

**Peaceful Change and Violent Conflict**  
**The Transformation of the Middle East**  
**and Western-Muslim Relations**

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Project Working Paper 1

**Jochen Hippler**

***Change in the Middle East –  
Between Democratization and Civil War***

***A Short Introduction***

Duisburg, May 2013

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### **Project description**

The current changes in the Middle East are opening new chapters in many societies as well as in international affairs, including the European-Middle Eastern relationship. This leads to an increased need for academic research for a better understanding in different aspects of local, regional and international changes and their implication for Western-Muslim relations.

The international project “Peaceful Change and Violent Conflict – The Transformation of the Middle East and Western-Muslim Relations” is a cooperative endeavor of academic teachers and researchers of universities including University of Duisburg-Essen (Germany), Mohammed V-Souissi University, Rabat (Morocco), University of Tehran (Iran) and Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad (Pakistan). It includes research, workshops, summer universities, and a student exchange, among other activities.

Website: [www.Change-in-the-Middle-East.org](http://www.Change-in-the-Middle-East.org)

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## **Executive Summary**

The current changes in North Africa and the Middle East (MENA) have swept several long-standing dictatorships aside. In some cases this has opened up possibilities for more pluralistic or democratic developments in the future. But even in Tunisia and Egypt economic and political crises have been in the making. In other countries the transitions to new forms of governance have taken the form of civil wars, like in Libya and Syria. In many cases extremist religious tendencies are on the rise.

This paper is providing an overview of the developments in the MENA region since late 2010. It focuses on Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, and on the regional trends and interconnections; the role of regime elites in the political transitions receives special attention. It also deals with the transformation of Islamist movements and its security implications. Finally, the paper analyses the changes in Western-Middle Eastern relationships as a result of the "Arab Spring".

## **Disclaimer**

This publication and all other Working Papers exclusively express the analysis, judgements and opinions of the respective authors. The institutes, universities and researchers involved in the project do not necessarily share the opinions and analyses presented in the papers of this series.

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In addition he is also working on inter-cultural relationships, specifically in regard to Western-Muslim relations, and on the political role of religion. His main regional interest are the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa), and Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan.

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**Jochen Hippler**

## **Change in the Middle East – Between Democratization and Civil War**

### **A Short Introduction**

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*Analysis in the heat of action is never easy,  
especially as events unfold and their causes - and the future itself -  
remain clouded with uncertainty.*

Tariq Ramadan

#### ***Introduction***

The current upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa would have been considered unlikely by nearly all observers before 2010. In the course of spontaneous and broad mass protests the long standing Tunisian dictator Ben Ali was toppled in January 2011; and a few weeks later Egyptian president Mubarak had to resign after almost 30 years in office. Hope for a fundamental change spread all over the region. In most countries from Morocco to Iraq demonstrations took place. Because of the euphoric sense of a new beginning and the dynamics of political change the regional upheaval has been termed the “Arab Spring”<sup>1</sup> or “Arabellion”. It should not be forgotten though, that these changes may have actually begun before, and that they have not been restricted to Arab countries: In 2005 the Lebanese Government was forced to resign because of mass mobilizations after the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri; in 2007 and 2008 massive protest in Pakistan contributed greatly to the downfall of General Musharraf as President; and even bigger demonstrations took place in Iran in 2009 as a reaction to the Presidential elections, which many Iranians perceived as manipulated. Only then the dramatic changes began in North Africa and the rest of the Arab World. (See: [Map of North Africa and the Middle East](#))

In early 2011 there was a widespread feeling that peaceful mass demonstrations were able to topple longstanding dictatorships and that these movements were spreading across the region. Some observers perceived a “domino effect”<sup>2</sup>, which would lead to a quick fall of more Arab dictatorships.

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<sup>1</sup> this term, actually, had already been used before, when in 2005 a series of mostly symbolic top-down reforms had created the short-lived impression of regional change.

<sup>2</sup> for instance: Mid-East: Will there be a domino effect?, in: BBC, 3 February 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12204971> (3.2.2011) and Khanna, Parag: The domino effect of Arab unrest, in: CNN, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/OPINION/02/01/roundup.jordan.egypt/index.html> (3.2.2011).

Also, the changes in Tunisia and Egypt were widely seen as "peaceful", which was less than accurate, since more than one Thousand people were killed by the respective regimes in both uprisings. But still, compared to the subsequent dramatic events in Libya and Syria the level of violence in both Tunisia and Egypt was rather limited. The sudden downfall of both dictatorships led many to expect a wave of democratization sweeping the whole region. Some even spoke of a "tidal wave" or a "tsunami".<sup>3</sup>

Two years later the situation in the Middle East has changed dramatically, again. The Arab Spring in Libya soon led to civil war and foreign military intervention. And the peaceful protest in Syria, which began in March 2011, developed into a civil war during the second half of that year, and further escalated in 2012 and 2013. More than 60,000 people had been killed by the end of 2012, according to the UN.<sup>4</sup> Today - in March of 2013 - the generally accepted figure is closer to 70,000. In early March 2013 the UN proclaimed that one million Syrians have fled their country,<sup>5</sup> while an additional two million Syrians were internally displaced.<sup>6</sup> This war and the inability of the International Community to stop the bloodshed now tend to dominate the perception of changes in the Middle East. At the same time the developments in Tunisia and Egypt did not follow a straight or easy path to democracy. Economically and politically both countries experience grave problems, leading to situations of serious crisis. The growing confrontation between Egyptian President Morsi and the liberal and secular opposition is an indication of this. The Turkish-Syrian conflict, sometimes including the use of military force, and the Israeli attack on Gaza in November 2012 have further shifted attention from processes of democratization and social change towards regional violence.

2013 and the years to come still will see basic changes in the political and societal conditions of the Middle East - but this change will probably not take the form of quick and peaceful transitions to democratic rule, but of a complicated mix of political struggle and violent conflict. Instead of a common trend to democratic rule, it seems more likely that the region will experience quite diverse and contradictory developments.

The paper at hand will try to provide an overview on key aspects of the processes of change in North Africa and the Middle East. After briefly sketching the causes of the public discontent and revolutions, it will focus on the developments in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria. Using the material provided, the paper will discuss the role of power elites in regime stability and the transformation of Political Islam

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<sup>3</sup> Lynch, Marc: *The Arab Uprising - The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, New York 2012, p. 101.

<sup>4</sup> Price, Megan/ Klingner, Jeff/ Ball, Patrick (Eds.): *Preliminary Statistical Analysis of Documentation of Killings in the Syrian Arab Republic*, commissioned by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/PreliminaryStatAnalysisKillingsInSyria.pdf> (2.1.2013).

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR: *UNHCR's Guterres: Syria refugees reach one million*, Press Release, New York 2013, <http://www.unhcr.org/513623756.html> (6.3.2013).

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR: *UNHCR leader warns of moment of truth for Syria, risk of unmanageable crisis*, Press Release, New York 2013, <http://www.unhcr.org/512e56f36.html> (27.2. 2013).

in the region. Finally, it will deal with the political and security implications for the overall region, before providing a short conclusion.

This is the first Working Paper of the joint project "Peaceful Change and Violent Conflict - The Transformation of the Middle East and Western-Muslim Relations", which is co-organized by academic colleagues from Morocco, Iran, Pakistan, and Germany, but also open to researchers from other countries as well (see project description at: [www.Change-in-the-Middle-East.org](http://www.Change-in-the-Middle-East.org)). The paper is meant to provide a reference point to discuss and organize future project research, to summarize selected key empirical developments since early 2011, and to raise some analytical points worth future research.

**Map: North Africa and the Middle East**



## **Roots of the "Arab Spring"**

The protests, revolts and regime changes in individual Middle Eastern and North African countries are part of a broader process that transforms the region.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the whole region there has been no lack of reasons for opposition, resistance and revolt during the last years. Apart from the less populous and oil-rich Gulf States most of the region suffered – and still suffers – from serious economic and sociopolitical problems which result in a high degree of poverty and unemployment. In addition, a chronic weakness of social infrastructure (e.g. social security systems, education or health systems) has been and still is a common problem in most countries. Such deficits combine with blatant weaknesses of governance like endemic corruption and nepotism beyond control, with repression and an atmosphere of intimidation, as well as a lack of opportunities for political participation and the articulation of dissent. All this has been dealt with elsewhere<sup>8</sup> and should have been known at least since the publication of the 2004 *Arab Human Development Report* by the *United Nations Development Program* (UNDP).<sup>9</sup> It had summarized the political conditions in the Arab World like this:

"The Arab political scene today is quite varied. Some states categorically prohibit any political organization. Other states allow conditional political pluralism and, as a rule, ban the strongest and most important opposition party, while favouring the party established by the ruling authority. States which allow party activity nonetheless try to trip up the opposition parties, by depriving them of resources and media coverage, controlling nomination and election procedures, using the judiciary, the army and security services to curtail their activities, hounding their leaders and activists and

### **The Arab State:**

*"(A)n Arab journalist describes ... governance in his country as a system in which there are no free and transparent parliamentary elections, resulting in a "monochrome" parliament. Under that particular system, press freedom is also restricted, as is political and human rights activity, the judiciary is used to make an example of opponents and the constitution establishes a regime that is "unlimited by time and not subject to the control of parliament or the judiciary." In such a regime, even the ruling party becomes a mere piece of administrative apparatus run by "civil servants with neither enterprise nor efficiency". We can call this the model of the "blackhole State", likening it to the astronomical phenomenon of extinguished stars which gather into a ball and are converted into giant magnetic fields from which even light cannot escape. The modern Arab state, in the political sense, runs close to this model, the executive apparatus resembling a "black hole" which converts its surrounding social environment into a setting in which nothing moves and from which nothing escapes. Like the astronomical black hole, this apparatus in turn forms into a tight ball around which the space is so constricted as to paralyze all movement."*

UNDP: Arab Human Development Report 2004, New York 2005, p. 126.

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<sup>7</sup> Lynch, Marc: *The Arab Uprising - The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, New York 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Hippler, Jochen: *Der Nahe und Mittlere Osten – Grundprobleme einer konfliktträchtigen Region*, in: Hippler, Jochen (Hrsg.): *Von Marokko bis Afghanistan – Krieg und Frieden im Nahen und Mittleren Osten*, Hamburg 2008, pp. 11-27.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Development Program (UNDP): *Arab Human Development Report 2004*, New York 2005, p. 126.



tampering with election polls. ... Restrictions on opposition parties have led to the marginalization of some parties and hastened their demise, and generated a lack of confidence in the political process as a whole. ... (C)ivil society faces the same problems as the political community vis-à-vis the authorities who seek to control civil organizations, directly or indirectly, by using a dual strategy of containment and repression. ... Consequently, civil society organizations have not been significant actors in resolving the existing political crisis, as they too have been caught up in its vortex."<sup>10</sup>

In addition, there were psychological, emotional, less tangible factors: A widespread feeling of insulted dignity through arrogant, predatory and at the same time incompetent political and social elites and bureaucracies which either ignored the citizens or treated them as meaningless. More and more, governments and their administrative apparatuses were seen by large parts of the populations not as a means to solve the problems of society, but rather as the root-cause of their problems. The fact that particularly in Tunisia and Egypt the ruling dictators often were perceived as tools of foreign (French and US American) interests made things even worse. Generally speaking, an accumulation of political and economic crises was linked to irresponsible, repressive, incompetent and corrupt regimes - which destroyed any hope that the respective Governments were willing or able to improve the situation and end the paralyses. Political solutions to these problems - be it by top-down reforms or bottom-up pressure - had been blocked over years by the regimes' repression and inflexibility, demoralization of political opposition and its general lack of organization, and through factors like the Arab-Israeli conflict, the US occupation of Iraq as well as the religiously motivated terrorism and the subsequent "War on Terrorism". The latter was perceived as an external threat which narrowed the leeway for internal reform and its proponents.

It is obvious, that socio-economic, political and cultural-psychological factors played a role everywhere, but the mix of those varied considerably from country to country. In some cases anti-dictatorial demands were of key importance, although socioeconomic ones and the fight against corruption and the abuse of authority played a role as well. Elsewhere, e.g. in Iraq, the exigency for improved living conditions and for better governance dominated people's demands. Taking their diversity into account, it would be too simple to just call these actors and groups a "democracy

#### **Egypt:**

*"This small-scale corruption led the large and unwieldy apparatus of the Egyptian state to become almost thoroughly dysfunctional. It was unable to meet even the smallest expectations of the public for the services that had been promised by the glowing rhetoric of the Nasser era. By the mid-2000s, the social contract of the Nasser era was long dead and, with it, the basis for the regime's legitimacy. In its place had emerged a corrupt and ineffective state that served the interests of a small elite consisting of the ruling party, businessmen with close ties to the regime, and Mubarak's family and close confidants. Their power was backed by the military, whose officers also benefited from this order. This system was propped up by an increasingly-brutal and arbitrary security service."*

Rutherford, Bruce K.: Egypt: The Origins and Consequences of the January 25 Uprising, in: Mark L. Haas / David W. Lesch (eds.), *The Arab Spring - Change and Resistance in the Middle East*, Boulder 2013, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Development Program (UNDP): Arab Human Development Report 2004, New York 2005, p. 16.

movement". Generally, they were anti-dictatorial, strived for economic improvement and shared some general values, like the need for the rule of law, an end to corruption, a improved living conditions, and the right to express themselves politically. But only small minorities had a clear idea what exactly should take the place of the obsolete and hated regimes.

The Arab Spring may have come as a surprise to many observers, but it had been long in the making. Despite the political stagnation and lack of political participation, North African and Middle Eastern societies had undergone a process of change. Middle classes had been growing, and the level of education had risen<sup>11</sup> - not necessarily in quality, but many more young people had opportunities for educational advancement. In this way, several sectors of the poorer population had become less marginalized culturally, and their horizons broadened. The result was a growing self-confidence, which soon led to a growing sense of frustration due to a lack of job opportunities. These changes in society were also effecting young women, who disproportionately used to opportunities of better education. In some Arab countries, but also in Iran and Pakistan, today more women than men are university students.

According to the Egyptian Human Development Report 2010 "females (were) constituting 56% of those who completed university. They also constitute 53.8% of those who completed their education in two-year higher education institutions, which provide diploma credentials."<sup>12</sup>

This strong representation of women in education, in turn, began to lessen their traditional exclusion from the public sphere and the job market. The comparatively low quality standard of education in the Arab World did not negatively affect this process, since it applied to both men and women alike. Even though the majority of women still remained in a weak position economically, culturally, politically and legally, some sectors of women from the upper and middle classes had progressed considerably. And in some countries women from lower social classes used the opportunity of higher education to gain a higher degree of personal independence than would have been possible one or two generations ago. This process will very likely continue over the next generations. But society in general and the younger generations in particular had begun to change. The fear and subservience of the earlier generations had started to recede, and what had been accepted in resignation by the parents and grandparents, now seemed no longer acceptable. It was not always "democracy" which captured the imagination (though it often did), but rather a strong desire for more personal freedom, the rule of law, and an end to endemic corruption. In some countries, decade-old dictatorships became the object of rejection and contempt.

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<sup>11</sup> for a more skeptical view on the role of the middle classes in the Middle East see: Ouaisa, Rachid: Blockierte Mittelschichten als Motor der Veränderungen in der arabischen Welt?, in: Jünemann, Annette / Zorob, Anja (Eds.), Arabellions - Zur Vielfalt von Protest und Revolte im Nahen Osten und Nordafrika, Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 257-277

<sup>12</sup> Institute of National Planning: Egypt, with technical cooperation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Egypt Human Development Report 2010 - Youth in Egypt: Building our Future, Cairo 2010, p. 47.

Among the reasons for the changes was the new media environment, which has developed since the 1990s. Before, media access generally was constrained to government controlled newspapers, radio and TV networks. Censorship assured that the population was denied any possibility of independent reporting and free public debate. In 1996 the Qatari satellite TV network *Al Jazeera* went on air, followed by other Arab-language networks like *Al Arabiya* (since 2003). Even if these and other satellite networks had to respect the interests of their respective owners (from Qatar and Saudi Arabia), they successfully broke the monopoly of information in most Arab countries. They brought uncensored news and information, and also public debates of different political viewpoints, and they could be seen all over the region via satellite.<sup>13</sup> In parallel, the use of mobile phones and text messaging (which later proved useful for political organization), and the belated expansion of internet access in the Arab World further undercut the control of the flow of information by dictatorial governments in the region. But the key factor was the growing *combination* of (more or less) independent Arab TV networks with the internet in general and social networks in particular, plus smart-phones, which allowed to share information, photos and videos instantaneously online. The linkage of these means of communication - at a moment, when long-term changes and grave frustrations in Arab societies had changed the political and social context - made a big difference in regard to society-government relations.<sup>14</sup> Combined the result was a new flow of independent, Arab information, a new regional culture of political discourse, and the opportunity to become a provider of news and opinion by individuals, local and national groups. All of this contributed to an empowerment of local actors, the loss of control over information and discourse by national regimes and a change in the approach to politics by parts of the population.<sup>15</sup>

Another effect of the regionalization (and globalization) of the media was that many people in many countries very fast could share not just the information, but also the excitement:

"Majorities in Arab countries say they were riveted by the political demonstrations in their region. Overwhelming numbers of Jordanians (98%), Egyptians (96%), Palestinians (94%), and Lebanese (86%), ... report following news about the uprisings. Outside the Arab world, 78% of Turks say they followed news about events in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain and Libya, ... Among those who followed news about the political demonstrations, excitement was commonplace. Large majorities in Lebanon (83%) and the Palestinian territories (84%) report being excited, including 58% and 40%, respectively, who say they were very excited. In Jordan, more than seven-in-ten (72%) were generally excited by the protests, with about a third (34%) saying they were very excited. ... More than seven-in-ten Turks (73%) who tracked developments in the region say they were excited by the demonstrations, with nearly four-in-ten (39%) saying they were very excited. Among the relatively

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<sup>13</sup> Lynch, Marc: *Voices of the New Arab Public – Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today*, 2006 New York.

