

**From**


# **Resilience**

**to**

# **Revolt**

Making Sense  
of the Arab Spring

بِسْقَطِ حَمْدٍ  
أَهْوَتْ إِلَى الطُّغْيَانِ

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# Executive Summary

**Early 2011 waves** of protest started rolling through the Middle East. Though in many states the status quo was only shaken without any actual transformations, the popular uprisings, which have since become known as the “Arab Spring”, did manage to remove a series of leaders from their figurative thrones.

The purpose of this research, funded by the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice, is to provide a broadly-scoped understanding of the Arab uprisings, aggregating also what research has already been done, in an effort to pinpoint what factors or dynamics can be found to be useful in trying to make sense of the sudden mass mobilization in the Middle East in 2011. Notwithstanding some methodological limitations that were imposed, the intentionally very general research question has yielded a series of valuable insights, mostly centered on endogenous factors that can help elucidate the complexities of the Arab uprisings.

**The first matter** to be addressed was how such a ground-breaking turn of events had been predicted by so few, if any. It quickly became apparent that periods of revolutionary upheaval are nearly impossible to predict due to their inherently complex nature, and can only be properly explained in hindsight. Nevertheless, it should be possible to identify stress factors carrying valuable information on the viability of a complex social system. In the case of the Arab Spring, very few managed to connect the build-up of those stress factors to the impending breakdown of authoritarian systems, or the wave of popular upheavals that trashed through the region.

This was explained by the traditional focus within academic circles on the robustness of authoritarianism. Suggested reasons for this regime resilience were the phenomenon of “authoritarian upgrading”, which entails the reaction of autocrats to changes in the political, economic or social environment, often converging around a policy built to preserve and stabilize their rule, and other similar factors based on fluctuating levels of authoritarianism. However, in light of the Arab revolts the idea has resurfaced that

these processes of adaptation have generated their own problems, for example by undermining authoritarian stability in the long run because of the absence of a robust political society, or the reinforcement of a growing cynicism among Arab populations.

**The question *why*** the Arab Spring came about was answered through the acknowledgement of structural imbalances, mainly socio-economic, political and demographic, that over the course of decades weakened the foundations on which authoritarian regimes were built. The economic hardship regimes endured in recent years, due to macro-economic shocks, forced rulers to revert money away from socio-economic appeasement of populations. The result quickly showed when prices of commodities started increasing and (youth) unemployment grew. At the same time, due to widespread corruption and cronyism, inequality had also risen to new heights. The hardship was only further worsened because of a youth bulge, which is what occurs when the fraction of young people in a population is unbalanced relative to other cohorts, finally leading to the collapse of the implicit social contract the autocrats had entered in with their populations.

Nevertheless, the explanation of why pressures mounted is not enough to explain *how* autocrats that had remained in power for decades were suddenly forcibly removed from office. For that purpose, the concept of social nonmovements — passive networks that bring change through unintended consequences of individual practices as a result of “politics of presence” — was discussed extensively, in order to elucidate how public frustration managed to crystallize into protest movements, and subsequently how these movements due to that mobilization grew to a critical mass, where repressive force was no longer able to contain it.

To subtly combine these matters of *why* and *how* the concept of triggers (or catalysts) was introduced, such as the death of Mohammed Bouazizi. In light of the factors discussed, it is difficult to imagine these seemingly small occurrences as having much impact, but it were nonetheless these apparently innocuous events that were the eventual straw that broke the camel’s back.

**Still, in only** a fraction of states were the revolts successful in the sense that they eventually managed to remove an autocrat from his throne. Now that the smoke has cleared somewhat, it is easy to specify how the “domino” factor ended up playing a smaller role than was initially envisioned, but it would be a loss to downplay the contagion effects of the initial revolts for the rest of the region.

The aftermath of the situation in the four countries that saw actual change was discussed in some detail. For example, the



socio-economic situation, an important cause of the revolts, has by no means improved which could prove itself a future source of conflict. Meanwhile, a possible source of conflict is also arising as a result of the recent electoral successes of Islamist parties. The rise of political Islam is viewed with some caution, both in the region as well as beyond.

In a comparison of the Arab Spring with a selection of historic accounts of revolutions and popular uprisings elsewhere, asking the question whether any lessons should be distilled, the answer is best summarized by the idea that even though there are always similarities to be found, these will only hold up on a general level. There appears to be no model formula for revolution, with each case being unique.

With that in mind, our gaze was nevertheless directed to the future, addressing the opportunities for Western-style democratic transitions, based on prior research dealing with possible sets of preconditions and chances of success. It was concluded that Tunisia has by far the best chances of successfully experiencing a move towards liberal democracy. Though for Egypt the transition process will most probably prove more difficult, this state is also well ahead of Libya and Yemen, which will have to deal with building both a state, a nation, as well as governing structures to keep them together.

Finally, a series of possible security risks were discussed. Most urgently in this matter is the deterioration of the conflict in Syria, and the set of national, regional, and international repercussions that would accompany such deterioration. Also, the growing influence of al-Qa'ida in Yemen was debated, as well as the fear of a fragile state in Libya. On a more general note, the possible effects of populist politics were examined, and how sources of conflict that would previously be contained should now perhaps be expected to make more of a ruckus, such as the position of Israel in the region, its actions, and the support it gets from its Western allies, including the Netherlands.

**To conclude, in** a region where academic research had mainly been focusing on the longevity of autocracy, explaining how established structures prevailed and seemed impervious to change, the unexpected revolts and subsequent removal of autocrats such as Ben Ali, Mubarak, Qadhafi and Saleh is at least a break with past decades. At the very least then, the Arab revolts, also those that were not (yet) successful, tell an impressive story about the human will and how to overcome fear.

# Introduction

## *A Few Notes on Methodology, Terminology and Structure*

Early 2011 the eyes of the world were once again set on the Middle East, as crowds measuring in the hundred thousands marched the streets of Tunis in a desperate attempt to finally end the reign of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, ultimately succeeding on January 14<sup>th</sup>. Waves of protest swept through the region, quickly also engulfing the streets of Cairo with public rage and not stopping there. Though in many states the status quo was only shaken without any actual transformations, the popular uprisings, which have since become known as the “Arab Spring”, did manage to remove a series of leaders from their figurative thrones, including also Mubarak of Egypt, Qadhafi of Libya, and Saleh of Yemen.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the Arab Spring, and more specifically aggregate what research has already been done, in order to answer a series of broadly scoped questions of interest regarding history, present and future. Specifically, questions involved the level of theorization in academic literature on the Arab Spring, and what factors or dynamics were found to be useful in trying to make sense of the sudden mass mobilization in the Middle East in 2011, also comparing the extent to which these factors and dynamics applied to the different states that saw their foundations rocked by these protests. Also, the question was posed whether there were other accounts of revolutionary upheaval that could provide telling lessons for dealing with the outcome of the Arab Spring, as was the question what is to be expected from the near future, using the factors and dynamics outlined in response to the aforementioned questions. Finally, it was asked to identify the possible security risks and consequences that could arise from the aftermath of 2011. However, before delineating in which chapters these questions are answered, first several methodological and terminological comments need to be addressed.

## Methodology

As said, the initial request for proposal was very broad in scope, asking for a theoretical analysis of the Arab Spring in its entirety, combined with a set of sub questions dealing with specific areas of interest for policy makers. In setting up a research plan, the broad scope of the initial research question was respected, though naturally some limitations were imposed. First of all, methodologically this research is based on a careful reading of academic literature on the subject of the Arab Spring. It aims to provide an aggregation of the views that are currently expressed in the academic community as to what happened in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region starting December 2010. However, given the specific focus on what had been written, a limitation is enforced through the subjects that are dealt with in the literature. For example, though the subject of religion is very much an important one as a cultural concept in the Middle East, and was thus expected to be crucial during the uprisings, the general consensus is that this was not the case (be it that, for instance, the “after-Friday-prayer demonstrations” have been an important mobilizational factor). It was only once the smoke cleared that it once again became a significant factor. This is reflected in the remainder of this research paper, with only minimal attention for religion and religious movements in the first part, whereas the latter part at specific points does come back to it.

Another point that must be stressed here is the fact that our attention was specifically directed at the internal dynamics of the Arab Spring. Though both the regional as well as the international political dimensions are important elements in discussing the revolts of 2011, the decision was made to focus on endogenous factors. Obviously the regional and international components are dealt with at certain stages, for example when explaining the situation in Libya, they are not dealt with expansively. The complexities of the international and regional environment can hardly be captured by the minimal treatment offered here, but due to constraints in time and resources this is a conscious decision the authors made.

As said, this research was originally aimed to provide an aggregation of the views that are currently expressed in the academic community. However, quite quickly it became apparent that there is as of yet a lack of abstract, theoretical analyses on the subject. Much of the work done is descriptive, opinionated or normative. Though these contributions were nonetheless valuable, the initial task of pure aggregation was somewhat altered in order not to deliver a mere list of opinions. Nevertheless, to allow for the proper transmission of the views that have surfaced in the academic

world, where possible the authors have tried to stick to what was published in the past 18 months.

Another change to the original research plan is the following: initially the plan was to focus on a structural thematic relay of those expressed views, ignoring the geographic spread across the region, the idiosyncrasies of countries, and the differences in ways in which the Arab Spring had run its course in different states. However, as research progressed it became apparent that those idiosyncrasies and individual courses were too significant to simply ignore and focus solely on the big, general picture. Therefore, in several chapters there is a divide in a general section up front, and often a country-specific section as latter half.

A final issue that would require attention is the manner in which the academic world was scrutinized for material on the Arab revolts. Though the majority of scholarly work is being written in English these days, on a subject such as the Arab Spring there was a substantial amount of material in Arabic. In order not to miss out on insights from the region a team of Arabists joined the project. With their additions the scope of the research is broadened to reflect not only what is written in the West but also incorporates how Arabs understand and explain it themselves.

## Terminology

Regarding procedural matters, there are a series of textual remarks that need to be acknowledged. First of all, there is much public debate on whether the events that transpired across the Arab world in 2011 constitute a “revolution.” Also in Arabic literature this appears a point of contention: Al-Sayyid Yasîn, for example, stresses that conventional wisdom has it that revolutions require clear political leadership. It is because of this lack of leadership (at the moment of writing) that he speaks of a popular upheaval instead of a revolution. According to him we can only speak of a revolution once this upheaval will be taken charge of by popular revolutionary leadership and is given (democratic) direction (2011: 291-293). In the end, given the extreme uncertainty regarding fundamental change in the near future, and thus the overall outcomes of the uprisings, the decision was made not to make use of the term “revolution” when describing the Arab Spring.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the protests will be referred to as “revolts,”

<sup>1</sup> Asef Bayat 2011, like John Keane 2011, labeled the Arab uprisings as “refo-lutions” — halfway between revolutions per se and reform measures. Also see Friedman, G. 2011, Amin 2011, Khazbak 2011, and Van der Pijl 2011.

“uprisings,” “protests,” and the like. These terms will be used interchangeably.<sup>2</sup>

Another point that requires clarification regards the terminology used in geographical explanation. Though strictly speaking the term Middle East would not necessarily cover all those states that were touched by the Arab Spring (such as Morocco or even Tunisia), the term will nevertheless be used. When referring to the Middle East, or the Arab world, the reference will point to the entirety of the MENA region.<sup>3</sup>

Also, though the Arab Spring does indeed encapsulate also protests in states where no actual transition has succeeded, in this research the term will be used to specifically mean those states where they did, namely Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Nevertheless, not in all chapters will these four states be treated similarly. This is not only due to the differences in availability of literature — on Egypt much more has been published than on Yemen — but also due to specificity of the different cases, and the general urge to do research into more general themes that can help explain the Arab Spring. This explains for example the focus in Chapter 4, “Engendering Transformations,” on Tunisia and Egypt. Nevertheless, as in later chapters the questions to be answered and the topics to be discussed become more concrete a country-specific approach will often be used to at least elucidate the differences mentioned.

An exception, and a different case entirely, is Syria. Though at some point even in Damascus the streets were filled with crowds protesting the reign of Bashar al-Asad, the situation in Syria escalated and is as of yet still unresolved. The volatile nature of the conflict, and the limited information available make it near impossible to make any statement regarding the situation, and will therefore largely be refrained from.

## Outline

In Chapter 2 an effort is made to answer the question why so few, if any, had foreseen the coming of the Arab revolts. The next chapter deals with the concept of authoritarian resilience, in order to elucidate how autocratic structures had managed to survive for so long in the region. Chapter 4, “Engendering Transformations,” tries to answer the main question if and how the combustion of resentment that grew into the Arab Spring can be explained in

<sup>2</sup> An exception will be made when an author uses the term “revolution” in a work to which is referred to, in which case that terminology will be adopted.

<sup>3</sup> The MENA region, Middle East and Arab world are used interchangeably. We want to stress that Israel and Iran, although not Arab, are part of this region.

general terms. The following chapter has a look at those states in the Middle East and North Africa that did see people taking to the streets, but where these protests never picked up speed to really harm the authoritarian status quo. In Chapter 6 once again the view is reverted to the states that actually managed to oust their autocratic leaders but with specific attention for the aftermath, the period following the actual removal of those leaders. Chapter 7 tries to compare the Arab uprisings to several other historical accounts of revolutionary upheaval, such as the Iranian Revolution of 1979 or the revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989. Then, in Chapter 8 an effort is made to look ahead at what is possibly in store for those states that sacked their leaders, and what trajectories are considered viable or likely. In the penultimate chapter the potential security risks resulting from the events in the Middle East in 2011 are scrutinized at national, regional and international levels, to be followed by a short conclusion in Chapter 10.

# Surprise, Surprise!

## *Why We Missed the Arab Spring*

As the initial excitement over the remarkable turn of events in the Middle East subdued, the first question that was asked to many of the region's scholars was how none had been able to predict the waves of protest that started in Tunisia in December 2010, and thereafter slowly rippled onwards through a part of the world that had thus far been seen as stably autocratic.<sup>4</sup> Though such critique is rather easily constructed in hindsight there is nevertheless an argument to be made that it is remarkable that few, if any, aptly identified the underlying factors (nor the triggers) that would eventually cause the protests to develop into full-scale revolts. Since then several arguments have surfaced that try to provide explanations for that lack of identification. Also, in retrospect, we all line up to underscore the seemingly obvious finding that during the rule of authoritarian regimes their collapse appears inconceivable, while after they have fallen their demise appears to have been inevitable (Aarts and De Vries 2011). Or, to paraphrase Tocqueville, why do revolutions seem so inevitable in hindsight, yet are impossible to foresee? (Goodwin, 2011: 453).<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps fortunately, the failure to predict crucial historical events is a phenomenon that is found more often in academic

<sup>4</sup> Some would claim the Egyptian novelist Mohammed Salmawy to have been the only one to have “predicted” the transformative events that took place in Egypt in his *Ajniha al-Farasha* (The Wings of the Butterfly), published in November 2010. We owe gratitude to Sami Zemni for pointing out this reference.

<sup>5</sup> A glaring example of this is delivered by the prominent journalist Rami Khouri, editor-at-large of the Beirut-based *Daily Star* newspaper. In the summer of 2009 he analyzed why Iranians do revolt and Arabs do not (his article was literally titled “Why Do Arabs Not Revolt?”), while two years later he voiced the opinion that a democratic Middle East region is “inevitable” (*Near East Quarterly*, 9 September 2011).

literature.<sup>6</sup> Especially in the final decades of the previous century the topic became subject to vigorous academic debate, following for example the 1979 Iranian revolution (Kurzman 2004) and the equally unexpected and rapid demise of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall (Kuran 1989 and 1995). Generally speaking, it is hard to predict when we deal with complex systems like the social world, compared to the domain of engineering, architecture, astronomy and most of physics where the linear is dominant. In systems where humans interact this is simply absent. So all what we possibly can do is to reflect upon events *after* they have happened. Indeed, as Robert Keohane once remarked, scholars are not fortune tellers and should not aspire to make predictions. What they have to do is look for the understanding of the underlying structures and dynamics that are shaping and constraining the relevant actors (Keohane 2004).

Moreover, even if social scientists were to succeed in reaching a full understanding of these structures and dynamics beforehand, it would most likely still be difficult to predict the level of individual support for the revolutionary cause (Goodwin 2011). Almost two decades ago Kuran predicted our collective failure to anticipate anything like the Arab Spring (Goodwin 2011: 453). In reaction to the fall of East European communism, Kuran stated that the best social scientists could do is “incorporate the fact that revolutions tend to come as a surprise into the set of phenomena to be explained”. His theory therefore focuses on the interdependencies among the decisions of political actors (1995: 1531-32). Kuran foremost stresses the importance of “preference falsification,” that is the fact that people may not publicly reveal their private preferences (Goodwin: 453).

Preference falsification occurs when there is a divergence between a person’s public and private preference, generally in relation to socially sensitive issues such as support for a repressive regime. When the regime’s legitimacy is being challenged it is therefore hard to predict what part of the populace will join a movement against the regime if others were to do so as well. Kuran refers to this as the “revolutionary thresholds” of individual members of society (1995: 1532-33). A shift in the distribution of

<sup>6</sup> Lack of predictive power is not a privilege of academicians however. Also rulers themselves are mostly not aware of upcoming sea-changing events that may lead to their removal from power. One author recalls a nice anecdote of March 1848 when Emperor Ferdinand I watched the riots in front of the Hofburg, wondering whether that was a revolt. The response of one of his ministers was: “Your Majesty, no this is a revolution!” The monarch then shook his head in disbelief and made the allegedly famous statement: “Ja derfens den des” (Are they allowed to do so?). The similarities with the 2011 events in the Middle East are not difficult to find: most probably also the Tunisian and Egyptian presidents may have asked themselves: “Who allowed the demonstrators to do what they did?” (Kneissl 2011: 13).



these individual thresholds brought about by “a small, intrinsically insignificant event” can spark a “revolutionary bandwagon” that will result in collective mobilization (Goodwin 2011: 453). After the revolution occurred, preference falsification also obscures the factors that had been working against change, because the majority of people will claim that their support for the toppled regime had never been genuine (Kuran 1995: 1533).

A somewhat similar argument is supported by Keddie (1995) and Kurzman (2004) who use evidence from the Iranian Revolution of 1979 to claim that perhaps revolutions are “explainable afterward but inherently unpredictable beforehand [...]. Revolutions may be products of tiny initial choices and an infinity of subsequent turning points and interactions that can be narrowed down or identified only in hindsight” (Kurzman 2004: 341). Kurzman even goes one step further than Kuran by stating that individuals themselves often do not have a considered and precise idea about how they would react to any given structural shock. Thus, even if there were no such thing as preference falsification it would still be impossible to accurately predict a collective mobilization beforehand (Goodwin 2011: 454). Research on the Color Revolutions<sup>7</sup> emphasized the role of “radical contingency” in revolutions, or the fact that “very small decisions early on can have huge and unanticipated impact on the final outcome of an uprising due to the strategic interaction of the various factors ‘in play’” (Bellin 2012: 142). Basically, the immensely complex interplay of causal and catalyst factors in a process of revolution makes it impossible to predict (Baker 2012).<sup>8</sup>

A less deterministic explanation of why the Arab Spring was hardly foreseen is based on the idea of “Black Swans” (Taleb and Blythe 2011; Shukrallah 2011; Joffé 2011; Boussaid 2011). A “Black Swan”, as originally posited by Taleb (2007), is an event with three distinct characteristics. Primarily, it is an occurrence that is outside the realm of conventional expectation; past experience carries no predictive power with regard to its occurrence. Second, the impact of a Black Swan is extreme, whatever form it assumes.<sup>9</sup> Finally, though it is impossible to predict beforehand, it is perfectly possible to formulate explanations in retrospect (Taleb 2007: xvii-

<sup>7</sup> The Color Revolutions is a term used to describe a series of political revolutions in Eastern Europe (more in particular Georgia’s Rose Revolution of 2003, and Ukraine’s Orange Revolution of 2004).

<sup>8</sup> A contributing cause is the often strict but unclear notion of success ascribed to the term “revolution”. The vague definition of a revolution results in ambiguity, as can be witnessed in the current debate on whether the transformations due to of the Arab Spring should even be considered proper “revolutions”.

<sup>9</sup> Previous Black Swan events are for example the bankruptcy of Lehman brothers in 2008, the Pacific tsunami in 2004, and the terrorist attacks on 9/11.

xix). Basically, without dabbling too far into mathematical probabilities, Black Swans are events that can be found in the long tails of a probability distribution, and are thus still very real possibilities, but because of the rarity of their occurrence are often not conceived as such.<sup>10</sup>

A sophistication of that original argument by Taleb and Blythe (2011) argues that the Arab Spring follows from these findings. Following the fall of Ben Ali and Mubarak, scholars were quick to assume no one could have seen it coming. However, Taleb and Blythe argue that the revolts in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya are simply a result of constrained systems exploding (2011: 149). Complex systems, such as the combined social and economic dynamics of a state or a region, tend to become extremely fragile over time. When the inherent volatility of society is artificially suppressed, it leads to the aggregation of risks underneath the surface. As a result, pressures start accumulating, explaining why complex systems are increasingly prone to Black Swans (ibid.: 150). They argue that the reason many were unable to predict the turmoil in the Middle East was because there was too much of a focus on possible catalysts whereas the underlying stress factors in the system were neglected (ibid.: 152-154).<sup>11</sup> On top of that, in a system that has been managed to sustain decades of autocracy there is a tendency to overestimate the required magnitude of a catalyst.

Boussaid (2011) in turn perhaps supports the claim that the build-up of stress factors prior to December 2010 could have been predicted, but shifts focus somewhat. He claims the reason these stress factors were never properly identified was not because of an overzealous search for possible catalysts, but instead due to a tendency to so often try and explain the Middle East in terms of religion and culture, factors which were of meager importance in explaining why people eventually took to the streets.

There is an important generalization to be taken from Boussaid's argument. This reflex to explain the Middle Eastern course in terms of such generalized irrelevant themes is part of engrained notion of Middle Eastern "exceptionalism" that was all too

<sup>10</sup> In order to better prepare for possible Black Swan events an inordinate amount of thinking "outside the box" is required (though logic dictates Black Swans can never be predicted); a reason why following 9/11 American government officials invited filmmakers, writers and other "creatives" to brainstorm on possible terrorist targets and security risks.

<sup>11</sup> They make clever use of an analogy with a grain of sand: "Imagine someone who keeps adding sand to a sand pile without any visible consequence, until suddenly the entire pile crumbles. It would be foolish to blame the collapse on the last grain of sand rather than the structure of the pile, but that is what people do consistently" (Taleb and Blythe 2011: 154).

prevalent in scholarly debate.<sup>12</sup> Arab authors (Huwaidî 2012; Yasîn 2011) even identify the stereotyping of Arabs as politically backward, apathetic and submissive to their authoritarian regimes as an important reason for the “unexpectedness” of the events. A perfect example is the argument that Muslims prefer strong leadership (*zaim*) over chaos (*fitna*), and thus have no tradition of consensual politics, based on a crude interpretation of Islamic thought (Boussaid 2011: 12). The line of reasoning is that Islamic political culture promotes political quietism, expressed in the famous admonition of Al-Ghazali (1058-1111): “Better one hundred years of the Sultan's tyranny than one year of people's tyranny over each other”.

Though quite a few alarming studies about the Arab world's “deficits” have been published in recent years,<sup>13</sup> it seemed that the resilience of autocracy itself eventually became part of that “exceptionalist” rhetoric, and many academics were blinded from seeing the buildup of pressures as described by Taleb and Blythe. Many trees have been sacrificed for publications on how authoritarian rulers in the Middle East managed to survive for so long.<sup>14</sup> We should, however, be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water. Many years ago Kuran stated that “The goal of all science, not just biology, should be to explain the explicable, predict the predictable, and, equally important, separate the knowable from the unknowable” (1995: 1534). The idea of authoritarian resilience might not have been useful to predict recent events, it did explain the explicable for many years and might not have lost its explanatory power just yet.

<sup>12</sup> The notion of Arab exceptionalism is drawn from work by, among others, Raphael Patai, Bernard Lewis, Elie Kedouri, Daniel Pipes, Ernest Gellner and Fouad Ajami. For more nuanced views and contemporary critique see Anderson 1991, Bromley 1994 and 1997, Waterbury 1994, Norton 1995, Niblock 1998 and Teti 2007. Not long after the revolts broke out, Filiu 2011 was one of the first authors to expose the failure of the “exceptionalism” notion.

<sup>13</sup> Among a range of studies, the most well-known and path breaking were the *Arab Human Development Reports 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2009*.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory Gause was one of the first academics who (in July-August of 2011) launched a sort of *mea culpa* while simultaneously making a lucid contribution on how to understand the Arab uprisings.

## Here to Stay

### *Solving the Puzzle of Authoritarian Resilience*

Since the 1970s the world has been swept by, to put it in Huntington's words, the Third Wave of democracy. In give or take twenty-five years, multiple countries moved away from dictatorial rule toward more liberal and often more democratic governance. This new political trend was welcomed warmly by various governmental, quasi-governmental, and nongovernmental organizations that wished to further promote democracy abroad. This "new democracy-promotion community" embraced an analytic model of democratic transition that soon became a universal paradigm for understanding democratization (Carothers 2002: 5-6). The transition paradigm is defined by the assumption "that any country moving away from dictatorial rule can be considered a country in transition toward democracy" and the conviction that this is a linear process (ibid.: 6-7). Following this line of thought, hybrid regimes, states somewhere on the scale between full democracy and full authoritarianism, have often been labeled as partial, incomplete, or unconsolidated democracies (Levitsky and Way 2010: 3-4).

