



# The Arab Thermidor: The Resurgence of the Security State

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*This collection came from the workshop “The Arab Thermidor: The Resurgence of the Security State” co-hosted by Marc Lynch, director of the Project on Middle East Political Science and the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University, and Toby Dodge, director of the Middle East Centre at the London School of Economics and Political Science.*

## **The Project on Middle East Political Science**

The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) is a collaborative network that aims to increase the impact of political scientists specializing in the study of the Middle East in the public sphere and in the academic community. POMEPS, directed by Marc Lynch, is based at the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University and is supported by the Carnegie Corporation and the Henry Luce Foundation. For more information, see <http://www.pomeps.org>.

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It is sometimes hard to remember that the Arab uprisings of 2010-11 promised the possibility of meaningful political change. The unprecedented outburst of popular mobilization overthrew some regimes and unsettled most of the others. Those hopes have long since come crashing down. Egypt's transition ended in a military coup, bloody repression, and a neo-authoritarianism legitimated through xenophobic populism. Tunisia's survived, barely. Libya, Yemen, and Syria have suffered near-complete political collapse, polarization, and civil war. Almost every regime has become more intolerant and more repressive. Violent, extremist Islamist movements such as the Islamic State group have surged in this chaotic atmosphere.

How should we understand the authoritarian resurgence in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings? In October 2014, Toby Dodge and I jointly convened a POMEPS-London School of Economics workshop to dig more deeply into the causes, mechanisms, and drivers of what he called "The Arab Thermidor." More than a dozen scholars looked deeply at specific sectors such as the military, police and intelligence services, different countries, and the broader regional environment. Some of the papers produced for that workshop have been published on the Monkey Cage, and all of them have today been released as *POMEPS Studies 11 The Arab Thermidor: The Resurgence of the Security State*, available as a free downloadable PDF. The papers in this collection offer a sharp, comprehensive, and acute look at the resurgence and persistence of the Arab authoritarian state.

From a historical perspective, the authoritarian resurgence should not be a great surprise. My 2012 book *The Arab Uprising* dedicated an entire chapter to demonstrating how each previous revolutionary wave in the Arab world had ended with a fiercer, deeper, and darker form of authoritarian control. In his essay for the collection, Raymond Hinnebusch grounds this pattern in the historical sociology of the region and the "iron law of oligarchy" by which "revolutionary mass activism, at best, infuses elites with new blood from below" and triggers ever more intense political struggle. The catastrophe of the Arab uprisings, then, is not simply a story of failed activists or fallen regimes or Islamist ambitions. It is a story of states: strong, weak, and fierce, in Nazih Ayubi's classical terminology.

The authoritarian resurgence by regimes that survived the initial wave of the Arab uprising is not so difficult to understand, of course. While some states – notably in Libya and Yemen – cracked under pressure and left an institutional void at the center, in most other countries the core institutions of the state remained largely untouched regardless of the fate of individual leaders. In Egypt and Tunisia, where long-ruling leaders were driven from power, virtually no progress was made in reforming state institutions. From the military, police, and security services to the judiciary and the official media, key personnel remained in place along with their entrenched worldviews, interests, and identities.

Almost all of the contributors to the collection note the importance of these continuities in state institutions, described evocatively by Salwa Ismail as "an entrenched apparatus of rule with high-stakes in existing power structures and arrangements." Ismail focuses on the role played by the police in Egypt

in counter-revolutionary mobilization, while Curtis Ryan examines the performance of the state security sector in Jordan and Toby Matthiesen does the same in Bahrain. Robert Springborg looks at the role of the militaries, which he sees as the greatest winner of that authoritarian resurgence, while Yezid Sayigh sees a deeper level of crisis lurking within the military's seeming triumph. Peter Moore digs in to the public finances of Arab states. Nathan Brown has outlined the implications of continuity within the Egyptian judiciary. Ellis Goldberg brings in the old elite itself, those who most benefited from the old status quo and whose social and economic power could not be ignored amidst transitions that fell short of full social revolutions. In a forthcoming article (not included in this collection), I dissect the role played by unreformed state media sectors in Egypt and Tunisia in undermining opposition, driving fear and polarization, and mobilizing support for anti-Islamist, populist nationalism.

The regional environment also contributed to this autocratic revival. Gulf states actively intervened to maintain or restore the status quo, helping to prop up like-minded leaders in Morocco and Jordan and channeling support to their chosen proxies in transitional countries such as Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. Catastrophes in Libya and Syria, covered lavishly in the Arab media, helped to dim popular enthusiasm for political change. The rise of the Islamic State offered unprecedented political cover for heavy-handed security crackdowns on all forms of dissent in the name of combatting extremism and terrorism.