<sup>14</sup> Noueihed, Lin / Warren, Alex: *The Battle for the Arab Spring - Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era*, New Haven 2012, pp. 44-59.

<sup>15</sup> Hanrath, Jan / Leggewie, Claus: *Revolution 2.0? The Role of Digital Media in Political Mobilisation and Protest*, in: Debiel, Tobias / Hippler, Jochen / Roth, Michele / Ulbert, Cornelia (Eds.): *Global Trends 2013. Peace - Development - Environment*, Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden (SEF), Bonn 2012, pp. 37-51, [http://www.globale-trends.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Globale-Trends\\_2013/gt\\_2013\\_hanrath\\_leggewie\\_en.pdf](http://www.globale-trends.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Globale-Trends_2013/gt_2013_hanrath_leggewie_en.pdf) (02.04.2013)

small number of Pakistanis who tuned into the dramatic news from the Middle East, the reaction was similar: 74% were excited by events, with half that number (37%) very excited."<sup>16</sup>

As varied as the mix of grievances and the possibilities of new means of communications were, as diverse were the reactions of governments. They followed different, country-specific paths:<sup>17</sup> In Morocco, Jordan and at times in other countries the ruling elites offered limited and controlled "reforms from above" which are supposed to open the respective political systems to some degree without endangering or threatening the power of political and economic elites. The oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf's southern shore pursue a combination of economic and sociopolitical largesse with selective repression to keep political change as limited as possible.<sup>18</sup> In Saudi Arabia alone, the Government in February of 2011 proclaimed a spending package of 130 billion US-\$ to finance higher salaries and other expenses to buy the loyalty of its population.<sup>19</sup> In a third group of countries - Egypt and Tunisia - after the toppling of the dictatorships the political struggle over redistribution of power and the building of new political systems has only just begun. Under different conditions this holds true for Yemen, as well, where long-term president Saleh finally stepped down. But even then his "eternal" vice president took over his office and a large number of the former president's relatives and friends tried to remain in key positions.<sup>20</sup> Whether the impending power struggles will be resolved peacefully or rather lead to violent conflict and civil war still remains open at the moment. In a fourth category of countries change took the form of armed insurgencies and civil war, like in Libya and Syria.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Pew Research Center: Obama's Challenge in the Muslim World - Arab Spring Fails to Improve U.S., Pew Global Attitudes Project, Washington 17 May 2011, pp. 15f, <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2011/05/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Arab-Spring-FINAL-May-17-2011.pdf> (3.4.2013).

<sup>17</sup> compare: Gelvin, James L.: Conclusion: The Arab World at the Intersection of the National and the Transnational, in: Haas, Mark L. / Lesch, David W. (Eds.): The Arab Spring - Change and Resistance in the Middle East, Boulder 2013, pp. 238-256.

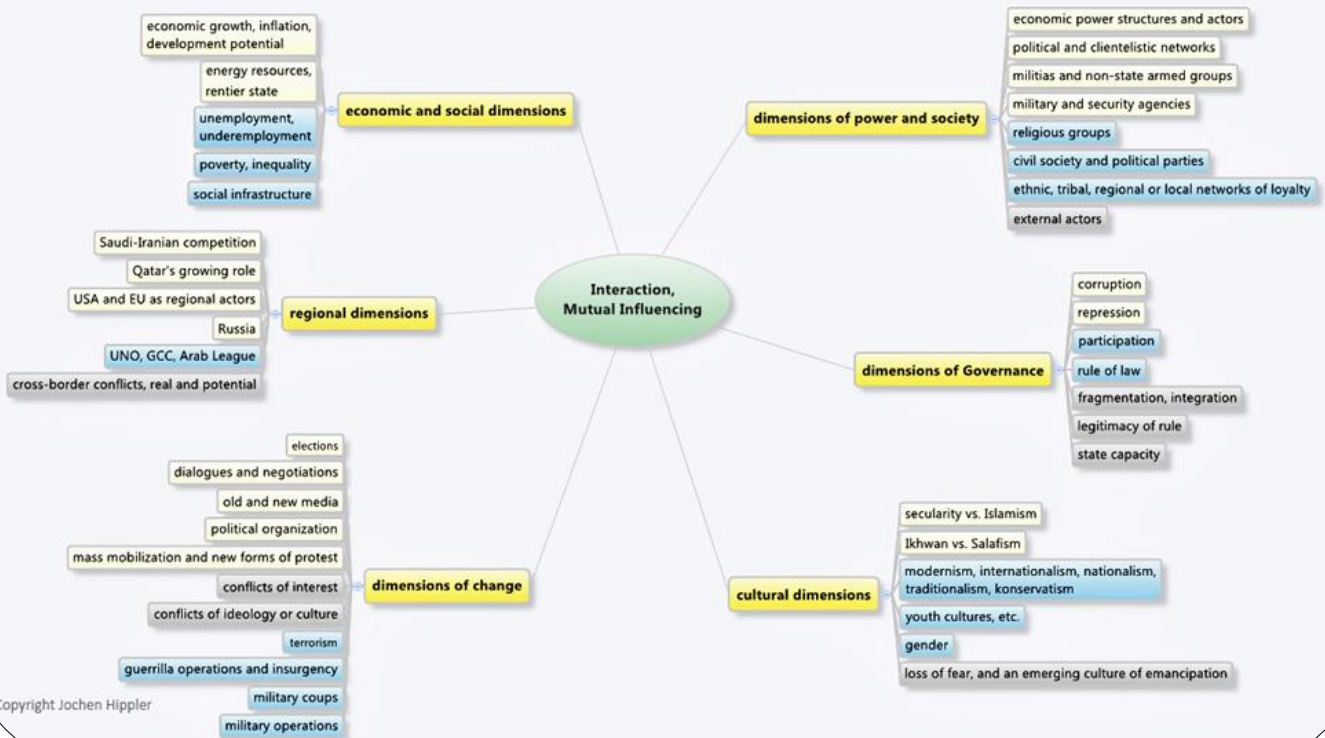
<sup>18</sup> Ehteshami, Anoushiravan / Wright, Steven (Eds.): Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies, London 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Noueihed, Lin / Warren, Alex: The Battle for the Arab Spring - Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era, New Haven 2012, p. 254; for a discussion of the Saudi Arabian stability in the Arab Spring see: Yetiv, Steve A.: Oil, Saudi Arabia, and the Spring That Has Not Come, in: Haas, Mark L. / Lesch, David W. (Eds.): The Arab Spring - Change and Resistance in the Middle East, Boulder 2013, pp. 97-115

<sup>20</sup> McMurray, David / Ufheil-Somers, Amanda (Eds.): The Arab Revolts - Dispatches on Militant Democracy in the Middle East, Bloomington 2013, chapters 13-17

<sup>21</sup> Rosiny, Stephan: Ein Jahr „Arabischer Frühling“: Auslöser, Dynamiken und Perspektiven, GIGA-Fokus Nr. 12, Hamburg 2011.

Chart 1:  
Analytical Dimensions of Peaceful Change and Violent Conflict in the Middle East



### ***The Sudden Fall of Two Dictators: Tunisia and Egypt***

It was not so much the broad feeling of discontent in North Africa and the Middle East, the need for fundamental change and the fact of a transformation itself that were surprising, but rather the exact timing of the upheavals, the speed of change and partly its forms.<sup>22</sup>

Its initially spontaneous character, decentralization and the mass mobilizations' low degree of organization hampered a quick and effective repression by the regimes. But later these aspects proved to be problematic for the new, developing opposition movements. In the end, the effectiveness of the protest movements was not so much resulting from their own strength but from some key weaknesses of the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes. The mass mobilizations demonstrated two points: (1) the complete loss of legitimacy of the dictatorships, and (2) the inability of the regimes to deal with these unprecedented events either politically or by force. In a sense, the effectiveness of the movement resulted from their ability to prove, that the Emperor was wearing no clothes. Because of space limitations, only a few key aspects will be dealt with in the next paragraphs.

<sup>22</sup> Perthes, Volker: Der Aufstand - Die arabische Revolution und ihre Folgen, München 2011, p. 13.

In both cases the dictators were not toppled by the mass mobilizations directly but by military coups – however, the latter were triggered by the former. The demonstrators, lacking cohesion and organization, by themselves did not pose a power alternative to the regimes. But they put the armed forces into a position where a coup became preferable to the status quo. Still, the differences between the roles of the military in Tunisia and Egypt should not be neglected.<sup>23</sup> The Tunisian armed forces relatively quickly sided with the mass protests, and even protected them against brutal violence by groups loyal to the Ben Ali regime.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, the intervention of the Egyptian military was of rather tactical character. Its concern was primarily not to lose control, and to safeguard as much power as possible for itself and for parts of the old regime. Out of their self-interest the situation had to be stabilized quickly, and therefore President Mubarak had to be sacrificed.<sup>25</sup>

The *International Crisis Group* (ICG) summarized the policy of the armed forces during the revolt like this:

"Overall, the military appears to have been guided by several principles: to protect stability, as well as its political and economic interests, and preserve its reputation. Its attitude toward Mubarak was symptomatic: although it was prepared to sacrifice the president if need be, it was keen to preserve the dignity of one of its own, and thus it preferred to hold on to that card until it became absolutely necessary to let it go."<sup>26</sup>

After Mubarak's resignation and the assumption of power by the *Supreme Council of the Armed Forces* (SCAF) it appeared that the military attempted to assure a decisive future role in Egypt, politically and constitutionally.<sup>27</sup> It might not have aimed for permanent self-rule, but it delayed a transfer of power to civilian authorities and generally tried to create a framework of future politics that guaranteed the institutional interests of the armed forces. In April 2012 the ICG wrote in regard to the policies of the SCAF:

"Eager to remove itself from the political limelight, it nonetheless has worked hard to ensure its concerns and interests would be protected once it stops ruling. Its ensuing efforts to manage the outcome of the transition undercut the trust it enjoyed. And, finally, its inability to achieve its goals

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<sup>23</sup> an overview of the role of the military forces in different countries during the Arab Spring is provided by: Lutterbeck, Derek: *The Role of Armed Forces in the Arab Uprising*, in: Calleya, Stephen / Wohlfeld, Monika (Eds.), *Change and Opportunities in the Emerging Mediterranean*, Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies (MEDAC), University of Malta 2012, pp. 160-176

<sup>24</sup> Filiu, Jean-Pierre: *The Arab Revolution. Ten lessons from the democratic uprising*, London 2011, p. 81

<sup>25</sup> an excellent overview of the Egyptian developments is provided by: Rutherford, Bruce K.: *Egypt: The Origins and Consequences of the January 25 Uprising*, in: Haas, Mark L. / Lesch, David W. (Eds.): *The Arab Spring - Change and Resistance in the Middle East*, Boulder 2013, pp. 35-63.

<sup>26</sup> International Crisis Group: *Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (I): Egypt Victorious?*, Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report, No. 101, Brussels 24 February 2011, p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> Sayigh, Yezid: *Above the State: The Officers' Republic in Egypt*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington January 2012.

led it to prolong its stay in power, which further eroded its credibility and thus ability to promote its objectives."<sup>28</sup>

While the Tunisian military accepted a quick transfer of power to new civilian authorities, their Egyptian counterparts tried to permanently secure their own power through control of the state apparatus and constitutional manipulation. In this case any limitation or decrease of the political role of the military had to be wrenched from it by further mass mobilization and political pressure - at least until President Morsi took office and used a terrorist attack in the Sinai Peninsula to retire the top military leadership.

For some time, the movement that led to the fall of the two dictators bridged the political and cultural gaps between religious and secular groups, between parties and between different strands of society. It was neither an "Islamic Revolution" – as the Iranian leadership claimed<sup>29</sup> – nor was it an exclusively middle class movement. The mobilization included the majority of the population.<sup>30</sup> This did not mean that the interests and identities of the different groups disappeared or became obsolete but that they temporarily moved in the background against the common goal of fighting the dictatorships. Remarkable in this regard was the importance of small, mainly middle class liberal groups and networks which played an important role in the beginning of the protests.

In the course of the events in both countries the relative strength of the different oppositional actors changed. In the beginning small, secular and loosely connected groups of young people played a particular role,<sup>31</sup> while in both Tunisia and Egypt the Islamist movements initially reacted hesitantly. Nevertheless, many young members and sympathizers of the Muslim Brotherhood joined the protests very early – albeit on their own initiative, not as party representatives and often against the wishes of the party leadership.<sup>32</sup> But when tens of thousands of demonstrators gathered on Tahrir Square the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups joined the protests and supported them by using their considerable organizational capacity – whereupon the size of the demonstrations grew tenfold. However, it is clear that neither the Muslim Brotherhood and even less the Salafist groups led or dominated the protests at the beginning.<sup>33</sup> After the fall of Mubarak the balance of power within the

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<sup>28</sup> International Crisis Group: Lost in Transition: The World According to Egypt's SCAF, Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report, No 121, Damascus/Brussels 24 April 2012, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Pick, Ulrich: Iranische Reaktionen auf Ägypten - Chamenei unterstützt "islamische Erleuchtung" in Kairo, in: Tagesschau, 5 December 2012, [www.tagesschau.de/ausland/iranreaktionen100.html](http://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/iranreaktionen100.html) (02.04.2013).

<sup>30</sup> the political sentiments of those times are captured in public opinion polls: Pew Research Center: Egyptians Embrace Revolt Leaders, Religious Parties and Military, As Well, Pew Global Attitudes Project, Washington 25 April 2011, <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2011/04/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Egypt-Report-FINAL-April-25-2011.pdf> (3.4.2013).

<sup>31</sup> Osman, Tarek: Egypt on the brink. From the Rise of Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak, New Haven/London 2011, pp. 213ff.

<sup>32</sup> Ramadan, Tariq: The Arab Awakening - Islam and the New Middle East, London 2012, pp. 10ff.

<sup>33</sup> Filiu, Jean-Pierre: The Arab Revolution. Ten lessons from the democratic uprising, London 2011, pp. 91ff.

protest movement began to shift, which was manifested in the first parliamentary elections (November 2011 to January 2012).<sup>34</sup> The electoral alliance led by the Muslim Brotherhood gained about 37 percent of the votes (which translated into 45 percent of the seats in Parliament), the Salafist alliance about ten percent less. Parties of – in abroad sense – liberal orientation had to content themselves with about 17.5 percent of the votes while several splinter groups of the former ruling party together received about 7 percent. The result of the Muslim Brotherhood was to be expected, but both the weakness of the liberal parties and the strength of the Salafists were surprising. As a consequence, both Islamist camps combined secured a 70 percent majority in parliament,<sup>35</sup> even though the strong political competition between them makes a strategic cooperation difficult. Before and after the elections the Muslim Brotherhood pursued an intelligent policy vis-à-vis the ruling military council that combined a willingness to cooperate with considerable political pressure. Overall, liberal and secular actors slipped into a defensive position: On the one hand the ruling military council left no doubt that it would not accept their support by external actors and took legal actions against foreign foundations and NGOs, and on the other hand in regard to the Islamist movements that clearly had won the elections, and were much better organized. President Morsi's assumption of office in June of 2012 did not end the political crisis, but merely gave it a new form. The tension between the Muslim Brotherhood and the military somewhat receded into the background without being fully resolved, and the President began to heavily rely on the - unreformed - police and the military to deal with political protest and restore public order. At the same time the conflict between the religious parties and the liberal and secular sectors of society sharpened dramatically, and was reinforced by widespread discontent in regard to the economic crisis. In February 2013 leaders of the opposition even threatened to boycott the upcoming Parliamentary elections, which became necessary after the Supreme Court had dissolved the just elected Parliament. During ten days of anti-Islamist mass protest around the second anniversary of the fall of Mubarak more than 60 people were killed.<sup>36</sup> The political landscape became polarized between two antagonistic camps of pro- and anti Islamist activists. Both camps were far from united, and displayed trends of internal conflict. The Brotherhood and Salafis resumed their rivalry that had been put aside for a while. The Salafis even split into two competing wings, a possibility that might be some time away for the Muslim Brotherhood, as well. And the liberal and secular opposition was and still is a collection of competing groups which often had problems agreeing on even basic matters. Some liberals went so far as to perceive a military intervention against the elected President Morsi as a

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<sup>34</sup> Carter Center Election Witnessing Mission: Egypt 2011/2012 Parliamentary Elections, Preliminary Report on All Three Phases of the People's Assembly Elections, 24 January 2012 and Büchs, Annette: Wahlsieg der Islamisten in Ägypten: Der Aufstieg der Muslimbrüder und der Salafisten, GIGA Focus Nr. 1, Hamburg 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, Nathan J.: When Victory Becomes an Option - Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Confronts Success, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, January 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Hauslohner, Abigail: After clashes, Egypt's security forces draw new scrutiny, in: Washington Post, 6 February 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/after-clashes-egypts-security-forces-draw-new-scrutiny/2013/02/05/ffdc192a-6fa5-11e2-8b8d-e0b59a1b8e2a\\_print.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/after-clashes-egypts-security-forces-draw-new-scrutiny/2013/02/05/ffdc192a-6fa5-11e2-8b8d-e0b59a1b8e2a_print.html) (6.2.2013).



desirable option.<sup>37</sup> And the chief of the Egyptian military, General el-Sissi, warned: "The continuation of the conflict between the different political forces and their differences over how the country should be run could lead to the collapse of the state and threaten future generations."<sup>38</sup> This might have been somewhat overdrawn or at least premature, but it signaled the sense of crisis the country was experiencing - and it provided a rationale that could be easily used at a later stage to justify a military intervention or coup.

