil boom?
No. Those years were glorious for Egypt, but we can't go about re-nationalizing the banks. The world has changed. But if you must privatize, do it carefully. If you go about it in a transparent way, the Egyptians will be patient. No people are more patient than the Egyptians.

How do you see the upcoming elections playing out? Will the Muslim Brotherhood become the dominant player in parliament?
The Muslim Brotherhood may have a plan to win elections but they don't have a plan beyond that. And why should they, given how far they've been from real power? They encourage private enterprise but with social justice, which is such a vague term. They are acting in a conceited way but the average Egyptian is religious and illiterate, which is good for them.

What did the revolution tell you about Egyptian identity that you didn't know?
The revolution revealed two things. First, the young generation of Egyptians, those between the ages of twenty to thirty-five, are much more patriotic than we knew. They displayed a good understanding of loyalty to tradition and openness to the world and they combined both. Second, we learned that Egyptian women are more liberated than we thought. All this time, we could not see beyond the veil. Now we know better.

did so in opposition to economic injustice in a country where 45 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and 20 percent of wage earners accounts for 60 percent of national income.

Even defenders of the neoliberal rubric concede it may have been exploited by regime insiders. "The reforms needed time to seep through though I do believe their dividends were concentrated on certain levels of society," says Amr Elalfy, a director at CI Capital in Cairo. For Naguib Sawiris, one of Egypt's most powerful businessmen who actively supported the revolution, it was not liberalization but crony capitalism that sealed Mubarak's fate. "The problem was a shortage of democracy and a surplus of dictatorship and corruption," he said. "For capitalism to work, there must be a trickling down of opportunity and that did not take place."

The perception that deregulation failed Egypt is as least as important as whether or not it actually did. Though Sawiris believes privatization will continue, he seems to be in a minority amid a population that regarded the private sector warily long before the regime began selling state assets to foreign corporations and allowed the pound to float freely against the dollar. Even Sawiris acknowledges that if capitalism is to survive in Egypt it will have to be packaged as something else. "We have to come up with new terms for 'secular,' 'liberal,' and 'capitalism,'" he says. "These are now bad words. Maybe 'social market' or 'social welfare,' is the way to go." Egyptians may also learn from a famous aphorism attributed to Chinese statesman Deng Xiaoping, who knew a thing or two about how to stimulate developing economies: "It doesn't matter if the cat is black or white so long as it catches mice."

There is no shortage of mice to round up, particularly since the revolution devastated the economy even as it seized the world's attention. According to CI Capital, Egypt's GDP is estimated to have contracted in the first six months of the

What would God regulate?

Calls among some members of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood for increased food and fuel subsidies may be a hit with voters, but they are very much at odds with the group's tradition of faith in the free market.

It was the prophet Mohammed—himself a trader—who inspired the Brotherhood's embrace of laissez-faire economics. In Muslim liturgy, deals cut in the souk are as irrevocable as the covenant between God and the faithful. Prices were to be set by God alone—not unlike the "invisible hand" of market-based pricing referred to by Adam Smith. Merchants confined their business deals to the souk, so as to prevent what we call insider trading.

In general, the Ikhwan, as the brotherhood is known in Arabic, supports free trade agreements as a kind of modern-day surrogate for the Islamic caliphate that unified the Muslim world from the seventh to the early twentieth century. Should its candidates win a dominant share of seats in parliament in Egypt's autumn elections, they are unlikely to push for the repeal of existing agreements except perhaps those that relate to Israel. Though Islam generally takes a dim view of tax collection, the brotherhood has supported tax reform in the past as well as the withdrawal of subsidies on staple goods.

The Ikhwan opposed nationalization under Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser just as Mohammed "believed in the private sector as the basis of productive activity" with a "limited" state role, says Yasser Abdo, a Muslim Brotherhood member and a former economist at the International Islamic Bank for Investment and Development in Cairo. It is opposed to cartels, citing a verse in the Qur'an: "He who brings commodities to the market is good, but he who practices monopolies is evil."

In the days of the caliphate, Islam boasted the most sophisticated monetary system the world had yet known. Today, Islamic banking is upheld as further proof of an instinctive Islamic pragmatism. Though still guided by a Qur'anic ban on riba, or interest, Islamic banking has adapted to the needs of a growing market and in recent years hundreds of Islamic banks and investment firms holding trillion of dollars in assets have emerged worldwide. How Islamists might run a central bank is more problematic: scholars say they would manipulate currency reserves, not interest rates.

The Ikhwan leans on fourteenth century philosopher Ibn Khaldun for inspiration. Anticipating supply-side economics, Khaldun argued that cutting taxes raises production and tax revenues, and that state control should be limited to providing water, fire and free grazing land, the utilities of the ancient world. The World Bank has called Ibn Khaldun the patron saint of privatization.

year by more than 6 percent and is forecast to manage annualized growth of a mere 1.2 percent. Tourism, which along with the fees from the Suez Canal is a major pillar of the economy, lost some $1.8 billion amid canceled bookings and travel restrictions imposed on would-be visitors. Foreign investment is in retreat, remittances from expatriate Egyptians are down due to political uncertainty in the Persian Gulf, and the Egyptian central bank was forced to burn through a quarter of its foreign exchange reserves to support the pound. In a measure of how weak is the US dollar, however, the Egyptian currency has yielded only a modest 6 percent of its value since the revolution.

Then there's the political uncertainty. National elections are scheduled for September and the Muslim Brotherhood, given its vast social networks, is expected to emerge with a majority of seats in parliament. While Brotherhood leaders have tried to reassure Egypt's business community and the population at large that it does not wish to impose sharia law on the economy, its alliances with Salafi groups has done little to inspire confidence. In June, the head of a major foreign-owned hotel in Cairo pointed to an opened beer bottle at an association luncheon and declared it haram(forbidden), a gesture that sent chills down the spines of hoteliers who fear the potential consequences of an Islamized Egypt. Not to worry, says Sheik Mohammed Farahat, a leading Salafi preacher. Under sharia, he says, tourists will receive eighty lashes only if they are caught drinking alcohol in public. There is no penalty if they imbibe privately in their hotel rooms.

Nor has the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the military-led interim government known as SCAF, done much to assuage popular anxieties about the future. In July, The New York Times reported that the SCAF was framing a new constitution that would preserve its entitlements not only as the peoples' protector but also, so goes the implication, as owner and operator of commercial properties like luxury hotels and textile mills. In doing so, the SCAF managed to offend both secularists and Islamists who interpreted the move as a step towards the political culture of Turkey, where civilians govern at the pleasure of military officers with a broadly defined writ of authority. While some might argue that condominium governance has served Turkey well given its stellar economic performance over the last two decades, in Egypt the military's business lines have done far more for the military than they have for the people its generals are sworn to serve. That being the case, the Turkish model for growth is as inappropriate for Egypt as the Swedish one is unattainable, at least for now.

Egypt, for centuries a river of regional political, economic and cultural trends until it was laid low by decades of dictatorship, must find its own formula for renewal. Some kind of hybrid solution is inevitable, given the country's myriad constituencies and its grim experience with absolutism. It must come up with something soon, however, or else its revolution may end up as extraordinarily short-lived as it is extraordinary.

Stephen Glain – Former correspondent for "Newsweek", he has covered Asia and the Middle East for the "Wall Street Journal" for a decade. Now based in Washington as a freelance journalist and author, Mr. Glain is currently working on his forthcoming book about the militarization of US foreign policy.

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Settling the Score

What Iranian influence in Iraq means for Camp Ashraf

The status of Camp Ashraf in Iraq is teetering on the edge of dissolution at the hands of the Iraqi government backed by Iran. While the international community rummages around for a solution, the close to 3,500 residents wait in fear for their lives as a menacing siege builds up around them.

Jacqueline Shoen

At midnight on 2 April 2011, at least 30 armored vehicles belonging to the Iraqi armed forces entered Camp Ashraf, an Iranian settlement 60km north of Baghdad, and took strategic positions to secure the area. Six days later, in the early hours of the morning, Iraqi forces attacked the unarmed residents, 3,500 in total, resulting in the death of at least 34 and the injury of more than 350. Until now, Iraqi forces occupy more than one third of the camp, which is riddled with barbed wire fences, watchtowers and large embankments.

This is a comprehensive siege: Very few are let in or out, and access to doctors and medical supplies is limited. In fact, camp residents are bracing themselves for another attack.

Following the raid, Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani, announced his government's decision to close Camp Ashraf by the end of 2011, and the formation of "a trilateral committee composed of Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross]… to create the needed road map in this regard," he declared.

It is in this humanitarian crisis that we can observe Iran's growing influence—and a simultaneous waning of US influence—in Iraq. Moreover, the long-time failure of US policy in Iran becomes starkly clear.

From Iranian Enemy to Iranian Proxy

The residents of Camp Ashraf belong to an Iranian dissident group originally established in 1963 to militarily oppose the Shah of Iran. The Mujahideen-e Khalq, or MeK, participated in the 1979 Iranian revolution, but because its ideology—tolerant and democratic interpretation of Islam—was not compatible with that of the newly established Islamic Republic, it became the target of a bloody crackdown that ultimately resulted in the execution of its original leadership. Those remaining launched a paramilitary campaign against the Iranian government, which continued until 2001, when the group formally renounced all military activity, and then disarmed completely upon the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. In return, the US government offered its protection, a formal responsibility which it transferred to the Iraqi government in January 2009.

Incidentally, the US violated Article 45 of the Fourth Geneva Convention due to it previously knowing Iraqi intentions to forcibly dismantle the camp. This is despite the fact that the Iraqi government had given written assurances that it would observe the rights of Ashraf residents in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention, of which Iraq is a signatory. However, the moment that Iraqi forces took responsibility for Camp Ashraf, they began the blockade. Seven months later, in July 2009, "the first attack was carried out that left 11 dead and 500 wounded," Saeed Abed, a member of Foreign Affair Committee of NCRI, confirmed in email correspondence with The Majalla. Furthermore, the MeK claims that eradicating Ashraf

Image © Getty Images

from Iraq was "the principal precondition set by the Iranian regime to back Maliki for a second term as prime minister."

It was during the Iran-Iraq war in 1986, when Saddam Hussein offered refuge to MeK members who had been fleeing from Ayatollah Khomeini's men, that Camp Ashraf was established. With the current transformation of Iraq from Iranian enemy to Iranian proxy, the residents of Ashraf are no longer welcome, so much so that the crisis has gained worldwide attention. From former US Congressional members like Patrick Kennedy and Barney Frank, and governors Tom Ridge and Howard Dean, to the European Parliament, to Amnesty International, the United Nations and the Arab League, all have condemned the deadly raids and are pushing for an immediate solution, specifically, to resettle the refugees in parts of Europe and the United States.

Suppressing the Forces of Change?

In 1997, the US designated the MeK as a terrorist group. This was, according to the secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs, Martin Indyk, meant as a goodwill gesture to the newly elected president, Mohammed Khatami. Unfortunately for the MeK, this has since become the US's de facto towards the group as it realized that Iran would show its willingness to compromise so long as the group remained a terrorist entity in the eyes of the US. The most recent example of this was the Bush administration's efforts to engage Iran over its nuclear program. In 2009, the MeK filed a petition to get its name removed from the list—the culmination of a decade-long international campaign—but the then secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, overruled them without explanation.

Clearly, and at the expense of innocent lives, the group's status is totally dependent on the progress of US foreign policy goals in Iran. The Iranian government, meanwhile, is now meddling in Iraqi affairs to further torment MeK members, even though they have renounced violence against the Islamist regime. Looking back, one will find that Iran has made little to no compromises towards the international community, specifically the US, suggesting that the long-term US policy has, very simply, failed.

