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A new hybrid in Arab politics: Unstable authoritarianism

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Unstable authoritarianism
A NEW HYBRID IN ARAB POLITICS

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INTRODUCTION

Four years after the Arab revolts of 2011, the majority of Arab regimes that embarked on a process of political change in 2011 have since readopted the authoritarian governance practices of the past. Simultaneously, those Arab countries that did not embark on the path of reform in 2011 have continued and in some cases increased their repressive governance practices. In the Gulf sub-region, the incumbent authoritarian monarchs and sheikhs continue to govern and rule without popular oversight and control. In the Levant, repression and exclusion continue to dominate regime practices, from Syria's persistent massacres of its internal opposition to Egypt's more recent repression of the Muslim Brotherhood and other challengers of the military regime. And in North Africa, the persistent inability of domestic, regional and international partners to find a comprehensive peace deal that includes the demobilization of the militias in Libya has continued to hamper the prospect of short-term regional stabilization.

In parallel with the restoration of authoritarianism, the repertoire of non-violent contentious politics that spread to the entire Arab region in the wake of the successful protests in Tunisia and Egypt in late 2010 and early 2011 has diminished significantly in size, scope, and its impact on political decision-making. Moreover, that process has been accompanied by a sharp increase in the scope and size of rebel politics and political violence. In a host of Arab countries, new contentious actors relying on violence and armed rebellion have replaced the peaceful street protesters who were at the forefront during the early days of the Arab Spring. From the anti-regime rebels who kill government officials in Egypt's Sinai to the militias in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen, the brutality of the latter is directed as much against one another as it is against the incumbent regimes.

As a potential driver for further consolidating the tendency towards the restoration authoritarianism and the militarization of contention, the past four years have seen the rise of regional great power competition to an unprecedented level. In particular Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey, but also Qatar, Egypt and Algeria, have embarked upon a protracted struggle to expand their influence over the post-revolt regional political order both by proxy and by direct military and economic intervention. Combined with the partial implosion of the national political situations in a row of Arab countries, the collapse of territorial integrity in several Arab states and the polarization of public opinion along ideological and sectarian divides all over the region, the prospect for short-term changes in governance and opposition practices are today limited.

These changes in the domestic and regional political order are not only the product of path-dependency and historical legacy in each of the Arab countries and in the region as a whole. They are also the unintended consequences of the changing US and western foreign policies in the Middle East and North Africa under President Obama. By rolling back its will to employ diplomatic, economic and military pressure on local stakeholders in the region, the US and its key Western allies share their part of the responsibility for the current restoration of authoritarianism led by regional great powers and domestic actors who have little appetite for democratic governance.

True, the Arab revolts did generate the first-ever liberal Arab democratic governance in Tunisia. As long as that continues to function and remains capable of regulating internal conflict, managing the potential spill-over of conflict in neighboring countries and steering free of excessive interference in its internal politics by autocratic regional great powers, it will confirm the fact that under the right structural conditions Arabs are indeed capable of changing the configuration of the political order and breaking away from the legacy of autocratic governance and militarized contention. It is also true that developments since 2011 in Algeria and Morocco, the two competitive great powers in North Africa and the Sahel, may actually provide the best current regional environment for the Tunisian exception to endure: over the past four years both of these sub-regional great powers have introduced minimal political reforms in order to avoid the mass politicization of local grievances. As such, their long-term trajectory does not exclude the possibility of gradual change away from the authoritarian model. At the same time, the unprecedented collapse of the security architecture in the region, including the unsolved and unpredictable nature of the Libyan conflict, hampers the prospect of seeing Tunisia develop into a model inspiring broader regional political development. The Gulf and the Levantine sub-regions, for their part, seem firmly set on a development towards protracted authoritarian governance based on the well-known dynamics of repression and rebellion.

The core claim of the present report is that the authoritarian governance that emerged in the Arab region in the post-colonial period still prevails four years after the Arab revolts. Yet, today's Arab authoritarianism differs from that prior to 2011: while the previous form of authoritarian governance provided a minimum of domestic and regional stability, the current configuration is correlated with unprecedented levels of mass contention, rebellion, state collapse and regional great-power competition. The report suggests this specific historical conjuncture in Middle Eastern and North African politics be conceptualized as "unstable authoritarianism". It also suggests that this new hybrid of Arab authoritarianism manifests itself in at least the following six correlative political trends:

- An increase in the Arab military's role in political decision-making
- An increase in the repression of opposition and challengers by Arab regimes
- An increased erosion of the capacity and territorial integrity of the Arab states
- A decrease in non-militant contentious politics and an increase in rebel politics and political violence in the Arab region
- An increase in the polarization of Arab public opinion along sectarian and ideological divides
- An increased level of Middle East and North Africa great-power competition through both proxy and direct intervention

These six trends should not be understood as template that fits all twenty-something Arab countries. While present political developments in a country like Egypt do indeed exposes traits of all six trends, most Arab countries will show only a few of them. And while one or two trends may emerge strongly in one country, they may only appear vaguely – if at all – in other Arab countries.

It must at the same time be stressed that none of the above trends lacks precedent in the Arab region. On the contrary, prior to the uprisings in 2011, Arab regimes had relied for decades on exclusion, repression and co-optation of the opposition as a way to assure their own survival. Equally, prior to 2011 contentious actors in the Arab region had for decades relied on rebellion and political violence to influence political decision-making. And regional great powers like Iran and Saudi Arabia fiercely competed for influence in countries like Lebanon and Palestine prior to the 2011 uprisings.

However, the present report argues that the significant novelty of the current situation is the level and correlation of these tendencies. Nowhere else in recent Arab history have these six trends manifested themselves so forcefully at the same time. Taken together, they provide the contours of a new and inherently unstable hybrid of the Arab authoritarian order. "Unstable authoritarianism" describes a specific conjuncture of the increase and decrease of pre-existing tendencies in Arab politics that have emerged at a precise historical moment and which, therefore, are likely to undergo further change in the future. It is a conjuncture, but a rather worrisome and unpredictable one.

The present report is organized in six sub-chapters, each of which treats one of these tendencies on the basis of one or two country-specific empirical cases. The selection of these illustrative cases reflects the following categorization of the trajectory of regime and opposition politics in each of the major Arab countries in the wake of the Arab revolts in 2011:

- Countries that experienced mass revolt against the incumbent regime and subsequent democratization. In early 2011, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen were candidates for this category. By late 2014, only Tunisia remained firmly rooted in this category.
- Countries that experienced mass revolt against the incumbent regime and subsequent authoritarian restoration. In early 2011, Bahrain and Syria were key cases of this. Today the category consists predominantly of Egypt and Bahrain.
- Countries that experienced mass revolt against the incumbent regime and subsequent partial state failure. In 2011 Libya appeared to be the most potent case in the category. By late 2014, Syria and possibly also Yemen had joined the category.
- Countries that did not experience anti-regime mass revolt, but did see slow regime-initiated reforms. Morocco, Jordan and Algeria are key cases in this category.
- Countries that did not experience anti-regime mass revolt, nor saw regime-initiated reforms. Saudi Arabia is a key case of this, with supporting cases in other Gulf countries like the UAE, Kuwait, and Oman.
- Countries that did not experience anti-regime revolt but whose increased disintegration during the period under scrutiny was provoked by factors preceding 2011. In this category we find in particular Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon.

The selection of these cases has been made in order to cover examples from each of these categories. However, a clear predominance has been accorded to countries like Egypt and Syria, which have experienced massive and visible transformations over the past four years to the detriment of countries whose domestic political scenes have passed relatively unaltered through the post-Arab Spring period, although countries like Algeria do figure regularly in the report. Ultimately, the above categorization has served as a loose set of guidelines for the selection of cases that the report implicitly and explicitly refers back to in discussing the comparative significance of those trends that each case illustrates.