The situation in Egypt is not just politically difficult, but also economically. The British *Economist* summarized the second year after the fall of Mubarak succinctly, under the heading "The economy faces collapse":

"Virtually every economic indicator points to trouble. The currency has slid by 10% since January. Unemployment may be as high as 20%. The stock exchange this year has slumped by a tenth. Tourism, which used to account for 12% of Egypt's GDP, has evaporated. Foreign investment has dried up. Foreign reserves have shrunk. Many of Egypt's most dynamic businessmen have fled, fearing they will be arraigned for complicity with Mr Mubarak. The government is threatening to reverse a number of privatisations. Meanwhile, the price of food is soaring at a time when the average family already spends almost half its income to feed itself. A good quarter of Egypt's 83m people live below the poverty line."<sup>39</sup>

These conditions have grave repercussions on the political atmosphere, because they contribute to a broad sense of disappointment, which to a big degree is directed against the Muslim Brotherhood and the government it controls, and against President Morsi. Political frustration and economic crisis combine to a mix of grievances, which has allowed the non-Islamist political groups a partial come-back.

The situation in Tunisia after the overthrow of the former dictator also turned into a crisis. The widespread disappointment because of economic stagnation and continuing difficult living conditions were comparable to the Egyptian situation,<sup>40</sup> and the same holds true for a polarization between the dominating Islamist movement and secular and liberal sectors in society. Marina Ottaway summarized the enmity between both camps like this:

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<sup>37</sup> Mohyeldin, Ayman: Egypt's liberals ponder return to military rule amid fears of 'Kafkaesque' Islamist state, in: NBC News, 28 February 2013, [http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2013/02/28/17118211-egypts-liberals-ponder-return-to-military-rule-amid-fears-of-kafkaesque-islamist-state?lite](http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/02/28/17118211-egypts-liberals-ponder-return-to-military-rule-amid-fears-of-kafkaesque-islamist-state?lite) (28.2. 2013).

<sup>38</sup> Keath, Lee / Michael, Maggie: Egypt Army Chief Warns State Could Collapse, AP, in: Time, 29 January 2013, <http://world.time.com/2013/01/29/egypt-army-chief-warns-of-collapse-of-state/print/> (29.01.2013).

<sup>39</sup> "The economy faces collapse. A broader-based government is needed to take tough decisions", in: Economist, 30 March 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21574495-economy-faces-collapse-broader-based-government-needed-take-tough-decisions-its/print> (02.04.2013).

<sup>40</sup> Escribano, Gonzalo: A Political Economy Perspective on North Africa's Transitions, Elcano Royal Institute, Working Paper 3/2013, Madrid 30 January 2013.

"The secularists' fears of Ennahda are mirrored by the Islamists' fears of the "Left," a term that seems to embrace everything from the barely left of center to the few surviving hard-line communists who still eke out an existence in fringe political parties and pockets of the labor movement. In Ennahda's portrayal, they are all unreformed Stalinists, unbelievers who see religion as the opium of the people, a minority that feels entitled to rule the country even if it has no support. The lack of trust between the two sides is complete. They accuse each other of doublespeak and outright lies, although requests for concrete examples by a visitor do not elicit concrete answers from either side."<sup>41</sup>

When a prominent secular politician was murdered in February 2013 - probably by Salafi extremists - mass demonstrations put considerable pressure on the Islamist-led Government.<sup>42</sup> Prime Minister Jebali could not agree with his own Islamist *Ennahda* Party on forming a new Government, which exposed deep contradictions inside the party. He had to resign, and in March 2013 Ali Larayedh was appointed new Prime Minister, leading a coalition government led by *Ennahda*, with two secular parties and several technocrats holding important portfolios.<sup>43</sup>

Current events in both Egypt and Tunisia share three basic commonalities: (a) deep popular disappointment in regard to a lack of improvement of the economic situation; (b) polarization between secular and Islamist sectors of the population, and at the same time fierce competition in both camps with a potential for fragmentation; and (c) severe deficits or a complete lack of reform of state structures and procedures. Both states may have received new leaderships, but the police, bureaucracies, legal systems and many other institutions still have changed very little compared to the old, dictatorial regimes.

These three points will probably decide the future course of development in both Tunisia and Egypt. If the political polarization cannot be overcome and a minimum set of political consensus and mutual toleration will not emerge, it will be quite difficult to transform the former dictatorships into pluralistic, tolerant and integrative political systems, respecting the rule of law and working towards democratization. Such a development would need time, even under the best conditions. But when patience of many people runs out, because their hopes for a better economic future have been disappointed and living standards may even be worsening; and when the new rulers increasingly rely on the old and unreformed repressive state organs, the chance of success will be decreased.

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<sup>41</sup> Ottaway, Marina: The Consequences of the Internal Power Shift, in: Ülgen, Sinan/Brown, Nathan J./Ottaway, Marina/Salem, Paul (Eds.): Emerging Order in the Middle East, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Outlook, May Washington 2012, pp. 8ff.

<sup>42</sup> Nkrumah, Gamal: Jasmine Revolution to martyrdom - In the wake of the assassination of political activist Shokri Belaid, Tunisia faces its toughest test yet, in: Al-Ahram Weekly, 13 February 2013, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/Print/1421.aspx> (13.02.2013).

<sup>43</sup> "Tunisia PM Ali Larayedh unveils new government", in: BBC, 8 March 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21711345> (08.03.2013).

## ***Civil Wars in Libya and Syria***

After the fast and successful changes of power in Tunisia and Egypt and the subsequent political mobilizations in other Arab countries, expectations arose that soon other dictatorships would fall as well. However, they suffered a major setback quite early when in Libya demonstrations were brutally repressed right after they began in February 2011, and the country almost immediately drifted into civil war. The Libyan regime, in stark contrast to the fallen dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt, decided not to give up power but to use all military means to defend it. It seems that Gaddafi's hard-line response to the protests and especially its relative success during the first months (and until NATO's military intervention) convinced other regimes in the region that determined and forceful repression including the use of military force could secure their power, even against broad-based protest movements. Thus the royal house of Bahrain – being indecisive at first – in April 2011 called in military forces from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to help suppress demonstrations and to crush the opposition movement.<sup>44</sup> And in March, when first sporadic demonstrations occurred in Syria, the Assad regime immediately chose the path of violent repression.

While having some parallels in common, the civil wars in Libya and Syria hold a number of important differences. In Libya the initially peaceful protests in a matter of days turned into a violent confrontation between the government and insurgents, while in Syria for several months violence was committed almost exclusively by the government against unarmed demonstrators. Only slowly armed resistance developed out of groups of deserted soldiers. The Syrian government's violence led to civil war between the regime and the insurgents only after many stages of escalation, which took nearly half a year.

### ***Libya***

In Libya very shortly after protests began, they turned violent and led to civil war. This is one indication that the country is a special case in the regional context. This was due to several factors: First of all many parts of Libyan society – and not only the state apparatus and its security forces – were armed even before the violent conflict began. Handguns and assault rifles had been widespread in large parts of the population, and even heavy weapons and rocket launchers were available. These weapons had already been used in conflicts within society during the Gaddafi era – particularly in conflicts between competing tribes. The Libyan government had even provided weapons to some of them to secure their loyalty, to use them against other tribes, and to use some tribes as border

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<sup>44</sup> the domestic conflict in Bahrain just before the outside military intervention is summarized in: International Crisis Group: Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (III): The Bahrain Revolt, Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report No.105, Damascus/Brussels 6 April 2011.

guards. At the same time, the Libyan Army was kept relatively small (perhaps 50,000 soldiers) probably to reduce the danger of a military coup.<sup>45</sup>

Also many tribes constituted informal organizational networks that interacted with each other and with the regime and at times maintained close ties to it while remaining sociopolitical actors in their own right. When peaceful protesters were attacked by Gaddafi-loyalists and government bodies of repression, the demonstrators were not defenseless – as in Egypt or early on in Syria – but owned weapons and had networks of communication and loyalty beyond the state’s control. Thus violent resistance and civil war posed a real option in Libya while it did not exist in Egypt and only slowly developed over time in Syria. Generally speaking, in most countries of the region the division, fragmentation, or at least partial dissolution (deserters) of the armed forces was necessary in order to break the monopoly of violence by the state, which was not seen legitimate anymore. In Libya, but also in Yemen, this monopoly of power was in any case very limited: The state as well as parts of society were armed. Another factor weakening the regime was the fact that numerous middle and upper level politicians and functionaries - up to the level of ministers - soon joined the insurgency. The inner core of the regime remained intact, but around it the regime started to erode.

The situation in Libya was further complicated in so far as it was not only a struggle for state power or for a different kind of state, but at the same time a struggle over the redistribution of power between tribes, regions and cities.<sup>46</sup> During the Gaddafi regime, the Libyan state was of a quite peculiar character. While state-institutions and a bureaucracy existed, these were not generally well integrated or coordinated. The state pillar of governance was supplemented by two more, rather informal branches of governance:<sup>47</sup> First, real power was strictly controlled by Muammar Gaddafi personally, and some of his relatives and companions. This power center was technically not part of the Libyan state, because Gaddafi officially since the 1970s did not hold any Government position. Still, the policies and institutions of the state were effectively dominated by this informal, non-state network of

#### **Tribes in Libya:**

*"The political role of tribes cannot be understated [meant is: "overstated"; JH] in determining the future shape of Libya. A number of attempts to seize power from him prompted Qadhafi to accentuate tribalization, turning to his tribal kinsmen to counter increased political opposition and appointing several blood relatives and in-laws to key security and military positions. Manipulating tribes and building informal tribal alliances became an important part of Qadhafi's internal political maneuvering, with nepotism and favoritism becoming the pillars sustaining Qadhafi's informal political alliances."*

El-Katiri, Mohammed: State-Building Challenges in a Post-Revolutionary, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, October 2012

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<sup>45</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2009*, London 2010, p. 256

<sup>46</sup> Lacher, Wolfram: *Libyens Neuanfang - Herausforderungen des Übergangsprozesses*, SWP-aktuell 1, Berlin Januar 2012.

<sup>47</sup> International Crisis Group: *Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (V): Making Sense of Libya*, Crisis Group Middle East / North Africa Report N°107, Damascus/Brussels 6 June 2011.

people. Gaddafi made sure that Libyan statehood remained fragmented, weak and insecure, in order to thwart any potential power alternative to his rule. Pargeter put it like this: Gaddafi "razed everything to the ground, destroying the country's institutions, or rendering them impotent. Aside from the energy and security sectors - both essential to the maintenance of his regime - little in Libya functioned in any meaningful way. Virtually every formal body in the state was little more than a facade - an expression of the Leader's vanity - behind which real power was focused almost entirely in the hands of Qaddafi, his coterie of loyal informal advisors, and, as they came of age, his sons."<sup>48</sup>

This was a key difference to both Tunisia and Egypt, where statehood traditionally was strong. In Libya, though, some state institutions were intentionally kept weak (like the military), others effectively insulated them from the state itself and placed under direct, personal control (like the state oil company), while others were often reorganized, abolished or re-established. Often state-institutions were more like unconnected islands, operating in the context of a society and a political framework which were widely skeptical of statehood.

A second, weaker branch of informal governance consisted of the network of tribal and related groups. Gaddafi had always used tribal relationships to consolidate his power informally, by playing off tribes against each other, drawing in key personnel into the state and the non-state power centers, and generally to create an equilibrium in society, in which he would hold the decisive position. But all of this was only possible as long as tribes were influential actors in their own right, and both been kept under control and utilized. Besides this tribal structures were also used to compensate for the weakness of formal statehood, for instance as armed border guards in the South, or in the social field. Later in Gaddafi's rule he attempted to even formalize tribal leadership in quasi-stately organizations.<sup>49</sup>

After the fall and murder of Gaddafi, most international observers focused their attention on the top level of the new state: The establishing of a new government, a parliament and other institutions. But it was often overlooked that after the end of Gaddafi's dictatorship the decisive pillar of governance - the clique of the "leader" and his companions and relatives, which had often linked the formal state structures with tribal and other informal networks and moderated between them - suddenly was removed. This left a fragmented and weak set of state-institutions, further weakened by the civil war and the insecurity it produced. And it left the tribes, local and regional networks of loyalty, commanders of militias and warlords that had organized themselves and taken advantage of the civil war to become relevant actors, power brokers and military leaders.<sup>50</sup> After Gaddafi, precious little "statehood" was left, and local or regional militias (like the one from Zintan, or numerous from Misrata) and the more relevant tribes by default occupied the center of power relationships, while the National Transitional Council and later the Government were struggling to prove their relevance. A

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<sup>48</sup> Pargeter, Alison: Libya - The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi, New Haven/London 2012, p. 250.

<sup>49</sup> St John, Ronald Bruce: Libya - Continuity and Change, New York 2011, p. 75.

<sup>50</sup> Pargeter, Alison: Libya - The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi, New Haven/London 2012, p. 248-256

few months later several Islamist organizations - armed and unarmed, moderate and extremist - had to be added to this equation.<sup>51</sup> These numerous and independent actors in the absence of a strong state that could draw them together and provide security started to compete for power and resources. Tribal, regional and religious militias struggled for power and for control over their cities and areas. The situation in the East and South of the country became especially difficult.<sup>52</sup> But also the border areas became regions of tension.<sup>53</sup> In addition, criminal gangs saw promising opportunities. As a result, the security situation became extremely serious and local and regional violence sprung up in many parts of the country. A list of acts of violence produced by the US Embassy in Tripoli covering the period from June 2011 till July 2012 ran 51 pages long.<sup>54</sup> The report remarks:

"The government struggles to establish its legitimacy with weapons freely available and various armed brigades having unclear lines of command and control. ... The government has acknowledged the problem of the Militias in torture and detentions, but it admits that the police and Justice Ministry are not up to the task of stopping them. On Tuesday, it sent out a text message on cell phones, pleading for the militias to stop."<sup>55</sup>

The most prominent act of violence has been the attack on the US Consulate in Benghazi and the murder of the US Ambassador and of three more US diplomats. The terrorist organization responsible - which was linked to al-Qaida - has been forced out of the city by angry demonstrators and the police,

#### **Militias in the Libyan Revolution:**

*"No one seemed to know who was in charge. Some said the commander was Gaddafi's former interior minister, Abdul Fattah Younes, who had defected to the rebel side, but others said it was Khalifa Heftar, the general who had commanded Libyan forces in the Chad war and then gone into exile in Virginia. Supporters of Fattah Younes said Khalifa Heftar was a CIA plant, while others suspected the former interior minister of still supporting Gaddafi. The shabab showed no sign of obeying anyone's orders, anyway. They had raided the weapons store at Ajdabia and welded mortar tubes and rocket launchers onto the backs of their vehicles, which they smeared with mud or sprayed with graffiti as camouflage. Each militia seemed to operate independently, and some fighters didn't seem to be part of any militia at all."*

Hilsum, Lindsey: Sandstorm - Libya in the Time of Revolution, New York 2012, p. 203.

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<sup>51</sup> International Crisis Group: Holding Libya Together: Security Challenges after Qadhafi, Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report No.115, Brussels 14 December 2011, pp. 9-13; and: Lacher, Wolfram: Bruchlinien der Revolution - Akteure, Lager und Konflikte im neuen Libyen, SWP-Studie 5, Berlin März 2013, [http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2013\\_S05\\_lac.pdf](http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2013_S05_lac.pdf) (3.4.2013).

<sup>52</sup> Wehrey, Frederic: The Struggle for Security in Eastern Libya, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington September 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Cole, Peter: Borderline Chaos? Stabilizing Libya's Periphery, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington October 2012.

<sup>54</sup> US Embassy Tripoli: Regional Security Office, Security Incidents since June 2011, undated.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*, p. 51.

but later returned, because many citizens of Benghazi now consider it as the only organization that can provide local security.<sup>56</sup>

At this stage there are many indications that the victory over the Gaddafi regime by NATO and the insurgents supported by it will not lead to a democratic state but to a fragmentation of society and to a low-to-medium level of violent struggle between numerous tribes and militias, probably being presided over by a weak and contested national government. Political conflicts generally are not being fought along pro- or contra-Gaddafi cleavages but for particularistic interests: Such as the competition between the cities of Benghazi, Misurata and Tripoli, between some tribes like the Walfallah or Awlad Slayman, or between regional militias that do not agree to disarm in fear of losing their newly gained power position. Furthermore ethnic minorities (e.g. Amazigh and Tabu) and religious extremists are among the armed non-state actors competing for influence, autonomy or resources.

### *Syria*

In Syria the dynamic of violence developed differently, albeit to similar or worse levels of destructiveness. What began as a peaceful and limited protest was suppressed by the regime with brutal force. Since the Syrian population was more or less unarmed, at first the violence did not take the form of a civil war but that of state repression and massacres. The demonstrators were not capable of meaningful counter-violence because the Syrian state held the monopoly of violence. Only because of increasing desertions a potential for counter-violence, offensive military operations and then civil war by the insurgents gradually developed since the summer of 2011. After early 2012 the situation in Syria deteriorated dramatically: On the one hand the level of state violence rose – including the shelling of residential areas of cities like Homs, Hama, Aleppo and Damascus by tanks and artillery, and the increase in air attacks and bombardments, also against populated areas. On the other hand, the character of the conflict changed. Although mobilization against the dictatorship had an *implicit* confessional or religious dimension from the very beginning, owing to the important role of Alawites in the secular Assad regime,<sup>57</sup> the confessional aspect gradually became more pronounced.<sup>58</sup> Increasingly violence occurred between confessional groups, not just between "society" and "state" or between Sunnis and the Government. Particularly between Sunni sectors of the population and Alawi (and Christian) ones violence and even massacres became not unusual. There are many indications that the regime deliberately provoked and promoted such tendencies, e.g. by systematically shelling and destroying Sunni neighborhoods while sparing or even protecting Alawi parts of town. As a

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<sup>56</sup> Elourfi, Asmaa: Libya: Ansar Al-Sharia Returns to Benghazi, in: Magharebia, 26 February 2013, [http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/awi/features/2013/02/26/feature-02](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2013/02/26/feature-02) (26.02.2013).

<sup>57</sup> very useful to understand the role of Alawi groups in the Syrian power setup before the revolt: Van Dam, Nikolaos: *The Struggle for Power in Syria - Politics and Society under Asad and the Ba'th Party*, London 2011.