Ali Savafi, member of Iran's Parliament in Exile and president of Near East Policy Research, noted in an interview with The Majalla, that "the experience of the past 15-20 years with the regime in Tehran has demonstrated that no amount of concessions or appeasement or incentives can convince the regime in Tehran" to compromise on any one of its unsavory policies, especially, "to give up its nuclear weapons program."

The undying efforts of the Iranian regime to "make the MeK's designation as a terrorist organization the number one demand on every single political exchange it has with western governments," said Mr. Safavi, coupled with its consistently aggressive policy towards MeK members—to date, the Iranian government has executed over 100,000 MeK sympathizers, according to the MeK—indicates that the Islamic government in Iran views the group as a serious threat to its hold on power. An investigative report issued by the Iranian parliament warning of the MeK's significant role in the popular protests of 14 February 2011, as well as Iran's alleged involvement in the attack on Camp Ashraf, are also evidence of this.

Delisting the MeK from the US terrorist list would "send a very strong political signal to Tehran, that for the first time in the past 30 years, Washington means business," Savafi went on to say. "It would also send a very strong message of encouragement to people in Iran."

At the Paris Conference of 19 April 2011, the MeK presented one top secret Iraqi Army document in Arabic that had been leaked to the Iranian Resistance from inside the Iranian regime, which illustrated three points: that the attack "had been planned well in advance at the highest levels as a wholly military operation with the specific objective" to kill Ashraf residents; that the plan "has been in the making by the Iraqi government with direct supervision and cooperation from the Iranian regime since three months ago"; and the documents

contained "a briefing on the latest situation in Ashraf with information from inside the clerical regime about the plots of the mullahs and their proxy in Iraq, Nouri Al-Maliki, on their next steps vis-à-vis Ashraf." The document, signed by Staff Brigadier General Kazem Danbous, commander of the Iraqi 5 Infantry Division, implies that the military command to attack and kill Ashraf residents was ordered by Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki himself. This claim is further supported by additional documents in the possession of the MeK in Paris, which has presented them to the national court in Madrid, Spain as supporting evidence for a charge of breaching the Fourth Geneva Convention and Additional Protocol I.

As the first of its kind in the world, the Spanish National Court issued on 14 July 2011 a writ against Prime Minister Maliki, requiring him to appear as soon as he steps down as prime minister. Lieutenant General Ali Geidan, commander of the Iraqi Ground Forces who led the attack against Ashraf residents on 8 April under Maliki's orders, Lieutenant Colonel Abdul-Latif al-Annabi, commander of the Iraqi battalion in Ashraf, and Major Jassem Al-Tamimi have been ordered to appear before the court on 3 October 2011. Plaintiffs Séller Morteza Komarizadehasl and Mohammed Reza Mohade allege that these men commissioned crimes against the international community.

The MeK has also claimed that its sources operating within the clerical regime have confirmed that Brigadier General Ghassem Solaymani, commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), "personally supervised the planning of this attack on Ashraf." According to this information, some Arabic-speaking officers of the IRGC actually participated in the 8 April attack.

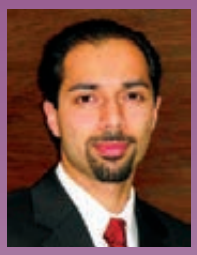
The Facts and the Future

The unsettling truth about this situation is that the international community, particularly Washington, was aware of the impending attack on Camp Ashraf and did nothing to prevent it. Not only did the US have an obligation to protect Camp Ashraf by international law, but the MeK is no longer listed as a terrorist entity in the UK and EU, and in July 2010, the Federal Court of Appeals in Washington ruled that the group's original designation as a terrorist organization in 1997 has since been discredited, and asked the State Department to reconsider that designation, which it is doing at this time.

In an effort to bring further attention to the worsening situation at Camp Ashraf, tens of thousands of MeK supporters from around the world descended on Paris on 18 June 2011. Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, president-elect of the NCRI, requested that the following actions be taken immediately: Appoint a Special Representative by the UN Security Council to conduct an inquiry into the April 8 crime; the UN should assume protection of Ashraf and station a permanent UN monitoring team in the camp with comprehensive support provided by the US and EU; and all Iraqi forces must leave Ashraf's grounds immediately, while the 28-month-long siege on the camp must end.

Certainly, the onus to resolve this most urgent situation is on the United States. It is high time for the Obama administration to do what his predecessors did not: Stand up to the Iranian regime, and delist the MeK, if not for a foreign policy win, then for the lives of the remaining Ashraf residents.

National Iranian-American Council and the MeK



An Iranian-born Swedish citizen called Trita Parsi has advocated vociferously against delisting the MeK in the US, using his American organization, the National Iranian-American Council (NIAC), as a platform. Like the Iranian government, he labels the MeK a terrorist organization, that the organization has no popular support within Iran, and warns against supporting it under the auspices of human rights. He goes on to claim that, "The greatest beneficiaries of delisting MeK would be Ahmadinejad and Iranian hardliners who seek to link the US and the Green Movement to MeK." Parsi's statements are in stark contrast to the international outcry over the targeting of the MeK in Iraq, official reports that the group is not a threat, and the subsequent responsibility to remove the group from the US terrorist list.

A brief analysis of Mr. Parsi's biography stating that he has been a "vocal proponent of dialogue and engagement between the US and Iran, which [he] consistently has argued would enhance our [Americans'] national security by helping to stabilize the Middle East and bolster the moderates in Iran," points to the possibility that he, like those in the US State Department, feels strongly that all dialogue with Iran would come to a halt, and therefore, delisting the MeK would not further US interests. This is based on an idealistic, and at this point unrealistic, assessment that dialogue with the Iranian government can achieve results, and the understanding that Iran will only consider negotiating with the US if the MeK remains on the terrorist list. The only other explanation is that Mr. Parsi is, as The Washington Times national security correspondent Eli Lake once alleged, in fact lobbying on behalf of the Iranian government, which would explain their similar opinions.

What is worrying is that Mr. Parsi does not weigh these issues like the professional and respected individual he is portrayed to be; rather he resorts to fear mongering to sway anyone considering to take the side of the MeK in Ashraf and advocate the group's removal from the terrorist list and a lasting solution to its conflict with the Iraqi and Iranian governments.

At the expense of innocent lives, the group's status is totally dependent on the progress of US foreign policy goals in Iran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الزوران التجارة العامة

The dramatic change of the status quo or the intense demands of reform are some of the challenges facing states considered to be some of the most stable in the region. This month, Egyptians held their breath as the much-anticipated trial of former President Hosni Mubarak began amid much courtroom drama. Here, Abdul Rahman Al-Rashid looks at the complex nature of the trial that has gripped Egypt and the world and asks, what is reasonable for a trial of a once untouchable leader? Also this month, Turkey demonstrated to observers how a critical regional player navigates the new reform minded regional environment. Iran expert Amir Taheri , looks at how Turkey, "a status quo power is acting as an opportunist player" is filling the emerging vacuum of power with diplomacy, trade and military might. The two writers do an excellent job of looking forward and exploring the changes coming ahead for both nations and the region as a whole.

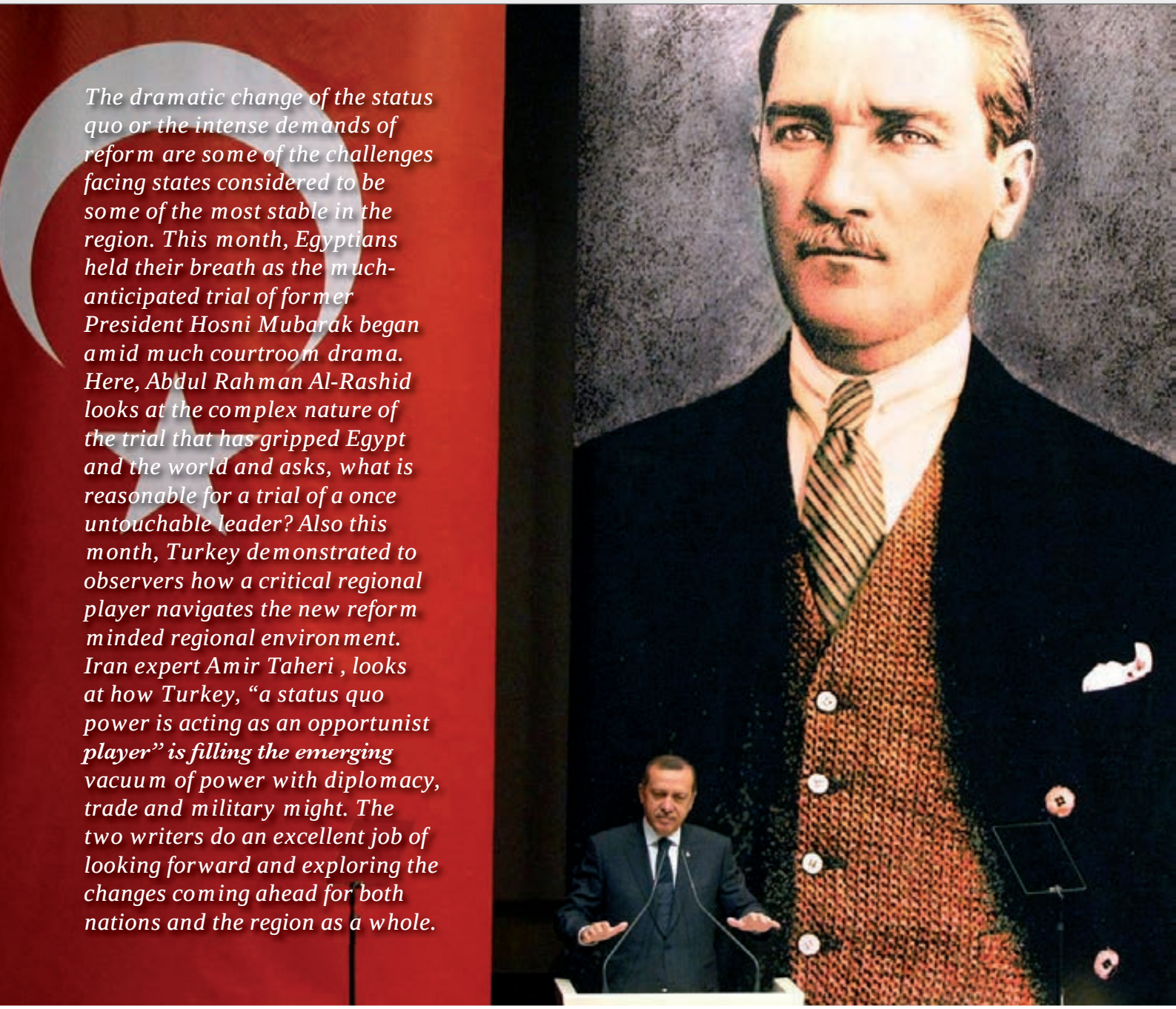

Image © Getty Images

Turkey and the Neo-Ottoman Dream

Amir Taheri

How does a nation shape its foreign policy? The standard answer is that a nation's foreign policy is the continuation of its domestic politics. In other words, a nation based on the rule of law at home cannot act as a rogue state abroad.

As in every rule, however, there are exceptions. One such exception is Turkey. For the past six months, Turkey has been the most active regional power supporting the "Arab Spring". It has already hosted two important meetings of the Syrian opposition parties and a conference of the coordination group on Libya. Turkey was the first regional power to throw its weight behind the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt from the very start. It has contributed to the efforts of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to implement the United Nation's resolution on Libya. Also, it is through Turkey that opponents of Iran's Khomeinist regime reach the safety of exile. Over the past two years, no fewer than 600 such opponents, including many former high officials, have fled Iran.