The report forms part of a larger research project on Megatrends in Arab Politics funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) in collaboration with JMW Consulting. The research for the report was mainly undertaken from September to November 2014 under the supervision of Senior Researcher at DIIS, Rasmus Alenius Boserup, and a partner at JMW Consulting, Jakob Wichmann. Research for the report was undertaken by consultants at JMW Consulting, Alexander Kjærøum, Emelie Rohne and Meia Nouwens. In December 2014, a conference was organised by the project partners in Copenhagen bringing together a series of internationally recognized top experts and policy-makers to discuss the status and prospects for Arab politics after the revolts.

Final responsibility for the content of this report lies with senior researcher Rasmus Alenius Boserup.





ARMIES BACK INTO POLITICS

ARMIES BACK INTO POLITICS

While civilian political systems in the kingdoms of Morocco, Jordan and the Gulf monarchies have managed to retain control over their expanding military apparatuses since decolonization, political systems in the majority of the Arab republics have historically been built by and for the military.¹ In many of the latter, the way into politics for the officer corps was via a military coup or direct alignment with a faction of the civilian political system. However, while retaining strong internal cohesion, in the two decades prior to the Arab uprisings in 2011, Arab armies had decreased their direct role in governance in most countries. Instead, a civilian administration, relying on the intelligence services, police forces and strongly mandated ministries of the interior, had taken over the daily political business in most Arab republics.

The power vacuums and power struggles in domestic and regional politics in the wake of the revolts of 2011 have presented both opportunities and to some extent obligations for Arab armies to reengage more directly with policy-making and direct governance.

Nowhere was this more obvious than in Egypt. The importance of Egypt in setting the tone for regional development is hard to overestimate: a regional major power, the most populous Arab country, a main producer of authentic and legitimate Arabic political culture and a military great power with a key role in maintaining the axis of regional stability through its peace agreement with Israel, Egypt's move into the camp of transition countries following the toppling of Hosni Mubarak was the trigger that turned the Tunisian experience into a potential model for imitation on a regional level. For these very same reasons, Egypt's shift to the restoration of authoritarianism with the military coup in July 2013 closed that very same window of opportunity. For observers of Egyptian politics, this military coup was not that surprising, there having been a strong possibility of military intervention throughout the period of "transition", given the central historical role of the Egyptian military in politics.

Since the establishment of the Republic in 1952, Egypt functioned as a presidential system created and dominated by Nasser's "young officers" government. In the following six decades of shifting constitutions and geopolitical balances, the Egyptian army kept the key ministerial portfolios of defense and military production for its own candidates, as well as diligently keeping the presidency for top generals turned "civilians". The post-colonial period had seen a gradual decrease of the direct role played by the military top brass in politics, a process emphasized by the parallel development of a strong civilian party, the NDP, as well as strong civilian repressive

agencies in the shape of the state security (amn al-dawla) and the ministry of interior. However, a key explanation for the regime-fractioning that occurred in the years leading up to 2011 within the Egyptian elite was President Hosni Mubarak's attempt to install a "new guard" of civilian top NDP politicians, none of whom had a military background – a move presumably strongly opposed by the top leadership of the armed forces.²

The toppling of Mubarak thus brought the armed forces, in the shape of the SCAF (Supreme Council of Armed Forces), back into political power. However, after sixteen months of direct military rule, the Muslim Brotherhood's second-choice candidate, Mohammed Morsi, was elected president, marking the opening of an unprecedented one-year period of civilian rule. On the back of a new mass mobilization, which escalated during autumn 2012 and spring 2013, the military intervened once more in the political process on July 3 to topple President Morsi. Under the leadership of then Defense Minister Abdelfattah Sisi, the military initiated what was probably the most repressive period independent Egypt has ever seen.³ The period after Sisi's coup against Morsi has seen a the consolidation and possible increase of the armed forces' role in political decision-making, policing (e.g. in the Sinai Peninsula), state construction work and investments, as well as in the general administration of the country. Egypt has also seen a general 30% growth of the armed forces, from 320,000 active members in 2011 to 468,500 in 2014 (including reservists).⁴

Algeria presents a different and quieter path towards a less visible but possibly equally important militarization of political decision-making in the wake of the Arab revolts. Like Egypt, the post-colonial political system in Algeria was created by the military following a coup d'état in 1965. In the first decades after the coup, political decision-making was in the hands of a small group of high-ranking generals in the so-called CNR (Conceil National de la Révolution) under the formalized leadership of the defense minister, Houari Boumedienne.⁵ Following a gradual reform of the economic sector introduced by Boumedienne's successor in the 1980s, Algeria's political system was opened to multiparty contest in the wake of popular protests, and the first contested elections were held in 1990. However, in January 1992 the Islamist dominance over the active electorate prompted the military's high command to orchestrate a coup that sparked a rebellion that, during the early 1990s, became known as the "civil war". Until the election of Algeria's incumbent president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the military directly and formally controlled political decision-making.

Hailed as a Algeria's first "civil" president since the coup of 1965, by 2011 the legacy of Bouteflika's rule was among other things to have sent the military high command back into barracks and out of politics, a process that had also seen the parallel expansion of the internal intelligence service, the DRS. In the aftermath of the Arab revolts the picture has begun to blur, and in 2014 Algerian newspapers excelled in speculating about a possible return to politics by some of the top generals from Algeria's armed forces.

Three factors seem in particular to explain this possible reintroduction of the military into politics in Algeria. First, there was a power struggle between the presidency and the DRS over whether Bouteflika should or not should try for a fourth presidential term in 2014 in spite of his fatal and paralyzing illness, which the DRA refused to endorse. Secondly, there was pressure from the international community on Algeria to assume a bigger role in assuring regional stability in the wake of the intervention in Libya and the collapse of Mali. Thirdly, a security concern arising from the instability in the South has prompted Algeria to rely increasingly on its armed forces including the special operational units rather than its intelligence apparatus and secret services in countering terrorism in the South. Together these three factors have provided the military high command with new possibilities to expand its influence on politics in Algeria in the wake of the Arab revolts.^{6, 7, 8, 9}

Algeria and Egypt thus belong to different categories of post-Arab Spring political developments. Egypt belongs to the category of Arab countries that experienced successive waves of revolutionary mass unrest with a strong impact on politics (between 2011 and 2014 two presidents, several caretaker presidents and half a dozen cabinets fell under pressure from street protesters). This originally placed Egypt as the leading Arab "transition country" alongside Tunisia and to a lesser degree Libya and Yemen. Yet with the military coup in July 2013, Egypt became aligned with those countries in which unrest was met with repressive regime politics and political exclusion, such as Syria, Bahrain and the UAE. Algeria, on the other hand, together with countries such as Morocco (and to a lesser degree Jordan), belongs to those states that did not experience mass repression, but did see top-down regime-implemented reform processes.

The increase in the military impact on politics in Algeria and Egypt suggests that similar processes of securitization may also be impacting on politics in other cases. For instance, Tunisia, the key case of civilian-driven democratization in the wake of the revolts, has in several successive periods called on the military to take over policing of the country's frontier regions with Algeria and has crushed active rebel or "terrorist" groups using expanded emergency laws. In more open cases of conflict like Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya, and perhaps also Lebanon, it seems likely that an analysis of political decision-making would reveal the strong influence of the military and security top personnel in political decision-making. As such, four years after its making, the Arab Spring seems to have called for an expansion of the role of military in policy-making in the Arab region more broadly.

A key outcome for the Arab uprisings may thus prove to be a temporary restoration of the role previously played by Arab officers and generals in day-to-day political decision-making. Each in its own way, Egypt and Algeria illustrate how the reemergence of Arab armies is playing itself out in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings.

NEW REGIME REPRESSION

As has been made clear in a number of studies, the ability of the political elites to sustain themselves was, in part, based on their ability to mobilize mass repression, as witnessed in Syria under Hafez al-Asad in the 1980s and Iraq under Saddam Hussein.¹⁰ A key novelty of the Arab revolts in 2011, however, was the ability of peaceful protesters and opposition groups in Tunisia and Egypt to exploit existing cleavages and power struggles within these regimes and avoid full-scale regime-orchestrated repression. In both cases, the military high command chose to split from the civilian political elites formed by Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak. In other cases, like Libya and Syria, however, the political elites stayed together and were able to orchestrate the mass repression of protesters.