Although numerous scholars — and, more in particular, Western policy makers — hold on to the idea that the whole world can and will be democratic (e.g. Diamond 2003; Deudney and Ikenberry 2009; Fukuyama 2011) others have become more and more critical of the democratization bias.<sup>15</sup> In 2002 Thomas Carothers called for the end of the transition paradigm because "many countries that policy makers and aid practitioners persist in calling 'transitional' are not in transition to democracy, and of the democratic transitions that are under way, more than a few are not following the model" (6). Based on broad comparative research Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way show that "the assumption that hybrid regimes are (or should be) moving in a democratic direction

<sup>15</sup> Yasín states that, even though the pressure of Western policy makers to democratize the Arab region is a tool that merely serves Western interests, democratic transition in the Arab world is needed and possible, since there is nothing inherent to Arab societies that is incompatible with democracy (2011).

lacks empirical foundation” (2010: 4). Instead of qualifying regimes by their level of democratization, over the years various categories emerged to label regimes falling between democracy and full authoritarianism. A broad distinction can be made between democracies with authoritarian characteristics, “democracies with adjectives” (e.g. Zakaria’s illiberal democracy), and autocracies with democratic characteristics, “autocracies with adjectives” (e.g. Brumberg’s liberal autocracy).<sup>16</sup>

Since the assumption that all countries would inevitably make a transition to democracy was no longer dominant, numerous scholars of Middle East politics let go of the democratization paradigm and shifted their focus to finding an explanation for authoritarian resilience (Valbjørn and Bank 2010). Given the fact that the Middle East was the only region that appeared to have missed the third wave all together, many scholars have tried to explain the persistence of authoritarianism in the Arab world. Early on Daniel Brumberg observed that “over the past two decades, the Middle East has witnessed a ‘transition’ away from — and then back toward — authoritarianism. This dynamic began with tactical openings whose goal was to sustain rather than transform autocracies” (2002: 56). Thus, liberalized autocracy was not a step in the direction of full democracy but rather “a *type* of political system whose institutions, rules, and logic defy any linear model of democratization” (idem; also see Aarts and Cavatorta 2012). In the years following “the end of the transition paradigm”, studies examining the different aspects of resilient authoritarianism have mushroomed.

### **Authoritarian Resilience: Strengths**

The end of the transition paradigm has had significant influence on how scholars of Middle East politics study political rule in the region. When the focus used to be on clarifying why many of these Arab countries had failed to democratize, the majority of explanations suggested numerous regional social, economic and political failures that withstood a democratic transition. In other words, the Middle East simply did not democratize because it lacked the prerequisites of democracy. The problem with this approach is that the Arab region is in no way unique in the cumulative failure to achieve the prerequisites of democracy. Many countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America did not score any better on standard social economic indicators or the strength of civil society and still went through a political transition. True, many

<sup>16</sup> For an extensive conceptualization of hybrid regimes: Levitsky and Way 2010; Gilbert and Mohenssi 2011.

of these countries have developed into “illiberal democracies”, but still at some point in time a transition was initiated. Moreover, no single variable has yet proven to be universally necessary or sufficient to guarantee democratization (Bellin 2004: 139-142, also see Lust 2011). Eva Bellin therefore has claimed:

The puzzle posed by the Middle East and North African states is not why democracy has failed to consolidate in this region (failure would be expected) but rather why the vast majority of Middle Eastern and North African states have failed to initiate transition at all. Herein lies the exceptionalism of the region (2004: 142).

Thus, to understand authoritarian resilience in the Middle East we should look beyond the failure to achieve the prerequisites of democracy. Numerous scholars shifted the focus of their research from the failure of democracy to the various mechanisms, or survival strategies, used by authoritarian regimes to maintain their power successfully.

Brumberg states “in the Arab world, a set of interdependent institutional, economic, ideological, social, and geostrategic factors has created an adaptable ecology of repression, control, and partial openness”. Because Arab rulers “widen or narrow the boundaries of participation and expression”<sup>17</sup> in response to what they see as challenges facing their regimes, the level of authoritarianism in the Middle East is always fluctuating (2002: 57). According to Brumberg, it is this process of political eclecticism that enables authoritarian regimes to stay in power. If we wish to understand the variation in autocracies and why some are better than others in sustaining survival strategies, we should analyze how authoritarian rulers perceive the threats they face and which institutional, social, political, and ideological conditions influence such threats. Brumberg believes that the key to apprehending autocracies is an understanding of the relationship between the regime in power and the opposition forces challenging this power. Opposition forces will be, implicitly or explicitly, allowed certain kinds of social, political, or ideological power because that is what autocracies need to endure. At the same time, however, they make sure that they will never lose the power to use force to protect

<sup>17</sup> An example of this “widening of boundaries of participation and expression” is given by Yasîn (2011) who notes that in Egypt in 2005, under the rule of Hosni Mubarak, a political dialogue was initiated as a response to the criticism from opposition parties and Egyptian intellectuals with regard to restrictive political pluralism. The dialogue led to the amendment of article 76, which concerns the election process of the president of the state. In reality, however, this amendment did not lead to a shift away from authoritarianism.

their interests (*idem*). Philippe Droz-Vincent makes a similar argument describing authoritarianism as a control mechanism that uses a strategy of exhaustion of alternatives to try to channel change “within the regime” (2011b: 6-7). He claims:

The key to survival of a given ruler lies in the ability of the inner circle (the president and his familial network, a ‘selectorate’ of high-ranking decision-makers) to provide and maintain the coherence of the entire system (the authoritarian equilibrium) either through material (privileges, corruption) or symbolic (positions in the state apparatus) rewards (*ibid.*: 7).

Autocratic regimes can preserve their internal cohesion because important elites (military, security forces, political and business) play by the rules of the authoritarian game. Moreover, through political repression and “de-participation” (of citizens), the authoritarian leaders have removed all alternatives from the system ensuring them a large margin of maneuver (*ibid.* 6-8).

Another interesting explanation for authoritarian resilience, in which the military and security force take a prominent position, comes from Bellin. She holds “authoritarianism has proven exceptionally robust in the Middle East and North Africa because the coercive apparatus in many states has been exceptionally able and willing to crush reform initiatives from below” (2004: 143). Based on comparative analysis Bellin shows that the present conditions that foster robust authoritarianism in the Arab world is what makes the region truly exceptional. There are at least four variables that shape the robustness of a regime’s coercive apparatus by influencing its will and capacity to hold on to power: (1) the maintenance of fiscal health, (2) the maintenance of international support networks, (3) the level of institutionalization, and (4) the level of popular mobilization. Although Bellin stresses that “no single variable is either a necessary or sufficient condition of retreat from power by the coercive apparatus”, she elaborates at length on the institutionalization variable (*ibid.*: 144-147). The main argument is that the higher the level of institutionalization of the coercive apparatus, the more willing it will be to allow political reform to proceed. This has to do with the fact if a coercive apparatus is rule-governed, predictable, and meritocratic, its longevity does not depend on the survival of the regime in power. When patrimonial ties dominate the coercive apparatus, its fate is more intertwined with that of the regime, thus it will be less amenable to political reform. In the majority of Middle Eastern and North African countries (Turkey, Egypt, and Tunisia excluded) the

regime and coercive apparatus alike are governed by patrimonial logic (ibid.: 145-146, 149). This is one condition that is explanatory for why authoritarianism is so resilient in the Arab region.

Steven Heydemann has brought forward a more comprehensive approach to shed light on why authoritarian regimes have remained so stable over the past two decades. He argues “Arab regimes are converging around policies that are explicitly designed to stabilize and preserve authoritarian rule in the context of ongoing demands for political change” (2007: VII). Autocratic regimes maintain their stability through the process of authoritarian upgrading:

The hallmark of authoritarian upgrading is the ability of Arab regimes to exploit rather than resist broad social, political, and economic trends both to blunt the challenges they might contain and to generate political resources that bolster regimes' hold on power (ibid.: 5).

The variety in authoritarian upgrading is influenced by the particular tensions facing individual regimes and shaped by the process of authoritarian learning. This refers to the process where lessons and strategies that originate within, and outside the Middle East, are diffused across the region, travelling from regime to regime and being modified in the process (ibid.: 2). Heydemann distinguishes five features as defining elements of authoritarian upgrading: (1) appropriating and containing civil societies; (2) managing political contestation; (3) capturing the benefits of selective economic reforms; (4) controlling new communications technologies; and (5) diversifying international linkages. According to Heydemann all major Arab regimes employ a particular mix of these elements to maintain their power (idem). He also notes that these new patterns of authoritarian government are neither planned nor coherent. Rather, they are “the result of *ad hoc* and often defensive responses to shifts in the political, economic, and social environment over the past two decades”. Authoritarian upgrading has not only transformed the political landscape of the Arab world, it has also normalized Arab authoritarianism. Consequently, the idea of Middle Eastern exceptionalism regarding democratization and political change does not hold any longer; Arab regimes did not resist change, they just did not change in favor of democracy (ibid.: 28).

Regime type is another factor that influences the particular cocktail of survival strategies used by autocratic rulers to maintain their power. States have a potential wide-ranging causal influence in society depending on their capacity to influence



social relations. To what extent and by what means states maintain an autonomous capability to influence these relations depends on a number of specific characteristics. These characteristics, in turn, depend for a great part on a state's regime type (Anderson 1987: 1, 14). Middle Eastern states are either monarchies<sup>18</sup> or republics and the respective characteristics of these regime types have greatly influenced their options when it comes to adopting survival strategies to keep their hold on power. A big advantage for monarchies, for instance, is that their political structures are flexible which gives them more room to maneuver to pacify people that are calling for change. Even more important, in monarchies succession can result in change and reform rather than the destruction of an entire system. Republics, where the power is concentrated around a single person (and his family), have inherent vulnerabilities that increase over time. These vulnerabilities, for instance the question of succession and the balance between self-enrichment and rewarding the elite, make it more difficult for republics to incorporate changes in the existing system (Goldstone 2011: 8-12, also see Hinnebusch 2010 and Colombo 2012).

Francesco Cavatorta takes the resilience argument even one step further by claiming that the Arab region “displays a form of governance that has become quite widespread across the globe with a number of different political systems and regimes displaying similar dynamics. In short, liberal-authoritarian forms of rule are part of a general trend” (2010: 217). This is the result of traditional authoritarian regimes adopting *ad hoc* liberal reforms and some democratic institutions (as thoroughly explained by Heydemann) while democracies are at the same time adopting fundamentally un-democratic and illiberal policies. Cavatorta argues that in both democratic and authoritarian regimes systems of governance are moving toward a system of governance where depoliticization is the norm; real policymaking power is concentrated in a few hands and democratic institutions are not truly responsive. He does not mean to insinuate, however, that life in authoritarian and democratic systems is the same; the varying degrees of protection for liberal rights between countries makes all the difference (2010: 218). In other words, there is a process of “democratic downgrading”

<sup>18</sup> For a different perspective, see al-Qassemi 2012. He argues that due to the regional monumental changes, including the realignment of political alliances, one possible long-term outcome of the Arab uprisings may be a “game of musical chairs involving the Arab monarchies, republics and Western powers.” By the end of the next decade, he expects, “it is not unreasonable to predict a stronger relationship between certain Arab republics and the West than that which existed between Arab monarchies and the West over the past few decades.”

taking place in democracies paralleling “authoritarian upgrading” occurring in the Arab world resulting in the convergence of governance where similar policies and mechanisms of decision-making are employed in authoritarian and democratic systems.<sup>19</sup> Following Cavatorta’s line of reasoning, post-democratization studies of hybrid regimes have reinforced the notion of Middle Eastern exceptionalism when it comes to its form of political rule, while in reality there is a general move towards liberal authoritarianism around the globe (ibid.: 218-219, also see Valbjørn and Bank 2010; Hinnebusch 2010).

### **Authoritarian Resilience: Opposing Visions**

Aforementioned scholars acknowledge that authoritarian upgrading takes a variety of forms resulting in a similar variety in hybrid regimes. Although they highlight different aspects in their analyses of authoritarian resilience in the Middle East and North Africa, their core assumption is similar: authoritarian leaders want to stay in power and they are likely to succeed at this a while longer. Naturally, not all scholars of Middle East politics agree with this perspective on authoritarianism. Daniel Deudney and John Ikenberry, for instance, hold that “this new conventional wisdom about autocratic revival is as much an exaggeration of a few years of headlines as was the proclamation of the end of history at the end of the Cold War” (2009: 78). They acknowledge that recent trends seem to support “the myth of the autocratic revival”, nonetheless they are convinced that in the end all autocracies will move toward liberalism. Deudney and Ikenberry argue that autocracies are fundamentally constrained by deep seated incapacities such as corruption, inequality, and weak accountability, which limit their viability in the long run. On top of this, autocratic leaders need to resolve the contradictions resulting from combining an authoritarian political system with a capitalist economic system. Yet another factor positively influencing a transition towards liberalism is that their recent success for a great part depends on their access to the international liberal order. Thus, according to Deudney and Ikenberry, the more attractive the liberal path, the greater the chance that illiberal states will choose the path of political reform (ibid.: 77-85).

<sup>19</sup> Cavatorta states that depoliticization (the core of democratic downgrading) is a significant development of political life in liberal democracies manifesting itself in four different ways: (1) decreasing turnout at elections; (2) low confidence of citizens in public institutions; (3) the quality of information citizens receive and how this information is processed; and (4) a rise in civil society activism that is not conducive to democracy. According to Cavatorta these manifestations are parallel to developments in Arab liberalized democracies (2010: 223-226).

Although Deudney and Ikenberry's approach is surprisingly optimistic in comparison to most studies of Middle East politics, there have been other opposing sounds. In 2008 Emma Murphy, for instance, noted "it is a rather sad indictment of Arab politics today that the word *democratization* has virtually disappeared from research-based literature on the Middle East" (Murphy 2008: 459; italics in original). To give Deudney and Ikenberry some credit it should also be noted that Gregory Gause, in retrospect, acknowledges "many Middle East scholars recognized that the neoliberal economic programs were causing political problems for Arab governments, but few foresaw their regime-shaking consequence" (2011: 87).

Moreover, in reaction to the Arab uprisings there has been renewed interest in the questions of transition and potential democratization. The question whether scholars of Middle East politics devoted too much time explaining the persistence of authoritarianism in the Arab world deserves some attention (e.g. Goodwin 2011; Gause 2011).

### **Authoritarian Resilience in Light of the Arab Spring**

Perhaps the "post-democratization paradigm" got undermined by events on the ground, paving the way for yet another paradigm to take over Middle East studies. On the other hand, instead of throwing the whole paradigm overboard, recent events may prove to be useful to deepen our understanding of authoritarian resilience. In his reflection on recent events, Gause notes that it was an important analytical task to explain the stability of Arab authoritarianism, but in the process it led to an underestimation of the forces for change that were slowly but surely affecting Arab politics. In reaction to the Arab Spring academics should reexamine some of their assumptions, but they do not just yet have to discard all of them (2011: 90).

In this context it is useful to note that most scholars of authoritarian resilience have mentioned that the same survival strategies employed by autocratic leaders to ensure regime stability might lead to their demise in the long run. Heydemann for instance has claimed "upgrading has generated problems of its own, including new opportunities for corruption, social polarization, and increased levels of economic inequality". On top of this he has argued that upgrading reinforces a growing cynicism among Arabs, especially Arab youth, about the value of political participation and the possibilities for meaningful political change (2007: 27). Brumberg has mentioned that the absence of a robust political society might at some point undermine authoritarian stability (2002: 57) and Bellin has given attention to the possibility that "tolerated pockets

of mobilization can come back to challenge the state” (2004: 147). Naturally, even more authors have pointed to the internal contradictions of sustaining authoritarianism after recent transitions in the Middle East (e.g. Droz-Vincent 2011a; Teti and Gervasio 2011; Yom 2011; Gause 2011; Lust 2011; Joffé 2011).<sup>20</sup> It is telling that many of these articles in one way or another build upon the arguments made by aforementioned scholars of authoritarian resilience. For instance, Lust’s argument that authoritarian elites used the threat of political Islam as a powerful tool to keep their regime in power and Yom’s focus on social opposition and geopolitical mediation can be seen as extensions of Brumberg’s analysis (Lust 2011; Yom 2011). Especially Bellin’s vision on the significance of the level of institutionalization of the coercive apparatus, the army in particular, has found much support (e.g. Gause 2011; Droz-Vincent 2011b; Nepstad 2011; Schneider 2011).

Thus, it is not surprising that Bellin, in her reconsideration of robust authoritarianism, concludes that this part of her analysis has been confirmed by the events of the Arab Spring (2012a). Heydemann, in cooperation with Reinoud Leenders, also concludes that although “the Middle East is undergoing its most dramatic transformation in sixty years”, it is clear “authoritarianism will remain a prominent feature of Middle East politics” (2011: 2). Following the same line of thought, Lust even gives us four important reasons why it is still useful to search to solve the puzzle of why reforms were more limited in the Middle East than in other regions and to understand variation in the extent of the reforms that did take place: (1) reforms were more extensive and significant in some countries than in others and it is important to understand the reasons for and the implications of these diverging experiences; (2) the underlying mechanisms that sustained authoritarianism in the region during the Third Wave are not yet established; (3) understanding the underlying causes of resistance to change can help us illuminate why widespread mobilization and the possibilities of change became possible 30 years later; and (4) re-examining the extent of reform in the Middle East provides important lessons for other regions as well (2011: 164).

At the end of 2010, only months before Bouazizi set himself on fire, Morten Valbjørn and André Bank examined the “Post” in Post-democratization with the aim “to push the debate on Middle Eastern political rule beyond the beyond” (2010: 194). They concluded that previous research trends regarding Middle East

<sup>20</sup> For an interesting pre-Arab Spring exposé on the “limits of authoritarian upgrading”, see Pierret and Selvik 2009.

politics that were part of the democratization paradigm could still be perceived as a reservoir of experiences and of theoretical tools to understand where the studies of Middle East politics should be going. It seems as though recent developments have only underscored their argument; even if it turns out that scholars need to move beyond the post-democratization paradigm, the tools it has provided might still be useful to solve the puzzle of authoritarian resilience in the Arab world.

# Engendering Transformations

## *On the Why, When and How of the Uprisings*

Given the course of events following December 17, 2010, the notion of authoritarian resilience has lost at least some of its appeal in academic circles. This chapter will be dedicated to explaining the causes and catalysts that have been suggested to be of use in clarifying how in a matter of months the political landscape in the Middle East was forcibly altered by the will of previously largely apathetic and atomized populations. In order not to drown in the myriad of possible explanatory variables the following structure will be applied.

Initially those aspects which in earlier decades supported the robustness of the authoritarian regimes in the region will be explored, but now specifically diving into the building of grievances (mainly, economic and demographic) that were slowly undermining these structures. Subsequently the societal changes that were a precursor to the revolts, those which were already present in the years prior to the mass-protests — termed by Lust (2011)<sup>21</sup> as “micro-transitions” — will be discussed (the increasing number of labor strikes in the past few years serves as an example). As a result of these structural imbalances, worsened by these micro-transitions, the social contract which the authoritarian regimes had forged with their constituents collapsed. The dynamics that both caused and resulted from this collapse will be scrutinized. Then, attention will be directed to those phenomena that can elucidate how the outrage, resulting from the building pressures and social contract collapsing, was allowed to crystallize into protest movements, and how these movements due to subsequent mobilization grew to such a critical mass that repressive force was no longer able to contain it. Finally, for such mobilization to occur the aforementioned structural grievances and micro-transitions needed to become visible through a series of catalysts. The self-

**21** Though it must be said in advance that this paper diverges from Lust's reading of economic restructuring as a “micro-transition”, and instead opts the socio-economic condition in the Middle East to be of a structural imbalance instead.

immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi serves as astute reminder. These triggers will be the focal point of closing section.

Much of the work done on the causes of the Arab Spring has an urge to downplay the complexity of the situation, relegating too much explanatory power to events that should perhaps be qualified only as mere catalysts.<sup>22</sup> Such gross oversimplification does not do justice to the systemic complexities that are at the core of the turmoil in the Middle East. Naturally, the aforementioned structural grievances, micro-transitions and catalysts are impossible to properly distinguish in abstract terms. As explained before, the interplay of all these factors in such complex systems does not allow for strict ordering. For example, the catalysts are in most cases natural results of the grievances that were built up over time, and in turn were allowed to become rallying calls for mass-mobilization, indeed because of the accumulating resentment. Still, in the following sections all these different societal dynamics that can be considered the root causes of the Arab Spring will be discussed categorically, in order not to get lost in that complex web of interrelated entanglements.

Before advancing an acknowledgement is required that much of the remainder of this chapter will be directed at understanding the internal dynamics within states that eventually lead to the mass protests. However, the impact of the international context should not be underestimated. An argument by John Foran signals its importance: what may facilitate the revolutionary process is a so-called “world systemic opening” (Foran 1997). This is exactly what happened in recent years when the apparently declining role of the U.S. in the region encouraged the people’s opposition, as it signaled an opportunity for change. The result was that Washington (as also the Europeans) finally had to leave its former “friendly dictators” in the lurch. In later chapters the impact of the international context will be further explored.

### **Structural Grievances and their Gradual Worsening**

The first aspect to be taken into consideration are the socio-economic and demographic structural imbalances that over time grew to such stature that it was no longer possible to ignore them. Regarding these imbalances, it has to be stated that these had indeed been noticed in prior years by both academics and policy makers. A prime example are the series of UNDP reports (*Arab Human Development Report 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2009*), which already highlighted problems of underemployment, lack of

<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, on average it appears though this is less the case in analyses by Arab authors.

deployment of economic growth, thus growing inequality, and as a result an expected growth of resentment among the population over their worsening conditions.<sup>23</sup> It is important to look at the years leading up to the Arab Spring in order to be able to explain why that resentment finally burst in December 2010.

To start with, an important characteristic of the region is that the state is in almost all countries at the center of economic activity; the economies of the Arab world are “fundamentally shaped by the region’s political, social and institutional structures, and economic problems [...] are inextricably bound up with the political context” (Kinninmont 2011: 32). This means that the fate of an autocratic ruler would by necessity be expected to be tied to the growth of the economy and subsequent wellbeing of the people he is presiding over. However, there are plentiful ways in which an authoritarian regime can maintain a firm grasp over a country even without solid economic growth. It is a known fact that many of the regimes in the Middle East were not afraid of resorting to repression and intimidation when countering opposition. Still, opposite to this proverbial “stick” there is also a “carrot” with which populations can be appeased, for example through selective patronage networks, or extensive subsidization programs. For the purpose of delineating the worsening socio-economic conditions of the general population it is these “carrot” techniques that will be explored further.

Logic postulates that for a regime to be able to resort to such appeasement techniques it needs to have access to the required resources. The fact that parts of the Middle East do indeed have such sources of external revenue, mostly oil (and gas) in this case, has in the past often been used as an explanation for the prolonged existence of authoritarian regimes.<sup>24</sup> The mechanics of this pattern of state exploitation, subsequent redistribution and how this affected the political system were formalized in rentier state theory (Mahdavy 1970; Beblawi and Luciani 1987; Gelb 1988; Yates 1996; Karl 1997; Ross 1999).<sup>25</sup> Better yet, in recent years

- <sup>23</sup> Also beyond these AHDRs there is plenty of academic material questioning the lack of development in the MENA region, notwithstanding the fact that several states, especially in the Gulf, have small elites that are extraordinarily wealthy.
- <sup>24</sup> Other than the exploitation of oil and gas reserves, the MENA region has benefited from several other sources of rentier revenue, such as foreign aid, and — in the case of Egypt — the proceeds of the Suez Canal. Also, there is still a discussion on whether labor remittances or the profits from the tourism industry can be considered as a form of rentier income.
- <sup>25</sup> “The essence of the rentier state concept is that while in ‘normal’ countries the state is supported by society, and must, in order to pay for itself establish a system to extract from society a part of the surplus the latter generates; in oil exporting countries the state is paid by the oil rent, which accrues directly from the rest of the world, and supports society through the redistribution or allocation of this rent, through various mechanisms of rent circulation” (Luciani 2005: 90).



a discussion has surfaced whether the existence of such rentier revenues does not inherently inhibit a growing demand for democracy (Ross 2001 and 2009; Herb 2005 Youngs 2008; Elbadawi and Makdisi 2011) or whether they have an impact on a resource-rich state's propensity for conflict (Smith 2004; Collier and Hoeffler 1998; Collier 2009).

A problem arises when an authoritarian regime's capacity to extract revenues decreases, or even stagnates compared to population growth. In the case of Tunisia (a non-rentier state)<sup>26</sup> and Egypt (mostly defined as a semi-rentier state)<sup>27</sup>, though they were initially capable of drawing on varying sources of rentier and other revenues, their reserves would always be of a more limited nature than their oil-rich Gulf neighbors. Still, they were autocracies with a redistributive welfare system, supported by an enormous bureaucratic machine, owning industry, supporting agriculture and supplying extensive subsidization for consumer goods such as petroleum and food (Malik and Awadallah 2011). Such a corporatist model "consolidates power by trading development for the political loyalty of key social forces" (Dahi 2011). Over time though, maintaining such a system would prove prohibitively costly, due to that lack of resource revenues. Finally, both after incurring high levels of foreign debt and due to changing circumstances in the global economy these states were forced by donor organizations in recent decades to modernize and deregulate their economies and embark on liberalization programs (Amin 2011).