In close cooperation with the United States, Turkey has emerged as an ally of forces fighting for reform across the region. The problem is that while Turkey has backed a trend that could lead to democratisation in large chunks of the region, its leadership has been pedalling in the opposite direction domestically.

Under Erdogan's leadership, Turkey that had always been a status quo power is acting as an opportunist player. It sees a vacuum, created by the United States' strategic retreat under President Barack Obama, and hopes to fill it with a mixture of diplomacy, trade and military power. Needless to say, Turkey does not want the Iran, an adventurist power, to fill that vacuum. With the inevitable fall of the Assad regime in Damascus, Tehran would lose a key client state. Change in Syria would also spell the end of the Lebanese branch of Hezballah.

Ten years ago, the speculation was that Recep Tayyib Erdogan, the man who led Turkey's "lite" Islamists to power, might have a secret agenda aimed at creating a theocracy with a hat rather than a turban.

Having had the opportunity of listening to Erdogan at some length on a number of occasions, I never shared that theory. I saw Erdogan as a Turkish version of Vladimir Putin, Russia's uncrowned tsar. Just as Putin is using Russian nationalism as a matrix for his policy of reviving the Soviet Empire, at least in part, Erdogan's Islamist profile is designed to help recreate the Ottoman Empire.In other words, the neo-Islamist pose is little more than a faced for the neo-Ottoman ideology.

A hint of this came in a recent speech by Erdogan, celebrating his party's election victory. He claimed that the Justice and Development Party's victory was shared throughout North Africa, the Balkans and the Middle East, in other words, all areas that had once been parts of the Ottoman Empire.

Turkey has been strengthening its economic presence in much of that area. Turkish investment in the Middle East, the Balkans and North Africa is estimated to be around $100 billion.Turkey is number one foreign investor in Syria, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania. Turkey is also a major trading partner of Libya and Algeria. Turkish banks and contractors have been active throughout the region for more than two decades.

The neo-Ottoman project will meet Turkey's needs in a number of domains. With hopes of joining the European Union all but dashed, Ankara would find a new space for its foreign policy in the Greater Middle East and the Balkans. This vast and potentially rich region would also be able to absorb Turkey's demographic surplus that had traditionally gone to Western Europe.

To have any chance of being realised, Erdogan's dream requires a number of developments.To start with, Erdogan must secure his own hold on power for at least another decade. He is trying to do just that by changing the Turkish Constitution to create a presidential, rather than a parliamentary, system. In such a system, he could become president for at least two successive terms of five years. Adding his current premiership, we might well have Erdogan at the helm in Turkey until 2026.

Erdogan's second aim is to weaken the military, the last institution still capable of challenging a future president's grip on power. A step in that direction came last week when the Turkish top brass, including the Chief of Staff of the armed Forces, General Isik Kosaner, Army Commander General Erdal Ceylanoglu, Navy Commander Admiral Esref Ugur Yigit and the Commander of Air Force Hassan Aksay tendered their resignation.The move enables Erdogan to form a new high command led by the former head of gendarmerie, General Necdet Ozel that consists of officers sympathetic to the neo-Ottomanist project.

Under Erdogan's leadership, Turkey that had always been a status quo power is acting as an opportunist player. It sees a vacuum, created by the United States' strategic retreat under President Barack Obama, and hopes to fill it with a mixture of diplomacy, trade and military power

Over the past decade, Erdogan has tightened his grip on the judiciary while placing his allies at strategic positions throughout the bureaucracy. Business allies of the AKP, Erdogan's party, already dominate the media scene in Turkey. Under Turkeys so-called secular system, the government controls the mosques and most other religious institutions. That would facilitate the revival of the Ottoman system under which the ruler was at the same time the sultan and the caliph.

To be sure, Erdogan is intelligent enough to know that he cannot call himself the sultan or the caliph just as Putin cannot present himself as the tsar. What matters, however, is the content of the new regime that Erdogan is trying to create, not its form. However, Erdogan's chief problem might be the fact that the neo-Ottoman project does not appeal to a majority of the Turks. In three successive general elections, the AKP has failed to secure even half of the votes cast. In every case, its victory was partly due to arcane election laws.

The AKP has been successful in putting the Turkish economy on a trajectory of growth without inflation. It has also managed to defuse the Kurdish ethnic time bomb, at least for now. More importantly, perhaps, it has given the poorer segments of society a taste of power for the first time.

Erdogan's performance is comparable to that of Putin who has also succeeded in reviving the Russian economy and restoring part of its international prestige. Sadly, however, like Putin, Erdogan appears unable to tailor his ambitions to feet the real capacities of his country and the aspirations of his people. Turkey cannot morph into an empire in any form. And this is not what a majority of Turks want, especially if it means the emergence of an autocratic system of government.

Amir Taheri – Born in Ahwaz, southwest Iran, and educated in Tehran, London and Paris. He was Executive Editor-in-Chief of the daily Kayhan in Iran (1972-79). In 1980-84, he was Middle East Editor for the Sunday Times. In 1984-92, he served as member of the Executive Board of the International Press Institute (IPI). Between 1980 and 2004, he was a contributor to the International Herald Tribune. He has written for the Wall Street Journal, the New York Post, the New York Times, the London Times, the French magazine Politique Internationale, and the German weekly Focus. Between 1989 and 2005, he was editorial writer for the German daily Die Welt. Taheri has published 11 books, some of which have been translated into 20 languages. He has been a columnist for Asharq Alawsat since 1987. Taheri's latest book "The Persian Night" is published by Encounter Books in London and New York.

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For or against Mubarak

Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed

Those who saw the trial of deposed Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak have split into two groups. One felt a sense of pride and triumph, while the other felt sorrow and defeat. The happy ones believe the trial is an enforcement of justice and a route for legitimacy and stress that it is a revolution against tyranny and corruption. The sad ones view the trial as the victorious party's revenge and a political ploy in which the ruling parties today are taking part so as to search for legitimacy for themselves. More seriously, it is a door to a bleak future the like of which even the 1952 revolution which deposed the monarchy did not practice.

Even Mubarak's supporters do not deny the regime's problems and mistakes but believe the man has lost everything and this is a very heavy price and the new rulers should establish for a better future that is not based on exacting revenge from the past. They believe that Mubarak's era was the most tolerant and freedoms of the Egyptian eras and that generations should read history as it really is. Anyone who hears the two sides' opinion finds it reasonable. What is reasonable?

In my opinion, the trial should indeed lay the foundation for justice and prudent governance, as its advocates say, but the world and the Egyptians in particular should see that it is based on law, and law alone, and not turned into a political trial. Leveling accusations, which mean presenting facts and giving the defendants their full rights to defend themselves, will be a source of pride for Egyptian justice and will in fact lay down the foundation for the concept of respecting the rule and applying it to all, starting with the head of the state. The fear, reiterated by the rejectionists, is that there is no possibility of justice with all the voices of revenge and the intimidation of adversaries and that the trial was rushed to placate the demonstrators and not in accord with the rule of litigation and defense in Egyptian law.

Campaigns have appeared in the Egyptian arena attacking the defendants' lawyers and inciting against them while Egyptian justice itself guarantees the defendant's right to the best possible defense system. Following the first session of Mubarak's trial, criticisms spread against allowing television cameras through which the defendants, such as Ala and Jamal, are seen in the cage behaving to suit the camera and that they were not shackled and were jovial when they left. These criticisms express the desire to shorten the trial to just condemnation and criminalization and this indicates it might be like the trials of coupists in the Arab countries, just a television spectacle for the new legitimacy.

Amidst this argument, no one denies bringing the deposed ruler to account, but not by the victors but by a really independent judiciary wherein the trial is a deterrent against a repetition of wrong practices later on by the new regime and thus it fears the abuse of power and society establishes the principle of accountability itself.

The fact is that, despite the media pressure on it, the judicial system in Egypt differs from other Arab systems by a considerable experience even under previous governments. Several judges during Mubarak's rule did not agree with his decisions and had a unique role in objecting to the laws of extension [of emergency laws] and the elections practices. When we hear today the legal argument outside the court we find that the culture of law in Egypt's society is refined and the legal argument dominates the discussions of politicians and media figures and not just the judicial establishments' circles.

Image © Getty Images

I am absolutely certain that we will hear in future a lot of blame for and disavowal of what is happening today being exchanged unless the victors use today the road of accountability to record stands and amend the writing of history and not for exacting revenge with jail and execution.

Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed – General Manager of Al-Arabiya television, currently based in Dubai. Mr. Al Rashed is also the former editor-in-chief of Asharq Al- Awsat, and the leading Arabic weekly magazine, Al Majalla. He has a US post-graduate degree in mass communications. He is a senior Columnist in the daily newspapers of Al Madina and Al Bilad and has been a guest on many TV current affairs programs.

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Power in the 21st Century

An interview with Joseph Nye, University Distinguished Service Professor in the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University

In this exclusive interview with "The Majalla," Joseph Nye, a long-time observer of power politics, discusses his latest work, The Future of Power, and insightfully examines the Arab Spring in the context of the new power equation emerging in the 21st century. Nye also sheds light on the future of American power after the Arab Spring.

Andrew Bowen

Joseph Nye is one of the world's most respected and influential scholars on international relations and American foreign policy. Co-founding the school of neoliberalism in international relations with Robert Keohane, and coining the terms "soft power" and "smart power," Nye has shaped how the world thinks and discusses international affairs. His writings have been a key source of influence for the development of Obama's foreign policy.

Joseph Nye is the University Distinguished Service Professor at Harvard University and the former Dean of the Kennedy School of Government. He currently serves as the North America Chairman of the Trilateral Commission. Nye's long tenure of government service includes: Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Chair of the National Intelligence Council, and Deputy Under Secretary of State for Security Assistance, Science and Technology. He has published over 12 books, including, Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics, Understanding International Conflict, The Powers to Lead, and Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power.

Your recently published work, The Future of Power, explores the new power dynamics in the 21 century. How is power changing and evolving in this new century? What significant trends are shaping the evolution of power in the world today?

I see two major power shifts in the 21 century. One is transition amongst states, which is from West to East, which you might also call the recovery of Asia so that Asia essentially returned to the normal proportions of being more than half of world population and half of world product, which was interrupted by the Industrial Revolution of the 19 century. The other great power shift is power diffusion which is away from all states East or West to non-state actors, and that's a result of the extraordinary reduction in the cost of computing and communications that resulted from the current information revolution. That essentially has empowered non-state actors and individuals to do things that had been previously been reserved to governments or large corporations.

Why do you conceptualize power in the 21 century as a three dimensional chessboard?

If you think of the distribution of power in the 21 century, it helps to use this metaphor of a three dimensional chessboard, because power is distributed quite differently in different areas. On the top board of military relations amongst states, the world is unipolar. The Untied States is the only super power; it's roughly half of world military expenditure and it is the only country

that can project military power globally. If you go to the middle board of economic relations amongst states, the world is multipolar. It has been for a couple of decades, and here Europe can act as an entity, and when it does, its economy is larger than the US economy. You have also China, Brazil, India, Japan and others that can help to balance American power.

You go to the bottom board of transnational relations, which is the flow of things outside the control of governments. This is where the diffusion of power and non-state actors come in and it can include: financial flows larger than the budgets of many governments, terrorism, cyberterrorism, climate change, and pandemics. Here power is chaotically distributed. It does not make any sense to call this world unipolar or multipolar. The only way to deal with these issues is essentially by organizing networks of cooperation among governments to deal with them. You have three quite different distributions of power depending on which of these areas you look at. It's a great mistake to take some categories or concepts that might fit with say military and economic power such as unipolarity and multipolority and apply them to the transnational level where they do not fit at all. That's a categorical mistake.