Egypt under the current military government is a key case in point in understanding the relapse into the regime-orchestrated repression of opposition groups and protesters in the post-revolt period. After the toppling of President Mubarak and the replacement of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), Egypt experienced a one-year period of civilian rule under the Muslim Brotherhood's President Mohammed Morsi, a period characterized by both mass political unrest and a fundamental expansion of political freedoms and room for maneuver on the part of opposition groups.

The military coup in July 2013 brought an end to both the unrest and the new freedoms enjoyed by the opposition. While pro-regime demonstrations were continually allowed to take place, contestation of the legitimacy of the regime was repressed, violating both Egyptian and international law. Throughout 2013 and 2014, various legal documents, including the Constitution of December 2013, the counter-terrorism legislation adopted in April 2014 and the September 2014 Law banning the foreign

funding of terrorism, institutionalized the expanded mandate for police, military and judiciary to repress political challengers to the regime, mostly under the pretext of fighting Egypt's increasing problem of political violence.^{11,12}

Following the coup, Sisi's military government launched what most observers describe as the country's worst crackdown ever on the political opposition in an attempt to uproot the now-banned Muslim Brotherhood. Conservative estimates claim that 18,977 Egyptians were arrested for politically related events, while another 2,590 were arrested for their role in the Muslim Brotherhood or other Islamist organizations during the ten-month period from July 3, 2013, to March 2014.¹³ In parallel, of 3,143 Egyptians killed in acts of political violence in the same period, 2,528 were civilians killed in protests, while another 60 were members of police and the military. More than 17,000 Egyptians are estimated to have been wounded in more than 1,100 demonstrations that took place in the same period.¹⁴

The repression of challengers to the military regime also has a legal aspect. Public prosecutors have systematically avoided presenting cases of police abuse, and judges have in many cases seemed overly eager to acquit those who were eventually tried and instead to impose maximum penalties on those who opposed the post-coup regime. A case in point was when, in spring 2014, a district court in Upper Egypt sentenced more than 500 protesters to death for the killing of a single police officer with a gunshot, a verdict handed down in a court session lasting less than three hours.¹⁵

The media has not fared much better under Egypt's recent military rule. Prior to and immediately after the toppling of Mubarak, Egypt had a controlled but relatively critical media, despite of a number of incidents where the Morsi government was reported to be intimidating journalists and editors.^{16, 17} In the wake of the July 2013 coup, the harassment and intimidation under Morsi was called up with imprisonment of journalists and the banning of media on an unprecedented level. In particular, the post-coup government has been keen on targeting media outlets sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood (e.g. channels Misr 25, Al Hafez, and Al Nas, Al-Jazeera Mubasher Misr, Ahrar 25, Al Quds, Al Yarmuk, the Muslim Brotherhood's party newspaper etc.). Local and foreign journalists have also faced varying degrees of government-sanctioned harassment from both the authorities and civilian supporters of the regime, leading to more than two hundred documented cases of harassment during a three-month period in the summer of 2013, some leading to fatal outcomes.¹⁸ The Committee to Protect Journalists has documented over a hundred cases of the abuse and detention of journalists and bloggers following the coup.¹⁹

This regime-orchestrated repression also hampered the newly acquired freedom of assembly, notably by permitting the police and the military to use excessive force when responding to protests and demonstrations. The gravest case was the clearing of the largely peaceful demonstrations in Raba'a al-Adawiyya Square against the coup organized by the Muslim Brotherhood in July 2013. Security forces used live ammunition against protestors, killing more than seven hundred, an act recently described by Human Rights Watch as "genocidal" in nature and for which the group holds Egypt's current President Sisi directly responsible.²⁰ The HRW "accused Egyptian Security forces of [the] 'systematic' killing of 1,150 demonstrators, including at least 817 during the dispersal of the Rabaa al-Adawaiya sit-in alone, suggesting the killings probably amount to crimes against humanity."²¹

The recent repression in Egypt describes what seems to be a general tendency towards an emerging order of unstable authoritarianism: increased regime repression of challengers to the authoritarian elites, as well as of contentious political actors in general. While the specific path followed by Egypt is unique, the repression that regimes have been exercising against the full spectrum of challengers seems generalizable. This is certainly the case within the category of countries that initially responded to the contentious politics of 2011 with repression, such as Syria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. But it may also be perceivable in some less obvious cases such as Algeria, Morocco and Jordan, where rulers followed the general tendencies in the region in 2011 and 2012 and initiated slow and partial processes of reform. By 2014 evidence from, for instance, Morocco suggests that the boundaries of activist politics have shrunk considerably since then and that these regimes have also followed the general change in the momentum in Arab politics signaled by coup in Egypt by increasingly relying on repression of opponents and protesters. As such, and unsurprisingly, the current moment of authoritarian restoration goes hand in hand with an increase in the regime-orchestrated repression of adversaries.



THE EROSION OF STATE CAPACITY



THE EROSION OF STATE CAPACITY

While in the immediate aftermath of decolonization Arab states were seen as weak and artificial structures imposed on strong Arab and Islamic societies (e.g. Hudson 1963), in the 1980s experts began to acknowledge the fundamental importance of the state as a framework for Arab politics (e.g. Anderson 1986, Yapp 1996, Ayubi 1996 etc.). The aftermath of the Arab revolts, and in particular the rapid collapse of the territorial integrity of Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, has brought a number of past discussions about the fragility of the Arab state and the Arab state system back on to the agenda.

The Libyan case is of particular interest. Libya is among those countries that, early in 2011, copied the Tunisian and Egyptian examples of non-violent street protest leading to regime-fracturing and the toppling of a country's authoritarian leaders. Libya was also, however, the first case of the regime-orchestrated mass repression of protesters. Incumbent despot Muammar Ghaddafi ordered his military and security forces to repress the protesters, who were based initially in the eastern part of the country. By early summer 2011, however, Gaddafi's attempt to repress the protesters was being met with a UN-sanctioned NATO force that imposed a no-flight zone on the Libyan air force and the strong assistance of international security agencies in forming a resilient rebel force to stand up to Gaddafi. When, in October 2011, Gaddafi was killed by a rebel group while on the run from NATO firepower, hundreds of militias and rebel groups had been formed on the basis of local networks and arms provided by foreign powers or looted from the reserves of the Libyan army. These rebel groups remain a key challenge for the Libyan state in at least four ways.

First, the continued existence of hundreds of strongly armed and battle-hardened militias with local roots and autonomous decision-making procedures undermines the Libyan state's ability to monopolize the means of violence and impose itself as broker of political, financial and other deals.

Secondly, the continued existence of the militias has prevented the Libyan state from effectively policing and controlling traffic across vast stretches of its desert borders. Shortly after Gaddafi's fall in October 2011, local armed militias such as the Libyan Shield Forces and the Zintan militia took control of a number of border crossings in their regions of origin and control.²² Hence key border crossings to Tunisia such as Ras Jdeir came under the control of Zuwaran fighters in 2011 and 2012, while other border crossings were held by the Tabu tribe. The Zuwarans went so far as to form local border guards and smuggle goods in complicity with kinsmen in Tunisia.

Between 2011 and 2013, the Tunisian government announced eighteen incidents in which it seized arms smuggled into Tunisia through such crossings. Libya's 1,115-km desert border with Egypt has also been held by rebel groups on several occasions. Hence the Libyan Border Guards, trained by US, UK, UN and Arab League instructors, reported being outmanned and outgunned by rebel groups seeking to cross into Egypt with smuggled goods. In late October and early November 2013, a number of border guards were killed in one such shootout. In some cases the Libyan state has proved itself capable of combating the rebel attacks on border security guards, as on the Tunisian border in August 2014. In this as in other cases the state's success in preventing rebels from imposing their will was made possible in part by extensive support from neighboring countries' armed forces.