Especially in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century this economic restructuring produced outstanding growth records, at least in terms of pure GDP growth as measured by institutions such as the IMF.<sup>28</sup> For years on end countries were showing growth rates of over 5%; Egypt was by economists even considered a part of the CIVETS or the "Next Eleven" (Pfeiffer 1999).<sup>29</sup> However, these efforts of economic liberalization were merely used to "transfer welfare responsibilities to the private sector, establish new patterns of patronage by favoring selected clients during bidding processes and privatization schemes, and enrich their military allies

<sup>26</sup> Tunisia has hardly any rent income (possibly apart from remittances, see note 24).

<sup>27</sup> Egypt is often labeled as "semi-rentier" both because of its substantial rent income — though much less than in the "classical" rentier states on the Arabian Peninsula — but also because of its close (economic) relationship with the oil-rich Gulf countries.

<sup>28</sup> In September 2010, only three months before Bouazizi's self-immolation, Tunisia was praised by the IMF for its "sound policies and reforms".

<sup>29</sup> CIVETS (Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey, South Africa) was originally coined by *The Economist Intelligence Unit*. The "Next Eleven" is a term coined by Jim O'Neill, as a successor to the BRICs (see *The Growth Map. Economic Opportunities in the BRICs and Beyond*. New York: Portfolio/Penguin 2011).

by granting them access to major businesses and investments” (Heydarian 2011). The result was somewhat derogatively labeled a system of “crony capitalism”, which inhibited those impressive growth rates of trickling down into the real economy, thus not benefiting the general population.

In this system, favored cliques gained access to industries such as tourism, real estate and finance through their connections within the regime (Lynch 2011). Several Arab authors (Yasín 2011; Dalnajâwî 2011; Amîn 2012) identify favoritism and monopoly as key factors in the growing dissatisfaction of Egyptian citizens: Mubarak’s reign was characterized by the collusion between businessmen and politicians. The rise to power of powerful businessmen within the NDP (National Democratic Party) and the People’s Assembly led to massive waves of anger. As a result of possession of goods, businessmen possessed decision-making authority. An example of this is Ahmed Ezz’s monopolizing of the steel industry in Egypt by holding more than 60 percent of the market share. NDP members structurally abused their power to acquire both wealth and special privileges, by facilitating corruption and abusing state resources. Basically, they were creating rentier income artificially; monopolies, regulation and intimidation all serving to “limit access to productive activity, [generating] fantastic rewards for a favored few at the cost of holding back whole nations” (*Financial Times*, 24 April 2011).

Meanwhile, the regime itself was no longer allowed to interfere too much in implementing policies fostering sustained industrialization and economic growth, and the restraints on budgetary and fiscal control meant the state was no longer able to provide basic socio-economic security to its citizens (Heydarian 2011). In fact, the population was bearing the brunt. As Rieff states: “[the population] lives in crushing poverty — an immiseration that has grown progressively worse for at least the bottom two deciles of the population over the past 20 years” (Rieff 2011).

So, despite perhaps any macro-economic growth, the worsening socio-economic conditions led to the growing discontent these last few years. One of the effects of the growing political insecurity about the capacities of the regime meant that those in power made sure to funnel economic opportunities to their own band of supporters, leading only to increasing inequality (Lynch 2011). Those in the right positions secured that position by strengthening their own patronage network. Another problem lies in the fact that the 2008 financial crisis left a heavy mark on the MENA economies, as on any other region in the world, and many economies struggled to crawl back towards pre-crisis levels. The fact that significant parts of the government budget had to be reserved to

maintain the security forces, or even just maintain security and order, only added to this problem (Springborg 2011a). In the long-run though, money kept getting tighter, forcing the government to have “soft” socio-economic measures of redistribution withdrawn.

Perhaps most importantly, people were faced with socio-economic conditions that failed to meet rising expectations. On 18 January 2011, *Al-Masry Al-Youm* published the results of a research conducted by Egypt’s National Center for Social and Criminological Research, polling a sample of 2,956 persons. Questions focused on the dreams of Egyptians, how to achieve those dreams, the obstacles lying in the way, and whether or not Egyptians share a national dream. The results are exemplary of the poor socio-economic development in the country: services to be improved included for example clean drinking water (42.4%) and better sewage systems (42.2%). Once asked for their dreams for Egypt, respondents were mostly focused on an improved economy (over 40%), having the problem of unemployment solved (36.8%) and having prices of basic commodities lowered (35.5%).<sup>30</sup>

In acknowledging Davies (1962): “it is the failure of conditions to meet rising expectations, rather than the conditions per se, that often generates unrest” (Lust 2011a). This problem is exacerbated as scores of fairly well educated youth were expecting to do better than previous generations, but found themselves lacking in serious opportunities. As also picked up on by Amin (2011): there is a large gap between the aspirations of the educated, cosmopolitan youth and their miserable situation. Because of a growing awareness of (the lack of) their possibilities and the neglect of the state to fulfill its responsibilities towards its citizens, the youth became increasingly frustrated about their inability to fulfill a most basic need: a reasonable job to afford a house and a wedding.

It is these factions of educated youth, often referred to as the “youth bulge”, that have been labeled by many analysts as a crucial factor in the revolts. As a result of improving healthcare standards several decades ago there is a spike in the proportion of youths (age 20-24) in the Egyptian population of more than 10.5% (Korotayev and Zinkina 2011; RAND 2011). This temporary increase in the fraction of young people can, depending on the socio-economic and political context, facilitate rapid development, but also exacerbate social and political strains (Möller 1968; Goldstone 1991; Urdal 2006). The problem is, as Goldstone (2002) notes:

<sup>30</sup> A later poll, done in Egypt in April 2011, by the International Republican Institute, showed similar results. See <http://www.iri.org/news-events-press-center/news/iri-releases-egypt-poll>

the rapid growth of youth can undermine existing political coalitions, creating instability. Large youth cohorts are often drawn to new ideas and heterodox religions, challenging older forms of authority. In addition, because most young people have fewer responsibilities for families and careers, they are relatively easily mobilized for social or political conflicts. Youth have played a prominent role in political violence throughout recorded history, and the existence of a “youth bulge” [...] has historically been associated with times of political crisis (11-12).

As healthcare standards improved over the past decades, so too have standards of education. As a result, there is now a cohort of fairly well-educated Egyptian youngsters who are entering the labor market, but there are no appropriate jobs to be found (Perthes 2012). Research by Korotayev and Zinkina (2011) shows that although the total unemployment in Egypt is 9%, which is not very high when compared along international standards, about half of those unemployed were part of the age cohort of 20 to 24. This adds up to roughly one million unemployed young people who resented their socio-economic conditions and were unable to find a suitable job to change that situation. As Todd explains: “young adults constitute the majority of the population and, unlike their fathers and mothers, they can read and write [...]. But they suffer from unemployment and social frustration. It isn’t surprising that unrest was inevitable in this part of the world” (*Der Spiegel*, 2011).

On top of the socio-economic conditions and the teeming corruption there is one more aspect, adding insult to injury. Though almost all of the states in the MENA region are autocratic, many of them still do have some decorative democratic tendencies woven through the seams of their political fabric. In theory this would allow for a population to voice its grievances through these channels, which were designed to grant a measure of representation. However, over the years it has become painfully obvious that these artificial means of political expression carry absolutely no clout in decision-making processes. It is important to realize the difference between democratic procedures and the values of democracy. Periodic elections are an example of democratic procedures, but if they are not exercised in a climate where democratic values like devolution of power are guaranteed, these democratic procedures become counter-democratic (Yasîn 2011). Voters face all types of pressure and intimidation, certain ideological currents are excluded from participating, and official figures of electoral outcomes often do not match reality. Basically, the formal

democratic structures in place in the Arab world obscure an enormous democratic deficit.<sup>31</sup>

Over the course of decades of authoritarian rule these democratic deficits have been allowed to grow and political systems have been hollowed out, which has had several implications. First of all: “Beneath the edifice of stability [...] state institutions were crumbling, their legitimacy faded in the relentless drift of corruption, nepotism, casual brutality, and indifference toward their people” (Lynch 2011). As Lust explains, the development of “sultanistic autocracies went hand-in-hand with the underdevelopment of political institutions” (2011a). For an autocrat it makes sense to not allow a political system, in most cases a political party, to develop which essentially could one day work without your centrality as spearhead. However, the weakening of these institutions meant that in times of need they were of no use in settling elite conflict, or mobilizing as counterforce to any opposition (Brownlee 2007).

A similar dynamic can be traced to elections and parliamentary performance. These too are limited in their capacities to stabilize a regime, either by doling out patronage favors, or navigating turmoil in elite ranks (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009), because of two reasons:

First, declining state resources and neo-liberal reforms weakened the links between patronage and parliament. Constituents continue to expect service from parliamentarians, but they have become increasingly disappointed as their representatives failed to meet their demands. [...] Second, [...] the regime narrowed the playing field. To maintain elite cohesion and undermine opposition forces, governing elites constrained parties' participation and limited seats that went to the opposition. [However,] constraining the playing field led to declining participation, limited the reach of patronage distribution, prompted disaffection of political elites and at times the formation of broad boycott coalitions, and undermined legitimacy (Lust 2011a).

Basically “[across] the region, elections have become increasingly constrained, opposition parties frustrated by constraints have

<sup>31</sup> This democratic deficit, forcefully analyzed in the 2004 *Arab Human Development Report*, is exemplified by the common low turnout at elections. In 2010 the turnout at the Egyptian parliamentary elections was estimated to be between 10-15%, a steep drop even from the already abysmal turnout of 25% in the 2005 parliamentary elections (*The Guardian*, 29 November 2010).

often boycotted in response, and citizens have remained skeptical about the entire exercise. By constraining the electoral playing field more tightly in an attempt to hold onto power, leaders unwittingly undermined their regimes” (Lust 2011a).

Regarding the matter of succession, another aspect to be discussed is the inevitable end of an autocrat’s life-cycle. Many of the autocratic rulers in the MENA region had been in power for decades, and thus many of them were also at an age where they were near the end of both their careers as well as their lives. The matter of succession was thus on the agenda in elite circles, which inherently weakens a regime as multiple elite factions opt to have their candidate picked as successor (O’Donnell et al. 1986). The grooming of candidates is a precarious activity, given all the different interests at play, and the sole vote in the hands of the autocrat. Controversy over potential contenders heightens the risk of conflict among elites, contributing to moments in which elite defections are likely (Lust 2011a).<sup>32</sup> Overall, all these dynamics lead to a situation where the autocrat cannot even be certain of the support of the elites carefully gathered around him, possibly making way even for top-down changes, whilst becoming more and more vulnerable to popular unrest, as political repression tactics lose their legitimacy.

Related to the “sell-buy” of Arab regimes, is the fact that the uprisings were aimed at the removal of the geriatric political leadership, which had lost all the legitimacy it once may have had. Slowly but surely demands were building up, in the end leading — at least in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria — to the call for the fall of the regime (“*ash-sha‘b yurid isqat al-nizam*”). Everywhere people realized that they had lost their dignity (*karamah*) and freedom (*hurriyah*), claiming justice (*adalah*) and respect (*ihtram*) (Rosiny 2012; Kneissl 2011; Dreano 2012). Tariq Ramadan neatly summarized the Arab regimes’ main deficits: “rule of law, equal citizenship, universal suffrage, elective mandate, and separation of powers” (Ramadan 2011).

There is another argument which is not often heard. It is based, essentially, on Lipset’s famous modernization theory (1952), and claims that the new generation of youth now at the forefront of the political conflict is actually a cosmopolitan, secular generation of engaged citizens, demanding genuine political change, and

<sup>32</sup> In a situation such as this one it does not help that most formal political institutions have been weakened substantially, up to a point where they can be of no more use in defending a regime against parting elite factions.

access to democratic freedoms (Courbage and Todd 2008).<sup>33</sup> French historian and anthropologist Emmanuel Todd, in an interview with *Der Spiegel*, claims evidence that:

[The] rapid increase in literacy, particularly among women, a falling birthrate and a significant decline in the widespread custom of endogamy [...] shows that the Arab societies were on a path toward cultural and mental modernization. [...] [E]ducational progress and a decline in the birth rate are indicators of growing rationalization and secularization, a development which ultimately ends with the transformation of the political system, a spreading wave of democratization and the conversion of subjects into citizens (*Der Spiegel* 2011).

A similar argument is voiced by Leila Austin who claims:

[the] rise in birth rates funded by oil wealth and encouraged by increasingly pious and patriarchal political regimes, the simultaneous increase in educational qualifications of this youth, subsequent decline in birth rates as a result of education-inspired upward mobility, and effective state-run family planning policies [...] have led to the paradoxical formation of one of the most educated, modern and globalized youth population the Middle East has encountered (2011: 82)

Finally, Olivier Roy builds on this argument in stating that these protest movements are essentially “secular” movements, which separate religious faith from a political agenda: “Religious practice has become an individual act” (Roy 2011). To round off the argument, Todd formulates repercussions for the political system: “The relationship between those at the top and those at the bottom is changing. When the authority of fathers begins to falter, political power generally collapses, as well. This is because the systems of the patrilineal, endogamous extended family has been reproduced within the leadership of nations” (*Der Spiegel* 2011).

### **Collapse of the Social Contract**

The picture that is painted by the previous paragraphs is that there are several structural flaws in the societal system in the

<sup>33</sup> According to Engelen and Puschmann (2011) this was also signaled by the great presence of women during the events of the Arab Spring. They believe women will play a crucial role in the period to come. For a critical review of Courbage and Todd's *Convergence of Civilizations*, see L. Rosen in *Review of Middle East Studies* 45(1), Summer 2011, pp. 91-92.

MENA regions. These had the most profound impact on the socio-economic development within the subjected states. Earlier, the notion of socio-economic development through state redistribution was discussed as a means for an authoritarian ruler to appease his population with a “carrot”. This “carrot” could be seen as an autocratic variation of a social contract a regime enters in with its population. In exchange for their loyalty, and no unrest on a grand scale, a ruler is expected to redistribute the gains made from exploiting a state’s natural resources and making sure to improve socio-economic conditions of its population.<sup>34</sup>

It is argued the states that were most directly struck by the Arab Spring were indeed no longer capable of maintaining that social contract, of which the growing inequality, teeming corruption, massive (youth) unemployment and an overall lack of future prospects are explicit signs. Through these signs, a growing awareness surfaced among populations that states were neglecting their responsibilities towards their citizens (Amîn 2011; Yasîn 2011). In a sense this could be blamed on the liberalization programs that were pushed in order to modernize and restructure the economy, as they were the first blow to the traditional structure of the original social contract (Amin 2011).<sup>35</sup> Another exemplification of this breakdown of the social contract could perhaps be found in the rising food prices in the region. The liberalization programs in the Middle East had left the region vulnerable to the economic downturn following 2008, for example leading to rising inflation, and the regimes were encapsulated by the global economy to an extent where they were no longer able to react to national effects with newly formulated strategies (RAND 2011). In contrast then to historically quite stable prices for basic commodities, largely due to subsidization practices, suddenly these prices started rising at alarming rates (the World Bank’s composite food price index showed a 29% increase in food prices from January 2010 to January 2011), heavily impacting the lower segments of society (Kinninmont 2011).

As said, a regime threads into heavy water when it is no longer capable of sustaining the carrot approach. Once a regime can no longer rely on appeasement to abide by the tacit agreement

<sup>34</sup> The social contract exists through the tacit agreement of the population. There is no active participation involved, but a population’s complacency or passivity regarding their situation can be viewed as the acceptance of the contract itself. The idea of a social contract is also highlighted by Pratt (2007) through the notion of “the national modernization project”. She argues that by participating in the social contract, people reproduce its functioning. As long as people do not question the legitimacy of this system, autocratic rulers do not have to fear their position.

<sup>35</sup> It is important to remember that for states such as Egypt or Tunisia, in which there are no large reserves of natural resources, this contract was in essence structurally impossible to uphold.



between itself and a population, it might need to rely more on its repressive capacities in order to retain power. Now, though repression has so far been amply mentioned in this chapter, it is obviously an important tool for authoritarian regimes in the region (Bellin 2004). Many of the states have extensive police and security systems, a feared secret service and a powerful army. Usually, these will be held in check by enlisting them among patronage networks, or by tying their fate to the fate of their ruler.

Ideally, an autocrat would like to see as much appeasement as possible, because in that way a repressive confrontation can be avoided. Still, there is always a balance present in a given autocratic state, and subversive elements can be, and regularly are, subdued. As argued, when a regime is no longer able to properly appease, it might need to rely on repressive strategies to keep a hold on power, tending in a downward spiral, as population's react to such repressive measures, which it itself incites violence (Ibrahim 2011: 1349). In the most extreme situation this would eventually result in an autocrat going to war on his own population, in which case there is a vested interest of the security forces to no longer side with the regime, but instead take up the plight of the population (Bellin 2004; 2012). On top of all those considerations, repression and conflict only controls the conflict for a little while, risking a flare in a later stage, or in a different group for example. Appeasement, as a positive technique, is a much more inclusive way of attaining stability, by acknowledging problems and offering a more direct form of relief (*The Economist* 2011).<sup>36</sup>

Now, regarding the Arab Spring, it has become clear that the semi- and non-rentier states were incapable of sustaining the traditional social contract they had with society and upon which their legitimacy was based. That tipped the balance of carrot and stick more towards repression, eventually leading up to a situation where the combination of the deteriorating socio-economic conditions, the vulgarities of inequality and corruption, coupled with the worsening repression, the general public would no longer accept the duties that accompany a social contract of which the rights were rendered void (Gökmen 2011). Slowly, the pressures start mounting, and it is at such a time that a population starts demanding representation, or rather, begins to acknowledge the

<sup>36</sup> Though as a general rule this seems correct in a period of relative stability, once unrest surfaces appeasement is no longer the best option for a regime. By rewarding their mobilization, the population could feel empowered, with a growing belief that dedication to a cause might result in rapid change. This is reflected in academic literature by showing that most revolutions actually follow a period of political liberalization (Tilly 1978; Kuran 1989).

lack of proper representation. As long as the social contract is upheld, the autocrat is kept in his seat by the silent consent of the people, who in turn takes care of his constituents.

This notion is based on the argument “no representation without taxation”, which claims that once constituents are able to live their lives comfortably, without having to share their boons with the government, they are less inclined to demand a right to be heard, or to demand their political freedoms (Herb 2005). In the case of the Arab Spring though, a variation on this theme is applicable. In exchange for their silent consent, the masses have grown accustomed to the benefits of their social contract. Once the regime is no longer able to supply these benefits, it appears as if a form of “reversed taxation” is being practiced. In exchange for silent consent, there is suddenly no favor in return (Okruhlik 1999).

A constituency is then faced with abysmal socio-economic conditions, and a poignant inequality, which only serves as a reminder of the corruption and patronage games that are required to be able to profit from the autocratic structure. In exchange, they are still expected to nod silently in agreement. Due to this feeling of “reversed taxation”, where instead of paying taxes one is for example left with rising food prices due to the fact that food subsidization was cut of the government budget, people demand more voice in the political process (Herb 2005). However, decades of autocracy have rendered the traditional political opposition both untrustworthy as well as suspicious, given their role in the political process, whereby through participating they create a sense of legitimacy for a system that does not abide by democratic principles. Their abysmal track records do nothing to subdue the renewed demand for change and political clout (Amin 2011).

Finally, up until a certain point people will be aware of the risk of violent repressive action, and will therefore be cautious in their subversive maneuver. Undermining an authoritarian regime is often a rather painful ordeal. Still, once public disapproval morphs into public resentment, and subsequently builds into public outrage, there is a point where the risk of violent repression is no longer enough of a deterrent to have people refrain from taking to the streets. In other words, once socio-economic conditions had deteriorated substantially, a feeling emerged that there was simply nothing left to lose, making the risk of violent repression secondary to the risk of not rising to the occasion and accepting the status quo (Amin 2011). At that point, all it takes is a small spark to light the fire to have people’s anger erupt. Once public outrage has built to such an extent that the crowds taking to the streets reach a critical mass, the regular repressive capabilities of the regime in

the street are incapable of containing the protest (as witnessed in Egypt), further undermining the regime both by showing its own weakness, and showing the masses their strength in numbers. Not only that but the fact that people actually can take to the streets without being met by violence is for others, who were initially more risk-averse, reason to join those like-minded in the streets.

However, these structural imbalances and micro-transitions are not enough to evoke mass protests, as these had been present for years without resentment growing to the outburst of public anger as it did late 2010 and early 2011. There are two other aspects that are necessary for resentment to turn into mass protests. Before addressing the issue of catalysts, the past several years have witnessed a series of changes in the MENA region, ultimately resulting in the masses taking to the streets, and a negation of the possibility of violent repression. The following section will address these changes, looking at the dynamics of mass mobilization, the role of civil society, the formation of social (non-)movements and finally the role of the media.

### **Individual Agency, Social Affiliation and Collective Mobilization**

Many scholars have pondered the question of how massive collective mobilization came about in a region that used to be characterized by passiveness and stability rather than by activism and change. This is not to say that there had never been protests in the Middle East; between 2004 and 2009 there were over nineteen hundred protest actions in Egypt alone, ranging from workers' strikes (involving over 1.7 million laborers) to protests in support of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Point is, however, that these dispersed protests never transformed into massive collective mobilizations (Bayat 2010; Dalnajâwî 2011). Although Tunisians, Egyptians, and Libyans alike finally did manage to oust their repressors, it would be incorrect to treat their respective uprisings as a whole; there are fundamental differences in the nature of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, compared with that in Libya (Joffé 2011: 511).

In Tunisia, not all traditions of autonomous expression had been crushed; consequently, a number of organizations were ready and able to create a powerful social movement against the corrupt and repressive Ben Ali regime. Local branches of the trade union movement (UGTT), in cooperation with representatives of lawyers' associations and journalists, were responsible for the organization of a series of rolling demonstrations around the country that finally culminated in a major protest in Tunis. The tradition of constitutionalism in Tunisia and a marginalized army helped to make the

uprising successful. In Egypt, although most autonomous organizations had been marginalized by the Mubarak regime, there were three stands of protest in operation offering conscious resistance to the regime and engaging broad swathes of the Egyptian population: Kefaya (“Enough”), the April 6 Movement, and the Khaled Said Movement. In Libya a political system had been in place since its early days that did not tolerate any competition to its institution of “direct popular democracy” expressed through basic people’s congresses and popular committees.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, there was no potential social space for a Libyan civil society, nor was there a political space where precursors to social movements could develop. Why Libyans did see the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt as an opportunity to rise against Qadhafi had to do with other factors such as the loss of political influence of important tribes, a number of domestic crises,<sup>38</sup> and the growing sense among Libyans that the regime’s grip on power was faltering. In the end a civil war led to the demise of Qadhafi’s regime (Joffé 2011: 518-524; Shaw 2011a; Haugbølle and Cavatorta 2011). (The rest of this section is solely based on the various academic analyses of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, because to date there is insufficient information available on the social dynamics underlying the revolution in Libya.<sup>39</sup>)

The majority of authors notes that social and political change does not arise from a vacuum and that it is therefore not surprising that the ability of authoritarian regimes to maintain power without addressing the deteriorating social, economic, and political situation generated the conditions that made the revolutionary moment possible. Problem with this explanation, however, is that many of these conditions were present in the Arab world for decades and all this time Arab subjects failed to collectively rise up against their repressors. The same scholars conclude that the uprisings happened at this exact moment in time because there was a conjuncture of economic and political demands that united different groups in their call for justice and dignity leading to wide

<sup>37</sup> For an extensive analysis on political developments in Libya, see Vandewalle (1998).

<sup>38</sup> There were three major domestic crises in Libya: (1) in 1993 a coup against Qadhafi at the town of Bani Walid was unmasked. The coup leaders included a large number of Warfalli that are normally considered to be loyal to the regime; (2) in 1996, 1,300 political prisoners were killed when prison guards suppressed a riot at Abu Salim prison in Tripoli; and (3) from 1999 Saif al-Islam, Qadhafi’s second son, began pushing for internal reform in Libya which contributed to the growing sense that the regime’s hegemony on power could be called into question (Joffé 2011: 522-523).

<sup>39</sup> In addition, the dynamics of conflict in Libya differed from the cases of Tunisia and Egypt, due the fact that an external military intervention played a large role in the country.

public mobilization<sup>40</sup> (Shukrallah 2011; Lesch 2011; Rubin 2011; Hibbard & Layton 2011; Ibrahim 2011; Shehata 2011; Abdelrahman 2011).<sup>41</sup> To get a full understanding of the transformation that turned passive subjects into active citizens it is of paramount importance to analyze the agents that finally decided to take matters in their own hands.