Many analysts have described the events in the Middle East as a revolutionary moment along the lines of the events that swept Europe in 1989. Others have called the Arab Spring the Arab world's 1848. Do you consider the Middle East undergoing its own power transition, and if so, what is the role of power diffusion in shaping the Arab uprisings?

You have seen this information revolution profoundly affect the politics of the Middle East, if you think of Egypt and the classical view that there was no middle between Mubarak and the Muslim Brotherhood. Essentially, this burgeoning of information not only created a new middle that was represented in Tahrir Square but also created the techniques and technologies such as Twitter and Facebook that helped them co-ordinate. Now, that does not mean that the process is over. We are in the first act of a multi-act play, so we do not know how this will all play out. This is a very different politics in say Egypt than 10 or 20 years ago. How this will all play out across the region as a whole is very uncertain. It is true that because of language and culture there is a contagion effect where events in Tunisia travel throughout the whole region. But, each country is very different in its own characteristics, so one should not expect the same outcomes in each country. So, I think what we will something analogous to 1848, but it is also worth remembering that in 1848 the contagion of the liberal revolutions in Europe did not produce democracy.

It took the revolutions of Europe 100 years or more to deliver change. Do you think it will take a long time in the Middle East to achieve this change?

Not necessarily because you have much more rapid social mobilization and communication in today's age. I think it's a mistake to take historical analogies too literally. The American author, Mark Twain, once said, "History never repeats itself; at best it only rhymes." So, I do not think we will see 1848 or 1989 repeated in the Middle East. They just give us some general ideas, but what we will see in the Middle East will have its own deep Middle Eastern origins.

The Future of Power

Joseph S. Nye, Jr.
Public Affairs

Joseph Nye's newest book, The Future of Power, serves as a summation of his works to date and provides an excellent but concise introduction to international affairs and power politics in today's world.

A proliferation of works on the changing nature of power in the international system as a result of the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the rise of China, and the 2008 financial crisis (notably, Niall Ferguson, Robert Kagan, and Fareed Zakaria) start from the popular premise that America's predominance of power in the international system is in decline and then, either support or disagree with this argument. As a result, these works tend to have an American-centric focus to the examination of the changes in the international system.

Nye is not an exception, but Nye has no qualms in taking such an approach, and writes according to his expertise on the American experience of power. His book's main limitation thus is that it's an American dialogue on the future of power, and focuses predominantly on how America's role is evolving in a changing international system and what the US should do to adapt to such changes. These questions have interested him throughout his distinguished career.

The Future of Power's most significant contribution comes from his introduction of the concepts of" 'power diffusion" and "power transition" in understanding the future of America's position in the 21 century. His work compliments well and frames more empirically driven works such as Fareed Zakaria's The Post-American World and Robert Kaplan's Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power.

Nye's prescriptions for a smart power strategy provide policymakers with a useful approach to conceptually framing their responses to these challenges. Whether this can serve as a guide in practice remains to be seen, yet Nye provides a strong starting point for how the US should think about its response to the challenges of the 21st century.

The full review was originally published at http://www.majalla.com/en/reviews/article460163.ece

American leadership has been questioned in the wake of the Arab uprisings. Some critics of Obama argue he has followed a contradictory narrative that embraces both realist and liberal interventionist paradigms. Has America effectively responded to the changes sweeping the region?

Well, it's true in one sense. Foreign policy involves reconciling often-contrasting values. Obama, or any president, say in regards to Egypt, has to maintain good relations with the Egyptian military which is still the strongest power, and at the same time, appeal to the younger generation of Tahrir Square. It's a little like walking a tight rope where you try not to tip over and you balance in either direction. I think Obama has from time-to-time wobbled on that tight rope, but he has not fallen off it.

Does Obama have a foreign policy doctrine, and if so, is it being reshaped by the Arab Spring?

I am a little bit suspicious of doctrines since they generally are implied by the press rather than the president or the strategists themselves, but I do think Obama has a general strategy which is represented in the National Security Strategy that was issued by the White House. It is one which they essentially call "smart power," the ability to combine hard and soft power resources into successful strategies, which means at times you have to use hard power; at times you have to use soft power. You have to figure out how to combine the two. The general proposition Obama has been trying to use as an organizing conception for his foreign policy is to deal with the power transition represented by the rise of Asia, particularly China, and at the same time, deal with the power diffusion, which means organizing better for communications to a newly empowered generation empowered by the information revolution. I do not know whether its good to call that a doctrine. Very often, the press likes the term doctrine but this does not really reveal the richness of thought behind it.

In power diffusion, non-state actors are part of shaping the scene. Do non-state actors have soft power capacities?

Yes, very much so. Non-state actors have a lot of soft power. If you look at corporations, they are always concerned about their brands, and if you look at some NGOs, they try to punish corporations by taking away their brand loyalty. Green Peace will attack Shell. Shell wants to keep the brand of Shell immaculate; Green Peace wants to dirty the brand as a form of political pressure. There are very real struggles over soft power among non-state actors.

Where do you place Islamism and political Islamic movements in this equation of power?

Religion is an enormous source of soft power. After all, religion generally attracts people and that is soft power. When one distinguishes between Islam and Islamism, Islam has its own soft power. It attracts billions of people. If Islamism means a political ideology, which takes up a certain type of Islam and tries to impose it on others, then it too can have soft power, but I doubt it will be successful. If you look at Bin Laden, Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda had soft power. Bin Laden did not point a gun at the heads of the people who flew into the World Trade Centre. He did not pay them. He attracted them to a particularly distorted view of Islam, but they did it because of Bin Laden's soft power. But, what we know is that the soft power of Bin Laden's version of Islamism has been in decline. Polls show that throughout the Muslim world the decline of Bin Laden's version of Islamism, as time went past, has become less influential even before he was killed.

Since taking office, more so than any other president in decades, Obama has attempted to articulate a new message for America's relations with the Arab world. Almost three years into office, Obama has failed to temper largely the anti-Americanism in the region. Do you believe this is a sign that the region is immune to American soft power?

No, I think it indicates that there are various dimensions of soft power. For example, even during the Iraq War when American policy under Bush was very unpopular, the Pew polls showed there were dimensions of American policy that were attractive, particularly those related to science and technology. Similarly, if you go back to an earlier period, if you look at the Vietnam War where American government policies were very unattractive and government policies undercut soft power, people were demonstrating in the street against the United States, but they were not singing the "Communist International" but rather, Martin Luther King's "We shall overcome." So, there are going to be dimensions of American culture that can be attractive even when American government policy is unattractive.

Obama has a general strategy which is represented in the National Security Strategy that was issued by the White House

Do you expect a change in China along the lines of the Arab Spring?

I think gradually China will change, but it will take some time. I do not see a Jasmine Revolution in China, but I think you are going to see a gradual liberalization of China over the next decade as per capita income rises.

And Iran, do you think something will happen there?

I find it much harder to understand what is going on in Iran. One hopes that the kind of development of liberal ideas that we saw in the aftermath of the last election will eventually prevail, but power is obviously wielded very much by the government basij. I do not see it happening immediately.

Do you think that our traditional concepts of approaching international relations are still relevant in how we approach the Middle East? Are they going to be obsolete? What happened to the balance of power or the realist argument in the Middle East?

Balance of power still matters but it is not the only way to think. As A.J.P. Taylor, the famous Oxford historian, once wrote about Europe in the 19 century, a great power is a country whose army wins, that's still important, but in the information age, it also matters whose story wins. If you think about how you apply the concepts from international relations theory to an area like the Middle East or any place in the world, you have to be able to think about all three dimensions of power: military, economic, and soft power, and think about how you combine them into effective strategies. If you think about only one dimension of power, you, in the long run, will not succeed. So, the key question is not to throw away the old, but to supplement the old with the new.

The Natural Source

Interview with Former Algerian Prime Minister Sid Ahmed Ghozali

Former Algerian Prime Minister Sid Ahmed Ghozali got his start in politics in 1966, when he served under President Houari Boumedienne. In 1977, he was appointed Minister of Energy and Industry, before becoming ambassador to France in 1979. In 1988, he returned to Algeria as finance minister, and served as foreign minister from 1989 to 1991. He ascended to the role of Prime Minister on June 5, 1991, but his time in office was short-lived. On July 8, 1992, Ghozali resigned from his post, following the assassination of Mohammed Boudiaf. He has run for President on two occasions—1999 and 2004—but was disqualified. *The Majalla* sat down with the politician in June, to discuss his country, his politics and the Arab Spring.

In your opinion, how has Algeria's Arab Spring been different from others in the region?

Let's talk first about what they have in common. What we have in common is that we see that there's a very serious problem in the relationship between the government and the governed. Now there are many similarities but there are plenty of differences too, many of which are masked. But if i had to choose one difference, a very important one, it's that, based on appearances, the Iranian government is much harder, much more difficult to be taken down. But in reality, this is where there's the most hope. In all the other Arab countries, there isn't the same kind of organized resistance, because we haven't let them organize. The problem is the confrontation between the people in the streets and those in power. In the Iranian discourse, L'OMPE, the principal resistance, existed since the time of the Shah. Plenty of people think that the OMPE was created to contest the power. No! The OMPE existed well before then, and was very important in the fall of the dictator. At the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, Ravaji (chief of OMPE) brought together these meetings of 6,000 people, because it was an organization that had the capacity to organize. That's the essential difference: The country that appears the most difficult to change is actually the country with the most hope. It's also a very old organization, which is why, if the West wants democracy in the Arab World, they must first look at the Iranian situation.

Echoes of the past

Algeria's previous experiments with liberalization have not turned out well. The 1980s oil glut is often blamed for the uprising that foreshadowed the Chadli government's failed liberalization experiment. The oil glut sparked the protests, but demographic change was the fuel - in the form of a youthful population coming of age, frustrated at their diminishing opportunities, and angered at rising living costs. When reform came, the government was prompted less by these grievances and more by concern for its own position. The reform initiative lacked legitimacy. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) capitalized where the FLN failed, by challenging the government's legitimacy in Islamist moral terms and couching its discourse in legitimate socio-economic demands. FIS was able to monopolise this discourse simply because the FLN's efforts to tap it rang hollow with self-interest. Although support for FIS arguably had more to do with dissatisfaction with the FLN than with genuine support for Islamism, such nuance made little difference to the subsequent imposition of military rule or ensuing civil war. If the adage is true that a government that begins a reform process is seldom the same government that concludes it, then Algeria may want to look to its past as it plots its future.

Ever since the end of the colonial period, we've been in the neocolonial period—a period where [world powers] want riches, not through direct domination, but through dominating others by intermediary means

What are your feelings about Western involvement in the region post Arab-Spring?