Thirdly, the continued existence of the militias hinders the Libyan state in effectively overruling secessionist calls to divide the national territory. In March 2012, for instance, tribal leaders in the Barqa region issued plans for autonomy and called for a federal solution based on pre-Gaddafi power-sharing models. According to the leaders, Barqa, an area they claimed stretched from central Libya to the borders of Chad, Egypt and Sudan, should have its own parliament, its own police force, its own national army, and the right to extract oil and other natural resources on its own. Further calls for a federal system were heard in 2013, when an independent government was proclaimed in Cyrenaica, with a twenty-member cabinet and a self-appointed prime minister.

Finally, the persistence of the militias has hampered the Libyan state's ability to control natural resource extraction. On 27 March 2011, rebels captured three of the country's five oil refineries: Ras Lanuf, Brega and Tobruk.²³ On August 18, 2011, rebels also captured the oil refinery coastal town of Zawiyah.²⁴ On March 19, 2011, Ibrahim Jathran's rebel group tried to illegally export 37,000 tons of crude oil out of Libya on an oil tanker that was eventually seized by U.S. Navy Seals in international waters southeast of Cyprus.²⁵ Later the same month, Libyan rebels secured a deal to sell Libyan oil under their control to Qatar, which then sold the oil on in the world market.²⁶

Taken as a whole, the imprint of the four years since 2011 has seen a considerable erosion of the Libyan state caused by both the deliberate destruction of infrastructure during the international military operation and the persistence of local rebel groups that escape the control of the central government.

Another key case in point is Iraq. Iraq belongs to the Arab countries that initially was not greatly impacted by the Arab Spring. The repertoire of opposition politics that emerged in Tunisia and Egypt and that spread to neighboring Syria did not manifest itself significantly in Iraq. Yet, if Iraq escaped the uprisings, it was not because it was a well-functioning political entity, nor because, like Algeria, it was capable of providing welfare services. On the contrary, Iraq was already in a political crisis in early 2011, whose roots went back into the US occupation of the country in 2003. The destruction of the Iraqi state's infrastructure and the dismissal of all state employees with prior relations to the governing Baath Party in the wake of the toppling of Saddam Hussain by the US-led "coalition of the willing" had already put Iraq on a path of violent rebellion against the foreign occupation forces in 2004, as well as increasingly against members of competing communities and rebel groups in Iraq, notably along sectarian, Shia–Sunni lines of division. Having never managed to completely repress the extremely brutal Al-Qaeda-affiliated Sunni terrorist organization, the ISI (Islamic State in Iraq), since the US withdrawal and the subsequent election of the Iranian-backed Shia president Nuri al-Malaki in 2010, the Iraqi state elite in Baghdad had seen a continuation of the high-level political corruption of the past, combined with the deliberate political exclusion of Sunni Muslims in the north-western regions of the country bordering Syria. The subsequent development of the Syrian rebellion in 2011 provided an opportunity for Iraqi rebels from ISI to increase their power and ranks by moving their struggle into north-east Syria, first aligned with the Syrian branch of Al-Qaida, and then, from 2012, increasingly in conflict with the latter and other rebel groups. In mid-2014, some thousands of these battle-hardened rebels swept back across the Syrian border into north-western Iraq, where it thrived on the anti-Shia sentiments of the region's Sunni majority population. The swift victories of the ISI – now rebranded IS (Islamic state) – in Iraq not only exposed the corruption and lack of ambition on the part of Iraqi political and military leaders – it also exposed a series of fundamental challenges to the Iraqi state itself.

Most fundamentally, the victories of IS expose the abandonment by the Iraqi central government of the Sunni-majority areas in the north and west of the country. Ill-prepared and under-prioritized, the Iraqi army has all but collapsed in its encounters with IS. Hence in 2014, the Iraqi army almost collapsed when 800 IS fighters captured the regional province of Mosul from 30,000 government troops, almost without a fight.²⁷

A similar tendency to abandon territory is also seen in the indecisive and inefficient handling of the border security.²⁸ In 2012, the government tightened up the six hundred-kilometer frontier with Syria to prevent weapon smuggling, trafficking, and terrorists and rebels from crossing the border.²⁹ In 2013-2014, the government's failure to achieve its aims was becoming evident. In December 2013, General Ahmed al-Jubouri confirmed that the border police only had limited control of access to Nineveh Province, which borders Syria.^{30,31} Following IS's occupation of northern Iraq in June 2014, the group erased the border all together. In most cases the Iraqi government has needed external assistance to maintain its position, either from Iran³² or from the international coalition force that, at the request of the Iraqi government, is currently bombing IS in Iraq. Also, the border crossings between Iraq, Jordan and Syria are held by a mixture of IS, the Jordanian security forces, Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces, the Syrian government, the Syrian Kurds and unknown groups. The central government controls none of the crossings.³³

In the last four years, the Iraqi state has also lost control of large parts of its territory – partly to the Kurdish government and partly to IS. In January 2014, the ISF controlled 41% of the total Iraqi population (located in fifteen cities), the Peshmerga controlled 5% (two cities), IS 1% (two cities), and an area representing 5% of the population was contested (two cities).³⁴ In June, the ISF controlled only 34% of the total population (located in thirteen cities), while IS controlled 9% in thirteen cities, the Peshmerga 2% in three cities, and Iraqi Tribes controlled less than 1% of the total population in two cities. Thirteen cities, representing 2% of the total population, were contested.³⁵ The amputation of Iraqi territory had already begun in 2011 when Kurdish Peshmerga troops from the Kurdish regional government moved into areas that the Iraqi government had all but abandoned in northern Iraq. In July, the Kurdish government repeated this exercise and captured the oilfields near Kirkuk by militarily ousting IS.³⁶ IS, for its part, has since the early summer of 2014 captured a considerable area in north-west Iraq and merged it with the group's Syrian possessions.

The loss of territory also affected the ability of the Iraqi state to extract resources. In mid-2014, IS controlled seven oilfields and one refinery in northern Iraq, and in June 2014, it also took control of Iraq's largest refinery, the Baiji refinery near Tikrit, responsible for 33% of total output³⁷ In June, the Kurdish Peshmerga seized control of Bai Hassan compound and in July seized the Kirkuk compound from the Iraqi government.³⁸ In August, IS fighters overran large areas of five of Iraq's most fertile provinces, taking control of several of the government's wheat silos, and adding the sale of wheat to its ongoing oil exports.³⁹

Libya belongs to the analytical category of countries that have experienced mass revolt against the incumbent regime and subsequent partial state failure – the same category in which we find Syria and possibly Yemen. In Libya the erosion of the state has mainly taken the form of internal secessionism prompted by the presence of locally rooted militias that grew out of the rebellion. One possible ultimate consequence of their autonomous practices and local rooting may be the division of the Libyan state into several enclaves or the emergence of a federal solution. However, Libya is not the only state in the region to face such challenges. In Algeria, the Kabyle region has long had effective semi-autonomous status giving the central government in nearby Algiers difficulties in imposing its authority over it. In Egypt, the rapidly expanding security challenge in Sinai has exposed the enduring inability of the police and military to fully control the region. In Mali, the state was split in two when Berber tribes proclaimed the state of Azawad in the northern territories. And Yemen may be heading towards comparable pressure for territorial break-up under the pressure from the ongoing militarized Sunni-Shia conflict between Houthis and AQAP.

Iraq belongs to another category of post-revolt political developments. Here the erosion of the state's authority related more directly to factors preceding 2011, a circumstance that groups Iraq with Palestine and perhaps Lebanon. In Iraq the erosion of the state came from the actions of IS as transnational actors rather than secessionist rebels. While the pressure from the Libyan militias potentially threatens an internal division of the current territory of the Libyan state, IS's plans to merge parts (if not the whole) of Iraq with parts of Syria undermines the Iraqi borders drawn between neighboring states and possibly undermines the political geography of the entire region. The only place where that is at play at present is in Syria, but Jordan and possibly Lebanon may face similar challenges in the near future from IS or offshoots from it.