Various authors stress that “the young” were the initial group of protesters that set everything in motion in Egypt, but that early on the whole populace joined in. Alaa al Aswany and Hani Shukrallah, two highly respected Egyptian authors, personally witnessed and joined the uprisings at Tahrir Square. According to their observations, the Egyptian nation was fully represented. Other journalists and scholars share their impression; Egyptian youth started it but, taking part as individuals, groups from all segments of society joined the uprising later (Shukrallah 2011; Aswany 2011; Anderson 2011; Tignor 2011; Shehata 2011; Abdelrahman 2011; Goldstone 2011a; Goldstone 2011b). The mobilization of a broad-based section of the population, spanning ethnic and religious groups and socioeconomic classes, has been of similar importance for the protests in Tunisia and Libya to be successful (Goldstone 2011a).<sup>42</sup> Maha Abdelrahman concludes that the Egyptian protestors “were orderly without organization, inspired without a leader, and single-minded without one guiding ideology” (2011: 422). Other journalists and scholars share her impression and stress that, in essence, it has been a leaderless revolution (al Aswany 2011; Anderson 2011; Tignor 2011; Shehata 2011; Anheier et al. 2012). On the other hand it has been argued that these protests are built upon years of organizing and preparation on the part of social movements. Mary Elizabeth King for instance argues that the uprisings were far from spontaneous: “for years, Egyptian activists were sharing knowledge, organizing and learning to think strategically” (2012).<sup>43</sup> Shukrallah also mentions that there has been an extent of planning and organization that not only triggered the uprising in Egypt but also provided it with leadership when massive protests finally broke out (2011: 4). Moreover, Shukr (2011) and Dalnajâwî (2011) both argue that the outbreak

<sup>40</sup> Ali Layla (2011) notes that the number and composition of the participants in the Egyptian revolution developed during the course of events. A “snowball effect” was initiated by the elite of the “Facebook youth”, followed by a wider coalition of youth and eventually all layers of society were involved.

<sup>41</sup> For a persuasive view on the “false dichotomy” between political and economic origins of the uprisings, see Kinninmont 2011 and 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Goldstone argues the vital role of cross-class coalitions to bridge the diverse goals and interests of different groups, pitting society as a whole against the regime and its loyalist supporters (2011b: 457).

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed description of this process, see Shukr (2011).

of the revolution in Egypt resulted from the accumulation of political struggle and protest actions by Kefaya and the April 6 Movement.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the label “spontaneous and leaderless” uprisings is simply the product of previous media neglect and ignorance (Engler 2011). A logical next step is to further study the social affiliation of the protagonists of the Arab Spring.

The main point of discussion is whether the protests movements have sprung from civil society (the usual suspects) or if we should look at non-formal processes of activism among ordinary citizens (the unusual suspect). The *Global Civil Society Yearbook* of 2012 notes that “the protesters in different parts of the world tend to talk of themselves as ‘the people’ rather than as civil society” (Anheier et al. 2012). However, they do refer to the various protests that took place in the Middle East (and the rest of the world) with the common denominator “global civil society events”. Other scholars have also claimed that civil society groups were involved in the organization of the uprisings (King 2012, Observatoire de L’Afrique 2011, Droz-Vincent 2011b). Qandil for instance notes that civil society has contributed to the awareness of citizens’ rights, but that it cannot be named as a major factor in the uprisings (2011). Other authors hold that the protests for justice and dignity in the Arab spring are part of a global protest movement or of a larger historical process of global change (Friedman, G. 2011; Smith 2011; Anheier et al. 2012). Jackie Smith for instance claims the Arab Spring should be seen as part of a global uprising against the basic structures of the world economic and political system: “This ‘movement of movements’ both responds to the oppressions and exclusions of the world-system while taking advantage of the opportunities inherent in the technologies and political structures of this very system” (2011: 656).

A comprehensive account on the role of civil society and social movements<sup>45</sup> is provided by George Joffé. He argues that civil societies in the Middle East over the years “acquired the potential to transmute into social movements prepared to contest regime discourses” despite being embedded in the authoritarian state (2011: 514). Paul Aarts and Francesco Cavatorta, on the contrary, claim “the real protagonists of the Arab Spring do not

<sup>44</sup> The cooperation between the founders of Otpor, a Serbian civic youth movement that employed a nonviolent struggle against Milosevic from 1998 until 2003, and the April 6 Movement is also an indicator of their high level of organization (for an extensive account of the role of Otpor in the Egyptian revolution, see Rosenberg 2011).

<sup>45</sup> A distinction can be made between insurrectionary movements that solely negate the existing order and social movements that strive to alter the dominant arrangement but also try to establish alternative institutions and value systems. Social movements can be composed of diverse activities and are institutionalized within civil society. They can give rise to social and cultural sub-system that usually coexist within the dominant order (Bayat 1998: 139-141).

come from the usual suspects within established and formal civil society, but from sectors of society that have been largely under-explored" (2012: 6). To understand the significance of this difference of opinion it is interesting to summarize the debate on the relationship between civil society and democratization in the Middle East that has been going on since long before the Arab Spring was even set in motion.

### **Civil Society and Democratization**

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Western) scholars have used the term civil society to refer to the collection of autonomous social associations that are an extension of the state while resisting arbitrary exercises of state power. The difference between civil society and just any group of people is the level of internal organization and assertiveness that enables it to challenge state power (Sadowski 1993: 15). Because civil society has played a significant role in subverting authoritarian regimes during the revolutions in Latin America and Eastern Europe it soon became a key feature of democracy promotion initiatives in the Middle East (Yom 2005; Sayyid 2011). Civil society is believed to be a prerequisite for democracy because "it holds states accountable, represents citizen interests, channels and mediates mass concerns, bolsters an environment of pluralism and trust, and socializes members to the behavior required for successful democracies" (Jamal 2007: 1). Since Arab people were failing (until recently) to rise and overthrow their dictators in favor of democracy the region has often been accused of having a weak civil society or of lacking a civil society altogether (Bellin 2004; Sayyid 2011; Lust 2011a). One could rightfully claim that the Western vision of a civil society is largely absent in the Middle East because autocratic leaders depoliticize their subjects and restrict their capacity to express critique of governmental policy (Sayyid 2011: 983). However, an approach based on this assumption fails to recognize thousands of social organizations that have been active in the Arab region for many years: Egypt alone counts over twenty-five thousand civil organizations ranging from sport clubs to political associations (Jamal 2007: 120). Over the past decade a number of scholars acknowledged that the Middle East does not lack a civil society all together, civil society just plays a markedly different role outside of the democratic context on which the concept is based

(Langohr 2004; Yom 2005; Heydemann 2007; Jamal 2007; Qandil 2011).<sup>46</sup>

The most important factor restricting civil societies' ability to generate democratic change in the Middle East is that they are embedded in the state by Arab regimes to bolster their hold on power. Arab leaders have gradually opened up more space for civic forms of organization than in the past while at the same time containing and regulating them through a combination of legalism, coercion, cooptation, and the appropriation of civil society roles by the government. Consequently, civic activism in the region is low, NGO sectors are fragmented, and civil society organizations "weak". By employing this dual strategy Arab regimes have managed to exploit the rhetoric and organizational framework of civil society to generate political resources that can be used to their advantage (Heydemann 2007: 5-10). An important consequence of this particular feature of authoritarian upgrading is that the majority of these civic organizations reflect and strengthen the vertical ties that are characteristic of patrimonial Arab states. Since democratic reform would undermine the very regime that supports them, these regimes will most likely not create support for democratic institutions. On the other hand, anti-regime associations will show high levels of support for democratic institutions, because democratic transformation is their only chance at escaping marginalization (Jamal 2007: 79-92).

Amaney Jamal argues that because political institutions shape the content and form of civic engagement, the overall political context in which civic associations operate shapes the way in which associations may or may not produce democratic change. Civic associations can only be counterweights to the state if the context allows this and non-democratic states rarely tolerate associations that challenge the status quo (2007: 3-10). Based on extensive research Jamal concludes that in authoritarian contexts civil society is not a monolithic gateway for more active, responsible, and effective political participation. Rather, there are two different civic spaces: one based on vertical ties strengthening the government in power, and one based on horizontal ties strengthening democratic civic engagement. Pressure for reform could come from the second group, if change is to be expected to come from civil society at all (ibid.: 79-92). Following this line of thought,

<sup>46</sup> One can also argue that the form of associations can affect the content and issues an association is campaigning for. A politically repressive context forces activists underground. Thus, they are forced to use new tools for communication. From this new form of organization and communication a different type of association can emerge that transcends classical boundaries of class and gender and hence can lead to broader-based campaigns.



it would be remarkable if the agents of the Arab spring come from traditional civil society.<sup>47</sup>

### **Liberal Normative Discourse and the Arab Spring**

The Arab Spring has renewed academic interest in whether the general (Western) discourse on civil society is adequate to frame civility in the Middle East. Aarts and Cavatorta note:

On the one hand democratization studies postulate that a strong civil society is conducive to democracy and is almost necessary to have political transformations. [...] On the other hand, the literature on authoritarian resilience focused almost exclusively on the mechanisms of state domination and cooptation of civil society, ignoring informal and unofficial loci of dissent and activism presenting therefore a picture of stability that was not there (2012: 2-3).

Many authors claim that the general discourse on civil society has been used as a vehicle to render meaningless types of civility that do not match liberal normativity (Soguk 2011; Volpi 2011a; Salvator 2011). Instead of perceiving the Middle East as having either a civility deficit or the “wrong” kind of civility, it should be recognized that there are different ways to produce civilities outside of the boundaries that characterize mainstream debates on civic behavior and civil society (Volpi 2011a: 832). Salwa Ismail for instance stresses that “political civilities should be examined as historically produced and socially differentiated norms and practices which are related to the structures, institutions and techniques of power that govern conduct” (2011a: 845). This critical stance towards civil society discourse is emblematic of general skepticism towards dominant liberal frameworks of analysis. A question that has become rather prominent is whether the Western academic discourse is adequate to analyze the Middle East protests or if scholars should better adopt a novel conceptual vocabulary to gain significant insight into the “Arab awakening” (Gause 2011; Soguk 2011; Dupont and Passy 2011).

Asef Bayat is of the opinion that students of regime stability and authoritarian resilience of Arab states may have to reevaluate their conceptual premises because the notions of Middle Eastern

<sup>47</sup> Vertical ties are strengthened through pro-regime associations while horizontal ties are strengthened through anti-regime associations. In authoritarian states there is not much space for anti-regime organization, therefore the majority of social associations are pro-regime and thus not conducive to democracy (Jamal 2007).

exceptionalism, stagnant culture, fatalist Muslims, and unchangeable polity have been undermined (2011: 386).

Andrea Khalil takes it one step further by stating that Western social scientific explanations of political crowds in the Middle East have failed to provide an understanding of the causes and effects of popular revolts: “Commentaries on North African popular uprisings are lacking in the quality of their analysis, and mainstream commentary lacks theoretical depth” (Khalil 2011). A more balanced argument is advanced by Halit Tagma who questions the particular discursive strategy that seems to straightjacket the “newly-founded agency” on the Arab street rather than being open to new forms of politics and different modes of economic and social organization (2011: 623). Following the same line of reasoning, Aarts and Cavatorta propose to strip civil society of its liberal normative content; this would provide a more useful tool to analyze the reality of activism on the ground because “a number of non-traditional actors not usually thought to be part of civil society such as individual blogger-activists or organizations more organically linked to the state could be included” (2012: 6). In 2010 Bayat introduced an alternative conceptual framework that can be used to analyze how these non-traditional actors (ordinary citizens) influence mechanisms of agency and change in the Middle East. His perspective on bottom-up politics in the Arab region has gained considerable relevance in light of the Arab Spring (Öncü 2011).

### **Social Nonmovements and Social Movements**

In *Life as Politics* (2010) Bayat uses the terms “contentious politics”, “quiet encroachment”, and “social nonmovements” to understand bottom-up politics in the Arab region.<sup>48</sup> His focus is on agency and change in the Middle East, instead of on stability and exceptionalism. For this reason he has been far more optimistic about possible political transformations in the region than most of his academic colleagues. These nonmovements are passive networks that bring about change through the unintended consequences of individual practices; it is about “politics of presence” instead of about “politics of action”. They forge solidarities within internally fragmented groups who act in common, although often individually. These solidarities are primarily formed in public space through instantaneous commu-

<sup>48</sup> For a similar approach see Chalcraft 2012; Chalcraft uses the idea of “horizontalism” and “leaderless movements” to enhance our understanding of how massive collective mobilization came about in Egypt in 2011.

nications, for instance through mass media.<sup>49</sup> Nonmovements are especially prominent in the Middle East because authoritarian states do not tolerate any independent and organized dissent. The most significant nonmovements are the youth, Muslim women, and the urban poor. These groups practice what they preach and because these actions are part of their day-to-day life and carried out by millions of people at the same time they ultimately affect the norms and rules in society. Thus, through their non-collective collective actions, these ordinary people subvert authoritarian rule (Bayat 2010: 19-26). Bayat claims that social nonmovements are key vehicles to bring about democratic reform in Arab states, because authoritarian regimes may be able to suppress organized movements and silence collective resistance, they are nonetheless limited when it comes to stifling an entire society, the mass of people in their daily life (ibid: 249). The crux is that social nonmovements can evolve into an active citizenry when the opportunity arises:

Actual (even though quiet and individualized) defiance by a large number of people implies that a massive societal mobilization is already under way. This may develop into contentious politics when opportunity for organized, sustained, and institutional activism becomes available — for instance when states/regimes gripped in fighting, crisis, international pressure, or wars become weaker (ibid: 24).

An active citizenry will induce and sustain democratic reform in the Middle East by producing alternative ideas, norms, practices and politics that will weave into the fabric of society eventually leading to the subversion of authoritarian rule (ibid.: 249).

A number of accounts on the collective mobilizations in Egypt show similarities to the processes described by Bayat. Frédéric Volpi for instance believes that the current political transformations can only be understood from a comparative perspective on political change in the region that supplements formal modes of social and political reform (2011a: 840). For this new perspective to be comprehensive of the complexity of social processes that underpin and prevent political change in the region, he states that

<sup>49</sup> A telling example is the influence of “El General”, a young Tunisian rapper whose songs are the 21<sup>st</sup> century anthems against both autocrats and extremists. Because Ben Ali’s regime had virtually banned hip-hop, El General decided to post his songs on Facebook and YouTube; they were an instant sensation and its outrage resonated among the young especially. His song “Rais Lebled” rippled across the Internet and was even picked up by Al Jazeera. The song has a transformative influence because it spoke out what so many Tunisians did not dare to do. Only a month later the Jasmine Revolution broke out (Wright 2011: 115-117).

the usual interpretations of the role of the regimes in the region and the dynamics of social actors opposing the state should be reconsidered (2011b: 805-806). Based on extensive research on civilities in Egypt, Ismail concludes that “intermediation and clientelization structure interaction among citizens and between them and the agents of state government, thus shaping the formation of political agency and acts of citizenship” (2011a: 857). She postulates that the social hierarchies structuring everyday life in Egypt are reproduced in interactions with the state and that these hierarchies determine the ability of citizens to benefit from or resist to state power. The citizens of Egypt try to subvert their government by pursuing various modes of action outside of the formal institutions, thus establishing a parallel informal state that meshes with the formal state (ibid.: 853-857). In this context it is also interesting that both al Aswany and Shukrallah mention how Egyptians were turned into citizens overnight, as if the uprising had recreated the people in a higher form (Al Aswany 2011: ix, Shukrallah 2011: 5-6).

Where Joffé's point of view at first seemed to be opposing Aarts and Cavatorta's, it now becomes clear that their difference of opinion is merely a question of diverging conceptual frameworks. Moreover, both accounts are strikingly similar to Bayat's analysis. Aarts and Cavatorta for instance state:

It is [...] in wider society where less formal and looser ties are formed that one would potentially find democratizing potential, highlighting an interesting paradox whereby those actors that sought democracy only found authoritarianism and the ones working within authoritarian constraints might be the ones leading the way to democratic change (2012: 9).

Joffé provides an in-depth analysis of how, within the partially liberalized space that authoritarian regimes created to maintain their stability, organizations and individuals alike managed to transmute into social movements prepared to contest the regime in power. He argues that social movements are a reflection of contentious politics and the base-rock upon which opportunities for major political change depend. According to Joffé, liberalized autocracies set up the conditions for their own demise by creating space for precursor movements that could evolve into movements of political contention; all they needed was an appropriate catalyst (2011: 514-517).

Social nonmovement theory is complementary to traditional social movement theory because it explains how a passive group of individuals transforms into an active citizenry (or social move-

ment) that tries to subvert dominant rule through contentious politics. Social movement theory does explain why collective action might develop, but it does not describe how individuals characterized by anomie finally do collectivize and mobilize to express their frustrations (Joffé 2011: 515). In this context it should be noted that a number of social movements scholars have provided useful information explaining the “sudden” protests in the Middle East using their traditional theoretical frameworks.<sup>50</sup> Political opportunity structures offer explanatory leverage by paying attention to the world outside a social movement:

Authorities and challengers make judgments about the varying and dynamic opportunities and constraints they face at different levels of authority (e.g. national, regional or international). The specific nested configuration at any given time, and its relative tightness or looseness, suggests a great deal about the stability of the state, its space of action and, in turn, dissidents’ prospects for influence (Alimi and Meyer 2011: 477).

Social movement theory also gives insight into the paradoxical impact of state violence, especially police violence, on the mobilization of protest. In Egypt and Tunisia state violence led to riots after which spaces were opened for organized underground groups to issue nation-wide calls for action (Smith 2011: 481-482). In both countries new social media played a vital role, heightening the awareness of state repression and corruption and mobilizing people that up till that moment had remained silent (Lesch 2011: 41). William Gamson analyses the diffusion of the revolution throughout the region using a collective action frame with three components: injustice, agency, and collective identity. In the Middle East the sense of injustice had a long build-up from high unemployment, food price inflation, widespread corruption, lack of political freedoms, and relatively poor living conditions. The sense of agency is subject to influence by example; the rapid success of collective action increased the sense of agency in the Arab world. Collective identity refers to the creation of a ‘we’ that cuts across different segments of society (2011: 463-467). However, Gamson does not describe

<sup>50</sup> Social movements scholars have developed three main theoretical avenues to understand protest: *political opportunity theory*, *resource mobilization approach* and *framing theory* respectively focusing on factors that constrain or facilitate the emergence and the development of protest, the importance of the organization of protest, and the necessity of a cognitive revolution or consciousness transformation to turn mere grievances into protest and claim-making (Dupont and Passy 2011: 448).

the mechanisms and dynamics that made the creation of a collective identity possible, while this was such an important factor for the success of the Arab Spring; this is where social nonmovement theory is complementary.

Regardless of whether the collective mobilizations can be attributed to leaderless individuals, civil society, or social non-movements; Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), especially Social Networking Sites (SNS), have had significant impact on the Middle East uprisings.

### **The Impact of Information and Communication Technologies on Collective Action**

Numerous scholars have analyzed the impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Social Networking Sites (SNS) on the massive collective mobilizations witnessed in the Middle East over the past year. There is a lively debate on exactly how decisive their role has been. Wael Ghonim, the creator of the Facebook page *We Are all Khaled Said* (Ar. *Kuluna Khaled Said*), for instance stated in an interview with CNN “If you want to free a society just give them internet access” (Khondker 2011: 676). At the complete opposite end of the spectrum Lisa Anderson has argued that the global diffusion of information witnessed during the Arab Spring is neither a new phenomenon nor the result of the Internet and social media (2011: 2).<sup>51</sup> However, most scholars share the opinion that ICTs and SNS should be considered as a facilitating rather than a decisive factor for successful collective action.<sup>52</sup>

The greatest contribution of ICTs and SNS in particular is that they help to construct a bottom-up narrative against autocratic regimes, weakening the regimes’ control of the political narrative. This has provided Arab subjects the opportunity to counter the culture of fear that has been an important cause of distrust among Arab citizens and the related atomization of society. In other words, the Internet helped to create a public sphere where contentious issues could be negotiated without immediate repercussions. This public sphere facilitated a space for civic activism in societies where popular dissent is rarely tolerated. In addition, digital forms of communication brought together otherwise remote and disparate groups of people. It goes without

<sup>51</sup> A major critical piece on the phenomenon of “cyber optimism” was written by Malcolm Gladwell, aptly titled “Small Change. Why The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted” (2010). For a more general, well-researched and sober outlook on the pros and cons of the use of the Internet, see Morozov (2010).

<sup>52</sup> For recent studies, reflecting “cyber optimistic,” “cyber pessimistic,” and “cyber realistic” views, see PITPI 2011; Else 2012; and Reardon 2012.

saying that this aspect of ICTs is especially important in societies where traditional media has been muzzled and civil society co-opted.<sup>53</sup> On the more practical side, ICTs have facilitated the organization and mobilization of the activists and they have increased international awareness through the possibility of real-time broadcasting (Manrique and Mikail 2011; Shaery-Eisenlohr 2011; Khondker 2011; Axford 2011; Diani 2011; Nanabhay and Farmamfarmian 2011; Joffé 2011; Dreano 2012).

Another aspect of ICTs is that they facilitate linkages between new and traditional forms of activism (Manrique and Mikail 2011: 3). Gamâl Mohammed Ghîtâs compares the information network to a nerve system, because it was keeping the revolution alive by collecting, transferring and exchanging information between the different 'cells' of revolutionaries; through 'tweets' and Facebook updates people knew what just happened, what was happening at the moment and what was about to happen (2011). This feature is especially interesting with regard to the idea of passive nonmovements turning into an active citizenry. Before the Arab awakening, Bayat already noted that:

The new information technology, in particular the current social network sites such as Facebook, can bypass the medium of physical space by connecting atomized individuals in the world of the web, and in so doing create a tremendous opportunity for building both passive and active networks (2010: 22).

Recent events in Egypt and other Arab countries have proven him right; by the end of 2010 many constraints on political and civic life were bypassed by youth cyber-activism, all they needed was a triggering event (Shehata 2011: 28).

Despite all these qualities, ICTs and SNS should not be seen as the new panacea for democracy. First, technology does not make collective action; it only affects its context and shapes its form. Other factors, such as the organization of civil society, opposition movements, and international backing, are evenly important. This is especially evident in countries like Syria and Yemen where ICTs have not been sufficient to provoke true reform. Second, the role of conventional media should not be underestimated. Various authors stress the significant influence of traditional media, especially of *Al Jazeera*, in bringing the uprisings to the larger public on both the national and international level.

<sup>53</sup> In this context Khondker even speaks of a "cyber civil society" (2011: 676).

Joffé even notes that old technologies may well have been even more important, especially satellite television which is not only universally accessible but also more difficult to shut down than the Internet (2011: 525). Third, authoritarian leaders can use ICTs to control and repress their subjects in order to consolidate their power (Morozov 2011; Manrique and Mikail 2011; Axford 2011; Diani 2011; Nanabhay and Farmamfarmian 2011; Shaery-Eisenlohr 2011; King 2012). Thus, new media can be both a benign and a malign force; it all depends on its user and to what end it is used.

### **Triggers and Dominos**

In this chapter the why, when and how of the revolts in the Arab world were traced. First of all, again the point must be stressed that the analysis presented here is the result of a careful scrutinization of the available academic literature. Aspects that would perhaps be expected to make an appearance, such as the role of religion, appear not to be a factor of importance as argued by the academic community. Though as a cultural component it is always present, there is no direct evidence of its influence on the popular uprisings. Also, the element of regional and international involvement is underrepresented. A decision was made early on in the process of sifting through the academic literature to focus firmly on endogenous factors and actors, in line with much of the available material.

As explained, initially the structural imbalances were examined, which over the course of many years weakened the foundation on which the likes of Ben Ali, Mubarak and Qadhafi had built their authoritarian regimes. Mainly socio-economic, demographic and political dynamics were discussed, with specific attention for the gradual dynamics and changing circumstances that caused those aspects that were historically part of the authoritarian structures of the regime to no longer support that construction. Special attention was paid to the ways in which these gradual transitions and structural grievances impaired the workings of the social contract the ruler had taken on with his respective population. This collapse of the social contract was argued to have a two-fold effect on the autocracies under stress. First, as fear of violent repression subsided in an acknowledgement of hitting rock-bottom, people once again actively engaged in public life. Second, in the final stages of the revolts, enough elite pressure was applied to convince the authoritarian rulers they had lost their legitimacy and could not maintain their grasp on power.

In the second part attention was directed mainly at answering the question of how these revolutions managed to become a



success. Discussed were those phenomena that are believed to be helpful in explaining how public frustration was allowed to crystallize into protest movements, and how these movements due to subsequent mobilization grew to such a critical mass that repressive force was no longer able to contain it. Aspects that were scrutinized include notions of agency and collective mobilization; explaining how societies shared similar goals and how this caused for a broad-based section of the population coming together. Subsequently the concept of civil society in the Arab world was examined, in an effort to see whether it had any explanatory value in this specific set of circumstances. As a counterpart the theory of social (non-)movements was discussed, before pinpointing the role of (new) media in the mass-protests.

Still, the question remains why in December 2010 all this suddenly combined into the combustible mix that led to the massive street protests in so many countries. After all, both the imbalances as well as the gradual transitions had been drawn-out dynamics. The answer lies in the acknowledgement that the Arab Spring resulted from a combination of accumulated dissatisfaction, built up over many years, with a set of triggers that gave face to these grievances. The following paragraphs will succinctly deal with these triggers.