<sup>58</sup> see: Ajami, Fouad: *The Syrian Rebellion*, Stanford 2012, chapter 7.

consequence, some Sunni groups increasingly identified Alawis with the regime, and considered violence against them justified. Alawis (and many Christians), on the other hand, increasingly felt threatened by Sunnis in general and Sunni religious extremism in particular, and more and more considered the regime the lesser evil, or even the source of protection from a Sunni threat. The result was that now many Alawis and Christians actively or at least passively started to support the regime. Both communities have organized armed self-defense groups for protecting their respective neighborhoods, which now are often operating in coordination with Government forces.<sup>59</sup>

The original lines of conflict, where a secular dictatorship was opposed because of its ruthless behavior, corruption and economic problems by many parts of society (though this criticism included some confessional undertones in the Sunni community), has changed into a double war: On the one hand, still many parts of society are rebelling against a brutal and repressive state and its regime; on the other, a confessional civil war has developed gradually, in which the regime is only one amongst several actors, though the most important one. This transformation of the conflict is obvious, when we compare the judgment of ICG for July 2011 with the current realities. In the early stage of the conflict ICG had correctly written: "Although [the conflict; JH] did not remain peaceful, it did not descend into a violent civil war, as in Libya, or sectarian affair, as in Bahrain."<sup>60</sup> Today, the complete opposite is true.

This confessionalization of violence and war has invited foreign actors to participate, especially Sunni jihadist fighters from Iraq and elsewhere, which in turn has led to a further increase of violence and a hardening of ideological and religious sentiments. When political ways of resolving the crisis became less and less realistic, the opposition had to transform itself accordingly. While the demand for foreign intervention and weapons were quite rare at the beginning, this gradually changed. Now a lack of military support is a key criticism against Western powers. The number and quality of armed insurgents increased significantly, especially in the North-West of the country (Idlib, Latakia and

#### **Phases on Conflict in Syria:**

*"The conflict experienced several phases: from the regime's political concessions, both half-hearted (which prompted stronger popular demands) and coupled with brutal repression (which further undermined their credibility); to its so-called security solution (which, by seeking to force entire communities into submission further energised the opposition and pushed it toward armed resistance); and, finally, to its so-called military solution (a scorched earth policy of rampant destruction and looting that turned what once was viewed as a national army into a broadly reviled occupation force)."*

ICG: Syria's Mutating Conflict, Crisis Group Middle East Report, No.128, 1 August 2012, p. i.

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<sup>59</sup> UNHCR: Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Periodic Update, New York 20 December 2012, p. 2.

<sup>60</sup> International Crisis Group: Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (VI): The Syrian People's Slow-motion Revolution, Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report, No.108, Damascus/Brussels 6 July 2011, p. i.



Aleppo provinces), while they are still relatively weak in the three southernmost provinces.<sup>61</sup> The growing strength allows them to operate in greater formations and in quasi-conventional ways against a well-armed army. They now can stay in control of "liberated areas" and sustain military battles against army units over days and even weeks. This was a remarkable shift from hit-and-run and Guerrilla tactics used before and demonstrates that the Assad regime gradually lost control over significant parts of the country. The military forces of the regime were spread thin and often not able any longer to reinforce units under heavy attack. The problems of the increased military strength of the resistance were a gradual militarization of the opposition, a loss of influence of the more political, civilian and liberal parts of the opposition, which were often less well armed and less efficient militarily than some of the more radical Sunni groups. The al Nusra front, which today is one of the largest and most efficient military components of the insurgency, is a case in point.<sup>62</sup> In April 2013, the al Nusra front announced its allegiance to al Qaida, though it was not quite clear whether this applied to al Qaida's Iraqi branch or its overall leadership.<sup>63</sup>

The rise of religiously inspired groups, which include mainstream, Islamist, Salafi, and also Jihadi organizations and militias linked to international terrorist networks, has been an effect of the confessionalization of the conflict. It should be kept in mind, that most of these Islamist and Salafi streaks are not very homogeneous.<sup>64</sup>

Politically, on the other hand, the opposition found it difficult to present a credible and united alternative,<sup>65</sup> especially one that would be acceptable to the Alawi and Christian communities. After continuous and strong external pressure, especially from Washington, the fragmented opposition tried to unite under the banner of the Syrian Opposition Coalition and appointed Moaz al-Khatib as chairman. But after an intense internal struggle the opposition also appointed Ghassan Hitto - supported by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and Qatar - as chief of a counter-government of the opposition for the regions it controls. This led to more infighting. Moaz al-Khatib resigned, and several

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<sup>61</sup> UNHCR: Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Periodic Update, New York 20 December 2012, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Quilliam Foundation: Jabhat al-Nusra - Jabhat al-Nusra li-ahl al-Sham min Mujahedi al-Sham fi Sahat al-Jihad, A Strategic Briefing, London January 2013, <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/jabhat-al-nusra-a-strategic-briefing.pdf> (18.3.2013).

<sup>63</sup> Al-Amin, Hazem: On al-Qaeda's Syria, Iraq merger, in: al Arabiya, 14 April 2013, online: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/2013/04/14/When-Golani-told-Baghdadi-you-are-not-my-emir-.html>

<sup>64</sup> International Crisis Group: Tentative Jihad: Syria's Fundamentalist Opposition, Crisis Group Middle East Report, No.131, Damascus/Brussels 12 October 2012.

<sup>65</sup> on the state of the Syrian opposition before the Arab Spring see: Pace, Joe / Landis, Joshua: The Syrian Opposition: The Struggle for Unity and Relevance 2003-2008, in: Lawson, Fred H. (Ed.): Demystifying Syria, SOAS Middle East Issues Series, London 2009, pp. 120-143.

important politicians protested or left the Opposition Coalition, including General Salim Idriss, who leads the Syrian Free Army.<sup>66</sup>

The Syrian conflict dynamics also grew more destructive because of other reasons. The high level and brutality of state violence had three consequences:

(a) a political solution or a compromise between the regime and the opposition became increasingly difficult, even impossible. When negotiations and a political solution to the crisis would have been possible in principle (during 2011 and perhaps still in early 2012) this was categorically rejected by President Assad. And when the weakening of his regime finally convinced him to offer negotiations, probably to win time (in early 2013), the amount and ruthlessness of violence had become so traumatizing that the opposition was not any longer willing to participate;

(b) the option for significant parts of the ruling elite to break with the regime and cooperate with the opposition became less likely, since the crimes and atrocities committed by the regime implicated and tainted all its core supporters;

(c) a radicalization of the opposition and a shift towards armed resistance. The strengthening of Sunni religious radicalism or extremism to oppose a regime has been mentioned before. The reactive militarization of the resistance went along with growing brutality of sectors of the insurgency, growing and sometimes outrageous human rights abuses by some insurgent militias,<sup>67</sup> and a degeneration of some groups into violent criminal gangs, busying themselves with plundering and blackmail. This played into the hand of the propaganda of the regime.

Thus, while in Libya we witness a fragmentation of society along different tribal, regional, local, ethnic, and religious cleavages, in Syria a trend towards the division of society into confessional blocks is a key problem – which by no account are homogenous entities in themselves. The opposition and resistance forces are very heterogeneous and so far have displayed little willingness and capability of acting together.

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<sup>66</sup> Sly, Liz: Syrian opposition in disarray as its leader resigns, in: Washington Post Sunday, 24 March 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/syrian-opposition-in-disarray-as-its-leader-resigns/2013/03/24/16523304-94ba-11e2-95ca-dd43e7ffee9c\\_print.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/syrian-opposition-in-disarray-as-its-leader-resigns/2013/03/24/16523304-94ba-11e2-95ca-dd43e7ffee9c_print.html) (24.3.2013).

<sup>67</sup> Human Rights Watch: Syria: End Opposition Use of Torture, Executions - Abuses Show Need for Accountability, 17 September 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/09/17/syria-end-opposition-use-torture-executions> (02.4.2013).

## ***The Role of Power Elites in Regime Stability***

A central factor of the upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa is the degree of unity or disunity of the regime, its allies and the social elites, and their ability to act effectively. This is a key point determining the degree of stability and persistence of the regimes.

### *Regime Rule*

It should be mentioned here that "political elite" or "regime" are terms not identical with "Government". The structure of rule in North African and Middle Eastern countries generally has been multi-faceted and linking formal and informal elements. Often we can observe a "regime core", which is consisting of a personal ruler (Gaddafi, Mubarak, Ben Ali, Assad, etc.) and members of his extended family, personal friends and trusted companions. This regime core often used its political power to create an economic sector under its direct control (which might be called an "economic empire"), both as a way to self-enrichment, as a power base in society, and as a means to support clientelistic networks. It might also convince or force entrepreneurs to grant them a share in their businesses. In addition, the regime core often created its own military and security institutions under the personal leadership of relatives or special loyalists of the ruler (like in Gaddafi's Libya, Syria, Yemen, etc.) (generally inside the state, but sometimes parallel to and in competition with security organizations of the state). It is analytically useful to look for such economic and military empires under direct control of the core regime.<sup>68</sup> It is also potentially fruitful to analyze whether some of those or other security organizations are developing an ability and desire to act as players in their own right, independent from the state or the core regime. This often can be preceded by such security organizations building their own economic empires (ownership and operation of networks of major businesses), which can reduce dependence on the core regime.<sup>69</sup> (See: [Chart 2: Components of Regime Rule](#), below)

While the Tunisian and Egyptian core regimes had directly and indirectly built their personal economic empires, they neglected building military ones under their direct, personal control - quite a contrast compared to their Libyan and Syrian counterparts, which did this quite ruthlessly.

In addition, it is of key importance how the regime core is controlling and managing the state. The official government, which is an *instrument* of the regime, but not the regime itself or in control of it, generally will be operating in a framework defined by the core regime. In some cases it may be allowed some degree of independence in daily governing, or the state institutions may keep a measure of bureaucratic self-confidence, while in other cases they will be hardly more than a bureaucratic mechanism to implement the will of the leader (like in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, where even government ministers understood that any "political" question was out of their reach and

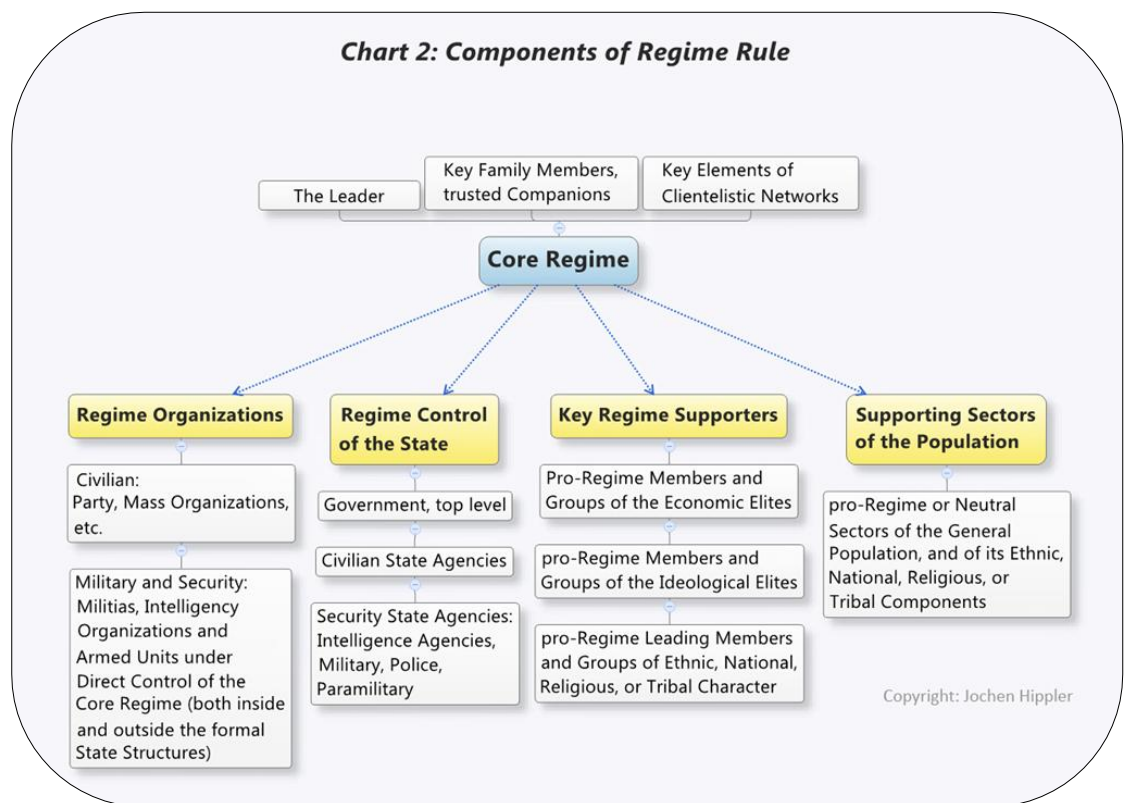
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<sup>68</sup> compare: Cook, Steven A.: *Ruling but not Governing - The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria and Turkey*, Baltimore 2007.

<sup>69</sup> for a different perspective see: Stacher, Joshua: *Adaptable Autocrats - Regime Power in Egypt and Syria*, Stanford 2012.

had to be decided by “the leadership”, meaning Saddam Hussein personally).<sup>70</sup> Therefore it is analytically important to study the interrelationship of the official state structures of Governance with the core regime, both in its formal and informal dimensions. Is the core regime basically *a part of the state* and its head, or is it using the state as its instrument?

In this context it is also crucial to shed light on the relationship between the core regime and military and security institutions under state control – in contrast to the ones it controls directly, and sometimes brings into competition to state institutions. A related question is the relationship between the regime and civilian state institutions. Generally, those will be decisive in regard to the long-term legitimacy of the regime, while the security organizations can be crucial in time of crisis and unrest. Finally, the interrelationship between both the regime core as well as the general state institutions



and (potentially) independent elites or even counter-elites should not be neglected. Economic elites beyond regime control can play important roles in the domestic power distribution. Because of their economic weight they have the potential of backing alternative political groups. Generally a regime will try to co-opt such economic elites, and try to establish economic links and dependencies in which they will lose their independent economic base, while becoming more dependent on state or regime favors. Bringing such potential or actual power centers closer to the regime or the state (by marriage arrangements, bribes, state licenses, or other means) will mostly make a dictatorial regime more

<sup>70</sup> interviews of the author with several ministers in Bagdad, July and August 1992.

secure – as long as this link remains strong.<sup>71</sup> Sometimes, though, the core or closer allies of the regime become so greedy when building their own economic empire, that they might alienate the economic elites. (See Chart 3: [Factors of Political Dynamics between Elites and Opposition](#), left side, p. 27)

### *Regime Cohesion and Cleavages*

It has been mentioned before, that even the broadest mass mobilizations alone generally do not directly lead to a change in regimes, governments, and power relations. They are important symbolic acts of criticism or opposition and can generate political pressure - but often a regime can withstand such pressure, if it is not translated into more hard power. As long as a ruling regime remains internally united, in control of the repressive apparatus and its clientelistic networks and supporters it still has a chance for survival.

In this, regime cohesion plays a central role. The effect of socio-political pressure by mass mobilizations to a large degree depends on regime cohesion (both in regard to the core regime and to its important allies and supporters), on the cohesion of the armed forces, and on their attachment to the regime. It is also of key importance which sectors of the regime coalition have to lose what in regard to their respective economic or political interests. (It should be noted that some analysts<sup>72</sup> have made the point that a plurality of power centers could increase the survivability of a regime, because a concentration of power in one center could focus and strengthen the opposition. While this argument can be valid in many cases, it should not neglect two points: whether the plural power centers are solidly linked or include the potential of tension and cleavages; and whether the centralization is one of real power, or of more symbolic character.)

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<sup>71</sup> in regard to Syria, see: Haddad, Bassam: The Politics of Private Sector Development in Syria, in: Lawson, Fred H. (Ed.): *Demystifying Syria*, SOAS Middle East Issues Series, London 2009, pp. 29-55.

<sup>72</sup> Hanrath, Jan: *Umbrüche im Nahen Osten - Hintergründe und Handlungsoptionen für westliche Politik und Zivilgesellschaft*, INEF Policy Brief, Institute für Entwicklung und Frieden (INEF), Duisburg 2011, pp. 9-11, <http://inef.uni-due.de/cms/files/policybrief09.pdf> (2.4.2013).

Under particular circumstances widespread protests can bring parts of the power apparatus to pursue their own self-interests at the expense of other parts of the regime (Tunisia, Egypt).<sup>73</sup> The symbolic impact of mass mobilization can deepen existing cleavages in ruling elites or create new ones. But this presupposes the existence or at least the potential of such cleavages - if the different components of the regime would all share the same basic interests, cleavages will rarely develop to a relevant degree. In this context it also is of importance whether the protests are directed against the core regime, against the government, the state, or all of those - or rather aiming to achieve more limited objectives. And these goals of social movements and mass mobilizations tend not to be stable, but to transform themselves over time.

**The Private Sector:**

*"The private sector does not generally play an independent political role in the Arab countries, although it has begun to emerge in the political life of the region's growing market economies. So far, business people have not gone further than becoming junior partners to the state bureaucracy."*

UNDP: Arab Human Development Report 2009, Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries, New York 2009, p. 72.