Libya and Iraq do, however, share one determining factor: the experience of having been subject to international military intervention. In light of the possible expansion of military interventions in the region, it may be important to keep this in mind, since it suggests that such military interventions are correlated strongly with processes of state erosion.

THE SHIFT FROM NON-VIOLENT OPPOSITION TO ARMED REBELLION

The Arab uprisings of 2011 led to the unprecedented, rapid and massive politicization and mobilization of the political masses in the Arab World. Millions of people without any previous direct engagement in political action took part in street protests, sit-ins, marches and demonstrations, and hundreds of thousands also engaged in more institutionalized and formalized forms of politics in associational life, the media, political parties, campaigns etc. Over the past two years, however, the large majority of these have withdrawn from public politics both in their own countries and regionally. The millions of newly engaged protestors, members of social movements and supporters of a protest cause that had been “born” in 2011 in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and elsewhere declined in numbers, and consequently in political importance both locally and internationally.

Since 2011, oppositional Arab politics has seen a significant increase in the size, scope and activities of armed rebels and terrorist groups. As protesting and demonstrating were repressed and grew increasingly dangerous, and as political developments suggested the reduced impact of non-violent practices on politics, activists began to change their manner of operations or were gradually replaced by rebels and terrorists.

Syria was the first country to see a massive shift from protests to rebellion. In March 2011, a non-violent protest movement erupted spreading from the countryside into the major cities of Damascus and Aleppo, and from there to other major cities, including Homs and Hama. Following harsh repression by the regime, opposition actors took up arms as early as June 2011, and by July the Free Syrian Army had

emerged with the explicit aim of toppling the Alawite regime.⁴⁰ While protests in early 2011 were able to mobilize hundreds of thousands of supporters, the number of non-violent protestors declined in the latter half of the year and continued to do so in the following years, in spite of the continued activity of non-violent activists.⁴¹

By 2014, however, the number of active armed groups in Syria had increased significantly, and there are now more than seven major alliances of paramilitary groups actively fighting not only the regime, but increasingly also each other, as the past year's struggle between ISIL and the Nusra Front illustrates.⁴²

The increase in the number of active armed groups in Syria has been accompanied by a high increase in the mobilization of armed rebels. In 2011, there were an estimated 70,400 fighters. By 2014, that figure had reached 231,000.⁴³ The sharp increase in the number of fighters is partially related to the ability of high-profile groups such as IS and the Nusra Front to recruit foreign fighters (an estimated 15,000 in total), and it is also related to the militarization of previously non-violent protesters.⁴⁴

The Syrian Revolutionary Martyrs Database estimated around 6,055 casualties in 2011. In 2012, this increased to 41,835 and further to 44,241 in 2013. For the first nine months of 2014, it was estimated to be 23,668.⁴⁵

The Egyptian case developed differently because of the overthrow of President Mubarak and was accordingly seen by many observers as the key example of "people power". Throughout the two-year span from the toppling of Mubarak in February to the July 2013 military coup, protesters were able to sustain a high level of mobilization and in several cases to influence political decision-making. While Egypt saw a reported 3,817 protests in 2012, the number increased further to 5,212 in 2013 in the run up to the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated President Morsi.⁴⁶ Following the coup against Morsi in July 2013 and the subsequent crackdown against the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as against key actors from the 2011 uprisings against Mubarak, non-violent protests have dwindled.⁴⁷ Whether due to the increasing dangers arising from direct police repression and a polarized, security-oriented media public, or from a new popular disenchantment with the transformative potential of nonviolent politics, protests have decreased significantly over the past year.⁴⁸

Since July 2013, however, the number of active rebel groups has grown, with five or six new groups such as Junud Masr. In 2012, the number of rebels actively participating in anti-government activities was estimated to be some 1,000 individuals, mainly operating out of Sinai.⁴⁹ By 2013, the number had increased to 6,000, also encompassing parts of Egypt outside Sinai in the Delta region.⁵⁰ In the same vein, the total number of reported attacks in Egypt grew from 12 in 2011 to 63 in 2012, and increased sixfold to 431 in 2013.⁵¹

In parallel, the death toll increased from 1,075 deaths during the uprising against Mubarak to 438 during the interim period of SCAF rule following Mubarak's deposal to 470 during the period of Morsi's rule, only to increase dramatically after the military coup, with an reported 3,428 deaths.⁵²

The militarization of opposition politics in Syria and in Egypt demonstrates the convergence of two cases that, during the first years of the Arab Spring, suggested distinct, if not completely opposed, directions.

In Egypt, the ability of opposition political actors to explore fractures within the regime (mainly between "the army" (al-geish) and the civilian state apparatus (al-nizam) – particularly the governing NDP party and the Ministry of Interior, with its affiliated security and police agencies – in order to topple long-serving President Mubarak in 2011 constitutes the key example of the new Arab "people's power".

Conversely, in Syria the protestors' inability to find and exploit deep divisions within the Alawite regime, combined with the regime's ability to deter international military intervention along the lines of what happened in the Libyan case, quickly transformed Syria into an example of the resilience of authoritarian regimes and the subsequent militarization of opposition politics. Along with Libya, Bahrain and partially Yemen, the Syrian case suggested that this process of militarization had strong potential in the face of protracted and immediate regime repression.

The alignment of Egypt and Syria in relation to the militarization of opposition politics further reduces the potential for the sustained and long-term emergence of non-violent forms of political opposition in the Arab world, at least in the short run. By 2013 the subsequent drift towards a militarized form of opposition politics had also gained traction in a country like Iraq, where initially the 2011 uprisings had little mobilizing impact on opposition politics. By late 2014 and early 2015, the dominant forms of opposition politics had thus shifted from non-violent to violent and militarized.





THE POLARIZATION OF PUBLIC OPINION

THE POLARIZATION OF PUBLIC OPINION

Over the past four years, public opinion in the Arab world has experienced a strong degree of polarization along two political identity markers: ideology and religion.

In the North African sub-region, the key divide has been ideological, pitting members and supporters of a Muslim Brotherhood-inspired politically moderate Islamism against a broad coalition of actors that, for the lack of any better designation, we may refer to either as “nationalists”, due to their tendency to inscribe themselves in a classical populist Arab nationalism, or as “anti-ikhwanis” following their common idea of fiercely opposing members and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. Known from public debates in Algeria since the late 1980s and strongly manifesting itself in Egypt ever since the legalization of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party in 2011, this has also been a key driver of political debates, positions and coalition-making in Tunisia since the fall of Ben Ali.

After decades in exile, in prisons and underground, Tunisia’s Islamist political party, Hizb al-Nahda, which emerged in the wake of the fall of Ben Ali, faced strong suspicion from the established political players and the non-Brotherhood-affiliated parties. High-pitched debates in the public media returned over and over again to a variety of symbolic and cultural issues, such as women’s role in society and public life, the appropriateness of certain cultural products, including films and books, blasphemy and religion.

The split in public opinion in Tunisia began shortly after the toppling of Ben Ali, when the Islamist leaders entered the political scene supported by a strong and mobilized electorate. The increasing tension between Islamists and the wider public in Tunisia is reflected in polls showing Tunisians’ rising fears of “extremism” from 2011 to 2014. In 2011, 46% of Tunisians replied that they were “very concerned” about Islamic extremism in Tunisia while 25% were “somewhat concerned”. In 2014, 69% of Tunisians were “very concerned” about Islamic extremism, with 12% only “somewhat concerned”.⁵³ With a total of 81% of the polled population thus “concerned” about “Islamic extremism”, Tunisia is the Arab country that shows the broadest concern with the presence of an ideological opponent.⁵⁴

These positions were further enforced in the wake of the assassinations in early February and late July 2013 of two left-wing and secularist politicians, Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, who had both been fiercely critical of Tunisia’s Islamists. Following these assassinations, the Islamist-led government was paralyzed for

months, sparking a fresh period of political mobilization that eventually forced Ennahda to step down and paved the way for a technocratic salvation government to take the lead.⁵⁵ During 2014 the political willingness of Tunisia's Islamists to restrain themselves and seek broad compromises on a number of important issues – including the presidential election from which it abstained,⁵⁶ the formation of a coalition government⁵⁷ and the endorsement of a constitution that for all practical purposes is the closest an Arab constitution has ever come to legally endorsing secularism – would permit Tunisians gradually to soften some of the mutual accusations between supporters of the two sides. As such the Tunisian case today may indeed provide a model for plurality based on the disenchantment of the nationalist populist idea that Tunisians are “one and the same”: they are clearly not. Nonetheless they are, for now at least, managing to balance a new form of political coexistence previously unseen in post-colonial Arab politics.