That's the question: We don't know what the true intentions of the West are yet. You've got Obama who says "I'm going to build relationships in the Middle East." But in reality, we don't know yet. We're at a stage of human development where the colonial period has already passed us. At that time, the world's powers were looking for the wealth of others via direct domination. This period has finished since the middle of the last century. It is no longer possible to colonize by direct domination. Ever since the end of the colonial period, we've been in the neocolonial period—a period where [world powers] want riches, not through direct domination, but through dominating others by intermediary means. The question is whether we've entered the post-neo-colonial era. I'm not sure yet. Following these events, the West said "these governments, including Ben Ali's regime, were incompetent, and our opinions are no longer relevant." You saw, for example, Bush was forced to lie to his own people to rally his soldiers and go after oil. If he'd told his people he needed the army to obtain oil, they would've said no. So he invented a story, and made his people scared. One must never forget, whatever their political orientations are, these countries [the West] are democratic.... So their opinion counts more and more. So their soft attitude vis a vis local despotism isn't viewed well, according to public opinion. So they can tell themselves that "we're going to make them believe." And that's why I wonder whether it's a cosmetic change, whether or not they've simply changed images, like Ben Ali, and whether or not they'll continue as if nothing happened. Will Egypt and Tunisia really be a democracy? Not to be pessimistic, but I'm not sure that there will be a change on the level of the people, or whether this is a cosmetic change. That is to say, has the West arrived at a vision, at the conclusion that "our interests coincide with the Middle East's interests"? That's the long term vision, but there are short-term visions that may jeopardize that.

What are Algeria's greatest economic and political challenges going forward?

Algeria is the natural source: The sun, the ground, the sea. For the first part, it's very much like California. For the second part, it's more like Texas—dry, but full of oil. But when you order US states by wealth, California is first and Texas is second. And that's the paradox with Algeria. It has all the natural resources, it has considerable human resources, with good education—the number of children enrolled in school at independence, 50 years ago, was 300,000, now there are 9 million kids in school... The human resource is there, but what's missing is the "management." That's to say, political management. The country has not succeeded in creating a state founded upon law. And that's the condition for good governance... The government doesn't have confidence in the people. It's blind. So Algeria has plenty of riches, but a terribly bad government. We can even say it's a rich country, where the people are poor—except for those who profit from the people at the bottom of society. The base is already there, but if the country had strong institutions, it would explode. But there's a total mismanagement, because one can't govern a country by giving orders, without having confidence in the people.

What role do you see the FLN (National Liberation Front) playing in Algeria's development?

The FLN is an abbreviation that applies to two different things. Before colonization, there were many nationalist parties. When the country decided to engage in military conflict, all the parties created a liberation movement. It was a movement that had a common goal, to fight for the independence of Algeria. But since then, the FLN has become a unique party. The FLN is not a party in the classic sense. It's a bureaucratic apparatus. Nowadays, the majority of the parties aren't autonomous. It's like a cast in a movie—everyone plays their role, and these aren't parties. There isn't a political life. There's one party that plays the role of nationalist, one that plays the role of Islamist, and even one that plays the role of Trotskyist. And besides, even the designation of the FLN is anti-constitutional, because the constitution says "everyone has the right to create a party, but a party can't have a name linked to the common religion (Islam), nor to the values of the revolution." And the FLN, of course, encompasses everyone. So even the use of FLN is illegal, already. When you see things from the exterior, you judge things from the constitution, the political discourse; you see that the FLN has the majority. But it's a regime that doesn't respect the law. In Algeria, we're not under the right of law.

If Morocco accepts its invitation to the GCC, where does that leave Algeria?

It's a game. The geopolitical and social reality is that everyone within the Maghreb is part of the same people. It's impossible to distinguish them from the face, the language, the religion, or history, even. It's a region that is infinitely more homogeneous than the Arabian Peninsula and the rest of the Middle East. There will certainly be a day when the Maghreb is just one big country. But why hasn't it happened? Because every federal process rests on mutual confidence—not between man and man, but between institutions. When a country doesn't have basic right of law, the others don't have confidence in it. For example, the border between Morocco and Algeria is closed. Officially, it's closed, but in reality it's open, people pass anyway, because there's profit to be made. But we have an agreement that we signed 20 years ago, on the free circulation of people across borders. In two years we arrived to do something that Europeans took 40 years to do! But three years later, Morocco decides to reestablish visas, meaning it was in violation of international law. But in response, Algeria closed its frontiers. If you kill, and I kill you as punishment, that's not law. But you can't imagine a day where the president of Belgium suddenly decides to close its frontiers, because Belgium is a democratic state that adheres to law and international law, and if he does it, he's no longer the president. But we don't have the same respect for the law, because we don't have law. If you look at all the heads of state in the Maghreb, they're sincerely for the Maghreb, but it's all sentimental. It's not serious on the political level, because we're not yet true countries of law. For all these federal processes to work, they must transcend man, and act directly on the institutional level.

And besides, even the designation of the FLN is anti-constitutional, because the constitution says "everyone has the right to create a party, but a party can't have a name linked to the common religion (Islam), nor to the values of the revolution"

What do you think of the US response and European involvement in Libya?

If you see the reaction of all the Arab population, no one has any sympathy for Qadhafi. When we learned that the UN decided to protect the Libyan people, we thought it was good. But when you want to protect them by dropping bombs on them, the reaction was immediate: the people didn't believe the sincerity of the West. Because if you want to protect the civil population, why would you bomb them? The Libyans, meanwhile, are stuck. They don't like Qadhafi, nor do they like the hypocrisy of the West. And Qadhafi is terrible. He speaks as if the people aren't even there. These are people that have become blind. That's why we have institutions, because this is human nature. A man who governs all alone finishes by abusing it. That's why we have counter balances. It's a natural tendency. The majority of chiefs who start to exercise this kind of power become crazy after getting power. It's like the Iraqis. They didn't like Saddam Hussein. They didn't like the Americans either. They were a country in hostage, between the local despot and international despotism... Iraq was a dictatorship, but one without terrorism. After the US entered the country in order to root out terrorism, Iraq suddenly became a hotbed for terrorism. The same will happen with Libya.

Do you envision a return to politics?

I have never quit politics. Even my friends think I quit politics, simply because they never see me on TV anymore. But I've never quit.

Yemen

Timeline

1832 British forces capture Aden port
1838 Sultan Muhsin bin Fadl cedes 194 km² (75 sq. miles) including Aden to Britain. The following January Royal Marines occupy the territory and establish a protectorate.
1869 Suez Canal opens
1918 The Ottoman empire collapses and northern Yemen gains independence as the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen
1937 Aden becomes the Colony of Aden; the Aden Protectorate expands to include Hadhramaut and surrounds.
1962 Arab nationalists depose King Muhammad al-Badr and establish the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). Civil war ensues in north Yemen.
1963 Federation of South Arabia established; independence struggle begins.
1967 Suez Crisis. Britain withdrawal leads to independent People's Republic of South Yemen.
1969 People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) established.
1970 Saudi Arabia recognizes YAR.
1972 Plan to unify the north and south are in agreed at a meeting in Cairo.
1979 Unification discussions stall when it is discovered that PDRY is arming left-wing rebels in YAR. Arab League intervention prevents War.
1989 Ali Abdullah Saleh and Ali Salim al-Baidh agree a unification deal.
1990 The Republic of Yemen is founded with Sana'a as its capital.
1993 April: Parliamentary elections; August: Al-Beidh withdraws from government.
1994 South secession leads to civil war.

Image © iStockphoto

1995 Yemen and Eritrea clash over disputed island territory.
2000 Suicide bombers attack the USS Cole in Aden harbour. Al Qaeda later claims responsibility. Ten suspects escape from custody in Aden in 2003.
2002 Having sought closer security ties with the US the previous year, in February Yemen expels over 100 Islamic scholars of various nationalities in a crackdown on suspected Al Qaeda supporters. In October, suspected Al Qaeda members bomb the supertanker Limburg off the Yemeni coast.
2004 A Shi'ite uprising in Sa'dah Governorate in Yemen's north west begins.
2009 Saudi and Yemeni branches of Al Qaeda announce they have formed AQAP.
2010 A truce with rebels in Sa'dah lasts 6 months before a new outbreak of fighting.
2011 January Street protests in Sana'a follow similar protests in Tunisia; March: President Saleh declares a state of emergency; 3 June: assassination attempt; July 7 Saleh addresses Yemen on state television from Saudi Arabia; August 7: Saleh leaves hospital, remains in Saudi Arabia.

Yemeni anti-government protesters paint a wall with the slogan 'People want to build a new Yemen' during a demonstration in Sanaa on August 12, 2011

Image © iStockphoto

Yemen's temperate climate and strategic location at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula have ensured the territory's importance to a succession of kingdoms and empires. Islam came to Yemen during Muhammad's lifetime and Yemen came under Ottoman rule from the early 16th century. From the 17th century the Ottomans controlled only the coastal areas while the Zaydiyyah Imamate and various tribal rulers controlled the interior. During the 19th century British interests in India and Suez prompted the British East India Company to occupy the Port of Aden and later declare Aden and surrounds a British protectorate.

North and South Yemen

Following the collapse of the Ottoman empire in 1918, Imam Yahya established the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen under Zaydiyyah authority with its capital in the ancient city of Sana'a. Expansion north was checked by Saudi forces; the present day border with Saudi Arabia was established in 1934. In the south, Yemeni forces occasionally clashed with the British too. In 1962 Arab nationalists led by Abdullah al-Sallal staged a coup d'etat against newly crowned King Muhammad al-Badr, seized Sana'a, and established the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). The ensuing civil war pitted republican forces supported by the Egypt against royalist forces backed by Saudi Arabia and Jordan. The war dragged on for several years until an Egyptian-Saudi Arabian deal cut off external support for both republican and royalist forces. A ceasefire was agreed following Saudi recognition of the republic in 1970.

The withdrawal of Ottoman authority allowed Britain to consolidate its influence in the south by concluding treaties with local rules in the Hadhramaut region east of Aden. Taken together, these agreements established the Aden Protectorate over what became South Yemen. Aden became the Colony of Aden, and was administered separately from the Protectorate. In 1963 Aden colony and the Aden Protectorate were joined to form the Federation of South Arabia, while states that declined to join the federation, mainly in Hadhramaut, formed the Protectorate of South Arabia. These further consolidations of British rule, at a time when the rest of the British empire was gaining independence, prompted an armed independence struggle led by the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY) and the National Liberation Front (NLF). Ultimately, however, it was the 1967 Suez Crisis that prompted British withdrawal from Aden, leading to independence for the People's Republic of South Yemen under NLF control. Two years on, a Marxist NLF splinter gained power, amalgamated political parties into the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP; the only legal party), established the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), and fostered ties with the Soviet Union, People's Republic of China, Cuba, East Germany, and Palestinian groups.

Discussions on a unification plan continued intermittently throughout the 1970s, although relations were often strained. However, oil exploration in the border region spurred interest in closer cooperation and produced a range of agreements foreshadowing unification. In 1989 Ali Abdullah Saleh of the north and Ali Salim al-Beidh of the south revived a 1981 draft constitution and agreed a plan providing for a demilitarised border and easier passage between north and south.

Unification and Civil War

The unified Republic of Yemen was established in May 1990, with Saleh as Head of State, al-Beidh as Head of Government, and the capital in Sana'a. A new constitution was adopted following a national referendum, and guaranteed a range of basic human rights and free elections within a multiparty political system. In parliamentary elections in 1993, the General People's Congress won 143 seats of 301 and their coalition partner, the Yemeni Socialist Party, 69 seats. However, political infighting and southern grievances against northern domination of the coalition prompted al-Beidh to withdraw from Sana'a to Aden. The following year the south seceded leading to a three-month civil war that ended when northern forces entered Aden and southern commanders fled into exile. The war led to several constitutional reforms, including popular election of the president. Yemen's first direct presidential elections were held in 1999 and Saleh was elected to a 5-year term. Further constitutional amendments extended the terms of office both of the president (7 years) and parliamentarians (6 years), and created a bicameral legislature consisting of a directly elected 301-seat House of Representatives and a 11-member Shura Council appointed by the president.