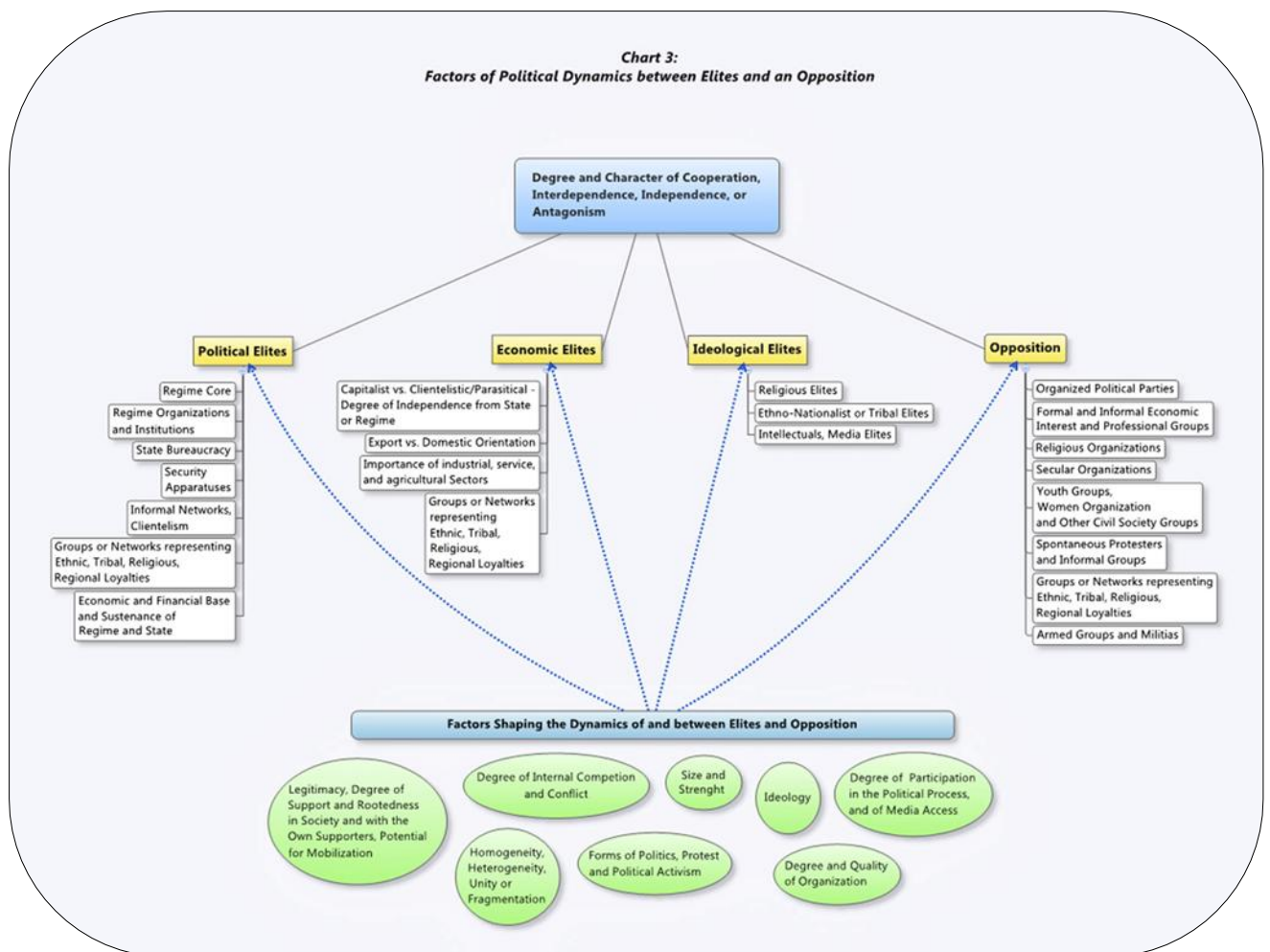
Mass mobilizations can demonstrate that the status quo is not without challenge or alternatives and perhaps not even sustainable. This may make parts of the regime or social elites re-consider their self-interest and their link to the regime. If relevant parts of the political leadership or the organs of repression get the impression that the regime has few chances for survival new options may arise. Instead of clinging to the regime and unsuccessfully trying to avoid its collapse they may try to save parts of their power or economic resources for the time after the regime's fall. Such a development can unfold a dynamic of its own which undermines the power of the regime and opens up new political leeway for the opposition.

If the interest of the core regime and its allies and supporters do not diverge, mass mobilization may not lead to deeper cleavages or fragmentation of the elites, but only to minor splinter-offs, if at all (e.g. Syria). If in such cases a simple policy of ignoring the protests is not longer possible and the usual degree of repression is not sufficient, the regime and its elites face a difficult choice:

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<sup>73</sup> It would be tempting here to discuss the relevance of Social Movement Theory and its application to Middle Eastern societies. While this cannot be undertaken here for lack of space and time, the slowly growing body of literature dealing with the specifics of Middle Eastern Social Movements should not be ignored. See, for instance: Joel Beinin / Frédéric Vairel (Eds.), *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, Stanford 2011; years earlier, Norton had edited a volume with case studies of Civil Society activism in the Middle East: Augustus Richard Norton (Ed.), *Civil Society in the Middle East*, Leiden/New York/Köln 1996; bridging the gap between these works is: Quintan Wiktorowicz (Ed.), *Islamic Activism - A Social Movement Theory Approach*, Bloomington 2004

One option is to respond to the demand for change from below with a controlled program of top-down reform (Morocco, Jordan<sup>74</sup>). Generally this will generate some opening of the political system, symbolic changes, even in government personnel, but it will assure that the core of political power is not being touched. Often, such reform strategies will attempt to split the opposition by drawing some parts of it into the existing political framework and co-opt them; while other parts of the opposition will be kept outside and isolated and might even be persecuted. This often has been attempted by US and Western external reform programs for Third World countries, including in counterinsurgency contexts.<sup>75</sup> But intelligent and self-confident local elites might also adopt such measures on their own. If mass protests escalate and the regime or its elites are not willing or able to implement such a reform from above, a second option arises. They may believe reforms to be unnecessary, consider their price in terms of power or potential loss in resources too high, or be afraid to lose control over the reform process as such. In this case a unified regime elite might try to face the opposition head on



<sup>74</sup> Lynch, Marc: *The Arab Uprising - The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, New York 2012, pp. 141ff.

<sup>75</sup> the rationale of this has been analyzed in: Jochen Hippler, *Counterinsurgency and Political Control – US Military Strategies Regarding Regional Conflict*, INEF-Report 81 (Institute for Development and Peace), Duisburg 2006, online: [http://www.jochenhippler.de/US\\_Counterinsurgency.pdf](http://www.jochenhippler.de/US_Counterinsurgency.pdf)

with repressive means, up to and including major military force. Depending on the size and character of the opposition and its rootedness in society as well as other circumstances (e.g. foreign intervention) this may lead to a defeat of the regime by the force of arms (Libya 2011), to a successful crushing of the opposition by force (Syria in 1982) or to civil war (Syria since 2011). If a government decides to use all military means at its disposal and to decide the power struggle on the battlefield or by ethnic cleansing, mass killing and massacres, the opposition has few options, if it is not willing to capitulate. Even if the final outcome of the struggle still will be strongly influenced or even decided politically, an opposition threatened by physical annihilation will in most cases try to arm itself in self-defense, if it has a chance to do so. This is what happened in Syria in 2011 and 2012. In such circumstances, the opposition has to create its own means of violence and armed formations. This might include recruiting defectors from the military, the police or intelligence services and to organize a countervailing military power. But it will often mean transforming large parts of a political opposition into armed formations. It might also include bringing in armed support (weapons, fighters, training, etc.) from outside. The problems of this strategy are the high human cost of military resistance and civil war, and the militarization of the opposition itself or major parts of it. Militant or military groups in the opposition will necessarily gain power at the expense of civilian groups. Even if successful, it might undermine a more pluralistic and democratic future after the violent overthrow of the regime. One crucial factor in this is the degree of cohesion in the opposition and the danger that different military or paramilitary units of the opposition develop into independent or competing groups led by warlords or entrepreneurs of violence. The Syrian situation illustrates this danger.

Besides the question of regime cohesion and effectiveness, the survivability of a regime often depends on its relationship to independent or counter-elites. Of key relevance are economic and cultural/ideological ones. (See Chart 3: [Factors of Political Dynamics between Elites and Opposition](#), p. 27.) In many cases dictatorial regimes are attempting to co-opt important segments of them and let

#### **The End of the Tunisian Dictatorship:**

*"As for the regime, its bases of support shrivelled in dramatic fashion. In his hour of greatest need, President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali found himself basically alone without support. Over time, what had been a one-party state had become the private preserve of the president and the first family. Economic resources that had been previously shared among the elite were increasingly monopolised by Ben Ali and his wife, Leila Trabelsi, and the private sector paid a hefty price. The ruling party, the Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique (RCD), no longer served as a source of patronage; it was unable to organise a single pro-regime demonstration despite repeated calls by the president's entourage. Likewise, the army suffered under Ben Ali, who did not trust it in the least; in the end, the military was loyal to the state, not the regime. Even the security services were distrusted by Ben Ali, with the exception of the presidential guard, whose privileged treatment only fostered greater resentment."*

ICG: Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (IV): Tunisia's Way, Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report No. 106, Brussels 28 April 2011, p. i



them participate in influence and resources. This can open ways of cooperation.<sup>76</sup> If this strategy is avoided or neglected, this can lead to competition, especially if the economic empire building mentioned above antagonizes other elites. In regard to Tunisia's dictatorship (and especially to Ben Ali's wife) Clancy-Smith spoke of a "national pillage-cum-privatization campaign"<sup>77</sup> which obviously created frustration and resentment in groups that could not participate in it or that were even victimized by it.

A cooptation or political neutralization of economic elites therefore is an important requirement for regime stability: Antagonistic ones which control relevant sectors of the economy might use their economic clout to hurt a government. They also possess considerable financial means, which could be used to support political opposition. Cultural and ideological elites, on the other hand, like religious leaders, persons with command of ethnic or nationalist loyalties, or prominent intellectuals, generally will not be as independent economically, and often can be bought off and co-opted - but if they are independent or joining the opposition, they could play an important role in mobilizing the population for the opposition. Cultural elites can hardly start a broad-based social mobilization or insurgency by themselves if the preconditions are lacking - but they are very well placed to articulate and sharpen existing grievances.

Obviously regime stability depends not only on elites inside and outside the regime, but also on the character and performance of the opposition. The most important aspects can be seen in Chart 1: [\*Analytical Dimensions of Peaceful Change and Violent Conflict in the Middle East\* p. 9.](#)

### ***Transformation of the Islamist Movements***

A central aspect of the upheavals is the changing role of Political Islam.<sup>78</sup> This term here summarizes both Islamist and Salafi tendencies, which should not be confused.

We can identify several changes and contradictory developments since the Arab Spring began.<sup>79</sup> At first (during the rebellions in Tunisia and Egypt) extremist, and especially violent, Muslim currents

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<sup>76</sup> for the Syrian example see, among others: Donati, Caroline: The Economics of Authoritarian Upgrading in Syria - Liberalization and the Reconfiguration of Economic Networks, in: Heydemann, Steven / Leenders, Reinoud (Eds.): Middle East Authoritarianism - Governance, Contestation, and Regime Resilience in Syria and Iran, Stanford 2013, pp. 35-60

<sup>77</sup> Clancy-Smith, Julia: From Sidi Bou Zid to Sidi Bou Daid: A Longue Durée Approach to the Tunisian Revolutions, in: Haas, Mark L. / Lesch, David W. (Eds.): The Arab Spring - Change and Resistance in the Middle East, Boulder 2013, p. 19.

<sup>78</sup> Noueihed, Lin / Warren, Alex: The Battle for the Arab Spring - Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era, New Haven 2012, chapter 11.

suffered a political setback which further emphasized their recent weakening<sup>80</sup>, while non-violent Islamist and Salafi groups grew in strength. Al Qaida's long-lasting silence regarding the fall of governments in Tunis and Cairo was a symptom. Religious terrorist groups had to realize that the political agenda in the Middle East and North Africa had shifted from religiously framed resistance against local governments and Western interests to a struggle for the rule of law, democracy and decent living conditions. Terrorism inspired by Islam had no place in this particular context. This questioned the practices and undercut the very reason of existence of Muslim terrorist groups that until recently had justified their violence as a means of struggle against local regimes and the Western military in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>81</sup> Indeed: A few weeks of peaceful protest had achieved in Tunisia and Egypt what violent terrorism failed to achieve in over a generation.

Besides this, the Arab Spring opened up hitherto non-existent ways of political participation for non-violent groups of Political Islam. This even included the chance of peacefully gaining power by democratization and elections. Radicalization of Islamist or Salafi movements in the past had often been caused or accelerated by their exclusion from the political process and by brutal oppression. Now, by entering the political mainstream in Tunisia and Egypt the option arose that Political Islam in general, and Islamism in particular in the long run might slowly move towards a "Turkish model".<sup>82</sup> This would imply that religious radicalism could slowly give way to conservatism, though still expressed in religious terms. If the movements of Political Islam now could freely organize and influence their societies by peaceful means and even take power through elections, the incentive or need for radicalization and violence might become considerably lessened.<sup>83</sup> In Tunisia this tendency was particularly prominent, but also in regard to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood it is not impossible that political and religious radicalism might be softening in the long run. Such a development will most likely be interrupted by setbacks and take a long and painful process, and depend on the future level of economic problems and political stability. It will probably also trigger splits in the Islamist movements. This is even more likely since the Muslim Brotherhood is not very homogenous, but

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<sup>79</sup> Brown, Nathan J.: Changes in the Domestic Order, in: Ülgen, Sinan / Brown, Nathan J. / Ottaway, Marina / Salem, Paul (Eds.): Emerging Order in the Middle East, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Outlook, May 2012, pp. 2-6.

<sup>80</sup> Gerges, Fawaz A.: The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda; New York 2011, p. 69.

<sup>81</sup> Byman, Daniel L.: Terrorism - Al Qaida and the Arab Spring, in: Pollack, Kenneth M. et al. (Eds.): The Arab Awakening - America and the Transformation of the Middle East, Brookings Institution, Washington 2011, pp. 76ff.

<sup>82</sup> see, for instance: Nasr, Vali: The Rise of Islamic Capitalism - Why the New Muslim Middle Class is the Key to Defeating Extremism, New York 2009, chapter 9.

<sup>83</sup> for a discussion of "moderate" or more inclusive trends in Islamism see: Browsers, Michaelle L.: Political Ideology in the Arab World - Accommodation and Transformation, Cambridge 2009.

consists of different political tendencies, ranging from hard-line to pragmatic.<sup>84</sup> This is not exclusively a Brotherhood phenomenon: The fall of the dictatorships and the increase of political freedom has already started to influence Salafism as well. Historically, the Egyptian Salafists had been more a cultural than a political movement, and did not want to become "polluted" by politics, including and especially by electoral politics. But after the end of the Mubarak regime they suddenly and surprisingly formed political parties and took part in the elections - a considerable break with their past. Salafi electoral success will probably reinforce this politicization of Egyptian Salafism. This process has also by now led to a split in the Salafi movement: One of the wings now demands greater flexibility in their political behavior and ways to cooperate with other parties, while others insist on ideological "purity" and political rigidity.<sup>85</sup>

But it should not be assumed that this process of moderation of Islamism and Salafism can be taken for granted. Very strong countercurrents exist, and the success of this potential process is less than guaranteed. If it happens, it will be slow, painful, and contradictory. It will take a long internal struggle in the religious movements and probably lead to several splits. And the electoral success of the Salafists in Egypt demonstrates that religious rigidity and radicalism is not without social roots in the countries of the Arab Spring.<sup>86</sup> Even in Tunisia the movements of Political Islam are not just heterogeneous, but by now have produced extremist and jihadi groups. In March 2013 *Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM) had once again called for violent struggle against Westerners, secularists, reformers and other so-called enemies - and the leader of Tunisian Salafi jihadists explicitly supported this. But even before, "the leader of Tunisia's Ansar al-Sharia movement – who remains a suspect in the September 14th assault on the US Embassy in Tunis – spoke out against the involvement of young Tunisians in foreign holy wars." His reason was not moderation, but he insisted that "Tunisia needs its young people and cadres more than any other country".<sup>87</sup>

This brings us to recent developments that indicate a renewed strengthening of religious extremism and violent forms of Islamism and Salafism. While the relatively peaceful end of dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt and especially the chances and experiences of electoral politics have opened a possibility of a more liberal development of Islamic parties and movements, the civil wars in Syria and Libya (and its aftermath) work in the opposite direction. The same applies to the creeping loss of

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<sup>84</sup> an excellent overview on the Muslim Brotherhood is: Pargeter, Alison: *The Muslim Brotherhood from opposition to Power*, London 2013

<sup>85</sup> Bayoumi, Alaa: *Egypt's Salafis split ahead of elections - Ultraconservatives are now represented by several groups after splits within the Al Nour Party*, in: *Al Jazeera*, 14 January 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/01/2013114105047960749.html> (14.1.2013).

<sup>86</sup> Hamid, Shadi: *Islamists and the Brotherhood: Political Islam and the Arab Spring*, in: Pollack, Kenneth M. et al. (Eds.): *The Arab Awakening - America and the Transformation of the Middle East*, Brookings Institution, Washington 2011, pp. 29-38.

<sup>87</sup> Ghanmi, Monia: *New terror threat to Tunisia*, in: *Magharebia*, 22 March 2013, [http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/awi/reportage/2013/03/22/reportage-01](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/reportage/2013/03/22/reportage-01) (22.3.2013).

control by the Yemeni government in parts of its territory. They all strengthen a violent countercurrent to a transformation of Islamist and Salafi movements into mainstream politics. Violence and civil war require people and organizations which are experienced in the use of force and in military operations. Some of the terrorist groups are. Also, when the violence of a regime justifies counter-violence, jihadist fighters gain legitimacy as well. If dictatorial regimes cannot be ousted by peaceful means because they use systematic violence and massacres against civilians, this often will lead to political radicalization and induce counter-violence. And when a civil war is inevitable, extremist and violent groups with their experience in violent conflicts may be perceived as useful and legitimate.<sup>88</sup> This has happened especially in Syria where since early 2012 Al Qaida fighters and other Sunni Jihadists have begun to infiltrate the country from Iraq to take part in the insurgency against the Assad regime. A corresponding development inside Syria, where Sunni radicalism is increasing in response to the "Alawi regime", provides these foreign Jihadists with the necessary social backing in the country.