In the Arab Middle East, since 2011 another division has manifested itself to an unprecedented degree. Known for decades as a constitutive factor in the “confessional” Lebanese political system, as well as from the perpetual power struggles in the Gulf region between “Shia” Iran and “Salafi-Sunni” Saudi Arabia, over the past couple of years the “sectarian” divide has come to fully dominate the divisions in public opinion, political attitudes and alliance-building in a broader number of Mashriq and the Khalidj countries, including in particular Syria and Iraq.

This division was already manifest politically in several countries prior to 2011. In the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary elections, for instance, participating groups were mainly split along lines between Shia' (State of Law Coalition, Iraqi National Alliance, Unity Alliance of Iraq), Sunni/Secularist (Iraqiyya, Iraqi Accord Front (al Tawafuq)), and Kurdish (Kurdistan Alliance, Movement for Change Gorran, Kurdistan Islamic Union, Islamic Group of Kurdistan), but nevertheless they included a wide variety of factions, including a minority party.⁵⁸

When parliamentary elections were held in Iraq again in 2014, the results displayed a clear reduction of the secular vote and a parallel boost for the sectarian vote.⁵⁹ This may to some extent be explained by the then Prime Minister's, Nuri al-Maliki's, increasingly sectarian way runoff running Baghdad's political processes based on the persistent marginalization of Iraq's Sunnis.⁶⁰ But it also reflected a broader process of outside influence in the form of the escalating sectarian conflict in neighboring Syria and the inability or unwillingness of the government to prevent it spilling over from Syria back into Iraq. In 2012, following the strengthening of IS, monthly mass casualty

attacks increased significantly in Iraq, from 10 to 40, with a number of them clearly being sectarian. Monthly attacks in the first quarter of 2011 stood at 358, but increased to 539 incidents in the first quarter of 2012 and further to 804 incidents in the first quarter of 2013.

The speed of IS's rise in Iraq in 2014 also highlighted the extent to which the network of Sunni remnants from Saddam's underground resistance was able to collaborate with and rally support from local Iraqi Sunni tribes in their fight against the Baghdad-based Shia government of Nuri al-Maliki.⁶¹

The polarization of political publics in Tunisia and Iraq illustrates the two predominant axes of polarization in Arab politics after the revolts: ideology and sectarianism. The sectarian polarization, illustrated in this section by the experience of Iraq, also has comparable cases. The most obvious example, of course, is Syria, where from the outset of the conflict the Shia-supported Alawite regime defined its opponents (in some but not all cases correctly) as "Sunni terrorists" with Al Qaeda affiliations. In Yemen, the stand-off between the Shia-aligned "Houthis" and Sunni rebel groups affiliated with AQAP is increasingly assuming a sectarian flavor, with targeted killings based on sectarian affiliations. Furthermore, in Bahrain the government's repression of the protesters in Pearl Square in late 2011 under the pretext that they were "Shia" sparked an increasingly sectarian dynamic in political mobilization and violence.

The ideological polarization illustrated by the Tunisian experience has its parallel versions in Egypt and previously in Algeria, where the current regime has launched crackdowns on its ideological opponents within the Muslim Brotherhood. The political public in Egypt has followed suit accordingly, and the majority of anchors, presenters, editors and commentators who cover issues related to the Brotherhood have almost without exception adopted the framing of the regime's ideological opponents as criminals initiated in the run up to the coup in June 2013. Another case of interest is the current attempt to impose a comparable reading of the conflict on the Libyan case by Egypt and its regional allies in collaboration with the ex-General Heftar. As in Egypt, the main dividing lines are the ideological distinction between "Islamists", who are systematically likened to terrorists, and the rest of the political spectrum.

However, this dividing line and the criminalization of the opposition within a security-driven framework observed in Egypt and Libya is not new to the Arab world. Indeed, it had been mobilized by authoritarian leaders for decades prior to the Arab revolts of 2011, this being their main strategy for justifying their protracted rule. While Arab autocrats in most of the region adopted this strategy during the 1980s, the most

intense conflicts generated along these lines were the “civil war” in Algeria in the 1990s fought between Islamist guerrillas and the Putschist anti-Islamist regime, and the mass repression of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1980s by Hafez al-Assad. Although the conflicts currently being observed along the ideological divide have so far been “contained” compared to the sectarian conflicts in the Levant and Gulf regions, the previous examples of protracted mass conflict mobilized along ideological lines in the recent past suggests that this conflict holds out great potential for further escalation.

THE INTENSIFICATION OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION

The decade prior to the uprisings in 2011 had seen a number of changes in the regional political landscape in the Middle East and North Africa. In the wake of the US-orchestrated military invasion that toppled the rulers of Afghanistan and Iraq, the formation of a Shia-dominated government in post-Saddam Hussain's Iraq provided Iran with an opportunity to expand its influence beyond its traditional relationships with the Shia Hezbollah militias in Lebanon and the Alawite regime in Syria. Perceived as a direct threat to the geopolitical interests of the Sunni-dominated GCC countries and Egypt, Arab great powers, in particular Saudi Arabia, have consistently opposed this Iranian expansion, often by boosting Sunni communities and actors. In the Maghreb region, the end of the Algerian civil war in the late 1990s gradually paved the way for Algeria's rehabilitation in international politics and for a gradual restoration of Algeria's role in ensuring broader North African and Sahel security, mainly in tandem with Qaddafi's Libya.

Since 2011, however, the power competition among Middle Eastern and North African great powers has seen a number of significant changes. These changes have in part emerged in response to the rapid breakdown of domestic political order and the subsequent deterioration of general security in countries like Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Yemen, and to a lesser extent also in Tunisia and Egypt. In these varying degrees of state collapse and internal polarization between preexisting communities, domestic actors have reached out for great power protection against their local adversaries, competitors and enemies to an unprecedented degree. In a number of cases, these Arab and Middle Eastern great powers have accommodated such requests in a bid to prevent their own regional rivals from gaining an upper hand, thus fuelling a sustained competition between their proxies. However, the emerging patterns of regional great

power competition are also a consequence of the shift in American strategy in the region under the Obama administration. Breaking with the legacy of direct military intervention in the region, the US has, throughout the revolts of 2011 and in their aftermath, adopted a withdrawn position of “leading from behind” that has provided increased room of maneuver for regional great powers. The revised US strategy has both enraged a host of America’s long-term strategic partners, including the Gulf countries, Israel and Egypt, and pushed Saudi Arabia and Iran in particular to step up their own security policies, competition and alliance-building with a row of less prominent regional powers like Turkey, Algeria, Egypt, Qatar and the UAE.

The regional great powers in the MENA region have exploited and reacted to this new room of maneuver, which has been introduced through a combination of domestic, regional and international conditions, in at least three ways.