A first, and perhaps symbolic mention needs to be given to Khaled Said, a 28 year old Egyptian, who in June 2010 was so brutally beaten upon his arrest by the security forces that he passed away from his injuries. The vulgarity and brutality of the beating, and Said's resulting death led to Wael Ghonim to start a Facebook group which rapidly went viral and attracted several hundred thousand followers. It was this Facebook group that was reported to be of crucial importance in mobilizing protestors to Tahrir Square in January 2011.

As counterpart to this individualistic spark is a rather institutionalized one, namely the 2010 Parliamentary elections in Egypt. In an election that was widely accepted to be rigged, the ruling NDP party of President Mubarak jumped from a 75% presence in Parliament (which is already considerable) to a stunning 90%. After the Parliamentary elections of 2005, in which it had first appeared as if the regime was planning on loosening the reigns and opting for a cleaner election process, such hopes were once again burnt in December 2010. Not only did this crush the hope of Egyptians of ever getting fair elections, it also led to growing concerns that Mubarak was making preparations to allow his wildly unpopular son Gamal to take over command.

There is one other incident that is viewed the world over as the initial trigger that caused the upheavals,<sup>54</sup> namely the suicide of Mohammed Bouazizi, a well-educated Tunisian of 26 years old who was unable to find a job that would suit his qualifications, and therefore started selling produce in Sidi Bouzid, his hometown. When he was hindered by security officers expecting bribes considering a lack of required permits, desperate by all lack of a viable future, Bouazizi burnt himself in front of the governor's office. His death caused an outrage among the villagers of Sidi Bouzid, who took to the streets. As news spread, neighboring villages joined the protests, slowly covering Tunisia like an ink stain. Ultimately, the protests reached such a stage that on January 14, 2011, President Ben Ali was forced to resign and leave the country.

Finally, there is one last, and very important catalysts which has so far largely gone unnoticed, namely what has been termed the domino effect. After President Ben Ali was forced to resign on January 14 it showed many others that change was indeed possible. Suddenly in Egypt people were no longer afraid to take to the streets, and similar protests were taking place all over the region. Perhaps it was a renewal of the sense of Pan-Arab identification. Or was it?

<sup>54</sup> Although this is very much up for debate, given the incidental nature of such a trigger.

## The Not-So-Domino Effect

### *Contagiousness and Its Limits*

It is a truism to say that there was a clear spill-over from the events in Tunisia to Egypt and elsewhere in the region. Even outside North Africa and the Middle East the impact was felt, like in the U.S. state of Wisconsin, where civil servants protested in late February 2011 against cuts in their payments while shouting slogans like “We are all Egyptians”. The Chinese censorship blocked the notion “jasmine”, thereby trying to avert any potential spill-over of the Tunisian “Jasmine revolution”. And “Los Indignados” in Spain felt inspired by the Arab revolts.

After the successful ousting of Ben Ali and Mubarak, there was a clear expectation that a domino effect would occur: one successful revolt against an oppressive regime successively toppling the next one. At face value, the impact of the leaderless popular mobilizations in Tunisia and Egypt and a renewed form of pan-Arabism in different countries gave many Arabs hope of successfully getting rid of their dictators. The question, however, is to what extent this supposed domino effect belongs more to the realm of wishful thinking than to reality. As we know, the region is home to traditional monarchies and competitive post-revolutionary authoritarian republics that have strong roots in power and although we concluded in Chapter 3 that the idea of authoritarian resilience might not have been useful to predict recent events, it might not have lost its explanatory power just yet. The Arab awakening and exit of Ben Ali in Tunisia did certainly have its consequences for other countries in the region. Arab states were directly affected by other revolts in unimagined and influential ways. The populations of Egypt, Libya and arguably Yemen<sup>55</sup> succeeded in overthrowing their hated dictators. People also took to the street in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Morocco, and to a lesser extent in Algeria, Jordan, Oman and Iraq, but at the time of writing these populations did not

<sup>55</sup> Till recently at least, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh seemed to be keeping tight control behind the scenes, especially through his son and his three nephews who retained control over the security services (Katz 2012; Haykel 2012).

succeed in toppling their authoritarian leaders so far. Through a set of contested, but familiar instruments and tactics the sitting regimes have managed to quell revolutionary spirits and avert drastic change. It turns out the “contagion” or domino effect was overestimated, at least in the short run.

### **Dusting Off a Familiar Playbook**

It depends on multiple factors whether or not revolutions have a successful outcome (Dix 1984; Goldstone 2011; Foran 1997). The importance of mass popular mobilization and the role of the international community are especially important. Robert Dix argues that “to make a polity ripe for revolutionary change, a movement’s ability to assemble a broad ‘negative’ coalition of diverse domestic groups and foreign supporters, including elite groups and the middle class, may be essential for success” (1984: 423). According to Jack Goldstone, there are four crucial elements that have to coincide for a revolution to succeed: (1) a government that seems so irreversibly unjust that it is commonly believed to be a threat to the country’s future; (2) elites, especially in the military, must feel alienated from the regime and no longer prefer to defend it; (3) a majority of the population, including different ethnic and religious groups and socioeconomic classes, must mobilize; and (4) international powers must either constrain a government from using all possible means to defend itself or refuse to interfere and defend the government in power (2011: 9).

A few remarks on each of these factors. Firstly, not all governments are equally viewed as threats to the country’s future. As explained before, an often made distinction is between monarchies and republics. Whereas leaders of traditional monarchies often manage to maintain popular support by making appeals to respect for royal tradition, religious authority or nationalism, authoritarian post-revolutionary republics are more vulnerable (idem). Arab monarchies have not been better at democratization than have republics, and vary significantly in political openness,<sup>56</sup> but most of them have been better at implementing “liberalization” policies (Lucas 2011). Except Saudi Arabia, Arab monarchies have tended to allow more political and individual freedoms. Contemporary republics, or in Goldstone’s terminology “sultanistic dictatorships”, often do not appeal to ideology and have no goal other than expanding and maintaining their personal authority and typically promote economic development to fuel their patronage networks and buy the loyalty of supporters and punish opponents (Gold-

<sup>56</sup> Saudi Arabia faces an almost completely closed political system while Morocco has an active party life.

stone 2011: 9).<sup>57</sup> All different types of regimes faced protests. The main difference between monarchies and republics, however, is the fact that in the first the traditional source of legitimacy that stems from the throne is not questioned and the blame for policy failures can always be laid on the incumbent government, while in the latter authoritarian leaders and their corrupt governments were seen as one.

Secondly, the role of the coercive apparatus or military<sup>58</sup> in repressing the revolts deserves further attention. Historically, the coercive apparatus in many Arab states was exceptionally able and willing to crush reform initiatives from below (Bellin 2004). However, part of the success of Tunisia's and Egypt's protest movements lay in the defection of the military from the incumbent regime. The matter of defection for a large part determines the success of opposition movements (Schneider 2011; Bellin 2012a; Kawakibi and Kodmani 2011). The structure, level of professionalism, and its place in the political system influence military behavior (Droz-Vincent 2011b; Schneider 2011). This is further elaborated on by Bellin who argues that two factors determine the variation in defection by the military: the institutional character and the level of social mobilization (2012a: 131). What is decisive, is the centrality and the patrimonial or ethnic links of the coercive apparatus to the authoritarian regime. "When the military is deeply invested in the survival of the regime because of its blood ties, or its ethnic/sectarian ties, or its crony capitalist ties to the regime, that military has significant incentive to shoot civilians even if such action violates its other mandates" (ibid.: 133).

The third crucial element is the level of social mobilization. If the number of challengers is small, it is not so problematic to use violence. However, if the level of social mobilization is high, the costs of repression will be high as well (ibid.: 132). If there is strong division within the military ranks, chances of defection and disobedience with the authoritarian leadership increase. The military is also more likely to oppose the dictatorship when the secret police conducts the majority of the repression and the military is not directly involved (Schneider 2011: 483).

Fourth and finally, the international environment influences the likelihood for success of a revolutionary movement. The way a

<sup>57</sup> The typical contemporary "modern sultans" are Bashar al-Asad in Syria, Omar al-Bashir in Sudan, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Muammar al-Qadhafi in Libya, and Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen.

<sup>58</sup> The term "coercive apparatus" is quite complex: authoritarian regimes rely on many different institutions to serve their security needs, including multiple branches of the military (army, navy, air force), the intelligence agencies, the police and often a praetorian guard as well (Bellin 2012a).

country is related to the outside world (i.e. Western powers, China or Russia) may to a large extent determine the trajectory whether that country moves from an authoritarian system to a more democratic one, or — which is not uncommon — to another kind of authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way 2006 and 2010). Generally speaking, where “linkage” to the West is extensive, authoritarian regimes are more likely to democratize and vice versa.<sup>59</sup> And, similarly, where states are vulnerable to democratizing pressures (i.e. where Western “leverage” is high), governments are more likely to fall. Many combinations are possible of course — linkage and leverage each can be low or high, or one being high and the other low, or vice versa — leading to different outcomes. In some cases the outcome may be unexpected, like in Egypt, where long-standing American support (for the Mubarak regime) ultimately worked to the people’s favor. The close relationship between the U.S. and the Egyptian army put “pressure on regime officials who had to make difficult choices on whether to use force against protestors” (Hamid 2011: 27). These close ties with the Egyptian military offered “another important point of leverage in the crucial final days of the revolution, when the military had to decide whether to turn on Mubarak, one of their own” (idem).

Even though “recombinant authoritarianism” (Heydemann and Leenders 2011) does not merely rely on repression and coercion, the politics of fear played a crucial role in controlling tense situations, just like buying off dissatisfaction through subsidies and top-down (cosmetic) liberal reforms. As will follow from the rest of this chapter, authoritarian leaders for a large part relied on “old” tactics (see Beblawi and Luciani 1987; Heydemann 1992; Richards and Waterbury 2007) to satisfy the population in the short run. Relying on their accumulated wealth, whether through oil revenues or foreign aid, most of the regimes dusted off a familiar playbook, be it with mixed results. What follows is a survey of the different countries in which the authoritarian rulers were able to remain in power.

### **Saudi Arabia**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia seems little affected by the Arab uprisings and, according to some, is said to be leader of the

<sup>59</sup> “Linkage” is defined as the density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational) and cross-border flows (of capital, goods and services, information, and people). Obviously, when there is high linkage to Russia or China it works differently (as is clearly shown in the case of Syria). More in detail, see Levitsky and Way 2010.

“counterrevolution”<sup>60</sup> in the Arab world (Riedel 2011; Al-Rasheed 2012). Four factors can be identified to explain why Saudi Arabia remained quite stable: (1) buying loyalty; (2) deploying loyal and well-trained security forces; (3) mobilizing the regime’s patronage networks; and (4) the division between reformers (Gause 2011b: 6-9).

First, when it comes to buying loyalty, in February and March 2011 King Abdullah committed to a package of economic gifts to the people (and to religious institutions), in total worth an estimated \$130 billion over the next several years. This included an extra two months’ salary to public sector employees, promotions for high-ranking military personnel, thousands of new hospital beds, and a minimum wage of approximately \$260 per month for the unemployed. Additional promises included the building of 500,000 houses and 60,000 new jobs in security and military services in the coming five years (Al-Rasheed 2012: 7; Gause 2011b).

The second reason for stability is the political reliability and deployment of its security forces. When Saudi reformists tried replicating the Tahrir Square model and planned for a “Day of Rage” on 11 March 2011, the Saudi government responded with a massive show of police and security force across the country to preempt any demonstrations (Riedel 2011: 160). These forces demonstrated that they were willing to arrest and shoot demonstrators and were also sufficiently trained to avoid massively violent responses to peaceful protests, potentially aggravating confrontations (Gause 2011b: 7).

The third explanation for a relative stable Saudi Arabia can be found in the mobilization of the regime’s patronage networks. The religious establishment is the most important of these networks (ibid.: 8). The Senior Council of Ulama<sup>61</sup> denounced the protests as not legitimate and un-Islamic and the government announced significant levels of spending on religious institutions and expanded powers for the country’s religious police (Jones 2011: 2). Wahhabi religious scholars warned from the minarets that the wrath of God would be inflicted on demonstrators and warned of an Iranian-Shia conspiracy from the Shia community in the Eastern Province to cause chaos and divide the country (Al-Rasheed 2012: 5). Meanwhile the regime also strengthened bonds with the Saudi Shia notables days before the proposed day of anger and

<sup>60</sup> This is contested by Gause (2011b) who argues that Saudi Arabia is actually on a losing streak in regional politics. Riyadh lost the confrontation with Tehran for influence on three major areas: Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. By raising the “sectarian temperature” the Saudis try to mobilize support against Iran and this could benefit them in the short-run, but only at serious costs.

<sup>61</sup> Saudi Arabia’s highest ranking religious authority.

tightened relationships with the Saudi business community (Gause 2011b: 8). In other words, when “Shias began protesting, their leaders hurried to Riyadh to express their allegiance to the king” (Al-Rasheed 2012: 6).

The fourth and last factor identified by Gause is the division among the groups and movements pressing for political change. In the early months of 2011 two different petitions calling for reform were drafted. One of the petitions was signed by a group of leading liberals and the other by notable Salafi Islamists. Although some activists signed both petitions, divisions between liberals and Islamists remained, which resulted in an opposition “that wasn’t” (Lacroix 2011: 55).

For the moment, the Saudi regime has avoided real turbulence. Economic rewards, religious bans on demonstrations, anti-Shia sectarianism and heavy policing, has effectively halted the momentum toward mass protest and it seems the regime faces no real threat in the short term (Al-Rasheed 2012: 8).

## **Bahrain**

Bahrain presents a special case. Protests in Bahrain were not a new phenomenon, and there even is a Bahraini saying that people have “demonstrations every year and an uprising every ten years” (Gwertzman 2011). After young Bahrainis started protesting in February 2011 and managed to occupy Pearl Roundabout in the center of Bahrain’s capital Manama, their activism was joined by other opposition groups. One of the uprising’s central features was the sectarian dimension and the regional implications it had. The regime depicted the 14 February revolt as distinctively Shiite, inspired by Iran (ICG 2011a: 7). Therefore it mobilized Sunni Islamists, to stage public support for the regime in the form of pro-government demonstrations. Another debilitating factor, from the protesters’ viewpoint, is the fact that the Bahraini army and police forces is dominated by foreigners, often Sunnis, who felt no compassion with the Shiite demonstrators. Besides, the regime was under extreme regional pressure not to let the democratic current go too far, and especially to ensure that the Shiites would not become the dominant political power (idem).

Considering these background factors, the initial response of the regime was with force, opening fire at the demonstrators on Pearl Roundabout, but after U.S. “condemnation” it allowed peaceful protests to take place. This situation continued for a few weeks, until Bahrain’s Gulf partners intervened. On 14 March, Saudi Arabia drew a proverbial line in the sand against the advance of the Arab Spring spirit (Henderson 2011). It led a Saudi/United Arab Emirates coalition, invoked by a GCC security



agreement, that sent an estimated 1,000 Saudi troops and some 500 United Arab Emirates police (and some Qatari troops) across the causeway that connects the two countries, to put down the Shiite-led uprising. The next day, a dozen of tanks and more than 100 army trucks also entered Bahrain (ICG 2011a: 8). After three days the protesters were chased out of Pearl Roundabout at gunpoint. Within a week, bulldozers crushed the iconic monument that served as a symbol of hope to the Bahraini people.

Another important aspect is the reaction of the West and particularly the U.S. (which harbors its Fifth Fleet in Bahrain). Both the European Union and the U.S. seem more concerned about the possible Iranian influence than the use of lethal violence by the Bahraini government. "According to diplomats from Europe and the BRIC group, GCC support for the UNSC Resolution 1973 regarding a no-fly zone over Libya came at the price of US silence in return for a license for Saudi Arabia's free reign in Bahrain" (Lulu 2011; also see Carlstrom 2012). This precarious regional (and international) situation is summarized well by Ottaway:

For Saudi Arabia, supporting the Bahraini monarchy means protecting all Gulf monarchies, sending a clear message to its own Shia population, and containing the much-feared Iranian influence in the Gulf. For the United States, dealing with Bahrain's turmoil is a balancing act among protecting access to the military base that serves as headquarters for the Fifth Fleet, restoring U.S.-Saudi relations badly shaken by Saudi anger at Washington's decision not to support Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, and the embarrassment of being seen as ignoring the brutal Saudi-Bahraini repression of the demonstrations in order to protect access to the Bahraini base and Saudi oil (Ottaway 2011a: 2).

### **Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates**

The remaining countries in the Gulf were also subject to (minor) political protests, with Qatar being the notable exception. Back in December 2010, Emir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber Al Sabah responded with violence against an opposition gathering of the youth in Kuwait (Diwan 2011). So did his counterpart in Oman when small revolts broke out among the population in February 2011 (Coates Ulrichsen 2011a). Political ferment also rose in the United Arab Emirates, with a petition signed by 133 Emirati intellectuals in March calling for political and constitutional change (ibid.). Further tension spread across the Gulf region in April, when 190 intellectuals signed a statement which expressed alarm at the behavior of some GCC governments in "stifling peaceful demands

for freedom, justice and democracy” (ibid.: 4). Policies have focused almost solely on short-term demands such as hand-outs of cash (Kuwait), creating jobs and raising wages (Oman), but any meaningful demands of the opposition forces were not met (ibid.: 5). Nonetheless these “superficial” measures seem to be enough for now. Tension has reduced and all the monarchs still heavily dominate political life.

The situation in Qatar was different. It emerged as a principal supporter of the international intervention on the side of the anti-Qadhafi rebels in Libya, organized the Arab backing for the no-fly zone, was one of the first countries to recognize the Transitional National Council (TNC) in Benghazi, and is a strong advocate of sending Arab troops to Syria. Apart from that, the Qatar-based regional media channel *Al Jazeera* was crucial in shaping a mass-based revolutionary culture through television coverage of the uprisings and conflicts all over the region (Coates Ulrichsen 2011b). The main reason for this unmatched quietness is Qatar’s enormous wealth. It provides its leadership with a great amount of flexibility to formulate domestic and foreign policy. The familiar appeasement policies are no different from other Gulf States, but the main difference with countries like Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia is that the rapid population growth in these countries is putting enormous pressure on the models of wealth distribution. Besides, Qatar has gained some international prestige due to its growing reputation as a reliable mediator in conflict areas and became the center of the world’s attention when it got rewarded the FIFA World Cup football in December 2010. Even though challenges also remain ahead for Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Qatar can be “proud” of its position as an Arab outlier.

## Iraq

The Arab Spring also touched the quasi-democratic state of Iraq. The successive governments’ inability to provide essential services, especially in supplying a steady supply of electricity, gave rise to grievances among the population (ICG 2011f). The government responded to almost daily demonstrations, by sacking a number of high profile political figures and suppressing political dissent (Jensen 2011). On 12 February 2011 protesters in Baghdad and Karbala went into the streets to demand anti-corruption and government action towards making public services fair and accessible. The Maliki government replied with subsidizing electricity costs (Rasheed 2011). Revolts continued and anger was built up to the proclaimed “Day of Rage” on 25 February. This protest was brutally cracked down by the security forces, deploying water cannons and sound bombs to disperse

crowds and eventually ended up shooting in the crowds. The semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan was also affected. On 18 April about 400 protesters gathered in Sulaimaniya's central square, and at least 50 were hurt when some demonstrators allegedly began to attack police with sticks and stones, leading to a riot (Tawfeeq 2011).

## Jordan

Jordan presents another example of a political system that managed to control the unrest. Through exploiting communal divide, keeping the opposition off-balance and using tried-and-true tactics of top-down liberalizations, the regime managed to put off any substantial reform (ICG 2012a). King Abdullah used the familiar instruments of a €170 million emergency plan, capping food prices and reducing fuel taxes in January 2011 as a pre-emptive measure to a proclaimed "Day of Anger" in Amman on 14 January (ibid.: 2). He also replaced an unpopular prime minister and set up a National Dialogue Committee to draft amendments for the electoral and political parties law. After this initiative also lost momentum, King Abdullah appointed a royal committee to draft a constitutional reform proposal (that eventually did not reduce the power of the king), which was largely welcomed by the opposition (ibid.: 3). Amidst yet other small crises the king ordered another cabinet reshuffle in October after which the newly appointed Prime Minister Awn al-Khasawneh promised to review the municipalities law and in so doing, he defused tension, and municipality protests stopped (ibid.: 4).

During the whole process of reducing the unrest, the regime exploited the communal differences in Jordan. In other words: "the existence of deep fault lines within the opposition — between East Bankers and Palestinian Jordanians; Islamists and non-Islamists; and between tribes — has presented opportunities for the regime and its supporters to undercut the reform movement" (ibid.: 23). Up till now, the pro-reform movement has not yet been able to gain an active mainstream following. As deeply as Jordanians are alienated from their rulers, they are just as fearful from each other (Brown 2011).

King Abdullah's regime also used foreign aid to manage the protests. Regimes in the Gulf have pledged €1.9 billion to Jordan over five years, the EU has granted €3 billion in financial aid over the next three years and the U.S. has offered €530 million in military and financial assistance in 2011, in addition to €200 million in development aid over five years (ICG 2012a: 26). As up to now, King Abdullah remains safely on his throne.

## Morocco

The shockwave created by the Arab Spring also reached Morocco. The North African kingdom was one of the few countries that demonstrated a more flexible approach to the tensions that were initiated by the protests in Tunisia. Against the background of the social and economic problems in the country, King Mohamed VI understood that retaining legitimacy without reform would prove rather difficult. He thus demonstrated his willingness to substantively engage with the demands of the opposition (Colombo 2011: 174). It seems the king of Morocco paid heed to the famous maxim in Guiseppe di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*: as the aristocratic Tancredi, engaged in the liberal revolution, says to his uncle, the Prince of Salina, "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change." If not, he warns, "They will foist a republic on us" (Di Lampedusa 1987: 40).

When the Arab uprisings reached Morocco on 20 February 2011 and gained further momentum on Labor Day (May 1, 2011), the king first reached back on his familiar strategies, but this time without success (Yerkes 2011: 198). He failed to appease the striking trade unions with a promise to raise both public sector salaries and the minimum wage. The king turned the tide on 9 March when he announced the introduction of a global constitutional reform based on seven key elements (Tourabi 2011). Although Mohamed VI had managed to separate his image from that of the corrupt political institutions, the crowd had just one major target: reducing the overextensions of the king's powers (Yerkes 2011: 198). Because of the population's (and regime's) familiarity with occasional protests the level of brutality in Morocco remained exceptionally low. Only in the beginning of May 2011 did the regime use some degree of force against its population (ibid.: 199). The adoption of the new constitution by a referendum on 1 July successfully defused the protests and, according to some observers, marks a potential new era in Moroccan politics. Under the new constitution the prime minister is chosen by the king from the biggest party in parliament and will become head of the executive branch with powers including full responsibility for the government, and civil service (ibid.: 200). Although the constitution also gives more power to the parliament, the monarchy stays at the heart of the institutional apparatus and retains control of the different levers of power, including the fact that the king remains commander of the armed forces and keeps the power to select the regional governors (Tourabi 2011). Early elections were held in November and according to the new constitution the new coalition government was headed by the Islamist party leader which had won the elections. It remains to be seen if the new constitution will

mark a positive bend in Moroccan political history, or the status quo is upheld. One thing is certain however: “during his twelve-year reign, king Mohammed has become very adept at taking first steps, but he has taken very few long walks” (Yerkes 2011: 204).

## Algeria

Algeria too was touched by the Arab Spring. Although some of the necessary “preconditions”<sup>62</sup> for a revolutionary swipe towards transition seemed present, popular demonstrations did not hit boiling point (Mikail 2012). Initial revolts in January 2011 were crushed with brute force, but in general Algerian authorities could rely on its rich oil and gas resources to buy off discontent (Chikhi and Lowe 2012). The government allocated more money for pay rises, food subsidies, granting three-year tax exemption for starting entrepreneurs and the president promised cash transfers and furniture for poor families in fourteen isolated regions. Besides, the government lifted the state of emergency after 19 years (Achy 2011). Buying off tensions through economic aid packages was only one reason why popular protests in Algeria did not gain momentum.

Achy identifies five other factors why regime change will be unlikely: (1) the public does not share a common set of grievances; (2) the opposition is divided and constrained by regulations that restrict the right to demonstrate; (3) protestors face a strong security apparatus; (4) the military is also part of the political sphere, making any resignation by the president irrelevant for regime change; and (5) the specter of civil war in the 1990s is still very fresh in people’s minds, keeping demonstrators from seeking radical change out of fear of resurrecting a long period of violence again (idem; and De Vasconcelos 2012: 99). Even though the regime adopted considerable reforms during the past year, few analysts expect real top-down change (Mikail 2012: 3). Most probably, the West favors a scenario that Algeria follows the trajectory of its neighbor Morocco, which conceded to pressure by allowing a moderate Islamist opposition party to head a new government, but kept real power safely in the king’s hands (Chikhi and Lowe 2012).

## Syria

The story of Syria is still unraveling. Nonetheless certain typical dimensions play a role in Syria. First, the sectarian composi-

<sup>62</sup> Algeria witnessed several self-immolations of unemployed youth and faced similar socio-economic conditions to Egypt and Tunisia, including high levels of unemployment and widespread corruption.

tion of the country and its effect on the possibility of military defection, and secondly, the international climate, both having substantial influence in the consolidation of power by Bashar al-Asad's regime.