The developments in Libya also have been important to re-gain Islamist terrorism some of its lost strength. First, several Islamist and Salafi groups - both mainstream and extremist - actively participated in the war against Muammar Gaddafi, though in a relatively low-key fashion. But after the overthrow of the regime, made possible by decisive NATO air force intervention, extremist groups gained strength.<sup>89</sup> As explained above, particularistic and fragmenting tendencies in Libya increased after the fall of the dictatorship. Militias, tribes, local or regional and religious groups started to dominate and sometimes manage different parts of the country, while the provisional Government was unable to take real control in many regions of Libya. The weakness of the state and the resulting lack of control opened the door for extremist groups, often of Salafi persuasion, which now were able to organize, operate and arm relatively unhindered. Violent attacks on Sufi graves, on the US consulate in Benghazi and other targets are expressions of this. Many weapons which the former regime had accumulated, were either plundered or sold off in the black market ([see below](#)). In connection with a rejuvenating cross-border jihadism this is a special reason for concern.

Taken together, the Syrian civil war and the post-civil war situation in Libya have strengthened extremist and violent religious groups in North Africa and the Middle East, which had been weakened over the last years and took a heavy blow by the changes of the Arab Spring in early 2011.

Which path the Middle East and North Africa will follow in the future depends to a big degree on the development of Islamism and Salafism. And this in turn depends on the intensity and duration of the violent conflicts on the one hand, especially in Syria; and on the success of economic and political developments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and other countries like Morocco, Jordan, Algeria, and the Arab

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<sup>88</sup> Tripp, Charles: *The Power and the People - Paths of Resistance in the Middle East*, Cambridge 2013, p. 68-70.

<sup>89</sup> Wehrey, Frederic: *The Wrath of Libya's Salafis*, in: Sada, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 12 September 2012, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2012/09/12/wrath-of-libya-s-salafis/dtaz> (12.9.2013).

peninsula, on the other hand. Should Political Islam become more compatible with democracy in key countries through taking over political responsibilities and by following the path of Turkey's AKP, new perspectives of stabilization and democratization for the whole region would arise – albeit in a culturally conservative framework. If the current crisis in both Tunisia and Egypt will lead to further escalation or if a Brotherhood-Salafi alliance could monopolize power in Egypt (or trigger a military coup), the road to a "Turkish" development of Islamism would suffer a setback for at least a decade, possibly a generation. In case of increasing levels of violence in Libya, Mali, Palestine and Yemen and prolonged civil war in Syria, there is a risk that Islamist extremism and its violent variations will be experiencing a new heyday- which would exert a destabilizing effect on the whole region.

### ***Regional Transformations***

The ongoing restructuring in North Africa and the Middle East which began in December 2010 is changing the domestic power structure and politics in all effected countries. But it also has important repercussions in regard to *regional* realignments, some of which have been underway for a few decades. These regional dynamics are characterized by several, often interconnected trends, some of which are:

- a long-range shift of power and dynamics from the most populous Arab country, Egypt, to the oil-rich monarchies on the Southern shore of the Persian Gulf, and other regional power shifts, like the weakening of Iraq and now Syria; also the more active and self-confident regional policies of Turkey are part of the context;
- the long-standing competition between Saudi Arabia (and some of its neighbors) and Iran;
- the changing role of regional Jihadist forces; and
- the changing role of Western, especially US policy in the region.

The specific developments in individual countries, like Egypt, Libya, Mali, Syria, Bahrain, Morocco, and others have to be placed into these contexts. For the sake of brevity this can only be done very briefly here.

### ***Power Shift from Egypt to the Persian Gulf - and Back?***

Up to the 1950s and 1960s Egypt had been the most important regional player in the Arab World. Egypt not only was the most populous Arab country, but also the most dynamic one politically, culturally, and ideologically. (Both Nasser's Arab Nationalism and the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood originated from Egypt, for instance.) This dynamism was especially striking in comparison to the conservative monarchies south of the Persian Gulf, which at this time were considered economically, politically and culturally backward and hardly relevant. After the 1967 defeat in the war against Israel the erosion of the Egyptian power began, and accelerated under the Sadat presidency, especially after the Camp David peace treaty with Israel. It reached its pinnacle under President

Mubarak. Domestically the country had lost any dynamism and became stagnant. While formerly Egypt's politics, culture and ideology had stimulated discussion and change in most of the Arab World, it later became politically sterile. (Beneath the surface slow sociological changes were preparing the country for breaking through the mould, but this was not to be seen for a few decades.) Besides this, Egypt's leadership role in the region ended with Sadat's separate peace treaty with Israel, which politically isolated the country from the Arab World and triggered the attempt by others (Saddam Hussein's Iraq, to some degree Syria, even Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, and Saudi Arabia) to assume this role. As non-Arab regional states, also Iran and somewhat later Turkey tried to achieve positions of influence, dominance and 'soft power' in the Middle East. But in the Arab World, while Egypt suffered internal and external paralysis, the oil-rich monarchies at the Persian Gulf managed an unprecedented rise to power.<sup>90</sup> Saudi Arabia obviously used its Islamic credentials as the Guardian of the Holy Places to build up considerable ideological Soft Power, and backed this up with tremendous financial resources. Many Mosques and projects were paid for, political-religious movements, often of Salafi persuasion, financed all over the region and beyond, in some cases Jihadist fighters supported financially and with arms (e.g. Afghanistan, where this was strongly invited by the US Government in the 1980s). Also some foreign Governments were subsidized. Economically Saudi Arabia was and is a crucial actor in the global energy market, and it used its financial and ideological opportunities to politically become a key regional leader.<sup>91</sup> More surprising were the success stories of Dubai (and the United Arab Emirates in general), and of Qatar - countries with oil and natural gas wealth, but very small populations. What they lacked in ideological attractiveness and population they compensated by a highly intelligent use of their oil resources and a ruthless efficiency in economic development, which all turned them from former backwaters of history into regional powerhouses, with growing regional and international influence. The importance of *al Jazeera* TV network, a 5-billion dollar loan to post-Mubarak Egypt<sup>92</sup> and the delivery of weapons to Syrian rebels<sup>93</sup> were just a few examples of the activist Qatari policies. The United Arab Emirates, as far as its foreign policy is concerned, has been more restrained, while concentrating on economic development. But its participation in the Saudi military intervention to repress the protests demonstrations in Bahrain indicates growing political ambition. Alongside Qatar, after some hesitation the Emirates also provided 12 warplanes to take part in the NATO-led military intervention in Libya.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> a historical perspective on the rise of the Gulf monarchies provides: Commins, David: *The Gulf States: A Modern History*, London 2012.

<sup>91</sup> for the lack of an Arab Spring in Saudi Arabia, see: Yetiv, Steve A.: *Oil, Saudi Arabia, and the Spring that has not Come*, in: Haas, Mark L. / Lesch, David W. (Eds.): *The Arab Spring - Change and Resistance in the Middle East*, Boulder 2013, pp. 97-115.

<sup>92</sup> Abu al-Khair, Waleed: *Qatar boosts Egyptian economy with billions in aid*, in: *Al Shorfa.com*, 1 November 2013, [http://al-shorfa.com/en\\_GB/articles/meii/features/2013/01/11/feature-02](http://al-shorfa.com/en_GB/articles/meii/features/2013/01/11/feature-02) (1.11.2013).

<sup>93</sup> Sly, Liz / DeYoung, Karen: *In Syria, new influx of weapons to rebels tilts the battle against Assad*, in: *Washington Post*, 24 February 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-syria-new-influx-of-weapons-to-rebels-tilts-the-battle-against-assad/2013/02/23/a6bf2bc0-7dfb-11e2-9073-e9dda4ac6a66\\_print.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-syria-new-influx-of-weapons-to-rebels-tilts-the-battle-against-assad/2013/02/23/a6bf2bc0-7dfb-11e2-9073-e9dda4ac6a66_print.html) (24.2.2013).

<sup>94</sup> "A statement from the General Command of the UAE Armed Forces", in: *WAM - Emirates News Agency*, 27. April 2011, [http://www.wam.org.ae/servlet/Satellite?c=WamLocEnews&cid=1289993266824&pagename=WAM%2FWAM\\_E\\_Layout](http://www.wam.org.ae/servlet/Satellite?c=WamLocEnews&cid=1289993266824&pagename=WAM%2FWAM_E_Layout) (2.4.2013).

This rise of oil-rich monarchies was reinforced by the decline of Iraq as a result of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), the two US-led wars against the country (1991, 2003) and the international sanctions (1990-2003).

The results of the Arab Spring over the next generation will lead to further changes in the regional dynamics. The Syrian position will be considerably weakened, even after an end of the civil war, because the country will have to confront serious challenges in regard to economic and political reconstruction. Of more relevance will be the future development of Egypt. If it could manage to overcome its current crisis and regain its former political dynamism lost by decades of rule by an ossified dictatorship (and solve its economic problems), Egypt might return to its role of regional leadership. And if the country would be able to develop a successful way to transform itself into a more pluralistic country respecting the rule of law and even become at least partially democratic, it would become a potentially attractive political model for many other countries in the region. While such a scenario is less than assured, it would not necessarily be a pleasant situation for Saudi Arabia and others.

#### **Increase of Peoples' Power:**

*"The uprisings have brought about a net power shift to the people themselves, not to one or another of the regional or international players. The Arab populations were a missing player in regional power relations, with power usurped by rulers and traded in various relationships of dependency and alliance with larger regional and international players. The power shift to the people is manifest in the fact that populations have realized that through their ability to mobilize, demonstrate, revolt, and—eventually—vote, they actually have the lion's share of power in their societies."*

Salem, Paul: The Regional Order, in: Sinan Ülgen (eds.), *Emerging Order in the Middle East*, Carnegie Endowment, Policy Outlook, May 2012, pp. 8.

### *The Iranian-Saudi Competition*

The gradual rise of the Gulf monarchies led to a sharpening of the Saudi Arabian-Iranian competition, which preceded the Iranian revolution, but was greatly intensified by it. Both countries aspire to regional leadership in the Persian Gulf and beyond.<sup>95</sup> Iran, though being internationally under pressure from the United States and its Western and other allies, made inroads in Iraq, where it today wields considerable influence<sup>96</sup> - courtesy of the US war against Saddam Hussein in 2003 and its incompetent handling of the country afterwards.<sup>97</sup> Iran has formed a close alliance with the secular dictatorship in Syria, which provides a gateway to Lebanon, where Iran is an important backer of

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<sup>95</sup> Terrill, W. Andrew: *The Saudi-Iranian Rivalry and the Future of Middle East Security*, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks December 2011; for background see also: Milani, Mohsen M.: *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy in the Post-Saddam Era*, in: Ali Gheissari (Ed.): *Contemporary Iran - Economy, Society, Politics*, Oxford 2009, pp. 349-366.

<sup>96</sup> Milani, Mohsen M.: *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy in the Post-Saddam Era*, in: Ali Gheissari (Ed.), *Contemporary Iran - Economy, Society, Politics*, Oxford 2009, p. 357

<sup>97</sup> for background of Iran's and Saudi Arabia's policies towards Iraq see: Barkey, Henri J. / Lasensky, Scott B. / Marr, Phebe (Eds.): *Iraq, Its Neighbors, and the United States - Competition, Crisis, and the Reordering of Power*, Washington 2011, chapters 3 and 4.

Hezbollah. Iran is also trying to build anti-Israeli alliances with other regional actors,<sup>98</sup> including Hamas. Beyond its Eastern border, Iran has slowly and steadily tried to increase its influence in (Western) Afghanistan, mostly by economic means, but also by supporting the Shia minority. Generally, though, Iran has been using any chance for strengthening its regional position by cooperating with anybody who will share its anti-Israeli or anti-Western policies, may they be Shia, Sunni, or secular. (Beyond the region, even Venezuela's deceased leader Hugo Chavez qualified as a close ally.) Lately Iran attempts courting Egypt to improve relations. Saudi Arabia and Qatar - and to a lesser degree the United Arab Emirates (which enjoy the benefits derived from Iran's precarious situation in international trade) and Bahrain - have been trying to block and even roll back the Iranian regional advances and positions. These countries often are ideologically as flexible as Iran: Sometimes they support Salafi groups, including violent Jihadists, sometimes more secular ones, sometimes groups or Governments from the Muslim Brotherhood camp, and they closely cooperate with Western Governments, especially the US. The support provided ranges from ideological sympathy and political initiatives to financial largess, to the delivery of weapons. The decisive points of this competition with Iran currently are Syria (and Lebanon), to a lesser degree Egypt where Iran's offers of cooperation and support will hardly lead to a stable alliance, and Yemen and Bahrain. In regard to Iraq Iran clearly has the upper hand compared to the oil monarchies, and the new project of a pipeline linking Iran and Pakistan<sup>99</sup> demonstrates that even some pro-American countries are interested in strengthening their cooperation with Iran, if this seems profitable.

### *Changes in Western Perceptions and Policies towards the Region*

Finally, the peaceful changes and violent conflicts triggered by the Arab Spring are also changing the region's relationship with the outside world and the Western policy towards the region.

They have not only influenced Western Governments' behavior, but also public perceptions. During the first months of the Arab Spring - and also during the protests in Iran in 2009 - in Europe old clichés towards Muslim societies and the Middle East weakened. Hundreds of Thousands of peaceful demonstrators risking their freedom, their health or even their lives demanding an end to dictatorship or a honest vote count triggered a wave of sympathy.<sup>100</sup> The myth that Muslims in North Africa and the Middle East were less interested in democracy than in radical religious demands was seriously shattered. Criticism of the traditional Western support for dictatorships in the region was broadly articulated in Europe and contributed to a reconsideration of such practices by Western Governments. The Libyan civil war re-introduced the question of violence into perception of the Middle East, though in a very different way than formerly the phenomenon of Islamist terrorism. In Libya, violence generally was perceived to be part of a freedom struggle (and government repression),

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<sup>98</sup> on the Israeli-Iranian rivalry see: Kaye, Dalia Dassa / Nader, Alireza / Roshan, Parisa: Israel and Iran - A Dangerous Rivalry, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica 2011.

<sup>99</sup> Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline defies US, in: BBC News Asia, 11 March 2013, online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21736725?print=true>

<sup>100</sup> Ramadan, Tariq: The Arab Awakening - Islam and the New Middle East, London 2012, pp. 16f.



not religion. It was only after the Syrian uprising transformed into civil war, that Western public perceptions towards the region grew less enthusiastic. Now, it was turning into a mix of compassion and sympathy with the victims of state violence, and concern that religious extremists were getting the upper hand and hijack the Arab Spring.

On the other hand, Middle Eastern perceptions of Western countries have also experienced modifications. Traditionally the Middle Eastern and North African public opinion, as far as it could be articulated, has been quite skeptical and critical towards Western powers. However, it has always criticized Western policies rather than Western values. In Egypt after the fall of Mubarak, only 19 percent of the population had a positive view of the United States, while at the same time 67 percent considered democracy preferable to any other form of government.<sup>101</sup> This has been reinforced in the Arab Spring. But it was quite surprising that many people and Governments in the Middle East now did not criticize Western interventionism in the Middle East, but the lack of it: the demand for Western military intervention in Libya had been widespread (until it obviously overstepped its UN mandate), and the Syrian opposition as well as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and others later criticized Western reluctance to provide weapons and other military support to the Syrian insurgents.

The dramatic regional changes led to alterations and adjustments in the Western-Muslim relationship, especially in the relationship between EU and NATO member countries and those in North Africa and The Middle East.

in 2011, Western foreign policy towards the region first was characterized by surprise, even shock and a short period of paralysis, since traditional partners and regional pillars in Tunisia and Egypt had disappeared, with a prospect that others might follow. At the same time, it was difficult to openly oppose popular revolts against dictatorships, while many politicians were concerned about the new, popular regimes potentially being anti-Western or even Islamist. After a few weeks most Western Governments accepted that the anti-dictatorial movements and revolts were unavoidable. Their success seemed likely, and it seemed advisable not to end up on the side of the losers. This brought in a wave of strong pro-democracy rhetoric, of modest support to new, reformist governments in Tunisia and Egypt, and it triggered the military intervention in Libya, to prove that Western powers were on the side of change.

Former Western support for regional dictatorships (like Tunisia and Egypt, among others) has discredited Western policy towards North Africa and the Middle East in the eyes of many people, including even some of the regional Governments. Also the direct and indirect Western support of Israel, its occupation of Palestine and its wars against Lebanon and Gaza have not endeared Western policies to the Arab public. The illegal US war in Iraq which liberated the country from Saddam Hussein's dictatorship at the price of destroying the Iraqi state and triggering a ruthless and bloody civil war, and the US and NATO military intervention in Afghanistan both have been failures, compared

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<sup>101</sup> Pew Research Center, Pew Global Attitudes Project, Muslim Brotherhood and Military Receive Positive Ratings - One Year Later, Egyptians Remain Optimistic, Embrace Democracy and Religion in Political Life, Washington, May 8, 2012, p. 20, 15

to the broad and lofty goals proclaimed at their beginning. Especially the Iraq war has discredited the US regional policy even further, and by extension, also the Western one. Now, US military forces have left Iraq at the end of 2011,<sup>102</sup> and in Afghanistan international troops are on their way out. Both experiences, in addition to the earlier failure in Somalia, have demonstrated that Western powers wield impressive capacities to successfully intervene in the broader region, but often are incapable to re-shape the domestic politics of these countries after military victory.<sup>103</sup> The situation in Libya is reinforcing this lesson. For the US and NATO it may be relatively easy to militarily overthrow hostile regimes (the Taliban, Saddam Hussein, Gaddafi), though at big cost to the respective country and sometimes their own. However, this overwhelming destructive capabilities hardly ever produced the desired political results, but rather led to quite unwanted ones, like chaos, insurgencies, civil war and a much stronger role of Iran in Iraq. This has not been overlooked in the region, and it has dampened Western desires to repeat such experiences, which is one of the reasons, that neither the US nor their allies have been very keen on militarily intervening in Syria. NATO has repeatedly made clear that it rules out a direct military intervention.<sup>104</sup> Especially the deployment of ground troops has been excluded repeatedly. Western countries are still by far the most powerful external actors in regional politics in North Africa and the Middle East, but they now are operating under strong political constraints, to which the financial and budgetary problems in the US and Western Europe have to be added. This weakening of Western policy is part of the current regional policy framework. The lack of success of Western countries to convince Iran to give up its nuclear program despite a decade of hardening sanctions is a case in point. The sanctions can hit the Iranian economy very hard, but they have not achieved a change in Iran's foreign or nuclear policy.