Sa'dah War

In 2004, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, then leader of the Shiite Zaidiyyah sect, led an uprising that has continued intermittently since. Centered mainly in Sa'dah Governorate in Yemen's north-west, Houthis, as the rebels have become known, complain of neglect by the government in Sana'a and inter-

Key Facts

Image © iStockphoto

Capital: Sana'a
Independence: 1918 (north), 1967 (south)
Government: Republic
State President: Ali Abdullah Saleh
Prime Minister: Ali Muhammad Mujawar

GEOGRAPHY
Area: 527,968 sq km (203,850 sq miles)
Border Countries: Oman, Saudi Arabia
Terrain: temperate coastal plain, rugged mountains, hot desert interior
Water: Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea

PEOPLE
Population: 24,255,928 (2010)
Ethnic Groups: Arab 92.8%, Somali 3.7%, black 1.1%, Indo-Pakistani 1%, other 1.4%
Religions: Muslim 98.9% (of which Shaf'i [Sunni] 58% and Zaydi [Shi'a] 42%), Hindu 0.7%, Christian 0.2%, other 0.2%
Languages: Arabic, English, Hindi, Somali

ECONOMY
GDP (per capita): $1,087 (2010 est.)
Exports: crude oil, coffee, dried and salted fish, liquefied natural gas
Currency: 9.5 million barrel per day
Inflation: 12.2% (2010 est.)
Unemployment: 15% (2008)

ference by Sunni Wahhabis across the border in Saudi Arabia. Sunni-majority Yemen in turn alleges Iranian support for the rebels. Sporadic outbreaks of violence have continued for several months every few years, and have resulted in several thousand dead on both sides. Several ceasefires and truces have ultimately failed to end the conflict.

AQAP

In 2000 suicide bombers severely damaged the USS Cole in Aden harbour. Al Qaeda subsequently claimed responsibility for the attack, in which 17 sailors were killed and 39 injured. It was the first significant terrorist undertaking by an Al Qaeda affiliate in the Arabian Peninsula and indicated a new front in international counter-terrorism efforts. Two years later a supertanker was attacked off the Yemeni coast. That attack led to a suspension of international shipping to the Gulf of Aden and cost Yemen $3.8 million per month in lost port revenues. Yemen responded by signaling its willingness to be a partner in the US-led 'war on terror', expelling dozens of Al Qaeda suspects and allowing, or at least ignoring, US drone attacks within its borders. While the Yemeni government's perceived willingness to partner with US interests continues to draw domestic criticism, since 2000 Al Qaeda members and supporters have targeted foreign tourists, international business interests, and embassies within Yemen with relentless frequency. In 2009 Saudi and Yemeni branches of Al Qaeda announced the formation of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The announcement was followed by a significant increase in scale and scope of terrorist plots launched from Yemen, including the Dec 2009 attempt to down a passenger plane over Detroit, USA, and the discovery in October 2010 of explosives originating in Yemen packaged in US-bound cargo.

2011 Uprising

Street protests in Sana'a in January 2011 followed similar protests in Tunisia. From January through March, tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets in cities across Yemen, with scores killed and several hundred injured by security forces and pro-government militia. Following an incident in March in which 45 protesters were shot dead in Sana'a, President Saleh declared a state of emergency. Amid escalating violence, Gulf Co-operation Council-sponsored talks aimed at facilitating Saleh's exit collapsed on several occasions after Saleh repeatedly reneged on promises to step aside. On 3 June, a bomb detonated at a mosque within the presidential palace, severely injuring Salah, Prime-Minister Ali Muhammad Mujawar and Speaker Yahya al-Raiee, along with several other government leaders. Several soldiers and guards were killed and Saleh was evacuated to Saudi Arabia for treatment. Appearing on Yemeni television in early July, his first public appearance since the assassination attempt, the extent of Saleh's injuries were apparent in his severely burned face and heavily bandaged arms. Calling for dialogue, Saleh welcomed a power-sharing arrangement, but insisted this should be "within the framework of the constitution and in the framework of the law". Despite pressure from Saudi Arabia and the US to relinquish power, Saleh has insisted he will return to Yemen, although he has not done so since his release from hospital on 7 August. Yemen has been relatively calm in Saleh's absence, and his return is likely to prompt renewed protest. At the same time, there is growing regional and international concern that the ongoing political vacuum will allow AQAP to further consolidate its power and operational capacity.

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh (R) waving with Prime Minister Ali Mohammed Mujawar (C) standing next to him during a rally in Sanaa on April 29, 2011

Image © Getty Images

Divide & Conquer

In Libya, two events have hinted at the West's increasing realization that they miscalculated a number of factors when they decided to intervene militarily.

Paula Mejia

The international community has been taking strategic decisions to cut their losses in Libya. As NATO operations have yet to deliver tangible results in bringing about an end to the civil war in the country, two events have hinted to the West's increasing realization that they miscalculated a number of factors when they decided to intervene militarily.

For one, the UK, which was adamant about forcing Qadhafi to leave Libya, has come around to France's point of view which does not consider that a necessary precondition for a negotiated peace. Why the change of mind?

Although the UK has not stated so officially, their decision points to a greater understanding of longstanding political divisions within Libya which Qadhafi has exploited to remain in power. Namely, the impact tribes have in maintaining loyalty to the regime. Qadhafi, whose own ascent to power made him especially aware of the danger unified militaries could pose to less than beloved leaders, organized the country's security forces in such a way that tribes would be able to undermine any other political identity.

In doing so he made sure that certain tribes benefited greatly from his rule. It is mainly amongst this group that Qadhafi has been able to recruit supporters since uprisings in the country began. Although claims have been made that some supporters are obliged to join his defense forces, a significant number among them understand that if Qadhafi goes, so will the system they benefited from. More importantly, because certain tribes are so strongly linked with his regime, even those that are less adamant in their support fear his departure will lead to reprisals against them. Recent analyses on Libya have pointed to the possibility that killing Qadhafi, or forcing his departure will leave loyalist force rudder less and make peace no more likely.

In addition to factors within the Qadhafi camp, disorganization and divisions amongst the rebels has doubled concerns over the future of an anti-regime dominated Libya. Rebel forces, which hail from a multiple backgrounds and include defectors from Qadhafi's regime, have been weakened by rivalries and mistrust, two remnants of Qadhafi's ability to rule the country through his divide and conquer strategy. This has been a source of great concern to a number of countries supporting the rebels who worry that after the war is over, these divisions will lead to continued violence and instability.

If there was ever any lack of evidence that this was a legitimate concern, such allegations were disproved with the news that a number of rebels had killed General Abdel Fateh Younes, the leader of their military forces.

Younes had been recalled from the eastern front in Berga to Benghazi to respond to accusations that he was secretly negotiating with Qadhafi. Younes, had been a controversial figure within the TNC, as many amongst the anti-Qadhafi forces doubted his loyalty. These suspicions were raised further when in April, one of Qadhafi's daughters insinuated he was still loyal to the regime.

As The Economist pointed out, Younes' death "raises a number of tricky questions for the international community and the TNC." First it is unclear whether or not Younes had been negotiating with Qadhafi, and if so, whether he had done so out of his own accord, or whether there exists within the TNC divisions over how to proceed in negotiations with Qadhafi. These questions become increasingly pertinent if one recalls that the political leadership of the TNC has contradicted itself in regards to the possibility of allowing Qadhafi to stay in the country.

Younes' certainly death points to a number of important divisions within the TNC, which will both have an impact on future negotiations, and perhaps more importantly on the prospects for a stable Libya in the future.

Democratic Regime Change

In the face of the current political and military stalemate in Libya, it is at least worth it to reflect on an apparently crazy idea suggested repeatedly by the Qadhafi regime: to hold an election in which Qadhafi would run, after the two parts agree on a permanent ceasefire.

Manuel Almeida

When hearing the words "regime change," one would most likely think of the disastrous invasion of Iraq in 2003, or more generally of foreign armies trying to topple a given leader, probably a tyrant, through violent means. On the end of the spectrum of the least likely ideas that one would relate with the almost inevitable violent nature of regime change is free, fair, democratically held-elections. If the idea of elections has anything to do with regime change, that is probably after the regime has changed, and when the foreign invaders collaborate with the local opposition to the former tyrant to build a new political order, under a new leadership.

Regardless of the extent to which NATO's Libyan intervention is humanitarian—it did save lives, on the rebels' side at least—it is undeniable that the underlying goal of the allies is to get rid of Qadhafi, or in other words, to change the regime. But what if, in the face of the intervention's current stalemate, NATO allies introduce a new modality of this century-old activity of tyrant-toppling, called "democratic regime change?"

Surprisingly, or perhaps not that so if seen as a strategy to buy time or as one more crazy idea to add to the long list of Qadhafi's delusions, this suggestion of overthrowing the Libyan regime democratically comes from some of the key figures of the regime itself. Indeed, Saif Al-Islam said his father would be ready to step aside if he lost the election, although he would not accept to go into exile. Likewise, Abdul Ati Al-Obeidi, Libya's foreign minister, declared that the regime was ready to hold free elections, supervised by the United Nations, within six months of the end of the conflict.

Surely, it is hard to conceive of a scenario where the US, France, or Britain would trust Qadhafi's word. Although it is not possible to determine the rebels' view on the issue, it seems plausible to assume that the Libyan rebels would have major problems in even considering the possibility of holding elections to which Qadhafi would also run. This would confer a certain idea of legitimacy to the Qadhafi regime, one that is opposed as much by the rebels as by the NATO alliance or the majority of the countries in the region.

Surprisingly, or perhaps not that so if seen as a strategy to buy time or as one more crazy idea to add to the long list of Qadhafi's delusions, this suggestion of overthrowing the Libyan regime democratically comes from some of the key figures of the regime itself

Image © Getty Images

The logistical task of organizing an election amidst such a climate of tension is quite a challenge. But it has been done before, in Afghanistan and in Iraq, to name two recent examples. Harder than holding the election is to guarantee a clean result. If all this was achieved, there is also the issue of how well Qadhafi would do in an election. Even if his ability to pay off people to support him remained—despite all the financial pressure that is being exerted to freeze all his assets, everything indicates that Qadhafi would lose, particularly if the opposition was able to gather behind a consensual candidate. Finally, there would be no guarantees that Qadhafi and those who still support him would accept the result peacefully and simply step aside.

To oppose to the long list of reasons why holding an election soon and with Qadhafi should never even be considered, an agreement between the regime and the rebels would press pause on the conflict and it would save lives. An election that includes Qadhafi would also counter the old but still alive and widespread idea in the Arab world that many governments are simply Western-puppet regimes. Many believe this was the case with Mubarak in Egypt or Ben Ali in Tunisia, or still is with Karzai in Afghanistan for example.

As crazy as it sounds given all the obstacles and challenges to hold an election in which Qadhafi (or one of his sons) would run, the current stalemate in the ground and the increasing intervention fatigue among NATO allies leaves some room to at least reflect on the idea. The feeling that Qadhafi's rule is approaching its end has been looming ever since NATO's intervention began, and yet despite the public optimist displayed by leaders of NATO countries, reports from the ground show a divided country, even if unevenly so.

Western Decline in the Age of Islamic Awakening

Who would have thought that a mere two decades after the West won the Cold War, the US would sustain an attack on the scale of September 11, suffer from a crippling, self-inflicted financial crisis and withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan? So what place for political Islam in the new New World Order?

Iason Athanasiadis

The US is pulling its armies out of Afghanistan and Iraq. The age of neoconservative nation-building and petty dynastic rivalries between the Houses of Bush and Hussein proved unsustainable in the age of fiscal collapse.