The protests started in March 2011 and while these protests steadily grew, the Ba'thist regime of Bashar al-Asad chose to govern with physical "might". It used its monopoly on violence to intimidate and violently crush any opposition, manipulated sectarian differences, used crude propaganda and grudging concessions and when this did not stop the largely non-violent protests, the regime further increased the ferocity of its repression (Van Dam 2012; ICG 2011c).<sup>63</sup> The regime presented itself as the only proper alternative to chaos and in the early stages this approach seemed successful, "enabling the regime to rally large segments of belonging to minority groups, the middle class and the business establishment [...] which comprise much of the "silent majority" that refrained from taking to the streets" (ICG 2011c: 23).

As became clear during the revolts, Syria's grave economic situation and its Alawi minority rule, prevented oppositional forces from gaining critical mass (Bröning 2011). During its rule, the Asad family firmly integrated the military into the regime which provided a strong political safety net (Bröning 2011; Van Dam 2012; Haddad 2011; Heydemann 2011). The ruling elite is so much intertwined with the military and the secret police that it is impossible to separate the regime from the security establishment. People lose their jobs if they do not assist in state repression and the military (and political system) is organized in a way that when a commander is Sunni (or Druze, or Christian, etc.), his second command is Alawite (Zenobie 2011). On the question whether the army could divide, like it did in Libya, a negative image pops up. Although the Free Syrian Army has been formed as an opposition movement, and claims to have deserted Alawite generals among its ranks, the military, the ruling elite, and the ruthless secret police are still so intertwined that it is hard to imagine a separation between the Assad regime and the security establishment (*idem*).

Although largely condemned by the international community, the regime still shows no intention of giving up. The international reaction to the Syrian crisis was (and is) aimed at isolating the

<sup>63</sup> For a recent, interesting perspective on the "why and how" of the Syrian uprising — and, more in particular, the regime's violent reaction to it — see Stacher 2012. He develops the argument that is mainly the degree of centralization of executive power that "determines how and where ruling elites can include, reaffirm, and exclude lesser elites and nonelites" (22). He compares the more centralized (and thus more "flexible") Egyptian system with the "oligarchic" (and thus less adaptable) system in Syria.

Syrian regime politically and strangling it economically (Donker and Janssen 2011). The European Union, the United States, Turkey and later Saudi Arabia went so far as to call the Asad regime “illegitimate”, but other nations, especially Russia and China, have condemned Asad’s violence but refused to call for a regime change (ibid.: 6). International disagreement has prevented the United Nations Security Council from adopting a resolution that condemns Bashar al-Asad’s regime as a whole and it remains to be seen what effect the diplomatic approach of Kofi Annan and his six-step approach<sup>64</sup> will bring about. So far, the Syrian regime has not met the critical demand of laying down its weapons first.

Syria’s future remains uncertain and the possibility of a civil war still dangerously lures behind the horizon. As long as the military unity (largely) remains and the international community cannot come up with effective measures, the Syrian population will continue to endure brutal violence and economic hardships. If one thing came to the surface the past year, it is the fact that Asad will never give up, which brings the likelihood of non-violent reform close to zero.

### **Not a First-Round Knock Out**

Despotic leaders across the Arab world were put to the test by the Arab awakening that started with the exit of Ben Ali in Tunisia in January 2011. To date, Tunisia and Egypt experienced “revolutions”, a civil war occurred in Libya; civil uprisings took place in Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen, major protests befell Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, and Oman, and minor protests happened in Kuwait, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia (Kneissl 2011: 17). None of these countries are the same, and none of the incumbent regimes responded in the exact same way. Nevertheless, the four general factors, defined by Goldstone, that have to coincide for a revolutionary movement to succeed did prove a valuable tool in explaining why in some places the dominos managed to stay upright. In none of the discussed countries all four factors came together.

Jordan and Morocco, but also the monarchies in the Gulf served as examples in which the upheavals were aimed at reducing the powers of the royal house, but never questioned the traditional legitimacy of the king. It is not a coincidence that presidents in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen were toppled, while all the monarchs still manage to sit on their thrones. As a result,

<sup>64</sup> The six-point plan includes a ceasefire by Syrian forces, talks to search for a political solution to this crisis and a daily two-hour halt in fighting to provide humanitarian aid. The plan was put forward 21 March 2012 by Kofi Annan in New York.

they improve their already high “YIPPI” score (years in power per incumbent).

The functioning of the military also proved a crucial factor. If the army is not divided, does not hesitate to shoot on the crowd, and is considerably invested in the survival of the regime as was the case in all the Gulf countries and still is in Syria, the opposition movement hardly stands a chance.

Another important element that influences the likelihood of success for revolutionary movements is the regional (and international) context. Bahrain proves the best example of a country where revolts were frustrated by a little help of the regime’s friends. The military interference of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, in addition to the West’s paralysis to seriously condemn the government’s brutal violence, clearly diminished the opportunities for what started as the biggest wave of protests in relation to the population. Even if interference is not that explicit, it can play an implicit role. The kings of Morocco and Jordan relied for a large part on Western financial aid and money from the Gulf states to keep their inhabitants satisfied. The Algerian regime too, though not in need of external financial backing, appreciates the West’s support.

The incumbent dictators’ policies relied mostly on familiar and tested instruments to silence discontent. Playing out sectarian divisions within society, offering subsidies, raising salaries and announcing top-down “liberal” reforms were all common strategies to slow down the revolutionary fervor. Counting on the army or police forces to spread fear and attack protesting crowds where necessary, they still remain functional instruments for controlling tense situations. Although people do not so easily accept announcements of reforms anymore and appear more self-confident, to date most of the authoritarian regimes seem able to weather the storm — thus illustrating the not-so-domino effect of the upheavals in North Africa.



# The Day After

## *Unequal Dynamics*

Since people started taking to the streets in Tunisia in December 2010, commonly referred to as the start of the Arab Spring, almost 18 months have passed. Though it is still far too early to reflect on the eventual results of the uprisings there is much to be said about events that have passed in the meanwhile. Troublesome however is that those events can only be partially addressed thematically. Whereas the revolts could be elucidated in terms of generalized explanations, what has happened since cannot be captured by several general themes. This is due to the large variation in course across the several states that have been witness to the ouster of their ruler. This chapter is thus divided in two segments, where the latter delves into the country-specific course of events.

The first segment deals with the more general themes. In an article by Perthes (2012), four specific aspects of the aftermath of the Arab Spring are pointed out: the lack of alleviation for socio-demographic problems, the role the military demands to play, whether Islamist movements really do get a proper hold on the transition stages, and finally how regional politics are affected by all the tumult.

As explained in previous chapters, aside from widespread political grievances, a major impetus for the uprisings were the abysmal socio-economic conditions people were faced with, combined with a demographic factor that causes a more numerous, well-educated contingent of 20-30 year olds with a lack of social or material opportunities. Since the ousting of Ben Ali, or Mubarak, these young crowds have not seen any improvement in their economic or social situation (Tamlali 2012). This is by no means surprising, as research shows that the Arab Spring has had an overall negative impact on the economy in the Middle East, stalling foreign direct investment, causing the tourism industry to collapse, the closing of banks and stock exchanges and overall disrupted economic activity (Buckner et al. 2012: 8; Geopolicy 2011; Saif 2011; McCormick 2011). Though the losses have been staggeringly high in Libya (an estimated \$14 billion, mainly

due to the damages of the prolonged conflict in 2011), they are sizable still in Egypt (\$4.3 billion) and Tunisia (\$3 billion), at a time when these states were already weakened by several years of economic hardship (*idem*). Therefore some argue there is a chance that this generation once again takes to the streets to challenge newly-elected authorities, potentially led by the political activists who triggered the upheavals of 2011 but subsequently failed to profit from their roles in the post-revolt elections (Perthes 2012). Others note that unsolved economic problems, coinciding with a persistent state of insecurity on the streets and growing labor unrest, could lead to an “authoritarian involution”, for instance by an overt military coup (Paciello 2011: 26).

Similarly, the role of the military should be watched. Though they played more positive than negative roles in the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt (be it different in each case), in Egypt in particular they have not released their grasp on the state since. Though people have more trust in the military than they do in other institutions, perhaps even view it as a factor of national unity, in the end it is not a neutral actor; it wants to preserve its own interest (Perthes 2012; Droz-Vincent 2011a; Owen 2011; Springborg 2011a and 2011b; Goldberg 2011; Kawakibi and Kodmani 2011). Also, as argued by Springborg, economic management is beyond the military's competence and responsibilities, and the measures they have instilled on behalf of their populations have as of yet not much result in facilitating an economic recovery (Springborg 2011b; Henry & Springborg 2011).

Another factor, that is also viewed with suspicion, is the electoral success of political Islam. In both Tunisia and Egypt, where post-revolt elections have already taken place, the Islamist parties emerged victorious — though they were aided by the fact that these parties were practically forbidden in the ages of Ben Ali and Mubarak and were thus not tainted by the admonition of traditional opposition politics.<sup>65</sup> Perthes claims that as a result it is perfectly likely for Arab states to become both more democratic as well as more culturally conservative in the near future (Perthes 2012). However, as Kausch (2012) argues, the success of political Islam, coupled with the opening of the political system also makes it possible for parties to compete in elections on a religious specter, as was witnessed in Egypt's parliamentary elections in which the

<sup>65</sup> There is a definite difference in situation between Egypt and Tunisia. In Tunisia An-Nahda Party was officially forbidden, with many supporters either forced into exile or burdened with heavy repression. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood was officially forbidden as well. However, in practice the party was allowed to exist and could even be linked with the regime at times.

Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafist Nur Party were forced to compete against each other.

Finally, there is an aspect of regional repercussions (Echagüe 2011; Ryan 2012). The events of the past 18 months have rocked the region, and altered the playing field for individual states. Turkey is playing a more active role as guide, as is Qatar. The Arab League has been bolstered by what has been proven possible by actively engaging the conflict in Libya and Syria (Perthes 2012). On the other side of the line we find Israel, which suddenly discovers itself in a region where a long-standing ally such as Mubarak has been forcibly removed from office.

Still, though all these effects are very much of influence in the intricacies of the aftermath, as explained above, it is impossible to properly capture the complex and changing situations in states in just these general themes. The differences between the different states are too big to not influence the trajectories after the uprisings.

## **Tunisia**

Tunisia is the trailblazer of the Arab Spring. Only after the Tunisians showed the Arab world that it was indeed possible to remove an autocrat from power solely through mass-mobilization did protests start surfacing elsewhere in the region. Tunisia was also quickly labeled as perhaps the most natural place in the region to commence a democratic transition for several reasons: its small size, large and well-educated middle class, low levels of social inequality, religious and ethnic homogeneity, small military, a tradition of constitutionalism and a largely secular political culture (NED 2011). However, after the departure of Ben Ali, tension arose between the old elite of which most had remained in their seats, and those who counted themselves among the leaders of the uprisings, leading to a few unrest laden first months of what was still maintained to be a transition process (ICG 2011a: 12-15).

Several factors need to be underscored in this process. First, the struggle for compromise: suddenly a political stage had been created, where everyone was still looking for their role, and subsequently how to play it, in the meanwhile figuring out how all the different layers of government functioned in this new situation (ibid.: 18-21). Nevertheless, as economic conditions deteriorate, and none of the socio-economic concerns so often voiced during

the uprising are dealt with,<sup>66</sup> a fear of a reversal of the transitions or a power vacuum eventually enforced the evocation of Constituent Assembly elections (ibid.: 23-25). These elections provided a telling result, with the Islamist An-Nahda party winning a majority of the votes. Notwithstanding the initial scare over the victory of an Islamist party, An-Nahda has agreed to cooperate with non-Islamist parties, and does not enforce a grave religious agenda.

## Egypt

There are several aspects — and their dynamics — to this first year of Egypt without Mubarak that warrant discussion. Egypt has suffered quite a turbulent transition period since the resignation of Hosni Mubarak on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011. On a positive note, there have been parliamentary elections, plans have been made to draft a new constitution, and Presidential elections are scheduled for May/June 2012. Nevertheless, the socio-economic conditions have failed to improve, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces is still in firm control of the country, and the Islamist parties managed to secure a majority in Parliament.

The first to be discussed stems directly from one of the factors that have been determined to be of vital impact leading up to the events of early 2011. The economic performance has been poor (Chatham House 2011). GDP declined by 4%, which was especially caused by the collapse of the tourism industry (Saif 2011). Other related factors of grievance such as the widespread corruption also proved impossible, understandably, to cure overnight (Chatham House 2011). It is these factors of everyday poverty, as Rieff states, that make them most relevant to many Egyptians (but also Tunisians) and if no results, or even serious plans, can be presented to these parts of the population soon, the transition will more likely run amok (2011).

This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces), given their firm grasp on Egypt's future, should define a well-designed plan for recovery and transition (Chatham House 2011). However, their performance in this terrain is questionable, with sudden movements in any which direction suits the moment (ICG 2012b; Hassan 2011). Though it is in a position it is familiar nor comfortable with, there is much to be said about maintaining that position so close to economic and political power, for a variety of reasons, such as the degree of impunity they are allowed, the protection of economic assets and

<sup>66</sup> Mid-April 2012, due to lack of economic improvements, peaceful manifestations (including general strikes) have taken place again in both Tunis and Sidi Bouzid. In response, violent police action has returned to the scene as well (Sebestyen 2012).

the safe-guarding of US-Egyptian relations (and subsequent flows of foreign aid) (Masoud 2011: 24-26). Therefore, until an alternative surfaces, the SCAF is expected to make sure to retain its position (Stacher 2011).

Still, they are faced by the structural economic problems and the risk that if there is no improvement people will once again take to the streets. As Springborg (2011b) explains, in order to ensure stability and gain acceptance of its rule has led to a situation where in a rush a series of measures were initiated to ease populist demands following the revolts (Saif 2011). The lack of experience regarding economic policy leads to government indulging in “populist pandering”, overspending unwisely whilst evading necessary reforms (Maloney 2011: 74).

Beyond the incapacity of the Egyptian state to climb out of the vicious cycle of socio-economic inequality and public resentment over it, there are a series of other factors that have not yet been mentioned. For example, in the past year ethnic conflicts between Islamists and Copts have flared (Hassan 2011) and it is unclear not only whether the Islamist parties, recently victorious in the parliamentary elections, will be strong enough to indeed impose the strict economic reform required to lift the country from its slump, or worse, steer the country away from a democratic, secular transition process (Meijer and Janssen 2012).

## Libya

Libya provides quite some contrast to the relative stability of Tunisia and Egypt. After Libyans started protesting in February 2011, the unrest soon evolved into a full-blown military conflict. The protest movement originated in Benghazi, a harbor in the east of Libya, and the second-biggest city. Though they were besieged by army troops, these rebellious organizations managed to successfully defend their positions, and initially even conquered parts of the Mediterranean coast. However, eventually they were forced to retreat to Benghazi as the Libyan military took back control. The status quo was eventually broken by foreign intervention, when the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1973, which imposed a no-fly zone over Libya, as well as proclaiming “all necessary measures” would be called on to protect Libyan citizens (UN 2011). Several days later an international coalition was mobilized to provide humanitarian support to the rebels, and NATO missiles first struck on March 19. This provided breathing space for the rebels to reorganize their forces and launch a counter attack against Qadhafi's troops (Coates Ulrichsen 2011b). Finally, in August 2011 the rebels managed to capture Tripoli, effectively causing the regime to implode and forcing

Qadhafi into hiding in Sirte, his hometown. Eventually, in October, Sirte also fell in rebel hands and Qadhafi was captured and killed in the process.

Only once Qadhafi was killed and the smoke cleared it became visible what premature damage the civil war had done to a possible transition process. The problems center on two aspects. The first is the legacy<sup>67</sup> of Qadhafi's system of government, which was built entirely to support on his persona and the second is the way in which the revolt was deployed (ICG 2011b) meaning that there were a plethora of militias roaming around the country, unwilling to abide to authority and heavily armed, causing real harm for the image of the National Transition Council (NTC). Basically, Libya has become a hotbed of conflict between various heavily armed militia arguing over whatever issue, as the NTC is unable to do anything about it (ICG 2011b). Al-Wahib (2011) mentions that the tribal nature of the Libyan society makes the spread of weapons easy and dangerous. He states that the case of Iraq showed that the arming of its people leads only to trouble. He also mentions that in order to not repeat the mistakes made by Iraq and to continue its "ugliness", Libya should pay great attention to the drawing up of the new social contract and make sure that all groups of society are part of this contract (with no exception), including those affiliated to the former regime (also mentioned by Badwân (2011)). According to the author, the people should keep in mind that a part of the victory in Libya is due to inclusion and not to revenge or exclusion (Al-Wahib 2011). In conclusion, the future of the transition process in Libya is thus very much an unknown (Al-Turk 2011; Shaw 2011a; Hatita 2011).

## Yemen

Yemen cannot be compared to any of the aforementioned cases. President Saleh had suffered a steady loss of support from the military and the tribal pillars that for decades supported his rule (Coates Ulrichsen 2011b). In January 2011, in response to the successes in Tunisia and Egypt, people started mobilizing mainly to protest against proposed changes in the constitution and to demand employment, the improvement of socio-economic

<sup>67</sup> Badwân (2011) mentions that the stage of transition is made difficult by the legacy of Qadhafi's reign. The NTC faces many challenges. The first is for the NTC to determine the transitional period (to write the constitution and to open the way to parliamentary elections). The second is to rebuild the economy. The biggest and most important challenge however is to provide stability and security. He adds that security must be available immediately in order to complete the other tasks, and argues that Libya should at all cost avoid "the Iraqi scenario", a state still suffering under the burden of post-occupation.

conditions, and finally the resignation of Saleh. The president played tricks on his constituents, offering empty promises not to run for office in 2013, or to remain in power until civil conflict with rebellious movements in the north and the south cooled, and the threat of al-Qa'ida subsided (Dahhan & de Vries 2012).

Nevertheless, protests persisted and though they were met with heavy repression protestors remained vigorous in their demands. All the while, the transition process was also hampered by political stalling and the web of interests that connect to the state and to Saleh (al Ahsab 2012; Basandu 2012). These factors were thought sufficient to hinder the uprisings from achieving the critical mass needed. However, in June 2011 Saleh was heavily injured by an attack, causing him to be moved to Riyadh for medical care, which was mistaken by the protestors as a victory. Several weeks after, the president returned, until at last the national and international pressure mounted to a point where he had to leave office on November 23, 2011. He left a country torn apart by ten months of protests, the constant threat of rebels in both the north and the south, and the pressure of al-Qa'ida's presence in the region (ICG 2011c; Haykel 2012; Schmitz 2012; Al-Dawsari 2012).

One of the defining characteristics of Yemen is the influence of tribalism and sectarianism. 'Atrîsî (2012) claims this dimension poses severe challenges to the application of a democratic system. For example, rotation of power is not compatible with tribal hegemony, a deeply-rooted practice in the structure of Yemen. The continuity of the political dominance of a tribe is ensured by the heads of states, who give members of their tribes social and material privileges, administrative and military positions. Some regimes encourage inter-tribal rivalries as a strategy to weaken the possibility of resistance. Tribalism has remained the norm in Yemen and the state's authority and that of the tribe are inter-mixed. It is one of the major factors that lend the Yemeni uprising its particularities. Any new authority will have to find a way to transform the tribal dimension into a positive force in the establishment of a new political organization.

What this chapter has shown is that the relative differences in dynamics and events in the discussed countries are quite large once they are judged comparatively. Nevertheless, there are several features of the aftermath that are generally applicable. For example, the immediate aftermath does not promise the socio-economic relief the protestors demanded, followed subsequently by the victory of Islamist organizations in elections as people looked elsewhere for such relief. The following chapter will dive

into other historic accounts of revolution, in an effort to uncover the existence of similar generalized themes that can offer insight into what is to be expected regarding the eventual outcomes of the Arab Spring.



## Analogies With Caution

### *Does History Teach Us Anything?*

As the world slowly started to comprehend the scale and impact of the protests in the region, commentators lined up to start drawing parallels to other noted periods of revolutionary upheaval in the past centuries. Cohen (2011) drew a comparison to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, whereas others were quick to emphasize the similarities with Iran's Islamic Revolution (Donnelly 2011). Beyond these two examples, many more comparisons were made in the months following the removal of Ben Ali and Mubarak. In this chapter though, specific attention will only be devoted to a modest set of commonly recognized cases, namely the European Revolutions of 1848, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the Green Revolution of 2009 in Iran, the Eastern European Revolutions following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the Color Revolutions in the Balkan and former Soviet Union in 2009.

#### **1848**

In 1848 decades of built up frustration finally erupted as governments all over Europe, and even some in Latin America, collapsed. Though the continent had been and would be rocked by other revolutions (such as the French Revolution of 1789 or the Russian Revolution of 1917) this was in nothing compared to the manner in which the protests spread across the region in 1848, contaminating almost every country in range (Palmer et al. 2003: 475-476).<sup>68</sup> The revolutions were born out of sentiments found throughout the continent, including an overall demand for democracy and political freedom; dissatisfaction with traditional leadership; a sudden rise of nationalism; growing demands by the working classes; and finally the regrouping of reactionary forces (Evans & Pogge von Strandmann 2000: 4). Still, the situation naturally differed between affected countries, and

<sup>68</sup> Only the Russian empire and Great Britain managed to escape the turmoil.

revolutionary groups lacked coordination to cooperate efficiently with one another.

This meant that different national protest movements were very much engaged with their own set of national goals, leading to markedly different outcomes (for example the abolition of serfdom in Austria and Hungary). This situation shows many similarities to the Arab Spring, as commented on by Applebaum (2011). She claims that though the Arab uprisings were very much built on several overarching themes — economic, technological, demographic — felt throughout the region, they have taken a “distinctly different flavor and meaning in each country” (idem). An important contribution, Applebaum signals the massive differences between the individual countries involved in the Arab Spring, and argues that in the aftermath these idiosyncratic differences might prove more important than the overarching themes that initially helped light the fire (idem).

Katz pinpoints another characteristic of the 1848 revolutions as potentially relevant when compared to the Arab Spring, namely their defeat by the original sources of autocracy (2011). Palmer et al. even claim that the main result of the European Revolutions was the strengthening of conservative forces that viewed revolution with alarm (2003). According to Katz there are two factors that can help explain this reversal, and these factors can also be found when examining the dynamics of the Arab Spring: first, the authoritarian undercurrents in the region experiencing popular uprisings remained strong;<sup>69</sup> second, external powers have jumped at the chance to suppress democratic revolts (Katz 2011).<sup>70</sup> The presence of these factors does not bode well for a stable and prosperous transition. Nevertheless, as Applebaum counters, though in the short haul the European Revolutions failed, in the long run the ideas that were fought for managed to trickle down into policy and government, eventually still achieving the initial goals of the revolution (2011; Kneissl 2011: 12-13). The conclusion to be drawn here is that the transition processes in the Middle East might not provide the rapid results that were hoped for, while a slow change of political system is underway (Rabbani 2011).

<sup>69</sup> Though indeed Mubarak and others like him were forced to surrender their powers, elements of the autocratic regime that surrounded these leaders are intact.

<sup>70</sup> Katz uses the interference of Saudi Arabia in Bahrain and Yemen and to a lesser extent Oman and Jordan as examples (2011).

### 1979 (and the Green Movement of 2009)

The Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 is another period of upheaval that is sometimes compared to the surge of mass protest in the Arab world over the past year. In 1977, after years during which the shah had presided over an increasingly authoritarian regime, embarking on an ambitious development program aimed at modernizing and secularizing Iran, public discontent started coming to the surface (Palmer et al. 2003: 929). Iran was crippled by strikes and riots in 1978, and the shah was ultimately forced to leave Iran after a tidal wave of demonstrations in January 1979. In February, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran from exile, and declared an Islamic Republic by popular referendum in April that same year. In the following thirty years the regime remained relatively stable, until in June 2009 people started taking to the streets en masse, in response to a disputed electoral victory by incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Due to series of repressive measures, combined with structural weaknesses of the oppositionist movement, the regime was able to control the unrest, preventing the protests to reach a critical mass at which point it would start endangering the regime.

Among scholars there is widespread disagreement on whether there are possible links between 1979, 2009 and the Arab Spring. First of all, a distinction could be made between possible similarities and potential influences. Keddie (2012), for instance, presents the argument that revolutionary movements often present themselves in waves, the European Revolutions of 1848 serving as an example. However, for this influence to carry over, revolts should be close in time, which suggests that the 1979 Iranian Revolution is unlikely to have any strong influence on the movements of 2011 (ibid: 151-152). Though Keddie does indeed consider the Green Movement of 2009 to be part of a 2009-2011 revolutionary wave,<sup>71</sup> as does Kurzman (2012) who bundles the inspiration of the Green Movement with other contemporary revolutionary efforts.

In terms of similarities Kurzman also presents a general argument claiming that the Arab Spring mimics the Iranian Revolution more accurately than the Green Movement, on the basis that in 1979 the revolutionaries succeeded in overthrowing the authoritarian regime, as opposed to the Green Movement, doing so through general strikes, a tool which was also seen as vitally disruptive in

<sup>71</sup> Though any possible influence was diminished due to acknowledged differences in goals; the Green Movement was primarily focused on the issue of electoral fraud, and never grew to a movement demanding the entire restructuring of the Iranian regime, or overthrowing its autocratic rulers.

for example Tunisia and Egypt. It has to be said, however, that Kurzman is a voice in the wilderness when lined up against other scholars that scrutinized this same topic. Keshavarzian at least considers this point of view when he argues that “if echoes do resonate between 1979 and 2011, they are likely indirect, subtle, and multifocal. [...] The dynamics of contestation in Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Libya, and beyond should foster humility and patience among academics and policymakers” (2012: 160).