The Arab Spring forced the US and Western European Governments to reconsider their policies towards the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>105</sup> The pendulum swung from opportunistic support of local dictatorships towards a contradictory support of democratic change, for a short while. An excellent example was a parliamentary speech of German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, in which he explained the position of the German Government with regard to the Arab Spring. It was a remarkable and intelligent speech, which marked a clear break with the past policy of nurturing local dictatorships. Addressing the "freedom movement, which began as Jasmin Revolution in the streets of Tunis" and spread to other countries, Westerwelle declared that "as democrats we are on the side of democrats. ... We, as the Federal Republic of Germany, will support these peoples." The Foreign Minister made clear: "Not an authoritarian Government makes stability in a country, but a stable

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<sup>102</sup> Hippler, Jochen: Zum Zustand des Irak beim Abzug des US-amerikanischen Militärs, in: Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik: Band 5, Heft 1, Berlin 2012, pp. 61-71, [http://www.jochenhippler.de/html/irak\\_beim\\_abzug\\_der\\_us-truppen.html](http://www.jochenhippler.de/html/irak_beim_abzug_der_us-truppen.html) (2.4.2013).

<sup>103</sup> Hippler, Jochen: Strategische Grundprobleme externer politischer und militärischer Intervention - Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Krisensituationen des Nahen und Mittleren Ostens, INEF-Report 103, Duisburg 2011, pp. 42 and 43, [http://www.jochenhippler.de/html/strategische\\_probleme.html](http://www.jochenhippler.de/html/strategische_probleme.html) (2.4.2013).

<sup>104</sup> Baczynska, Gabriela: NATO head urges Syria political solution, rules out intervention, in: Reuters, 27 March 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/assets/print?aid=USBRE92Q0JL20130327> (2.4.2013).

<sup>105</sup> for a background of current US policy towards the Middle East, see: Gerges, Fawaz A.: Obama and the Middle East - The End of America's Moment?, New York 2012.

society is the precondition for its stability. We want stable democracies and democratic stability. ... Support of the drastic change in the Arab World corresponds to our values and our interest to the same degree." In this context Westerwelle warned, that the chance for democracy still might be threatened by the powers of the past: "The old forces in many places are still in full control, they still control money and influence."<sup>106</sup>

This was an ringing promise of a new regional policy for North Africa and the Middle East based on a democratic activism. It was not to last very long.

Since those early days of spring 2011, Western policy halfway swung back to a pragmatic policy of support for reform (Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, etc.) and in some cases insurgency (Libya in 2011 and Syria) on the one hand, and concern for regional stability on the other. And the term "stability" again is disconnected from the adjective "democratic" and can mean support for the "old forces" to which Westerwelle had referred to. When, for instance, the German Defense Minister called Saudi Arabia an important "anchor of stability" in the Middle East and agreed to sell the country 200 German battle tanks *Leopard II* and other military equipment, it was clear that democratization was not the decisive concern of regional policy. Foreign Minister Westerwelle explained, that "Human rights are not negotiable. ... But when we think of the region, we also have to consider our strategic and security interests and those of our allies".<sup>107</sup> This clarification came less than three month after the foreign minister had promised his far-reaching democratic activism. And a few months later German chancellor Angela Merkel in the context of further arms exports to the Arab Monarchies at the Persian Gulf justified these by postulating a "strategic partnership" with some of those, conservative regimes. It should be noted that such declarations of a preference of stability over change and the sale of tanks and other lethal and non-lethal military equipment happened *after* Saudi Arabia and the UAE had used tanks and soldiers to help crush a democratic revolt in neighboring Bahrain.<sup>108</sup>

#### **Western Countries and Islamism:**

*"So far, Western countries appear more willing than the secular parties of Tunisia and Egypt to accept the rise of the Islamists. Election results are clear, and Western countries know that they would lose all credibility if they rejected the outcome of democratic processes they support. ... Nevertheless, the rise of Islamist parties is a matter of concern to Western governments for two reasons. First, questions still remain about the ultimate goals of these parties, how they will evolve once they are in power, and whether they will be open to strong relations with the West."*

Ottaway, Marina: The Consequences of the Internal Power Shift, in: Ülgen, Sinan/Brown, Nathan J./Ottaway, Marina/Salem, Paul (eds.): *Emerging Order in the Middle East*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Outlook, May Washington 2012, p. 8.

<sup>106</sup> Auswärtiges Amt: Regierungserklärung durch Bundesaußenminister Westerwelle vor dem Deutschen Bundestag zum Umbruch in der arabischen Welt, 16 March 2013, [http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2011/110316\\_BM\\_BT\\_arab\\_Welt.html](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2011/110316_BM_BT_arab_Welt.html); translation J.H. (16.3.2011).

<sup>107</sup> „Anträge abgewiesen - Opposition scheitert mit Veto gegen Panzer-Deal“, in: Spiegel Online, 8 July 2011, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/antraege-abgewiesen-opposition-scheitert-mit-veto-gegen-panzer-deal-a-773253.html>; translation J.H. (8.7.2011).

<sup>108</sup> on Bahrain see, e.g.: McMurray, David / Ufheil-Somers, Amanda (Eds.): *The Arab Revolts - Dispatches on Militant Democracy in the Middle East*, Bloomington 2013, chapters 23 to 27.

Social and political change still is seen as unavoidable and basically acceptable, as long as it will not threaten "stability". And "stability" can still imply support for authoritarian or dictatorial regimes, like in Saudi Arabia or the UAE. Or, paradoxically, it may even include US support for the Israeli air attacks on Gaza in November 2012, when President Obama declared: "(W)e will continue to support Israel's right to defend itself."<sup>109</sup>

Also, besides retuning to the old emphasis of regional stability,<sup>110</sup> concern for anti-Western, Islamist extremism is back and high on the agenda (Egypt, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, etc.). The US Defense Department spoke of a mixture of "strategic opportunities and challenges" regarding the Arab Spring and concluded:

"Our defense efforts in the Middle East will be aimed at countering violent extremists and destabilizing threats, as well as upholding our commitment to allies and partner states. Of particular concern are the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction (WMD). U.S. policy will emphasize Gulf security, in collaboration with Gulf Cooperation Council countries when appropriate, to prevent Iran's development of a nuclear weapon capability and counter its destabilizing policies. The United States will do this while standing up for Israel's security and a comprehensive Middle East peace. To support these objectives, the United States will continue to place a premium on U.S. and allied military presence in – and support of – partner nations in and around this region."<sup>111</sup>

This approach does not exactly give the impression of being driven by concern for democratization, and it also is unclear, what exactly is new, and why it should succeed now when it failed before. In the European Union, as usual, several political approaches have been suggested. A typical one was formulated by the EU's Institute for Security Studies in Paris:

"The Arab revolts should act as a wake-up call for the transatlantic partners to refocus on *democratisation as a solution towards achieving more stability and security in the region*." This sounds wonderful, but trying to wish away the contradiction between democratic change and stability by assuming that one will lead to the other is not very convincing. Also the specific suggestions to implement this approach provide little reason for optimism: "Support to the security sector and the

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<sup>109</sup> Bruce, Mary / Ninan, Reena: Obama: 'We Are Fully Supportive of Israel's Right to Defend Itself', in: ABC News online, 18 November 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/11/obamawe-are-fully-supportive-of-israels-right-to-defend-itself/> (18.11.2012).

<sup>110</sup> in regard to US regional policy just before the Arab Spring, compare: Hanrath, Jan / Hippler, Jochen: Die US-amerikanische Politik im Nahen und Mittleren Osten unter Präsident Barack Obama, in: Orient – Deutsche Zeitschrift für Politik, Wirtschaft und Kultur des Orients, hrsg. vom Deutschen Orient-Institut in Berlin, Bd. 50, Nr. 2, 2009, pp. 56-66, [http://www.jochenhippler.de/html/us\\_nahostpolitik\\_unter\\_obama.html](http://www.jochenhippler.de/html/us_nahostpolitik_unter_obama.html) (2.4.2013).

<sup>111</sup> US Department of Defense: Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense, Washington 2012, p. 2.

judiciaries as well as supporting development in the Sahel region would be successful strategies to follow."<sup>112</sup>

The Western policy seems to have returned to an ad-hoc and case-by-case fashion, without a regionally integrated strategy. This may be less than surprising, given both the complexity of the regional situation and of Western interests (energy resources, political influence, regional stability, gradual change, control of migration, fight against Muslim extremism, etc.), but it is still very different from an overall policy driven by the desire of democratic change.

### ***Destabilizing Effects of the Civil Wars***

#### *Regional Impacts of the Libyan Civil War and its Aftermath*

Since its independence Libya has never been an important regional actor. Under the monarchy of King Idris, the Libyan state was weak, inefficient and corrupt. Under Muammar Gaddafi's rule (1969-2011) the eccentric character of the regime and its leader assured that hardly anyone outside Libya considered the country a relevant international actor, despite its oil-wealth. Gaddafi's foreign aspirations were quite ambitious: first Arab Unity, after repeated disappointments in this regard African Unity - both preferably under his leadership. But until his rapprochement with Western countries between 2000 and 2003, he and his regime were isolated as long as they did not pay for friendship. Arab countries in particular never took Libya very serious.<sup>113</sup> After the Libyan revolution the new Government is so weak and insecure domestically that there still is no reason to consider Libya a major foreign policy actor. The country is struggling with its internal problems. But still, the overthrow of Gaddafi and developments in the post-Gaddafi era have triggered instability in parts of Northern Africa, and to a much lesser degree in parts of the Middle East. A key trouble spot in this regard is the vast area that ranges from southern Libya through southern Algeria into northern Mali and Niger. In this vast region several small Salafi extremist and terrorist groups have operated for years, with *al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM) being the most prominent. Estimates of AQIM's strength vary, but probably the organization did not field more than 600-800 men in the whole area until the fall of Gaddafi. Despite operating as an al Qaida franchise, it was more a criminal gang than a political and terrorist organization, mostly busying itself with cigarette and drug smuggling from Western to Northern Africa, and with kidnapping and the extortion of money.<sup>114</sup> The Libyan civil war and the overthrow of Gaddafi changed all that. On the one hand, weapons and fighters from Libya

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<sup>112</sup> Wolff, Sarah: The Arab revolts: reconsidering EU-US strategies for freedom, security and justice, in: Pawlak, Patryk (Ed.): The EU-US security and justice agenda in action, Institute for Security Studies, European Union, Chaillot Papers, Paris December 2011, p. 111; emphasis added.

<sup>113</sup> Pargeter, Alison : Libya - The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi, New Haven/London 2012, p. 118-144

<sup>114</sup> Thornberry, William/ Levy, Jaclyn: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, CSIS Transnational Threats Project and the CSIS Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Program, Case Study Number 4, Washington, September 2011.

flowed south and south-west, strengthening AQIM considerably. This was reinforced by ethnic Tuaregs, which had been supported by Gaddafi before and also fled Libya after his downfall. When in March 2011 a part of the Mali military staged a coup against their Government, the Salafi groups and their Tuareg allies took the initiative and conquered the North-Eastern half of Mali, including the city of Timbuktu. When a further advance south and a control of all of Mali by AQIM and other extremists seemed imminent, the French government intervened militarily, with the logistical help of the US and a few European Governments. After a few weeks the Salafi coalition was dislodged from the towns and most of Northern Mali and mostly withdrew to the North-Western mountain range Adrar des Ifoghas.<sup>115</sup> Currently the extremists are trying to regroup and begin a long-lasting guerrilla war against French, Chadian, and Malian troops, which might be difficult to win for either party involved. A second option is that AQIM and the other Salafi groups avoid the French forces and relocate in neighboring Niger, Southern Libya, Mauretania, and Southern Algeria. The ruthless terrorist attack against an Algerian gas field close to the Libyan border demonstrates this danger.<sup>116</sup>

A second regional effect of the overthrow of Gaddafi is the proliferation of Libyan weapons from plundered stockpiles of the Gaddafi era. The chief of the US Africa Command, General Carter Ham, mentioned that "thousands of shoulder-fired anti-aircraft weapons from the arsenal of deposed Libyan leader Moammar Ghaddafi remain unaccounted for in Africa and beyond".<sup>117</sup>

Besides finding their way South to Tuareg fighters and Salafi extremists, Libyan weapons have been exported to Egypt by Libyan militias and religious groups. Some of them have ended up in the Sinai peninsula, where the security situation has been deteriorating. Some reports indicate that Libyan weapons "are turning up for sale at clandestine auctions in Egypt's lawless Sinai Desert, where shadowy buyers purchase firearms for Al Qaeda and Hamas operatives".<sup>118</sup>

Others might have reached the Gaza strip via this route. Some reports also have indicated that Hamas has ordered considerable amounts of weapons directly in Libya.<sup>119</sup> Other weaponry are obviously reaching Syria for use in the civil war. Generally, huge amounts of Libyan weapons are still unaccounted for and available to anybody willing to pay for them. A news agency for instance

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<sup>115</sup> Nossiter, Adam / Tinti, Peter: Mali War Shifts as Rebels Hide in High Sahara, in: New York Times, 9 February 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/10/world/africa/new-focus-in-mali-is-finding-militants-who-have-fled-into-mountains.html> (18.3.2013).

<sup>116</sup> Birnbaum, Michael: After Algerian standoff, debate emerges over hostage-takers' intent, in: Washington Post, 20 January 2013, [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-01-20/world/36473170\\_1\\_hostage-deaths-algerian-officials-algerian-security-forces](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-01-20/world/36473170_1_hostage-deaths-algerian-officials-algerian-security-forces) (2.4.2013).

<sup>117</sup> "General: many shoulder-fired anti-aircraft arms from Libya are still at large; some in Syria", Associated Press, in: Washington Post, 7 March 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/general-many-shoulder-fired-anti-aircraft-arms-from-libya-are-still-at-large-some-in-syria/2013/03/07/42278cd0-8746-11e2-a80b-3edc779b676f\\_print.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/general-many-shoulder-fired-anti-aircraft-arms-from-libya-are-still-at-large-some-in-syria/2013/03/07/42278cd0-8746-11e2-a80b-3edc779b676f_print.html) (7.3.2013).

<sup>118</sup> Alster, Paul: Covert auctions in Egypt put arms that freed Libya into hands of terrorists, in: FoxNews.com, 2 March 2013, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/02/26/arms-that-freed-libya-turning-up-at-desert-auctions-and-in-hands-terrorist/print> (26.2.2013).

<sup>119</sup> "Hamas ordered multiple shipments of missiles", in: WorldTribune.com, 8 March 2013, <http://www.worldtribune.com/2013/03/08/hamas-ordered-multiple-shipments-of-missiles-from-libya/> (8.3.2013).

reported about the violent Nigerian extremist group Boko Haram acquiring Libyan weapons from Tuareg groups in Northern Mali.<sup>120</sup> Another report indicated that Somali pirates also had bought weapons from Libyan sources.<sup>121</sup>

This trend of free-floating Libyan weapons all over the region and beyond is a very serious warning signal for regional stability. A UN report from the end of 2011 summarized the regional impact of the Libyan civil war and the overthrow of Gaddafi both clearly and graphically:

"While the impact of the crisis reverberated across the world, such neighboring countries as Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Tunisia bore the brunt of the challenges that emerged as a result of the crisis. In a relatively short period of time, the Governments of these countries, especially those in the Sahel region, had to contend with the influx of hundreds of thousands of traumatized and impoverished returnees as well as the inflow of unspecified and unquantifiable numbers of arms and ammunition from the Libyan arsenal. Although the volume and the impact of the returnee population differs from one country to the other, the influx clearly has the potential to further exacerbate an already precarious and tenuous situation. In addition, these countries are directly threatened by an impending food security and nutrition crisis that could further exacerbate and negatively affect the political, social and economic situation in the region."<sup>122</sup>

### *Regional Impacts of the Syrian Civil War*

The regional implications of the situation in Syria are at least as dramatic. The main reason is Syria's geographic location: Its neighbors Turkey and Israel are important regional military powers. While the former is involved in conflicts with the Kurdish PKK, the latter acts as occupation force in Palestine.<sup>123</sup> A Turkish airplane was shot down by Syria over the Mediterranean Sea, and instances of Syrian forces shelling Turkish territory have caused several deaths in Turkey. The Netherlands, Germany and the US have in response stationed Patriot missiles in Turkey. The Turkish government has applied heavy pressure on Damascus and is supporting the Syrian rebels. It has moved military forces close to the Syrian border. Also, weapons deliveries for the Syrian rebels, often bought with Saudi and Qatari

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<sup>120</sup> "Nigeria Islamists 'get looted Libyan arms", in: UPI.com, 12 April 2012, [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/Special/2012/04/12/Nigeria-Islamists-get-looted-Libyan-arms/UPI-61471334260074/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2012/04/12/Nigeria-Islamists-get-looted-Libyan-arms/UPI-61471334260074/) (12.4.2012).

<sup>121</sup> Roelf, Wendell: Analyst says Somali pirates have new weapons from Libya, in: Reuters, 12 April 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/assets/print?aid=USBRE83B0HO20120412> (12.4.2012).

<sup>122</sup> UNO: Report of the assessment mission on the impact of the Libyan crisis on the Sahel region, 7 to 23 December 2011, United Nations Security Council, S/2012/42, New York 2012, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2012/42](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2012/42) (18.1.2012).

<sup>123</sup> for the repercussions of the "Arab Spring" on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict see: Asseburg, Muriel: Der Arabische Frühling und die Zuspitzung des Arabisch-Israelischen Konflikts, in: Jünemann, Annette/ Zorob, Anja (Eds.), Arabellions - Zur Vielfalt von Protest und Revolte im Nahen Osten und Nordafrika, Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 159-174.

money in Croatia, are being transported to Northern Syria via Turkey, and through Jordan.<sup>124</sup> Lately, in the South of Syria military tension has increased. A few cases of cross-border fire have occurred both on the Jordanian border and on the Golan heights, involving Israeli forces. Israel has bombed several targets in Syria. Recently a group of Syrian rebels captured and held hostage 21 UN peacekeepers in the Golan heights for several days, in order to exert pressure on the Syrian Government.<sup>125</sup> These examples illustrate the military tension linking the Syrian civil war to regional and international actors.