Forced by the financial crisis into responsibility, the West got involved in Libya in what started with the invocation of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine but might actually be a classic war over resources. Gold, that safe haven of last recourse, is breaking successive all-time records. The knot reached the comb, as the Greek saying goes. Priorities are reshaped and conflicts motivated by White Man's Burden sentiments ditched in favor of survival and the drive to re-achieve relevance.

Reinvigorated by Western folly, Iran is flexing its muscles. In the past year, it ramped up attacks against US troops in southern Iraq and held a security conference in Tehran where the Afghan and Pakistani presidents strategized with Iranian officials on the post-American regional landscape. The cherry on the top (or knife twisted in American guts) was a top military official's declaration that this the Century of Islamic Awakening and prediction that the Arab uprisings are enabling a number of countries alongside Egypt and Yemen to regain religious sovereignty in the coming years. The Iranians visualize that a generation of repressed Islamists will regain power after years of being repressed by secular, pro-Western militaries.

Islamic Iran's leadership envisages this awakening (the Arabic word for it, sahwa, is being bandied by Arab revolutionaries) as coming about through the Muslim bloc's domination of energy resources and strategic passages.

"Seventy percent of the world's fossil fuel reserve is under the feet of the soldiers of the Supreme Leadership and soon oil and gas fields belonging to Muslims, which is now in the hands of America, will fall into the hands of the people," said Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naghdi, the commander of the Bassij ideological militia. "That will be the time when all those overlords will have sanctions put on them."

The Muslim world sanctioning the West? Coming from sanction-slammed Tehran, this is the kind of turning-of-the-tables that appeals to the Persian literary soul. Iran and neighbors Iraq and Afghanistan suffered under Western sanctions. Of the three sanctioned regimes, Tehran's is the last one still standing. And it plans not just to remain relevant but become dominant again.

"About 80 percent of world trade is done through sea voyage and cargo fleets and these cargo fleets should pass through the world's strategic straits," said Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi. "Meantime, Islamic countries are located on both sides of these strategic bottlenecks which we call 'compulsory passages'. Muslim states can come in control of the world economy."

Image © Iason Athanasiadis for *The Majalla*

Such talk is dismissed as merely hopeful rhetoric in Western capitals where Muslim disharmony is ridiculed with a measure of relief. But the 1973 oil embargo, when Egypt and Syria coordinatedly attacked Israel, then a coalition of oil producers punished America with an oil embargo for resupplying Tel Aviv, are proof positive that a coherent Muslim bloc can come close to holding the West to ransom.

In the Muslim East Mediterranean, post-Kemalist Turkey held its coming-out party last week. The country's neo-Ottoman government held a glittering diplomatic meeting in the former imperial capital whose participants unilaterally recognized the Libyan rebels as the country's legitimate government. In doing so, Turkey conclusively retired its zero problems foreign policy and ushered in a new unilateral era that, although multilateral and consultative, has just endorsed regime change.

But nowhere is the West's demise more on show than in Kabul, where NATO is withdrawing to an accompaniment of midsummer dust storms conjuring up ghostly, tree-whipped midafternoons. A visitor who returned from commiserating with the President over his half-brother's assassination described a presidential palace sunk in grief where top officials spoke in whispers. After claiming their most prominent scalp, the Taliban are now thought to be everywhere, watching, waiting.

Postscript: Barely had I finished writing these words that news broke of the audacious assassination inside Kabul of Jan Mohammad Khan, a warlord, governor and top Karzai adviser on tribal affairs. "There'll be assassinations non-stop from now on," a friend predicted. "The Taliban want to frighten Karzai into thinking that he's next and make him even more paranoid than he already is." I put the phone down, listened to the sound of the wind ruffling Kabul's trees and wondered if it had been enough to muffle the crack of the gunshots that killed Jan Mohammad Khan.

Something Old, Something New

Ancient Islamic traditions set in a contemporary cultural age

From 22 July, the UK's Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum will hold the Jameel Prize, an exhibition promoting contemporary Arab artists who are inspired by ancient Islamic traditions of art practice. Artists like Iranian Monir Farmanfarmaian and Algerian-born Rachid Koraichi seek to convey the philosophy and daily life of a modern existence, while also incorporating some of the artistic traditions of their Middle Eastern origins.

Amy Assad

Noor Ali Chagani
Life Line, 2010
Terracotta bricks, nylon wires

The power of art to access and reflect hidden worlds is enduring. For evidence in these current times one need only look at the intriguing, cliché-defying work produced by contemporary Islamic artists—the group who commanded a "vigorous" presence at this year's Venice Biennale festival. Many of these artists are young members of a new, more open generation that is somewhat freer from the many ideological boundaries that restricted their parents and grandparents. Now the progressive contemporary art of the Middle East is making its way into the Arab street, spilling over into vibrant, sometimes daring political images cast across its walls. The western-born practice of graffiti art is becoming increasingly popular in the Arab world, and in turn it is gaining increased recognition—a development naturally encouraged by the enthusiasm and socio-cultural changes brought on by the Arab Spring.

From 22July, the UK's Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum will hold the Jameel Prize, an exhibition promoting contemporary Arab artists who are inspired by ancient Islamic traditions of art practice—an exhibition that was originally created after the redesign and redisplay of the V&A's Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art in July 2006. Islamic art used to be, and often still is, solely associated with the ancient disciplines of Islamic calligraphy and painting techniques. Many contemporary Arab artists, however, seek to convey the philosophy and daily life of a modern existence, while also incorporating some of the artistic traditions of their Middle Eastern origins. In the contemporary Islamic art world, the calligraphic script is still often adopted, as are various other traditional methods and materials, but is manipulated to create pieces that depict modern ideology. In such pieces, the Arabic script often works not only as text to be read and understood but also as a visual tool to captivate and provoke emotional responses, alluding both to timeless issues and the present world around us.

The artists who have been shortlisted for the Jameel Prize are inspired by the rich variety of Islamic art traditions. They come from a wide generational spread, and many have both Middle Eastern and western world experiences. This fusion of cultural identity and awareness not only gives their work an interesting East-West duality, but also helps to stamp out the notion that Middle Eastern and western art processes might be incompatible. The art of these contemporary Islamic artists is varied. Some utilize Arabic script, some don't. Some have religious or political undertones while others serve to remind us that the world of high politics can have relatively little impact on the routine of day-to-day being. As V&A director Mark Jones acknowledged, "The works show how complex and eloquent the art and design inspired by this tradition has become."

The 10 artists on the Jameel Prize shortlist have all exhibited internationally, and their biographies are as varied as their work would suggest. The list, which includes Algerian Rachid Koraichi, Aisha Khalid from Pakistan, and Iranian Monir Farmanfarmaian, had to be whittled down from almost 200 nominations from across the globe. As the more seasoned member of the group and with a career spanning over five decades, 84-year-old Iranian-born Farmanfarmaian does not appear to have slowed down in productivity in her "constant quest for the new." Although Farmanfarmaian spent many years in New York where she had her formal training, her work is entrenched in the spirit of Iranian culture and tradition, both in style and flourish. Her art production, which is influenced by Iranian vernacular architecture and modernist mirror work, once came against a disappointing setback when her collections were confiscated during the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

Algerian-born artist, Rachid Koraichi, comes from a traditional Sufi family and lives and works between Tunisia and France. He is a devout follower of the mystical elements of

Rachid Koraichi
The Invisible Masters, 2008
Cotton Applique

Soody Sharifi
Fashion Week, 2010
Digital collage

Sufi practice. His work, which utilizes a diverse range of medium including ceramics, metals, and painted silk, is deeply reminiscent of his multicultural heritage, the aesthetics of which are often inspired by signs—both tangible and imaginary. Koraichi is considered to be a truly cosmopolitan artist with a globally influenced view, and uses in his art calligraphy from a multitude of different languages and cultures.

Aisha Khalid is of a younger generation of prominent Pakistani artists, with a leading reputation in both her home country as well as internationally. She lives and works in Lahore, Pakistan, and her art focuses on the skilled tradition of Mughul miniature painting. However, she injects into this practice a contemporary subject matter and utilizes diverse media, ranging from miniature paper-based paintings to film. As she asserts, there is a strong presence in her artwork of her life and personal narrative as well as socio-political commentary, including the female condition that exists in both the Middle East and the western world.

The Jameel Prize contender list also includes artists Bita Ghezelayagh, Babak Golkar, Hazem El-Mestikawy, Hayv Kahraman, Soody Sharifi, Noor Ali Chagani and Hadieh Shafie, and the winner will be announced in September 2011. However, the bright and brilliant future of contemporary Islamic art looks set to be ongoing. It appears that a new wave of expression combined with the old traditions of the Arab world, as well as an understanding and appreciation of western culture, have both inspired and brought together Middle Eastern artists of an old and a new generation, under an umbrella of a new cultural awareness and continuous, innovative, boundary-breaking art processes.

Escaping the Tribe

The Origins of Political Order: From Pre-Human Times to the French Revolution
by Francis Fukuyama
Profile Books Ltd

In his new expansive book, The Origins of Political Order, Francis Fukuyama tells the genesis story of modern political structures. In his account of man's movement away from traditional social order, Fukuyama argues that man, in the absence of greater political structure, will organize himself in favor of genetic relationships, whereby favoritism for family and conflict against others prevails. In order to evolve, society must "de-patrimonialize," or remove kinship from politics.

Francis Fukuyama famously marked in 1992 a grand political milestone with the publication of his book, The End of History three years after his infamous essay of the same name. In it, he pronounced that human evolution is experiencing "not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the endpoint of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." It was a statement that caused waves in political discourse that still travel today. His newest contribution, The Origins of Political Order: From Pre-Human Times to the French Revolution, examines how we got there.

Outside of his writing, he has in recent years been best known for his conspicuous shift away from the American neo-conservative movement, placing himself firmly among a growing number of political thinkers disillusioned by the failures of modern American conservative values to evade two crushing wars and a financial crisis.

The Origins of Political Order is a two-volume project in which the newly available first volume attempts to begin with pre-historic man and follows this development all the way to the French Revolution. He will attempt in the second volume to look at political development all the way up to current debates.

To call the book sweeping would not be specific enough. Fukuyama indeed begins in pre-historic times but only briefly, really beginning with chimpanzees and moving quickly to early society. He makes the case that humans are beings that have never lived in isolation, and seek to organize in bands (when we were hunter-gatherers) and tribes when we evolved into agricultural societies.

Fukuyama flies through the most famous western theories of order and dismisses them all: Hobbes, Rousseau and others, finally settling on Aristotle's idea that the nature of man is that of a political animal.

From this starting point of human nature he begins to make the case for kinship as the critical motivator of social relationships, and argues that man, in the absence of greater political structure, will organize himself in favor of genetic relationships. To be sure, the trouble, according to Fukuyama, of early societies was that the kinship groups generated what he calls "the tyranny of cousins," which meant favoritism for family and conflict against others. The key, Fukuyama asserts, is the "de-patrimonialization" of society—getting kinship out of politics.

The advent of Greek democracy was an attempt to unwind these too-tight groups, and allow for tribes built on member "citizens," and leaders elected by political values and not kin bonds. However, strong political structures are insufficient in developing strong states.

REPORT

The Exception

Transfers of Guantánamo Detainees to Yemen: Policy Continuity Between Administrations
by Benjamin Wittes, Matthew Waxman and Robert Chesney
Brookings Institute, 15 June 2011

In a briefing paper to the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Benjamin Wittes, Matthew Waxman and Robert Chesney examine the problem of the transfers of Yemeni detainees from Guantanamo Bay, and argue that Yemen's exceptional circumstances should not impede the continued transfer of detainees from other locations.