A more accepted view, bluntly put, is that there is “little in common between the events of Iran in 1979 and what has happened in the past year in the Arab world” (Nabavi 2012: 153), a sentiment which is shared by others (Amanat 2012 and Kashani-Sabet 2012). Important differences are the fact that the Arab Spring was a spontaneous eruption and relatively short-lived, as opposed to the drawn out process of the 1979 Iranian Revolution (Kashani-Sabet 2012), and that crowds were not united by a prevailing Islamic sentiment (ibid), or even any ideology, in favor of a pragmatic outlook on the situation (Nabavi 2012; Amanat 2012). Another factor that is mentioned is the personality of Ayatollah Khomeini and his leading role during and after the revolution, opposed to the leaderless coalition for change that mobilized during the Arab Spring (idem). On a final note, one striking similarity that does get attention is the fact that the Iranian Revolution also made use of the modern technology of that time, transferring Khomeini’s speeches across Iran on cassette tapes (Kashani-Sabet 2012: 157).

## 1989

The revolutionary period that is perhaps best remembered, and therefore requires the least explanation, covers the Fall of 1989 as the Soviet Union crumbled and one after the other Eastern European autocracy was dragged along in its fall, exposed most symbolically by the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is this period that is most often compared with the Arab Spring. In academic literature though, expectations regarding these comparisons are tempered somewhat.

Of course the transformations in Eastern Europe in 1989 were also an example of a rapid succession of the unexpected decisive overturning of decades of authoritarian rule. Beyond this somewhat superficial comparison, there are several other commonalities worth discussing (Coates Ulrichsen 2011a; 2011b). First, the role of the economy: regional economies in the Middle East (with the exception of oil-rich rentier states) were stagnating, rooted in an uncompetitive and knowledge-deficient system, at a time of accelerating innovation and global economic growth, comparable

to the Soviet bloc's marginalization in the twentieth century. The second springs from the first, namely the inability of Middle Eastern autocracies to confront the socio-economic challenges resulting from that economic stagnation, such as un- and underemployment, by providing alternative models of development, thus offering improved living conditions in the future. Finally, there is a heightened sense of awareness of that lack of development, as expectations of change are rallied through penetration of closed societies and new forms of media (Jones and Baczynska 2011), but also through a sense of opportunity as other like-minded regimes crumble, creating possible domino effects.

In the aftermath too, several similarities are to be found, such as the struggle of idealistic civil society actors, some of whom were of importance in the mobilization of dissent, to try and participate in the rigors of competitive political life; the public skepticism about traditional politics and the subsequent mushrooming of new political parties without either a coherent ideology or a clear constituency; and the tireless efforts by the old elites to re-enter the changing political system (Carothers 2011).

Nevertheless, though the similarities do in this case have a more striking resemblance, there are still more than enough counter-arguments to the claim that the Arab Spring resembles the Eastern European revolutions of 1989. Counterbalance is for example provided by Kramer (2011), pointing to the very different role of the international community. In 1989 the West was viewed as a clear alternative to the stagnating communist system, demands were raised for opening societies, the creation of democratic governments and installing market economies and integrating with the West and rejoining Europe (Carothers 2011), essentially tearing up the centrally-organized structures of before. In turn, the revolutions were very much welcomed by the West, as the ultimate breakdown of the communist system (Coates Ulrichsen 2011a). Now, relations between the Middle East and the West are strained, and the Arab Spring has been welcomed with mixed feelings. Unease exists over the fragmentation of traditional opposition, and how the void that is left is filled by organizations whose intentions are unclear, but with whom fundamental differences of opinion exist on topics such as the role of religion in society (Carothers 2011). On top of that, there is no Western example for the protestors of the Arab Spring to turn to as those in Eastern Europe did (Kramer 2011).

Another factor still is the organizational structures that the two periods of upheaval dealt with. In 1989, once the pressure had reached the boiling point regimes were forced to abandon ship entirely (Kramer 2011). This allowed for a complete reconstruction

of a new political system (Kneissl 2011: 12). In the Middle East, though rulers were indeed forced to leave, the militaries have stayed in place, signaling a shift of leadership without a clear change of regime (Carothers 2011; Ottaway 2011b). Also, in 1989 opposition movements had been in operation for some time and were thus quite organized, and they were blessed with strong leadership with charismatic figures as Havel or Walesa (Jones and Baczynska 2011). The Arab Spring is almost entirely the result of spontaneous combinations of mobilized movements, without any clear ideology or strong leaders, which explains at least partially the hard time these movement are having translating their successes during the revolts to real societal changes (Carothers 2011; Aarts and Cavatorta 2012; Rabbani 2011).

Summing up, though there are definitely aspects of the Arab Spring that do share common traits with the revolutions in Eastern Europe across 1989, more so than is the case with the other comparisons made, there is plenty of material that refutes such commonalities. The intricate and complex dynamics that characterize periods of revolutionary upheaval does not appear to transfer well to measure up to other cases.

### **The Color Revolutions**

Nevertheless, a final revolutionary episode with which a comparison will be made is the series of revolutions taking place in most recent years. Over the past decade the term “Color Revolutions” has become generic to mean wave of revolutionary upheavals across the globe. In this chapter it is taken to specifically mean the revolutions in the Balkan and across former vassal states of the Soviet Union early in the new millennium, namely the Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia in 2000, the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 (Shaw 2011b; Raiser and Kunicova 2011; Coates Ulrichsen 2011a, 2011b).

Across this range of revolutions is a series of common features: first, they were the reaction of organized groups of young people to fraudulent elections by an often semi-autocratic regime.<sup>72</sup> Second, though the driving force was popular mobilization, the organizations were not leaderless. Often politically engaged officials led the protests, carrying an element of intra-elite rivalry. Third, in contrast to classic examples, these revolutions were non-violent. Finally, the successes of these Color Revolutions showed

<sup>72</sup> Examples of such groups are Otpor (Resistance) in Serbia, Kmara (Enough) in Georgia, and Pora (It's Time) in Ukraine. The Egyptian movement Kefaya was heavily influenced by these organizations.

others that it is near impossible to contain mass popular revolt by a repressive regime (Cheterian 2011).

Taking these common features as the foundations of the Color Revolutions, there are some distinct differences when comparing them to the Arab Spring, as argued by Cheterian (idem). First, youth anger against abysmal socio-economic conditions and a no hope for improvement is as a driver of engagement very much different from the more hopeful Color transitions. Second, the Arab Spring surfaced as a leaderless call for change, explained by the marginalization of traditional opposition elites after years of constraint. Third, the Color Revolutions were mostly based on a rebellion away from political Soviet remnants often driven by the taste of political freedoms after the crumbling of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the Arab Spring was driven by a hopelessness “created by a lack of any perspectives for change” (Cheterian 2012). Finally, where the international context is far more visible in the case of the Color Revolutions, elucidated as a rebellion against the remnants of a fallen communist system, attracted by the Western spoils that were suddenly so near, in the Arab Spring the lack of engagement from the West in states as Tunisia and Egypt is striking. Overall, it appears that upon close scrutiny the differences hold more truth than any combination of similarities.

Still, given the post-revolutionary track record of the states involved in the Color Revolutions, this is perhaps not that bad, as postulated by Michael Emerson (2011). In Georgia economic reforms and a de-corruption policy were installed by a near-autocratic regime headed by Mikheil Saakashvili. In Ukraine, the foundations of a vibrant civil society were crushed by the conflict between the two leaders, Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko, ultimately leading to “dysfunctional chaos between the institutions of democratic governance” — bringing Viktor Yanukovich to power — only worsened by the failure to do anything about endemic corruption (Emerson 2012). In Kyrgyzstan one corrupt clan was replaced by the other. All in all, none of the examples of the Color Revolutions can really project a hopeful prospect for states in the post-revolutionary process of rebuilding the state.

Ultimately, in almost all cases the apparent similarities between other historical accounts of revolutionary turmoil as compared to the events of the Arab Spring do not hold up to close scrutiny. Often, there are enough differences to refute those similarities. It appears as if the lesson from Chapter 2 — its complexities make a revolution impossible to accurately predict — has applicable uses for this chapter too, to the extent where lessons can only be taken

in general form. As Yaphe states: "There is no model formula for revolution. Each case and country is unique" (2011). Still, in the following chapter an effort will be made to reflect on what is still to come for the states confronted with the popular uprisings, and whether any general conclusions can be drawn.



# Uncertain Outcomes

## *Different Repertoires of Transition*

When in 2011 three long entrenched Arab dictators were jettisoned by their people, hope was revived that the Arab world would finally catch the third wave of democratization. Bellin states, however, that now the Arab Spring has unfolded it becomes clear that the geographic spread of the political opening has been limited and the depth of the opening has been minimal (2012b: 1). Out of twenty-two Arab countries six saw serious mass protests (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain) of which only four resulted in the ousting of their rulers (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen<sup>73</sup>). The majority of countries (Palestine, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Morocco, and Algeria) did experience some form of protest, but none were faced with regime-threatening collective mobilization. These countries were therefore able to resort to their classic survival strategies as described in Chapter 5 of this research. According to Bellin, the depth of the political opening, in the sense of initiating true democratic transition, has been minimal as well (idem). Although true political change did occur in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, she questions whether the ousting of dictators has led to fundamental regime change in these countries (ibid.: 2).

Perhaps a clarifying note is in order to explain the structure of this chapter, and the arguments that underscore that structure. First of all, this chapter especially requires a certain structure, given its predictive nature, otherwise there is a risk to wander off into overly speculative territory. The decision has therefore been made to focus on academic work on the viability of democratic transitions. Much work has been done on singling out key variables or conditions that would help predict the possibility of a transition to a Western style democracy. Because of this decision, many aspects have naturally been left out of consideration. This is

<sup>73</sup> Developments in Yemen appeared to have a somewhat different character. Though President Ali Abdullah Saleh had to leave office, he seemed to be still active behind the curtains, at least for a certain period of time. Only in recent weeks it appears that his influence on the situation in Yemen has diminished significantly.

unfortunately a result of the restriction of limited time and resources. That authoritarian breakdown is an insufficient condition to guarantee a democratic transition is not a novel statement (e.g. Geddes 1999). Naturally, in light of recent events, various scholars of Middle East politics have renewed their interest in the likelihood of democratic transition after the collapse of autocracy (e.g. Bellin 2012b; Carothers 2011; Aarts and Luyten 2011). This interest should not be confused with a revival of the transition paradigm where the core assumption holds that any country moving away from dictatorial rule can be considered a country in transition towards democracy (see Chapter 3; Aarts and Cavatorta 2012).

Based on extensive empirical research, Levitsky and Way show that the majority of countries that initiated a political transition away from autocracy in the Post-Cold War period did not witness a democratic regime outcome (2010: 4). Although some of these countries did democratize (e.g. Ghana, Mexico, and Slovakia), many regimes either remained stable (e.g. Malaysia and Tanzania) or became increasingly authoritarian (e.g. Belarus and Russia). Levitsky and Way found out that, as of 2010, more than a dozen “competitive authoritarian regimes” had persisted for more than 15 years. They conclude that “rather than ‘partial,’ ‘incomplete,’ or ‘unconsolidated’ democracies, these cases should be conceptualized for what they are: a distinct, undemocratic regime type” (idem). Nonetheless, based on previous experiences, it might be possible to distinguish socio-economic and political factors that increase the likelihood of a democratic transition in a country coming from authoritarian rule. Carothers has labeled these factors “indicators of likelihood” instead of “preconditions”, because their absence only indicates a difficult path, not an impossible one (2011). Bellin, following the same line of argument, speaks of structural endowments and political variables that are favorable to democratic transition (2012b: 2-4).

It is important to stress that these authors reject the idea that a country has to meet certain requirements before democratization is feasible.<sup>74</sup> Rather, their approach can be placed within the camp of “gradualists” who argue that political liberalization is an iterative process in which — apart from economic factors — social and cultural context are of paramount importance (Aarts and Luyten 2011: 8). This chapter employs a combination of the indicators as proposed by Carothers and Bellin to analyze the

<sup>74</sup> This is the core belief of the supporters of sequencing-theory which became popular after dismount failure of democratization in a number of countries (e.g. Rwanda, Iraq, and Afghanistan) (Aarts and Luyten 2011: 8). For a recent critical view on the notion of “prerequisites,” see Grand 2011.

likelihood of a democratic transition in subsequently Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen.

### **Pitfalls on the Path to Democracy**

The first<sup>75</sup> “underlying condition” is the level of economic development. Statistical findings show that a higher GNP/capita<sup>76</sup> strongly correlates with higher vitality of electoral democracy. There has been much debate on the causal mechanism underlying this correlation (see Bellin 2004), nonetheless empirical research shows that the “magic number” lies somewhere in the range of \$3,500 to \$5,500<sup>77</sup>. Higher income levels are associated with higher literacy levels and the presence of a larger middle class which is commonly presumed to be given to tolerate and compromise (Bellin 2012b: 3). In addition, as Inglehart and Welzel (2009) have shown, economic growth influences the norms and values of a given society in a way that is conducive to democracy; people become more secular, rational, and focused on self-expression (Aarts and Luyten 2011: 9).<sup>78</sup> It is a well-known fact that poverty is widespread in the Middle East, still the average GNP/capita varies greatly among different Arab states. In 2010 Tunisia’s GNP/capita measured \$4,160 and Egypt’s \$2,340 (Bellin 2012b: 3, 6). In 2008 Yemen clocked in at \$1,180 and Libya at \$12,020 (Aarts and Luyten 2011: 9). In Libya’s case it is important to stress that GNP/capita is a weighted average and in this case effectively functions as an indicator of Libya’s enormous oil wealth rather than giving a true impression of its economic development (Bellin 2012b: 8).

This brings us to the second (economic) indicator: the degree of concentration of national wealth. As mentioned in Chapter 4, many Arab countries are rentier states. Next, the redistributions of profits and means follow a patronage system dominated by the patron-client relations between the elites and their supporters. A defining characteristic of this system is that politicians and statesmen are rarely called to account by the people. Not surprisingly, in general Arab elites are not interested in levying

<sup>75</sup> The order in which the various conditions are mentioned should not be considered as an indication of their importance.

<sup>76</sup> Various variables can be used as indicators of economic development (e.g. diversification of the economy or labor productivity) in practice; GNP/capita is the general indicator (Aarts and Luyten 2011: 9).

<sup>77</sup> Based on Paul Collier’s research, Aarts and Luyten take \$2,700 as the defining income line. This only shows that there is no consensus on this particular issue. The important point is, however, that scholars do agree that economic development correlates with the feasibility of democracy.

<sup>78</sup> The notion that people become more secular as they become more wealthy is a debatable one, in the Middle East region in particular.

taxes for this will raise the question whether public means are well spent. In Arab states, in varying degrees, economic and political power are not only strongly interrelated but also concentrated in the hands of only a few people. In other words, there is a “limited access order” characterized by an absence of competition over means and power (North et al. 2009) This system limits the prospects for positive (economic) development because the ruling elite’s principal focus is on maintaining their lucrative position. Transition to an open access order where competition is possible and where the people can hold the government accountable becomes more likely when institutional relations are impersonalized. Of the four countries of our interest Tunisia potentially scores best on this indicator because of its relatively productive economy. Libya is a rentier state par excellence and although Egypt and Yemen are semi-rentier states a quick and smooth transition to an open access order is rather unlikely in these countries (Aarts and Luyten 2011: 9-11). Moreover, in Egypt the military is deeply interwoven into the domestic economy which decreases the likelihood that they will promote economic liberalization and private-sector growth (Anderson 2011: 4; also see Chapter 6).

Aforementioned indicator rubs off on the coherence and capability, or institutional power, of the state; the third indicator of likelihood. It is widely accepted that effective state institutions (military, bureaucracy, judiciary) are key to a flourishing democracy (Rodrik 2004). Again, Arab states vary considerably when it comes to the coherence and capability of the state. Tunisia is a strong state with state institutions that are relatively meritocratic and professionalized which raises the prospects for a clean, efficient, and technocratic government to replace Ben Ali’s. In Egypt the foundations of order are also present in the form of a relatively professionalized military and judiciary. Egypt is less well-endowed than Tunisia when it comes to their deeply inefficient bureaucracy and corroded public sector. Before the Arab Spring state institutions in both Tunisia and Egypt were predominantly used to keep the sitting elites in power; as of recent efforts have been made to reform these institutions. This is an important step towards true political change given the fact that old institutions often remain the vehicles of old rulers. Libya — the “stateless” state — lacks all basic state institutions. Consequently, the acting government does not have the capacity to exercise a legitimate monopoly over the means of coercion nor has it been able to exert authority evenly throughout Libya. One could say that the absence of any social and governmental cohesion makes the possibility of a transition to democracy rather unlikely. Yemen takes the middle ground because it used to have state institutions (though weak).

Yet, after years of decreasing central authority and increasing tribal fragmentation, they now have even less effectiveness and professionalism than before (Bellin 2012b: 8-9; Anderson 2011; Al-Dawsari 2012).

The fourth underlying factor is national unity or the degree of homogeneity in a given society. As early as 1970 Dankwart Rustow already mentioned that although transition to democracy is not a world-uniform process, some sense of common solidarity is an essential background condition for democracy (345, 350). Divisions over ethnic, religious, linguistic, tribal, clan, or regional lines are difficult to resolve and form a handicap when building a stable democracy. Tunisia's level of religious and ethnic homogeneity is rare in the Arab region and with the exemption of a 10-15% minority of Copts, Egypt is also largely homogenous ethnically, linguistically, and religiously. Thus, insurmountable identity divisions will most likely not hamper a democratic transition in these countries. Libya and Yemen, on the other hand, lack this common identity. Libyan society is divided by the cleavages of kinship, tribe, ethnicity, and religion (Brahimi 2011; Lacher 2011; Badwân 2011; Al-Wahîb 2011). In Yemen, President Saleh deepened existing cleavages by pitting different tribes against each other to consolidate his power. The presence of al-Qa'ida and South Yemen's ambition to become independent have only made matters worse (Bellin 2012b: 8-9; Jones 2012; Byman 2011).

The fifth, and final, condition is the amount of historical experience with political pluralism. Although Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen all experienced some degree of political opening it is hardly part of the collective memory of their respective peoples and Libya does not have any experience whatsoever with the tradition of political pluralism (Carothers 2011). For this reason it might be useful to have a look at how these four countries score on five political variables that are key in shaping the possibilities of effective democratic transition — following Linz and Stepan (1996). These variables include: (1) the commitment of rising political elites for the democratic process; (2) the inclusiveness of the transition process; (3) the incentives for the military to stay in or to give up power; (4) “whether the political institutions put in place during the transition process deny any one group majority control and create incentives for compromise and collaboration among opposing groups”; and (5) “whether there is a history of negotiation and bridge building between opposition forces such

as that their shared commitment is greater than what divides them” (Bellin 2012b: 4).<sup>79</sup>

Tunisia scores well on all political variables. Political leaders have demonstrated a commitment to the democratic process and the Higher Commission for Political Reform has seen to an inclusive institution building process and the embrace of a system of proportional representation. The military in Tunisia is small and professionalized and has not intervened in high politics. Another important factor is that secularist and Islamist camps share a commitment to the process of democratic transition. With regard to these political factors Egypt’s position is not as strong. First, the commitment of political players, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, to the democratic system is less certain than in Tunisia. Second, the process of institution building was not inclusive but largely opaque and dictated by the ruling Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF). Third, as previously mentioned, the Egyptian military still plays a major role both politically and, more importantly, economically. Fourth, although there is an electoral system in Egypt that is designed to deny a majority position to any one party, the majority (68%) of the seats went to Islamist parties. This may mean less collaboration among Islamists and non-Islamists in shaping Egypt’s new government.<sup>80</sup> Fifth, Egypt’s opposition forces do not share Tunisia’s rich history of bridge building between opposition forces. Notwithstanding, their political repression under Mubarak might strengthen their shared commitment to the transition process. Libya and Yemen both face the challenges of building a state in which the government has legitimate authority and where the people can be called a nation. Libya is still controlled by a host of rival militias and the central government in Yemen is far from having won the loyalty of Yemen’s citizens. Consequently, it is difficult to discuss the political variables that favor democratic transition with regard to these two countries. One could argue that both Libya and Yemen face serious obstacles that need to be addressed before they can initiate a possible fruitful process of democratization (Bellin 2012b: 3-9; Badwân 2011; Al-Wahîb 2011).

Based on these structural endowments and political variables Bellin concludes that Tunisia is “on the way” and is most likely to succeed at transitioning to (some kind of) democracy. Egypt also shows potential, but its political future is less certain and thus “on

<sup>79</sup> Some of these variables may slightly overlap with some of the “indicators of likelihood” that were sketched above.

<sup>80</sup> Bellin acknowledges “early indications are that the Muslim Brotherhood may seek pragmatic alliances with secularists more than might have been anticipated” (2012b: 7).

shakier grounds.” Libya and Yemen have to build a state and a nation at the same time making a democratic transition in the near future highly unlikely. At the same time she acknowledges “crucial precedents have been set that fundamentally challenge the status quo ante” (2012b: 1-2). Aarts and Luyten agree that conditions in the Middle East have become more favorable for democracy. Nonetheless they argue that political change in these countries might as well be just a switch of players that end up playing the same old game (2011: 13), much in line with the findings of Levitsky and Way for other parts of the world. Carothers also mentions that:

though citizens in some Arab countries have given their governments a hard push, the underlying regimes themselves — the interlocking systems of political patronage, security forces, and raw physical coercion that political scientists call “the deep state” — are not giving up the ghost but are hunkering down and trying to hold on (2011a).

### **Turkey as a Model?**

While many observers share the opinion that a transition to democracy is hardly a sure shot, for some Turkey alone is enough ground for hope. Erdogan's Turkey is often mentioned as an example of co-existence of Islam with democracy and pluralism, as well as a healthy capitalist economy. According to several scholars Turkey could serve as a model for democratization in Arab countries. Dana and Rosenfeld for instance argue that in Egypt the course is set for transition to an electoral democracy under the army's control, similar to the process that took place in Turkey between 1980 and 1983 (2011; also see Hundley 2011). More generally speaking, Atasoy perceives that Turkey is a general inspiration for political and economic liberalization in other Middle Eastern countries (2011: 86).<sup>81</sup> Based on the Turkish example he offers insights for democracy-aspiring reformers in the Islamic world such as never to use the judiciary as an ideological political tool and to encourage modernization from below instead of imposing it from top (ibid.: 98). Other scholars argue that the Turkish model is unique, defined by the Kemalist foundation that emphasizes national unity and the principles of secularism, and therefore not applicable elsewhere (Hinnebusch 2010; Osman 2011; Zubaida 2011). One feature that is of paramount importance, and unexampled in the rest of the region, is Turkey's

<sup>81</sup> For a balanced, though critical view on Turkey in general, see Garfinkel 2012.

possible EU accession. The conditions posed by the EU — the Copenhagen criteria — have not only exerted pressures for legal and institutional modernization that favored the Justice and Development Party (AKP) but have also restricted the range of options for military commands (Zubaida 2011; Atasoy 2011). Zubaida does not only argue that “the connection of Islam to democracy in Turkey is unique to the particular history and institutional pluralism of the country, and not applicable to any of the Arab neighbors” but he also questions the accuracy of the rosy image that is being sketched of Turkish Islam and democracy since, according to him, political pluralism in Turkey is being threatened by the electoral successes of the AKP (2011).

To conclude, though opinions differ widely on the subject, it is safe to say that the democratic transition of Turkey will not act as an exact blueprint for political change in the Arab world. Nevertheless, aspects of Turkey’s road to democracy could certainly be adopted. Though obviously there is no certainty in these predictions, Turkey’s model has interesting features that could prove very informative when applied to the processes of change as they are currently developing, especially in Tunisia and Egypt, and might even provide a source of inspiration for those involved in the transition processes.

Since the beginning of 2011 true political change has occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. The question remains, however, whether these countries will be able to make the transition to democracy. Based on abovementioned indicators of likelihood it is safe to say that these countries, in different degrees, still have an arduous journey ahead of them; especially in the absence of a political model to guide them. One additional factor that possibly affects the democratization process in the region are the security implications arising from the Arab Spring. The next chapter, cautiously, addresses these implications on a domestic, regional, and international level.



# Not Without Danger

## *Security Implications Arising from the Arab Spring*

It is impossible to predict exactly which direction the Arab Spring is heading toward given the infinite variables at play. Any attempt to predict the future of the Middle East, especially when performed in terms of certainties, should be taken with a fair grain of salt. Similarly, predictions about the future threats stemming from a constantly changing environment would obviously contain an intolerably high margin of error to the extent that it bears no meaning. Consequently, possible scenarios are assessed in terms of likelihoods rather than certainties. In this chapter we aim at identifying patterns and trends ensuing from the Arab uprisings and subsequently assess the possible ramifications the developments in this particular part of the world could have on domestic, regional and international security. By so doing, special attention is given to those countries that have been the most affected by the Arab upheavals.