Over the last two years the Syrian conflict has developed increasing spill-over effects in Lebanon and Iraq. Both are instable and fragile countries, with their very own painful histories of civil war. Both countries play a role in supporting the fighting parties in Syria. Sunni groups are often supporting the Syrian Sunni insurgents with money, weapons, and sometimes fighters. This includes Jihadi groups, mainly from Iraq, but also from Lebanon. The Lebanese Hezbollah is known to support the Syrian Government with advisors and fighters, at least in the border areas. Hezbollah for a long time had disputed a military presence in Syrian, but at least since May 2013 has openly confirmed and justified it.<sup>126</sup> There are indications that during the battle for the Syrian city of Qusayr Lebanese Salafi fighters and Lebanese Hezbollah soldiers directly confronted each other, indicating a growing link between Lebanon and the Syrian civil war. A fall of the Syrian dictatorship and a subsequent strengthening of Sunni groups or their direct control of the future Syrian government could further destabilize Lebanon<sup>127</sup> and Iraq. Especially if radical or extremist groups become even more involved, which is more likely over time, the destabilizing effect might grow. In Lebanon, Hezbollah would come into a difficult situation that could bring the country's delicate equilibrium of social and political forces out of

#### External Competition over Syria

*"The dynamics of strategic competition in Syria can also be expected to further strain relations between and within the pro-opposition and pro-Assad blocs. The current proxy war being played out between the Western-aligned states in Syria against the so-called "rejectionist axis" will not improve the prospects of negotiating broader regional disputes, including Iran's nuclear program. But even within blocs, the Syrian conflict will eventually drive wedges between partners whose interests do not perfectly align. For example, the United States and Saudi Arabia may agree on the need to bring down the Assad regime, but their visions of a future Syria are likely to differ markedly."*

Martini, Jeffrey / York, Erin and Young, William: Syria as an Arena of Strategic Competition, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica 2013, p. 8.

<sup>124</sup> Chivers, C.J. / Schmitt, Eric: Saudis Step Up Help for Rebels in Syria With Croatian Arms, in: New York Times, 25 February 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/26/world/middleeast/in-shift-saudis-are-said-to-arm-rebels-in-syria.html> (25.2.2013).

<sup>125</sup> Gladstone, Rick / Cowell, Alan: Syrian Rebels Agree on Deal to Release Peacekeepers, in: New York Times, 8 March 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/09/world/middleeast/syria-developments.html> (2.4.2013).

<sup>126</sup> Morris, Loveday: Hezbollah chief defends group's involvement in Syrian war, in Washington Post, Published: May 25, online: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/hezbollah-chief-admits-and-defends-groups-involvement-in-syrian-war/2013/05/25/3748965a-c55e-11e2-9fe2-6ee52d0eb7c1\\_print.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/hezbollah-chief-admits-and-defends-groups-involvement-in-syrian-war/2013/05/25/3748965a-c55e-11e2-9fe2-6ee52d0eb7c1_print.html).

<sup>127</sup> Salem, Paul: Can Lebanon Survive the Syrian Crisis? Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Middle East Center, Washington/Beirut, December 2012.



balance. This is one reason why Hezbollah – unlike the Palestinian Hamas – continues to support the secular dictatorship in Syria. The Syrian war also has led to sporadic fighting in Lebanon (e.g.: Tripoli, Beirut) and in March 2013 the Lebanese government resigned, which was at least indirectly linked to the Syrian conflict. Because of the escalation interconnection with the Syrian war, the elections in Lebanon have been postponed until November 2014.<sup>128</sup>

The Iraqi Government, which surely does not sympathize ideologically with the Baathist dictatorship of Bashar Assad, still politically supports it, because the Shiite and Kurdish parties consider the Assad regime as the lesser of two evils compared to a Sunni or even Sunni-Islamist takeover in Damascus.<sup>129</sup> Such a power shift could strengthen the Iraqi Sunnis or even their Jihadi groups which would further destabilize the current situation of rising violence in Iraq after the withdrawal of US American troops.<sup>130</sup> As a result of this skepticism Kurdish parties in Iraq have long urged the Syrian Kurds not to join the revolt against the government in Damascus, though they have little or no sympathy for the Syrian regime. A graphic example of the Syrian-Iraqi connection was an al Qaida led ambush in Iraq on more than 40 Syrian soldiers, who had fled to Iraq when under serious attack on the Syrian side of the border. All of them were killed, alongside at least seven Iraqi soldiers escorting them back to Syria.<sup>131</sup> Another, very different case was the urgent request of US Foreign Minister Kerry during his visit to Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki in Baghdad, to stop Iranian airplanes using Iraqi airspace for the delivery of weapons to Damascus in support of Bashar Assad's government.<sup>132</sup> During the last few months, the death toll of violence in Iraq has been on the rise, up to approximately 700 death in April 2013 - the highest figure for some five years. One of the possible connections might be that reports are accumulating about a Iraqi Shiite military role in the Syrian war,<sup>133</sup> which could motivate extremist Sunnis to attack Shiite targets in Iraq.

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<sup>128</sup> Syria crisis: Lebanon parliament postpones elections: BBC News, 31 May 2013, online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22733599>.

<sup>129</sup> Dodge, Toby: Iraq - From War to a New Authoritarianism. London 2012, p. 193.

<sup>130</sup> Hippler, Jochen: Zum Zustand des Irak beim Abzug des US-amerikanischen Militärs, in: Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik: Band 5, Heft 1, Berlin 2012, pp. 61-71.

<sup>131</sup> Adnan, Duraid / Gladstone, Rick: Massacre of Syrian Soldiers in Iraq Raises Risk of Widening Conflict, in: New York Times, 4 March 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/05/world/middleeast/fighting-escalates-in-syrian-city-opposition-says.html> (4.3.2013).

<sup>132</sup> Richter, Paul: Maliki resists Kerry's call to halt flow of Iranian arms to Syria, in: Los Angeles Times, 24 March 2013, [latimes.com/news/world/worldnow/la-fg-wn-kerry-maliki-20130324,0,4190952.story](http://latimes.com/news/world/worldnow/la-fg-wn-kerry-maliki-20130324,0,4190952.story) (24.3.2013).

<sup>133</sup> Hauslohner, Abigail: Iraqi Shiites fight for Syrian government, in: Washington Post, May 26 2013, online: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/iraqi-shiites-fight-for-syrian-government/2013/05/26/2013/05/26/6c3c39b4-c245-11e2-914f-a7aba60512a7\\_print.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iraqi-shiites-fight-for-syrian-government/2013/05/26/2013/05/26/6c3c39b4-c245-11e2-914f-a7aba60512a7_print.html).

A key point of Syria's regional importance is its role as the most important arena of competition<sup>134</sup> between Saudi Arabia (and some of its Gulf neighbors) and Iran, which has been dealt with above. Sometimes this is resulting in political initiatives to weaken the Syrian regime, e.g. within the Arab League context where Syria is now represented by the opposition, not the government. But over the last year it has also led to the more or less discreet delivery of arms and money to Syrian rebel groups.<sup>135</sup> A general support of Salafi groups and ideology in the whole region is part of their policy, which is less than reassuring. In turn Iran supports the government in Damascus in its fight against the insurgents politically, with personnel, advice and probably delivery of weapons as well.<sup>136</sup> In this sense the Syrian civil war functions as a proxy war for regional dominance. This is why the Syrian civil war is of higher relevance for the region than the Libyan one was in 2011. Also the Iranian financial and military support to Hamas (now reduced) and Hezbollah is part of Iran's policy to buy friendship and counter Saudi Arabian and Qatari influences.<sup>137</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The upheavals in the Middle East that began by the end of 2010 will stay with us for a long time. In most countries the struggle to overcome old, ossified systems has only begun and will continue for at least the rest of the decade. But it is important to recognize that the ongoing regional developments and upheavals themselves have been and still are changing their character everywhere, and they are not developing in synchronicity in all countries of the region. It is a *regional* process of change towards more pluralism and the political emancipation of the middle classes - but its forms are varied and follow diverse and specific avenues in different areas and countries. In several countries the old culture of fear and subservience towards the dictatorial systems has been broken or weakened considerably. Demands for an end to corruption and dictatorships, while simultaneously strengthening the rule of law and personal freedoms have become common – even the demand for democracy strongly arose. This is all the more remarkable, as the term “democracy” – though not the substance of it – became strongly discredited just a decade before, because of President George Bush’s use of it as one of his justifications of the Iraq war. Now, the majority of the population in several countries has no problem identifying with democracy.

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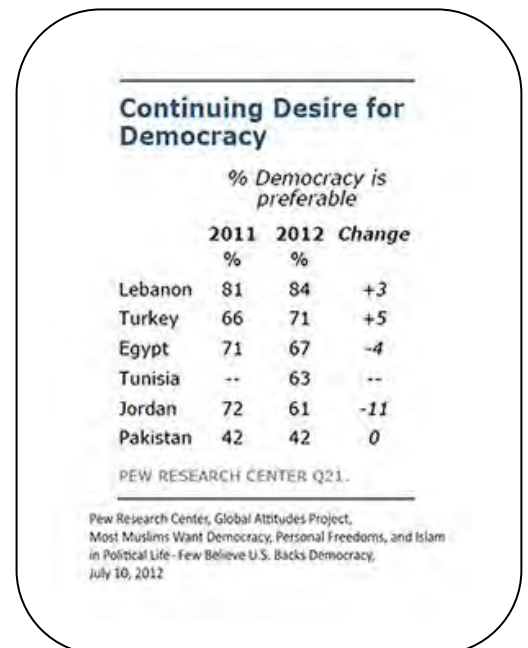
<sup>134</sup> Martini, Jeffrey / York, Erin / Young, William: Syria as an Arena of Strategic Competition, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica 2013.

<sup>135</sup> Chulov, Martin: Qatar crosses the Syrian Rubicon: £63m to buy weapons for the rebels, in: Guardian online, 1 March 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/01/syria-conflict-rebels-qatar-weapons> (1.3.2012).

<sup>136</sup> Charbonneau, Louis: Exclusive: Iran steps up weapons lifeline to Syria's Assad: envoys, in: Reuters, 14 March 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/assets/print?aid=USBRE92D11Z20130314> (14.3.2013).

<sup>137</sup> Byman, Daniel L. / Pollack, Kenneth: Regional Actors - The Changing Balance of Power in the Middle East, in: Pollack, Kenneth M. et al. (Eds.): The Arab Awakening - America and the Transformation of the Middle East, Brookings Institution, Washington 2011, pp. 243ff.

Though electoral processes and in some cases even constitutional reforms have been implemented (Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, etc.) democracy will not come overnight or soon. It will take a long process and political struggle to achieve it, even in contexts where the starting-point has not been a civil war. Without a new culture of mutual respect for dissenting or opposing viewpoints and a willingness to cooperate a functioning democracy is difficult to achieve. The ethnization or confessionalization of conflicts leads in the opposite direction, as does the polarization of society between religious and secular blocks. In several countries important steps have been undertaken towards a more pluralistic and democratic rule, like elections, the forming of new governments, and especially in regard to a new political culture. Popular participation in politics and the expression of dissent is not a rare exception any longer, but a usual occurrence - even if it often takes unruly or chaotic forms. This achievement will be very difficult to reverse. But still, the way ahead to participatory and more democratic societies is long and difficult. One of the key questions will be whether, after the overthrow of a dictator, the society and its political actors can reach a consensus to not just change the personnel, but also the structure, rules and mechanisms of rule. Statehood under the old regimes generally was not very different from – and sometimes even worse than – the former colonial states: The rulers and their states were not very much interested in their citizens (or subjects) and their wellbeing, but in their control and exclusion from power. These states were designed not to represent and serve their societies but to control them for powerful elites. This could be most clearly seen in the police and intelligence agencies, which were quite poor in protecting and serving the citizens, but strong in regard to corruption and in repression.



The crucial point for the future will be to re-design the state, to reform it from an instrument of the ruler against society into an instrument of society to manage itself and serve its needs. This struggle has not really begun, though the future of democratic rule will depend on it, even more than it will depend on elections. In Egypt, for instance, two years after the fall of the dictator there is precious little reform of state institutions. The police and the armed forces basically are the same as before, and President Morsi is more interested in using them for his own purposes and to keep order than to reform them.<sup>138</sup> Changing personnel by elections to run an incompetent or repressive state should not be taken for democratic rule.

<sup>138</sup> "Egypt's police: What happened to reform? -The police are as rotten as ever", in: The Economist, 23 March 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21574017-police-are-rotten-ever-what-happened-reform/print> (23.3.2013).

The process of broadening the role of society in running its own affairs and taking control of the state by society is threatened from at least four sides:

- By a disillusionment of the population, because their aspirations might become disappointed, both economically and politically. This might lead to a situation in which the processes of change might just slow down and finally come to a standstill, because the energy that drove them becomes exhausted;
- By a successful policy of old elites to keep their power intact, in some countries, or pave their way for a return to power. This would generally not mean that the respective political systems would stay in or reestablish their pre-2010 form, but imply degrees of modification or limited reform as a price for the old elites to keep control;
- By a development, in which new elites, Islamist or secular, would establish new authoritarian regimes, either by design or by default. The more polarized the societies become in the process of change, or the more violent this process develops, the more likely such a scenario becomes; or
- By a longer process of escalating political conflict, potential fragmentation and violence. This would delay the building of a new political order for some years or longer.

It is obvious that under specific conditions a mix of some of these scenarios may be possible, for instance an new authoritarianism that might include elements of the old elite, made possible by the exhaustion of the spirit of change in society.

Tunisia and Egypt are cases, where already today the future development is threatened by growing economic and unresolved social problems, which disappoints the hopes of many people for a better future. Also, the ongoing struggle between religious and secular forces, and between mainstream Islamists and Salafi radicals might intensify. The outcome of the political developments are less than certain, and a period of growing instability a realistic possibility. In countries which aim for controlled, top-down reform (Morocco, Jordan) it is yet unclear whether this approach will succeed, and if it ever is going to produce more than cosmetic changes. Elsewhere – like in Libya and Yemen – there have been important political changes, but stable development and democratic reforms are threatened by fragmentation, sometimes violent. In Syria the future outcome of the civil war is not predictable at

**External Support for Democracy:**

*"In formulating policy approaches and assessing their likely effects, it is important to recognize the limits of outside influence on transition processes once they are under way. As discussed [elsewhere], foreign aid (of all types, except military, aggregated) has been shown to have no significant effect on democratization. The relatively small portion of foreign aid directed specifically at building democratic institutions and processes has been shown to have intended effects, but, on the whole, modest ones. One of the most notable statistical studies of the effectiveness of democracy and governance assistance found that elections and civil society support were the most effective types. But overall, democracy assistance did not account for most of the variation seen in levels of democracy."*

Miller, Laurel E. et al.: Democratization in the Arab World - Prospects and Lessons from Around the Globe, RAND Corp., Santa Monica 2012, p. 337.

this point.<sup>139</sup> A fall of Asad's dictatorship is most likely, but how and whether the multitude of very diverse opposition groups will be able to agree on and build a new political framework cannot be predicted. It is realistic to expect continuing violence even after the end of the regime. In some of the oil-rich Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain) demonstrations took place but were suppressed by the authorities. In these countries a policy of sociopolitical accommodation, trying to offer economic benefits to the population to compensate for the complete lack of participation, is combined with the threat or use of violence, to secure stability for the moment. Whether this can last for much longer is hardly predictable.

It is very difficult or impossible to predict the outcome of all the different power struggles and processes of political change in individual countries. But it is most likely, that the *region* will not return to the old days of a "monochrome" political framework, where most countries shared very similar experiences in regard to Governance and State-Society relations, despite the differences in formal state setups (republics, monarchies, secular, religious, nationalist, fake democracies or outright dictatorships). In the future we can expect a greater regional diversity in regard to pluralism, the rule of law and political freedoms, probably ranging from systems of a modified authoritarianism and dictatorships to more pluralistic systems bordering – but not quite reaching – democratic rule, somewhat compromised by the influence of informal or clientelistic networks of social elites.

The potential influence of Western countries on regional development is modest at best. Even the use of military means (e.g. Libya and Syria) does not guarantee success. In Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011) the tactical war objectives were achieved quickly - the overthrow of the Taliban, Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi - but the strategic result was neither stability nor democratic development nor sustainable Western dominance. When influence is exerted below the threshold of the use of military force, such as diplomatic pressure, the support of civil society organizations or economic sanctions, the risk of further destabilization is smaller, but often the effect is rather non-specific and unreliable. In the end the policy goals can either be "stability", or a fundamental reshaping of the respective North African and Middle Eastern societies. And in both cases the potential influence of third parties is rather small, and previous experiences have not been encouraging.<sup>140</sup> Therefore Western actors should be wary of exaggerated ambitions. They should rather focus on promoting positive framework conditions, both economically and politically, on humanitarian assistance, on the support of reform developments coming from the respective societies themselves, and on other "soft" instruments. In particular they should refrain from further stabilizing dictatorial and repressive regimes by economic or military support. Furthermore, while Western

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<sup>139</sup> alternative scenarios are being presented by: Wieland, Carsten: Syria - A Decade of Lost Chances: Repression and Revolution from Damascus Spring to Arab Spring, Seattle 2012, pp. 287-300.

<sup>140</sup> Hippler, Jochen: Strategische Grundprobleme externer politischer und militärischer Intervention - Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Krisensituationen des Nahen und Mittleren Ostens, INEF-Report 103, Duisburg 2011.

governments indeed might legitimately represent the interests of their respective countries in the region, they should not hide those behind humanitarian or altruistic justifications. Imperial interests and the promotion of democratic stability can block each other - and those blockages tend to derail both.

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