The first of these ways is proxy warfare, as seen in Iraq and, perhaps even more clearly, in Syria. From the outset of the Syrian rebellion the armed opposition was split among a number of trends and tendencies opposed to the Alawite regime. With Iran (and behind it Russia) supporting the Alawite regime, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, plus a host of international powers like the US, Britain, France and a number of smaller European countries, provided support to the dispersed landscape of rebels. The proxy intervention and competition of regional and international great powers was driven by a number of local and to some extent domestically determined policies. Saudi Arabia in particular was keen on containing Iran’s increasing influence in the region in the form of the consolidation of a “Shia half-moon” in the Middle East extending from Teheran via Baghdad and Damascus to southern Lebanon. Qatar for its part was driven predominantly by its aim to ensure strategic independence for itself from Saudi Arabia and the broader GCC power politics by supporting Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated actors in Syria and most of the rest of the Arab World, a strategy Saudi Arabia very much disapproved of. The Turkish government was both ideologically aligned with the Islamist (Sunni) rebels opposing the Asad regime and particularly keen on preventing the Kurdish question from spilling back into the Turkish heartlands. These divergent geopolitical interests have been a key driver in the perpetuation of the proxy war. This was not least the case in the brutalization of the competition and of the internal conflict between local militias and guerrilla groups like ISIL and the Al-Qaida-affiliated Nusra Front, which had already emerged forcefully in early 2012 and has continued to prevent common ground from being formed between the different rebel forces.

The second type of great power competition is being fought with financial means and has been observed in a host of the transition countries, but is perhaps best illustrated in the case of Egypt. In the aftermath of the fall of President Hosni Mubarak, Egypt became a playground for the Gulf States, and in particular Qatar, Saudi Arabia the UAE and Kuwait, whose multi-billion dollar “aid” dwarfed past US loans and development assistance while tying internal Egyptian politics to regional policy dynamics emanating from the Gulf.

During the presidency of the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Morsi (June 2012 to July 2013), Egypt's main regional backer was Qatar, which, through its financial support, maintained the Brotherhood government's ability to pay wages in the enormous Egyptian public sector. Under Morsi's government, Qatar pushed ahead with commercial acquisitions in Egypt, including the purchase of a branch of Société Générale in the country and the launching of a joint project to import liquefied natural gas in collaboration with Egypt's Citadel Group.⁶² As late as a week before the military coup against President Morsi, Qatar also bought Egyptian bonds worth \$1 billion at the low interest rate of 3.5% in an attempt to bolster the Brotherhood's financial credibility in the midst of the escalating political crisis between Morsi and his internal Egyptian opponents.

The toppling of President Morsi in July 2013 by the then defense minister, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, not only brought a new anti-Muslim Brotherhood regime to power in Egypt, it also drew Egypt further into regional power politics by prompting Saudi Arabia to offer billions in aid to the new Egyptian regime with support from the UAE and Kuwait. Saudi Arabia and the UAE pledged a total of \$8 billion to Egypt to help support the economy, with the Saudis pledging \$5 billion (\$2 billion in Egypt's central bank, \$2 billion worth of oil products, and \$1 billion in cash) and the UAE pledging \$3 billion (\$1 billion grant, and an interest free loan of \$2 billion). For its part, Qatar froze its activities in Egypt and issued a measured statement of its “respect [for] the will of Egypt and its people across the spectrum.”⁶³

In 2014, a third model for regional great power competition in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings increasingly manifested itself, namely direct military intervention. Besides the brief but forceful GCC intervention against protesters in Bahrain in late 2011, two key cases of direct military intervention in neighboring countries have been observed in the collapsing and civil war-torn countries of Libya and Yemen.

Since the uprisings against Gaddafi in 2011, the UAE, Qatar and Turkey have fought for influence by proxy among Libya's numerous militias, initially providing intelligence, training and arms during the struggle against Qaddafi. Over the summer of 2014, however, Libya's political transition collapsed, and the previous unity government split into two warring factions, each claiming to represent the will of the Libyan people legitimately. One was the internationally recognized government based in Tobruk in the west of the country, which set about rallying militias under the leadership of a former general in the Libyan army, Heftar. The other faction was the mainly western-oriented, Tripoli-based government in the west of the country, which drew its support from the powerful Misrata coalition of militias, as well as the Libyan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. In May 2014, General Heftar launched his military campaign, dubbed "Operation Dignity", which targeted Islamist groups in Benghazi in the eastern part of the country in what he claimed was an effort to restore security and secure Algeria and Egypt against extremist Islamist terrorism.⁶⁴ In the wake of the military coup in Egypt that ousted the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Heftar successively called on Egypt to engage militarily and "use all necessary military actions inside Libya" to secure its own borders. In agreement with this, high-level Egyptian intelligence sources stated that, with regard to Libya, "urgent measures were needed to secure Egypt's border with Libya. Special forces, backed up with satellite surveillance technology and rapid deployment teams, were on standby to counter any attempts to infiltrate Egyptian territory or to smuggle arms across the desert."⁶⁵

As the fighting between Libyan militias continued, Egypt under President Sisi, in alliance with its Gulf financial backers, and in particular the UAE, has escalated the engagement in Libya from a proxy war to direct intervention. In July 2014, top intelligence officials from Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria met to coordinate their efforts to counter radical forces inside Libya. In August 2014, the UAE and Egypt conducted two waves of airstrikes against what were termed Islamist fighters vying for control of the Libyan capital, Tripoli. On August 17, more than two dozen targets in Tripoli held by the Misratan militia were hit in Operation Dawn. The precision of the attacks immediately triggered speculation that foreign jets were involved, prompting France, Italy and NATO to deny their involvement. On August 23, seventeen Misratans were killed in subsequent airstrikes that hit ammunition dumps and the Interior Ministry building, which had been captured by the Misratans the day before. Additionally, air strikes in support of nationalist forces have been targeting Islamist brigades in Libya for the past three months, with most being in Benghazi, 400 miles east of the capital. Furthermore, in response to the killing of 21 Egyptian Coptic migrant workers by ISIL in Libya in March 2015, Egypt for the first time openly conducted airstrikes against positions inside Libya, though in alliance with the Tobruk government.

Algeria, on the other hand, has relied more on its traditionally strong intelligence services when intervening in Libyan affairs, although the Algerian army is reported to have massively increased its border security in the wake of the In Amenas attack in January 2013. Hence, on June 6, 2014, the Algerian newspaper El-Watan reported that 5,000 Algerian Special Forces had entered Libyan territory with aerial support, including military fighter jets, reconnaissance aircrafts and drones.⁶⁶ The Algerian government promptly denied this, but the Algerian army refrained from commenting on the story.

As a historical Arab great power, Egypt had aimed to mobilize direct superpower support rather than support from other Arab regional powers. Under Qaddafi, Libya for its part had developed a strong presence as a great power in the Sahel region, rather than integrating itself with the broader Arab region.

While the increasing competition of regional great power competition in the wake of the revolts is nourished by the perpetual instability in the region, the breakdown of domestic political order and the polarization of public opinion, a large part of the internal Arab competition had by mid-2015 been downplayed in favor of a shared Arab position against the expansion of Iranian influence in the region and the expansion of militant jihadist groups like Islamic State and the Nusra Front.

CONCLUSION

Four years after the Arab revolts began, the Arab World is in a deep and multifaceted crisis. Rarely if ever in its modern history has the region in a single moment faced so many and such grave crises of political authority and the breakdown of order. The crisis spans the collapsing states that are incapable of effectively controlling their own borders, territories and populations in Yemen, Libya, Syria, Iraq and to a lesser degree in Egypt's Sinai. It encompasses the drift towards mass rebellion and intra-communitarian mass violence, the cleansing campaigns against religious and political minority groups, and the most brutal and spectacular forms of terrorism. This new wave of rebel violence and terrorism is centered in the areas in the region that escape government control, partially or fully, but it is not limited to it: terrorist attacks are regular features in a number of the "stable" countries and areas like Lebanon, Jordan, Algeria, the government-controlled parts of Iraq and Syria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Nile delta in Egypt, etc. In the countries and areas where Arab governments do exercise comparably good control and maintain a fair amount of authority over their population, the model for generating domestic order is based on mass repression, xenophobia and populism, and it is fed by strong ideological and sectarian polarization of public opinion and attitudes. As in the pre-2011 MENA region, political stability has once again little to do with popular legitimacy, and much to do with intimidation, repression and exclusion.