Guantanamo Bay has been the central prison for suspects considered unlawful enemy combatants in the "war on terror," a campaign waged by President Bush after 9/11. What started as an experiment after the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon has become an enduring American institution—and institution which attracts ongoing criticism and condemnation. Despite that Obama ordered Guantanamo closed immediately after entering the White House, the facility remains open as his first terms draws to an end.

Yemen has become a particularly intractable problem, especially after the attempted bombing of an airplane bound for Detroit in December 2009. This was a plot believed to have been developed by an affiliate of Al-Qaeda based in Yemen. The administration subsequently halted transfers to Yemen, which is among the countries contributing the largest number of detainees to Guantanamo. The problem of Yemen has resisted all efforts by both this and the last administration to reduce the Guantanamo population, worryingly making Guantanamo itself somewhat of a Yemeni problem.

Two of the report's authors have taken part in policymaking during both the Bush and Obama administrations. Waxman served as deputy assistant secretary of Defence for Detainee Affairs and as a senior State Department official advising on detainee issues, and Chesney has served with the administration's Detention Policy Task Force. The close association with policymaking is felt throughout the paper, as it focuses exclusively on how the US government has handled detainee transfers, rather than a discussion of the ethical issues surrounding the existence of Guantanamo itself. This is largely a strength of the paper, as such a discussion has been frequent over recent years, but rarely with concrete policy suggestions.

What to do with Guantánamo's large population of Yemeni detainees has proven exceptionally difficult for the Bush and the Obama administrations alike, both of which have treated the issue with great caution, the authors argue.

Transfers to Yemen are particularly problematic because the country has long been on the verge of state failure. Saudi Arabia, where many detainees come from,

Fukuyama claims the purpose of this book is to fill in the gaps of the traditional political historical narrative, which has some amnesia over the development of what comes after these early forms of social organization. He asserts that three institutions are necessary for strong states: state, rule of law and accountable government, which, when established, result in states resembling Denmark, the end of the democracy evolutionary road. Meanwhile, weakness in the development of one of these pillars results in states like China, closed autocracies.

To make his case, Fukuyama applies his previously used quick dismissal method to explain history here. He soars through dynastic history and settles on war with neighbors as the reason behind China's strong centralized government. Historical specialists may have questions here about the details he leaps over, and similarly, the political specialist may have questions about why the comparatively similar early European societies broke into separate entities (Germany, France, Hungary) while China's pluralist society remained unified.

In the Arabian Peninsula, Fukuyama inserts "religion" where war was applied to China, and gives his readers a brisk explanation of how religion, led by the Prophet Mohammed, created large and strong social organization—so strong, in fact, that it created inertia still evident in modern Arab states.

What is most problematic about this argument is its wholesale exclusion of the role of large complex tribes, such as Al-Dulaimi, in effective state organization. The Al-Dulaimi, which count 7 million members and largely occupy southern Iraq, played an enormous role in stabilizing the Anbar province against the advance of Al-Qaeda, while the elaborate United States military enterprise struggled to do so. Their sheikh, Ali Hatam Al-Dulaimi, mobilized his community militias, known as the Sunni Sahwat, nationwide, to push out Al-Qaeda in a little over a month in 2007. The United States subsequently rushed to absorb their organization into the new Iraqi army and police, resulting in the dramatic security improvements that were evident by 2008. Their continued co-operation with the new Iraqi government is critical to the stability of the state.

In many ways, Fukuyama claims he is attempting to fill in the gaps in the Anglo-American narrative, by paying attention to areas of the world where kinship, a staple of his political theory, had less traction, namely, areas such as China where there were lower levels of kinship relations exhibited in political life, or the Arabian Peninsula where agriculture was not the impetus for tribe formation. However, he fails to do so.

Fukuyama does not gain much ground in including political narratives that diverge from the commonly known Euro-centric one. At best he is able to prove that if you study a larger part of the world using a framework that searches for signs of western liberal democratic practices, you will find it. As expansive as his study is, it could still benefit from a more detailed historical account.

The absence of historical detail makes his arguments vulnerable to easy criticism, and his attempts to compensate make the political analysis sections of the book harder to follow. His explanations give more of an impression of the role of luck than democratic determinism, and it entirely ignores the effects of capitalism and colonialism on social formation, convergence and movement.

The second volume deals with the period in which the West developed in leaps and bounds in material wealth, but does not promise to offer much more than what Fukuyama has already described in The End of History and The Last Man. Indeed, it might be proof that political theorists like the states they study when heavily guided by their ideological ancestors and kin (Huntington and Bloom) can also at times fall prey to idea inertia and may succumb to getting stuck in a theory development rut.

has a strong central government, with which the United States has managed the threat posed by transferred detainees with relative ease. Yemen, on the other hand, lacks Saudi Arabia's policy instruments and institutional resources in dealing with transferred detainees. Furthermore, repeated jailbreaks by militants and occasional government releases of high-profile Al-Qaeda prisoners has eroded US confidence in Yemen's capacity and will to deal with the detainees. This situation has only been worsened by the current crisis, with which Yemen's credentials as a negotiating partner has significantly worsened. Afghanistan, which has also contributed a large number of detainees to the base, is similarly if not more unstable, but the US has a large presence in this country, improving the capacity to handle returned detainees. While resettlement in a third country might seem like a viable option, it is likely that most Yemeni detainees, in the absence of prosecution in Yemen, would return to their home country—and most third countries would not prevent them from doing so.

Hence, while the Bush and Obama administrations have proclaimed very different attitudes to the existence of Guantanamo, their approaches to the handling of Yemeni detainees have been "remarkably similar and consistent." This shared approach has been characterised by great hesitancy about releasing large numbers of detainees to a country with so little control over its own affairs. According to the report, the number of detainees transferred to Yemen is dramatically lower that those transferred to Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia: The Bush administration transferred only 14 detainees to Yemen between March of 2004 and November of 2008. The Obama administration, meanwhile, has transferred only eight detainees to Yemen, two of whom it transferred under court order.

While the efforts to remove Yemeni detainees were intensive around the time Obama took office, these efforts were completely halted with the 2009 Christmas bombing attempt. Now, with conditions in Yemen rapidly deteriorating, only court-ordered transfers and releases are likely for the foreseeable future. This is not because of legislative transfer restrictions, but because the executive branch is fully aware that the current environment does not permit repatriations of significant numbers of detainees.

However, the authors argue that there is an imminent risk that legislative transfer restrictions intended to prevent releases of Yemenis are impeding transfer efforts for detainees from countries that do not pose risks remotely comparable to those posed by Yemen. As argued above, the executive branch is fully aware of the dangers surrounding Yemeni detainees, and this very specific problem should thus not affect the wider opportunities for resettling Guantanamo detainees. As argued by the authors, the situation faced by Yemeni detainees, many of whom may not pose a significant individual threat to the US, is "regrettable." Regardless, this situation needs not affect the rest of the population at Guantanamo, and for it to do so is a—more than regrettable—mistake.

The Decline of Journalism

Adel Al-Toraifi

In 1946, George Orwell wrote an essay entitled "The Decline of the English Murder", that described a typical English Sunday evening at home by warmth of the stove, the wife asleep in an armchair, the children outside for a walk and the father, quietly smoking his pipe whilst browsing through "The News of the World", a newspaper full of investigative reports and news, alongside gossip and social scandals. The warm fire and smoky atmosphere of the scene are perfect for when the father turns his attention to his favorite section of the paper, the "murder" stories.

Orwell goes on to examine how the stories of murder in the English press before the Second World War were full of emotion and human details, profound in their emotional stock. Behind every murder was a story of contrasting emotions, not merely cold crime. Some critics commented on the article in later years, noting that Orwell was not simply lamenting the demise of newspaper murder stories but was mourning the state of the press. For Orwell, the press had lost its compass and no longer painted a picture of the story behind the news.

This month that same paper of Orwell's essay, "The News of the World", closed after 168 years in circulation. It was the end result of a moral scandal that rocked British society and the journalism industry. The most read and widely distributed newspaper in the United Kingdom had been spying on dozens of celebrities, and even ordinary citizens, with the number of cases reaching over 4,000. In the face of the crisis, the newspaper's publisher Rupert Murdoch – in an unprecedented step – decided to close it down. It was a move that surprised and highlighted the tension between the business aspect of journalism and the journalists. Ultimately the decision to close was the difficult last resort. The closure of the News of the World was not only due to the moral scandal, but because the newspaper "was no longer a cash cow", according to the veteran English journalist Ann Leslie.

For more than a decade the printed press has suffered a decline in distribution and advertising. In the beginning the magazines were the worst affected, where satellite broadcasting and the internet became more favorable arenas to discuss the news. With the proliferation of mobile phones capable of taking photographs, thus creating a parallel media of citizen journalists, major press organizations felt compelled to offer their products free of charge to the public, who were now spending more time on social networking sites on the internet, and away from traditional media.

These are extremely tough days not only for the print media, but also for the online press, where we find articles and subjects being transferred to hundreds of other websites without regards for copyright, and at a high cost to the industry. Furthermore, some people – especially bloggers – now argue that the era of the traditional media is close to extinction, as the reader no longer accepts the control and restrictions imposed upon him by the directors of media institutions and their editors, rather they want the press not to be subject to the tastes and views of the publisher or editor.

Larry Kilman of the World Association of Newspapers (WANIFRA) says that the crisis of newspapers around the world is "not a question of audience, but a question of income". There are of course those who disagree with that, believing that the press is not only threatened commercially, but the news industry itself is being challenged by millions on the internet who can produce news items themselves. The man who first exposed the story of the assassination of Osama bin Laden was an ordinary individual who broadcasted the news via Twitter, even before the media realized the truth of what had happened. And the results are clear, print and television have shrunk by 30 percent since 2000 according to Pew Research Centers.

On the other hand, practicing journalists argue that the media, in its traditional form, has professional rules and responsibilities which do not exist in alternative media are frequently not much more than a repetition or re-hash of what was first published or broadcasted in the traditional media. Consider the story of the man who posed online as a Syrian lesbian, arrested during the recent oppression against the popular uprising in Syria. His deception reminded many of the need for investigation integrity in reporting.

In their important book "The Life and Death of American Journalism" (2010), Robert McChesney and John Nichols try to look past the news story of the "death of journalism" and counter that when television first emerged many thought it would replace reading. But the fact remains that the free written word still holds strong and the ever-changing tastes of consumers threaten sustainability across the board. Television series are challenged by cheaper "reality" television, social networking sites such as "MySpace" falter in the face of Facebook, and even Facebook and Twitter are vulnerable to new competitors and new ideas.

Orwell warned of a decline in public taste after the war, but what would he write these days, if he witnessed the rapid change towards modern means of communication? Journalism has in fact been killed twice over: firstly through the reluctance of readers to opt for sincere content, and secondly when journalism abandoned its composure and credibility, and drifted behind the volatile mood of the average reader, rather than targeting a serious readership.

With the proliferation of mobile phones capable of taking photographs, thus creating a parallel media of citizen journalists, major press organizations felt compelled to offer their products free of charge to the public

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- بانوراما مول - الشارع العام
إمتداد شارع التحلية مع التخصصي

جدّة
- عمارة الأمير منصور - شارع الملك عبد العزيز
- عمارة الملكة (الدور الأرضي)، شارع الملك عبد العزيز
- بجوار معرض قزاز - كورنيش الحمراء
- مركز التحلية التجاري - شارع التحلية
- رد سي مول - طريق الملك عبد العزيز - بوابه رقم١

مكّة المكرّمة
- مركز مكّة السكني التجاري
مقابل الحرم المكّي الشريف

المدينة المنورة
- أنوار المدينة مول