### **Listen to the People!**

The Arab Spring has led to an increased sense of insecurity among regimes in the region. The unrest that has swept its way across the Middle East has led to a change in the distribution of power, from which often instability emerges (Mearsheimer 1990). The fast-changing political environment in the Arab world carries the grave risk of policy miscalculations with all its consequences. The crisis in Syria threatens Iran's political position in the Arab world as evidenced by the burning of Iranian flags by protestors because of Tehran's support for the Assad regime, whereas the uprising in Egypt has raised red flags in Israel about the future of the peace treaty between both countries.<sup>82</sup> Yet perhaps the most significant outcome of the Arab Spring is that public sentiment has become a factor that can no longer remain ignored in the decision-

<sup>82</sup> Case in point: referring to the Arab uprisings, former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Arens wrote recently, "This is not the time to throw caution to the wind... it is a time to think how we are going to assure the security of Israel's citizens... it may be the time for those demanding 'social justice' for 'the middle classes' to fold their tents" (Arens 2011).

making of governments — either through positive incentives as in political reforms and/or yielding to public pressure on certain important issues, or negative responses such as increased repression (Noueihed and Warren 2012).

Until now, the manifestation of public anger was largely related to domestic issues, such as corruption, repression, and economic and social inequality. Hence, most analysts concluded that the Arab Spring “has not been animated by foreign policy or anticolonialism or Israel or Britain” but instead is more about “democracy and individual rights and liberties” (Friedman 2012; Zarate and Gordon 2011: 104). Nonetheless, from this should not be concluded that foreign policy has been completely removed from the public sphere either. What many observers largely seem to ignore is that the revolts coincided with the presidential term of American President Barack Obama, whose foreign policy has been more sensitive to public attitudes in the Arab world than that of his predecessor George W. Bush. Furthermore, the relative tranquility in the Palestinian territories and the absence of war in the region whereby either the US and/or Israel’s government is involved, largely prevented foreign policy issues from becoming the subject of public anger. Although perhaps Arab relations with the West or Israel are not on top of the public agenda, support for their policies could become a key factor in the Arab Spring in the future. In other words, public anger vis-à-vis Israel’s foreign policy and the Western military presence in the region could be perceived as a latent factor.

This could however change in the event of a military escalation in the Arab world in which either a Western country or Israel is involved. An Israeli military campaign similar to the 2006 Lebanon War or “Operation Cast Lead” in Gaza in 2008 is more likely to trigger a hostile response from even those Arab countries that previously preferred to remain silent. Against the backdrop of the Arab Spring a public outcry, as during the conflict in Lebanon and Gaza in respectively 2006 and 2008, could turn out to be potentially fatal for these regimes. The Arab uprisings have left Arab leaders more susceptible to public pressure, and as a result, political support or even acquiescence of an Israeli military campaign could potentially affect domestic stability. The changing environment is slowly but surely translating into policy; Egypt has recently suspended its highly controversial gas supplies to Israel following heavy public pressure, a deal that was signed under Mubarak (CNN 2012). Furthermore, in August 2011, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) killed five Egyptian soldiers in response to a border infiltration by armed militants who crossed Israeli territory from the Sinai Desert and in which several Israelis were killed. The

incident sparked a public outcry whereby the Israeli embassy was attacked by thousands of protestors and caused the Israeli ambassador to return to Israel and Egypt to recall its ambassador from Tel Aviv. Such events were deemed unthinkable during the reign of Mubarak. It is however extremely doubtful that Arab regimes, like Saudi Arabia or Egypt, would take military action against either Israel or any of the latter's backers in the future, nor is it feasible that they would impose sanctions on countries on which they largely depend. What does seem plausible, however, is that in an attempt to ease public pressure, symbolic steps against Israel are taken in addition to economic bullying of those countries that are most supportive of the latter policies, but are of lesser economic significance than the United States or large European nations like France, Germany or Great Britain.

Given the Netherlands' remarkable pro-Israel stance in the past several years,<sup>83</sup> there is a possible risk of becoming subjected to such symbolic sanctions. The political costs of targeting smaller countries, of lesser significance in the international community, by halting or reducing oil supplies would be small, but possibly very significant for the affected countries. Though there is no sign of any such steps taken in the near future, in the long run it could prove a cheap but effective way of easing (populist) domestic pressures would the situation call for it.

Yet regardless of the Dutch position vis-à-vis Israel the threat of protracted regional instability could also affect the global oil price. The energy-dependent Eurozone with its recovering and shaky economies would be hit hard. Regional stability in combination with maintaining good public relations with the Arab world is of utmost importance in safeguarding European interests in this particular region. In addition to the economic threats that the Arab uprisings could pose to European and Dutch interests, there are several countries that need to be examined further because of increased security concerns.

### **Syria: Epicenter of Violent Extremism**

The recent Syrian government's relentless crackdown on protestors has established the structure of conflict between the

<sup>83</sup> Prime examples are: the Dutch vote in the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR) in 2009 against endorsing Israel and the Palestinians to carry out investigations into alleged abuses that took place during the Gaza War in 2008/2009; the blocking, in September 2011, of a joint EU declaration, again in the UNHCR, about the status of human rights in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories; the vote, late October 2011, against Palestinian membership of UNESCO; and most recently, in February 2012, the Dutch reservations in an internal EU report about Israeli settler violence (UNHCR 2009; Schult 2011; *The Guardian* 2011; Modderkolk 2012).

regime and its contenders. The country has witnessed a sharp increase of terrorist activity within its borders, mainly stemming from Salafist groups. Many of these elements have crossed into Syria from Iraq but there is evidence that many of the Sunni insurgents are in fact “home-grown” (Karim and Ketz 2012). U.S. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper recently told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee: “[Sunni] extremists have infiltrated [Syrian] opposition groups” (ABC News 2012). The cities of Damascus and Aleppo have suffered several bomb attacks in recent months, which allegedly bears the hallmarks of al-Qa`ida. So far, however, neither al-Qa`ida nor any other group has claimed responsibility for the attacks. Several opposition members and Western security experts doubt the claim that al-Qa`ida had a hand in the attacks and instead hint at government involvement. In addition there are numerous reports indicating that Sunni extremists are specifically targeting religious minorities through means of assassinations and kidnappings (Reuters 2012). The Syrian government’s brutal repression tactics have unwittingly facilitated the reemergence of religious extremism in the Syrian political domain. The overcrowded Syrian prisons such as the notorious Sednaya prison facility, as currently used by Air Force Intelligence and State Security, serve as potential breeding grounds for extremism. The support for extremist factions is likely to coincide with continued regime brutality.

The effects of the Syrian crisis are currently being felt across the region. The balance of power in the Middle East is shifting and continues to develop as the Syrian conflict rages. The country is increasingly becoming a regional battleground between Iran and Saudi Arabia, in which the former continues to support Asad’s regime with weapons and money, whereas the latter equips the opposition with military hardware and intelligence assistance. Saudi Arabia’s somewhat bold move to throw its public support behind the Syrian rebels marks the end of a tacit agreement of non-interference that existed between the kingdom and Syria.

It seems nevertheless likely that Syria is becoming the principal battleground for international Jihadist networks, especially those who until recently operated in Iraq (Putz 2012; Jones 2012). The Shiite government in Iraq and its security apparatus have grown stronger in recent years, while most Iraqis have turned their back towards extremist violence as a result of al-Qa`ida leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s exceptionally violent campaign against fellow Muslims (Stone 2009: 767). The conditions in Syria, however, are more conducive for al-Qa`ida inspired groups to settle given the

partial disintegration of the central authority and its security apparatus (Jones 2012).<sup>84</sup> The potential spillover from Syria to the rest of the region depends in part on the question of how many foreign fighters will be involved in the battle against Bashar al-Asad's regime and on the jihadists' military and political performance. As the recent examples of Afghanistan and Iraq show, foreign fighters often join a cause in order to gain experience to subsequently start their own uprisings at home. Furthermore, a possible Sunni-led overthrow of the Syrian regime could embolden Sunni groups in Iraq, which in turn might challenge Shiite political dominance in the country through force.

Events in Syria would obviously also affect the position of the Lebanese Shiite organization Hezbollah. There are several reports indicating that increased Syrian arms transfers are taking place, including strategic weapons (Cohen 2012; Shenker 2011). Damascus' political bloodletting as a result of the uprising rendered it more vulnerable to pressure from its allies, enabling for instance Hezbollah to coax Asad into transferring sophisticated weapons, some of which until recently were considered red flags, such as advanced anti-tank missiles, high-trajectory long-range missiles and/or air defenses. As one Israeli military officer puts it, "The more Asad loses his grip, the [more] transfers will increase" (Naharnet Newsdesk 2012). It thus seems conceivable that Hezbollah would inherit Syria's strategic weapons in the event the Syrian regime were to fall. The generally accepted notion that the fall of Asad would deliver the "death blow" to Hezbollah, as recently conveyed by Israeli President Shimon Peres, is thus largely unfounded (*The Daily Star* 2012).

The chances of war are also increasing as events in Syria could eventually draw Turkey into the conflict. The Turks have coined the idea of installing "humanitarian corridors" on various occasions, an act that could possibly lead to armed conflict with Syria (*Al Arabiya* 2012). As one Turkish report contends, "the possibility that the Syrian army [would] respond to an intervention in its own vital interest area is higher than the other regions" (ORSAM: 39). The involvement of a NATO member in a war with Syria would be of global significance. In case Syrian troops would launch attacks against Turkey, the latter could appeal to Article 5 of the NATO Treaty that requires NATO members (including the Netherlands) to "restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area."<sup>85</sup> In

<sup>84</sup> Other conducive factors are: (1) a more favorable sectarian constellation (i.e. Sunni majority as opposed to Iraq where the majority of the population is Shiite); (2) the circulation of large amounts of weapons; (3) porous borders; and (4) and mountainous terrain.

<sup>85</sup> For the entire treaty, see: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm)

this regard, the recent firing of bullets into Turkey from Syria has set a dangerous precedent in the region.

In the absence of regional war it seems unlikely that the Syrian crisis will generate direct negative repercussions for the Netherlands in the short term. Most Syrian refugees are currently being hosted in countries like Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, and the majority intends to return to Syria. Migration flows from Syria to the Netherlands are not likely to occur in large numbers in the near future. However, if instability continues to plague the country, considerable numbers of refugees could attempt to cross into Europe including the Netherlands seeking safety.

### **Yemen's Al-Qa'idazation**

The security situation in Yemen has been negatively affected because of the recent upheavals. The Yemeni economy, which was already deemed the weakest of the region, has been further disrupted by the recent unrest in the country (Schmitz 2012). The economic woes have considerably drained the government's resources and the regime's efforts to preserve domestic stability and maintaining control over the borders. This is already evident in the resurgence of Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) whose fighters have since the uprising taken control over several cities and villages in Yemen, as well as Shiite Houthi rebels seizing control over sizable parts of the country (Alley-Longley 2011). Increased instability that arises from Yemen could have far-reaching consequences for the entire Arabian Peninsula and beyond. Several years ago, a Chatham House report concluded that "future instability in Yemen could expand a lawless zone stretching from northern Kenya, through Somalia and the Gulf of Aden, to Saudi Arabia." Also, it warned for the possibility of increased piracy and jihadist activity that could "threaten shipping routes [and] the transit of oil through the Suez Canal" (Hill 2008: 11). The lack of government control has permitted the spread of terrorist organizations and criminal activities.

The U.S. Army, in close cooperation with the CIA, has stepped up its efforts in countering the threat of AQAP by means of carrying out extrajudicial assassinations of al-Qa'ida suspects through use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), also known as drones (Miller 2012). Occasionally drone strikes are carried out with success as with al-Qa'ida figurehead Anwar al-Awlaki in September 2011, but sometimes these attacks include intolerable numbers of civilian casualties (Dilinian and Cloud 2012). Setting the moral and legal issues aside, drone attacks are, as suggested by several analysts, considered strategically counter-productive as they do more harm to Yemen's stability than good.

U.S. military operations in Yemen in fact undermine the latter government's credibility and efforts to win over support from the population, creating "local animosity and instability" instead (Mayborn 2011: 82).

In terms of security, the direct implications of developments in Yemen are primarily confined to the region itself and the United States. European tourists are at risk of being kidnapped by local militias or al-Qa'ida, but such attempts could not be perceived as a strategic or vital threat. However increased piracy activity in the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea, and the subsequent disruption of maritime traffic, could be considered as a potential threat to Dutch economic interests in the region as well as beyond.

### **Libya: Fear of Fragility**

Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC) is struggling to assert authority over a country that is divided along tribal and ethnic lines and with poorly defended borders, as has been set out above. The country remains politically fragile with abundant local and regional grievances. In combination with the circulation of large amounts of weapons and weak government institutions, local disputes could easily spin out of control, spreading to other regions. The potential of civil war exists as is evidenced by the explosive growth of local militias of which experts claim to number between hundred and three times that (ICG 2011b: i). Among the Libyan militias there are also Islamist movements with a history of violence, such as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), previously associated with al-Qa'ida and listed by the United States as a terrorist organization (U.S. Department of State 2012). There are also reports that other jihadist groups are active in the eastern regions of Libya, whose members include veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan (ICG 2011b: 11). Because accurate estimates about the size of these organizations are usually either classified or non-existent it is hard to tell what impact their emergence could have on the security situation in Libya. However, the NTC has in fact three options in controlling the Islamists: reintegration, inclusion or clash (Ashour 2011). The option of engaging the Islamists militarily could lead to further domestic instability and draw jihadists from around the region to join the latter's struggle. The abundance of weapons in the country significantly diminishes the NTC's chance to assert effective control over opposition factions through force and without putting domestic stability at risk.

The deterioration of the central authority in Libya has also affected other parts of the region, mostly in the south. The recent military coup in neighboring Mali was indirectly tied to events in

Libya. Tuareg rebels, many of whom had allied themselves with the Qadhafi regime during the Libyan uprising and received a substantial amount of weapons and money in return, put their newly-acquired military hardware and battlefield experience into practice against the Malian regime. Several months following the expulsion of Qadhafi, Tuareg rebels declared independence of the region of Awazad, a move that has threatened to slide the country into further chaos. Consequently, reports have emerged that al-Qa`ida-oriented groups have exploited the lack of security in the country to establish a presence (BBC 2012).

As opposed to Yemen, which is of hardly any economic significance, domestic unrest in Libya has implications for oil-importing countries in Europe. Attacks on pipelines could negatively affect the energy supply of the European Union, especially against the backdrop of record-high oil prices. In terms of migrant patterns, large number of Libyans could seek refuge in Europe in the event of protracted political instability and/or lack of economic progress. Yet the number of migrants from Libya is negligible when set against Libya's relatively small population size.

Although the Arab Spring is still in its early stages and optimism is prevalent (at least among some pundits), there are nevertheless certain developments ongoing that could be described as alarming. Prolonged political instability and the lack of economic progress could have adverse consequences for both the Arab world and the West, not only in terms of economic interests but also in terms of security. The developments in countries like Syria, Yemen and Libya are of great concern to the region and the West as conditions permit violent extremist groups to settle and subsequently expand their sphere of influence.



## Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to provide a broadly-scoped understanding of the Arab Spring, the series of popular uprisings spreading across the Middle East and North Africa from December 2010 onwards. In hindsight, we know how it worked in practice, the challenge was to see how it worked in theory. Given the broad scope of the research project, and the manner in which material would be gathered, the initial research question was intentionally kept very general. A result of this, combined with the methodological limits of the project, is that the concluding remarks are also of a general nature. Nevertheless, the manner with which we tackled the subject material has provided for a series of valuable insights that can help elucidate the complexities of the Arab uprisings of 2011. Before disclosing these there are two procedural matters that need to be addressed.

First of all, in the process of writing several complications surfaced: though the initial scope was maintained, there were obvious limitations to the amount of material that could be explored; and though there was an abundance of material available, it proved difficult to find insightful, academic analyses of the events of 2011 (partially to be explained by the short time span between the first ripples of the Arab revolts and the start of this research program). In that respect, an important recommendation is that there are still many features that would invite further research, and especially more rigorous academic testing. For example, it would be interesting to see whether an empirical correlation between socio-economic indicators and the examined popular discontent can be found.

A second point is that in this analysis there are several “usual suspects” with regard to any subject matter that might be missed. Aspects such as the role of the international community but also the position of religion, and religious organizations, were perhaps expected to make a more prominent appearance than they have been allotted here. There are several explanations for their absence. As far as the factor “Islam” is concerned, there is a clear consensus that if religion played a role in the context of the Arab

Spring, this was hardly the case *during* the events but the more so *after* dictators were dethroned. Regarding the international and regional environment, it has to be noted that over the course of the past months a focus on the internal dynamics of the Arab Spring naturally developed. Questions why people suddenly started taking to the streets, and how they stayed there, seemed more prudent to answer in that respect. A similar tendency was found in much of the available literature. Without underestimating the roles of religion or the international setting, the majority of the literature, and thus of this research paper, deals instead with the many endogenous aspects of the Arab uprisings. In addition to what was said earlier, the more exogenous features also warrant more academic scrutiny.

The first matter to be addressed was how such a groundbreaking turn of events had been predicted by so few, if any. It quickly became apparent that periods of revolutionary upheaval are nearly impossible to predict due to their inherently complex nature, and can only be properly explained in hindsight. Taken from theoretical work based on previous cases of revolutionary upheaval, the concepts of “preference falsification”, “revolutionary bandwagons”, “radical contingency”, and “Black Swans” were explained, and their relevance with regard to the Arab Spring identified. It has to be noted that though predicting a revolution might be inherently impossible, it would indeed be possible to pinpoint stress factors carrying valuable information on the viability of a complex social system. In the case of the Arab Spring, very few managed to connect the build-up of those stress factors to the impending breakdown of authoritarian systems, or the wave of popular upheavals that trashed through the region. A plausible explanation would be that the traditional focus on the robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa in academia clouded the perception of those observing the region to an extent where the buildup of stress within the system was indeed noticed, but often deemed insignificant.

The concept of authoritarian resilience needs further elaboration. In hindsight these dynamics, and perhaps their waning or malfunctioning, may provide justification for the events of 2011. A first explanation emphasizes the fluctuating levels of authoritarianism in the region, based on the idea of an “adaptable ecology of repression, control and partial openness”. The variation in political structure, between either more pluralist or more autocratic, allows a regime to have an ample supply of countermeasures to many oppositional challenges. This idea shares roughly similar characteristics with the concept of “authoritarian upgrading”, which entails the reaction of authoritarian regimes to changes in the

political, economic or social environment, often converging around a policy built to preserve and stabilize their rule. In light of the Arab Spring, the idea has resurfaced that these processes of adaptation have generated their own problems, for example by undermining authoritarian stability in the long run because of the absence of a robust political society, or the reinforcement of a growing cynicism among Arab populations.

In Chapter 4 an effort was made to explain the underlying dynamics of the Arab Spring, by constructing a framework that could specifically fit the intricacies and complexities of the Arab revolts. The matter of understanding the uprisings was divided in questions of both why and how.

The *why* was answered through the acknowledgement of structural imbalances, mainly socio-economic, political and demographic, that over the course of decades weakened the foundations on which authoritarian regimes were built. These imbalances, which had actually been noticed in years prior, were mainly of socio-economic and demographic nature. Socio-economically, a very important aspect of the Middle Eastern autocracies is the manner in which the regime is typically at the center of economic activity. This means that the fate of such a regime is intrinsically bound to the socio-economic well-being of a state. Such a system can then be supported by the installment of patronage networks, or general subsidization practices, but especially in most recent years the economic hardship regimes were enduring due to macro-economic shocks forced rulers to revert money away from such appeasement techniques. The result quickly showed when prices of commodities endured sharp increases and (youth) unemployment rose. At the same time, due to widespread corruption and cronyism, inequality had also risen to new heights, infuriating the populations.

The hardship was further worsened because of a demographic factor. Many states in the MENA region were suffering from what is known as a "youth bulge", which is what occurs when the fraction of young people in a population is unbalanced relative to other cohorts. As many of these young Arabs were unable to find work, and were forced to witness the deterioration of their socio-economic future, their discontent started rising. It is a well-known adage when studying revolutions that it is the failure of conditions meeting rising expectations rather than the conditions itself that cause for trouble. Combined with a system in which any form of democratic accountability had been hollowed out by years of authoritarian reforms, widespread corruption, and an overall lack of dignity for the populations, the situation turned combustible. Especially the societal dynamics and changing circumstances of

more recent years showed how the pressures were allowed to build up, leading to the eventual collapse of the implicit social contract the autocrats had entered in with their populations.

Nevertheless, the explanation of why pressures mounted is not enough to explain *how* autocrats that had remained in power for decades were suddenly forcibly removed from office. For that purpose, the concept of social nonmovements — passive networks that bring change through unintended consequences of individual practices as a result of “politics of presence” — was discussed extensively, in order to elucidate how public frustration managed to crystallize into protest movements, and subsequently how these movements due to that mobilization grew to a critical mass, where repressive force was no longer able to contain it.

Finally, in order for the why and how components of this framework to connect and evolve into the popular revolts that swept the region, the concept of triggers (or catalysts) was introduced. In light of the factors discussed, it is difficult to imagine these seemingly small occurrences as having much impact, but it were nonetheless these apparently innocuous events that were the eventual straw that broke the camel’s back.

After defining the structure that was deemed most apt at offering a general explanation, there were still several autonomous sub-questions that required addressing. Among the matters that needed clarification were the issue of why and how the Arab Spring only managed to unfold in a select group of countries, leaving vast parts of the region touched, but essentially unaltered. Upon the successful toppling of Ben Ali by the Tunisians all across the MENA region people started taking to the streets. Quickly a domino effect was envisioned, whereby the success of one would enforce the other, leading to a cascade of authoritarian regimes falling from their pedestals. Still, in only a fraction of states were the revolts successful in the sense that they eventually managed to remove an autocrat from his throne. On close inspection, after delineating a series of criteria that outline the necessities for a revolution to succeed, it was shown that in none of the states where autocrats remained in power did all factors eventually come together. Now that the smoke has cleared somewhat it is easy to specify how the “domino” factor ended up playing a smaller role than was initially envisioned, but it would be a loss to downplay the contagion effects of the initial revolts for the rest of the region.

Also, the aftermath of the situation in the four countries that saw actual change was discussed in some detail, at some point veering away from the thematic approach and instead properly addressing the variation among these four. Once the individual differences between states are properly addressed, it becomes clear that any

comparison between the lot can only function at the most basic levels: though Tunisia and Egypt do share a range of characteristics, very few of these would hold up in a comparison with Yemen, or Libya for that matter. Still, there were several repercussions of the popular revolts that can be addressed in a general, thematic approach. For example, the socio-economic situation, an important cause of the revolts, has by no means improved (and as a result of the uprisings in many cases has even become worse), which could prove itself a future source of conflict. Meanwhile, a possible source of conflict is also arising as a result of the recent electoral successes of Islamist parties. Though, like in the case of Egypt, the armed forces are generally still in firm control over the state proceedings, the rise of political Islam is viewed with some caution, both in the region as well as beyond.

Chapter 7 was dedicated to the comparison of the Arab Spring with a selection of historic accounts of revolutions and popular uprisings (1848, 1979, 1989, the Color Revolutions, and Iran's Green Movement in 2009), and the obvious question whether any lessons should be distilled. The main lesson from this chapter could well be summarized by the idea that there is no model formula for revolution. Each case is unique. Though at the basic level each case shares some characteristics with the Arab uprisings of 2011, these often cannot hold up to closer examination, and are at times even refuted.

In the penultimate chapter our gaze was directed to the future. However, in order not to wander astray in the myriad possible directions the situation could develop, the decision was made to focus solely on the opportunity for a Western-style democratic transition. In the past years, a lot of work has been done on possible sets of preconditions and chances of success, which were applied to the situation in the subjected states. After close consideration it was concluded that Tunisia has by far the best chances of successfully experiencing a move towards liberal democracy. Though for Egypt the transition process will most probably prove more difficult, this state is also well ahead of Libya and Yemen, which will have to deal with building both a state, a nation, as well as governing structures to keep them together. Finally, the possibility of Turkey serving as a model for those states now rebuilding their political system was discussed. In line with what had been found earlier, it appears as if the situations differ to the extent where characteristics of Turkey's transition towards democracy could be mimicked by some of the states in the MENA region, or could perhaps serve as a source of inspiration.

Finally, in the last chapter the subject of security risks was discussed. In line with the prognoses on the possibility of

democratic transitions in the region, this chapter carries a sober tone. The most urgent of matters discussed in this chapter was the deterioration of the conflict in Syria, and the set of national, regional, and international repercussions that would accompany such deterioration. However, on a more general scale the possible effects of populist politics were discussed, and how sources of conflict that would previously be contained should now perhaps be expected to make more of a ruckus, such as the position of Israel in the region, its actions, and the support it gets from its Western allies, including the Netherlands. Finally, the growing influence of al-Qa`ida in Yemen was debated, as well as the fear of a fragile state in Libya, as too many expect a share of both power and wealth.

The extraordinary wave of events that swept through the Middle East and North Africa does not warrant ending this research project on a mere note of caution. In a region where academic research had mainly been focusing on the longevity of autocracy, explaining how established structures prevailed and seemed impervious to change, the unexpected revolts and subsequent removal of autocrats such as Ben Ali, Mubarak, Qadhafi and Saleh is at least a break with past decades. The Arab revolts, also those that were not (yet) successful, tell an impressive story about the human will and how to overcome fear.

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