The key challenge for the region itself and for its neighboring regions like the EU is the fact that the current security-driven model for handling the crisis has already proved ill-founded. While it can legitimately be argued that strong security measures are necessary in the short run to combat the immediate threats from rebel and terrorist groups in places like western Iraq, eastern Syria, southern Libya, Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, etc. the security measures have been proved wrong as a long-term solution

to the challenges the region is facing. Indeed, the Arab Spring – the millions of predominantly peaceful protesters who took to the streets in 2011 to call for change – was a symptom of the failure of the autocratic security model that for decades had been predominant in the Arab region as a way of effectively handling the internal political, economic, cultural and social conflicts faced by Arab societies in the new millennium. Popular trust had disintegrated, and the popular mandate for the strong security-driven state actor in politics had been dissipated and had given way to a call for reform of all the corners of the social pact and the political order. Reintroducing autocratic governance by force and by means of petro-dollars is unlikely to fare any better this time. Certainly, the threats of total state collapse and of provoking well-known old patterns of regime-orchestrated mass repression has for now deterred a large number of dissatisfied Arab citizens from the politically active class from pushing further ahead with the calls for genuine social, cultural and economic reform. But once relative security has been restored, alongside a minimum social pact between society and regime, the call for reform is likely to reappear.

It is important that such calls are not met with continued security measures by regimes or from opposition and rebel groups in a quest for vengeance. The Arab region contains strong development potential for itself and for its neighbors in terms of geopolitics, resources, demography, consumerism, industry, agriculture, security collaboration, trade and labor migration etc. To develop these is an urgent need for Arab leaders and their international counterparts in their attempts to push for the establishment of an alternative political order to emerge out of the ashes of the current crisis. There is a deeply shared interest between these partners in ensuring that long-term opportunities of an economic, social, cultural and political character are generated for the Arab populations within their own regions. This is first and foremost an Arab responsibility. For too long Arab autocrats have served as the caretaker leaders of a frozen autocratic security order devoid of developmental visions and bent on accumulating incomes for themselves and their cronies. Avoiding another crisis five, ten or fifteen years down the road will require these local leaders to present genuinely new and alternative models for restructuring the relations between states, regimes and societies in the broadest sense. This alternative order should, to begin with, take seriously the demands presented persistently by protesters in the period immediately after the fall of the autocratic leaders Ben Ali, Hosni Mubarak and Abdulla Saleh, and they should pay deep attention to the calls for reform presented by protesters in the first months of the Arab Spring in countries like Libya, Syria and Bahrain, where regime repression soon wiped out the protesters and paved the way for the far more narrowly supported and far less constructive demands presented by terrorists and armed rebel groups.

The Arab regimes should also find ways to push forward non-security-driven forms of regional collaboration. The Middle East and North Africa remains primarily a region due to the tight web of security threats that links the countries together. In the current crisis conjuncture, regional great power competition has increased significantly between, in particular, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey, but it also includes other actors like Egypt, Algeria, Qatar and the UEA. A post-crisis situation would have to find ways of reintegrating former regional actors like Iraq, Syria and Libya into the geopolitical security pattern. But that will not be the end of it. Once the immediate crisis has passed, it will be crucial for the Arab and broader Middle Eastern states to find alternative ways of retaining the coherence of the region while deescalating the various arms races: mutual trade agreements, ambitious exchange programs, mutual investment programs, labor migration facilitation, cultural co-production programs etc. A host of alternative and historically deeply embedded options are available for Arab leaders to draw on. By grasping such opportunities once the current crisis has passed, the Arab region will provide itself with an opportunity to stabilize itself through measures and institutions that are neither repressive, exclusive or xenophobic. Only in this way will the Arab region be able in the long run to contain its own domestic and regional economic, demographic and ultimately security challenges.

The international community is also likely to want its say in paving the way for this to happen. Perhaps the time is not ripe for direct US and Western superpower pressure on the “partners” in the Middle East and North Africa to implement specific solutions. But leverage still exists. An active US, a strongly mandated and supported UN and a streamlined EU policy towards the region, each combining sticks and carrots as measures without dictating the specifics of the process, are likely to be major players in any future development of the domestic and regional political order in the MENA region.

The Tunisian exception to the current political developments in the region is a crucial factor in all of this. It is true that the direct impact of the successful creation of a liberal democratic model in Tunisia, the smallest player in Arab regional affairs, on the dispositions of the regional Middle Eastern great powers may be compared to the potential impact of a possible coup d'état in Lichtenstein on Germany's political system. The importance of the Tunisian exception is therefore not in its direct impact on other political systems, which in all probability is small. Tunisia will not expand its hard influence into either of its neighboring countries: not even the collapsing playground for regional political competition that Libya is increasingly turning into is likely to see any Tunisian interference. The importance of the Tunisian exception is

that, as long as it endures and prevails, it shows autocratic leaders, militarized rebel leaders, the broader Arab populations and the international community alike that there is an alternative to restoring and perpetuating the security-driven, unstable autocratic form of governance that has hampered the development of Arab societies since independence in the mid-twentieth century.

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- 2 Kandil 2012
- 3 Human Rights Watch 2014
- 4 CNN World 2011; Global Fire Power 2014
- 5 Ghanem-Yazbeck 2014.
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- 7 The Economist 2013
- 8 The Economist 2013
- 9 Boserup et al. 2014
- 10 Bozarlsan 2004, Heydemann 2007, Hafez 2003
- 11 Al Jazeera 2014a
- 12 Amnesty International 2014
- 13 Dunne & Williamson 2014
- 14 Dunne & Williamson 2014
- 15 Aziz 2014
- 16 Freedom House 2014c
- 17 Freedom House 2013
- 18 Freedom House 2014c
- 19 Freedom House 2014c
- 20 Freedom House 2014b
- 21 Human Rights Watch 2014
- 22 Gaub 2013
- 23 Lubin 2011
- 24 Fahim 2011
- 25 Fahim 2011. See also: Reuters 2014
- 26 White 2011
- 27 Zirulnick 2014
- 28 Tohme 2012
- 29 Ahran Online 2012
- 30 Berwani 2013
- 31 Al-Salhy 2014
- 32 Schmidt 2014
- 33 Roggio 2014New York Times 2014
- 34 Authority 2003 Minaya 2007 Knarr 2013RHA 2012Biden 2007
- 35 Authority 2003 Minaya 2007 Knarr 2013RHA 2012Biden 2007
- 36 Kennedy & Gismatullin 2014
- 37 Al Jazeera 2014b
- 38 BBC News 2014
- 39 Fick & El Dahan 2014
- 40 Istanbuli 2014
- 41 Hassan 2014

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- 44 Zelin 2013b; Vinatier 2014; Daily Star 2012; Zelin 2013a; Zelin 2014; Sink 2014; The UN Security Council 2014; The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center 2013
- 45 The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) and the Syrian Revolutionary Martyrs Database (SRMD) are the most cited sources available. While the SOHR depends on its own contacts in Syria, the SRMD is based on numerous sources and uses crosschecking to check their estimates as rigorously as possible. For this reason, the SOHR's estimations vary by 20,000 from those of SRMD. The SOHR has been criticized for its politically biased reporting of fatalities, however. For this reason, SRMD is preferred.
- 46 Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights 2013, Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights 2014
- 47 Afify 2014
- 48 Ahram Online 2014
- 49 The Washington Post 2013; Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium 2014; Stanford University 2014b
- 50 Sweilam 2013
- 51 IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre 2014
- 52 Wiki Thawra 2014
- 53 Pew Research Global Attitudes Project 2013
- 54 Pew Research Center 2014
- 55 Al Jazeera 2014d
- 56 Amara 2014b
- 57 Shaikh & Hamid 2012; Sharqieh 2013; Yehia 2014
- 58 Smith 2010
- 59 New York Times 2010 and IPU 2014; New York Times 2010
- 60 Katzman 2014; Allawi 2012; Markey 2012
- 61 The Economist 2014
- 62 Hall et al. 2013
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- 64 Wehrey 2014
- 65 Elmenshawy 2014; Kingsley et al. 2014
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