In short, having faced down an existential threat to their own survival in power, leaders from the Gulf to North Africa set out to ensure that it wouldn't happen again by doubling down or intensifying some of their worst practices. They seem to have mostly concluded that the iron fist, rather than reforms and political concessions, would best serve their survival needs. As Steven Heydemann argues, they learned the best practices of repression from one another, upgrading their control to meet the new challenges. They did not simply fall back on the practices of the past: Their "adaptations seem to signal more fundamental changes in elite perceptions about the nature of the threats they face and the changes that would be required to ensure regime survival." Their fears and their very real new challenges led them to "narrowly-nationalist and exclusionary-repressive modes of authoritarian governance."

It seems unlikely that these resurgent autocrats will succeed in stabilizing their control over the medium term. They have shown little ability to solve any of the underlying problems that drove the Arab uprisings in the first place. The collapse of oil prices could eventually erode the capacity of these Arab states to sustain these new patterns of authoritarian governance, whether at home or in the region. The young, wired generation of citizens who drove the Arab uprisings have higher expectations of their states, less tolerance for abuse and failure, and a demonstrated ability to take to the streets when the conditions demand it. The Arab Thermidor may have put states back in control for now, as the essays in this collection demonstrate, but this is likely to only be a passing stage in the long-term political reordering of the Middle East.

*Marc Lynch, Director of POMEPS  
February 27, 2015*

# Explaining democratic divergence: Why Tunisia has succeeded and Egypt has failed

*By Eva Bellin, Brandeis University*

In the wake of the Arab Spring, Tunisia and Egypt emerged as the two heretofore autocratic Middle Eastern countries with the greatest promise for successful transition to democracy. Both countries had successfully jettisoned longstanding autocratic leaders, both were endowed with strong and effective states, and both enjoyed a coherent and unified sense of national identity. But already by year three it was clear that the two countries were on very different tracks: Tunisia was successfully transitioning to democracy while Egypt was turning back to authoritarian rule. What explains their divergent trajectories?

One of the most conspicuous differences between Tunisia and Egypt lies in their socio-economic standing, with Tunisia enjoying greater wealth (measured on a per capita basis), a higher level of urbanization, a larger middle class, and a higher rate of literacy. Hence it is tempting to attribute Tunisia's greater success at democratization to the country's superior performance along standard indices of "modernization." While I acknowledge the enduring insights of the modernization school, I reject the argument that structural factors of the socio-economic variety explain the divergent political outcome observed in these two cases. The different paths taken by Tunisia and Egypt were in no way "carved in stone" by socio-economic conditions. Rather, to explain Tunisia's political success and Egypt's failure one must look to other factors – some that are quasi-structural in that they are long-standing (although not necessarily socio-economic) and some that are much more contingent and located in agency-based factors such as leadership and strategic choice.

## **Inadequacy of structural or material explanations**

Two observations discourage us from taking a purely structural or material approach to explaining the divergent trajectories of Tunisia and Egypt. First, although the correlation between economic development and sustained democracy is one of the strongest findings to come out

of 40 years of democratization studies, four decades of such research has also revealed that there is no economic determinism governing democratic transition. There are countless examples of countries that have transitioned to and sustained democracy despite dire poverty and terribly low levels of development (e.g. Mongolia, India, and any number of sub-Saharan African countries). Conversely there are the many relatively well-developed countries in Latin America (Argentina, Chile) that sustained authoritarian regimes well into the 1980s long after their level of economic development might have led one to expect them to go democratic.

Second, both Tunisia and Egypt fall into the category of lower middle-income developing countries – a category that many analysts consider an "indeterminate zone" for democratic transition. Statistically the political trajectory of these countries can go either way. Clearly, other factors come into play to steer countries in either a democratic or authoritarian direction. What follows is the identification of six variables that played this key role steering Tunisian and Egyptian along different paths.

## **1. Institutional endowment: The military**

Institutional endowment, and specifically the character of one state institution - the military - is pivotal to explaining the different trajectories of Tunisia and Egypt. The militaries in these two countries are very different in terms of their size, legacy of political engagement, and (hence) susceptibility to authoritarian temptation. Tunisia has a small military, very professional, with little experience of political engagement. As Risa Brooks has argued, it has over time developed an institutional culture that accepts civilian supremacy.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Risa Brooks, "Subjecting the Military to Rule of Law: The Tunisian Model," in Eva Bellin and Heidi Lane (eds.) *Building Rule of Law in the Arab World* (forthcoming).

The reasons for this have deep historical roots: the negligible role played by the military in the struggle for national independence; Tunisia's distance from the Arab-Israeli crisis and other regional wars that in other Arab states swelled the prestige and self-importance of the military. The restraint of the Tunisian military is also a consequence of deliberate policy adopted by Habib Bourguiba and later Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, both former presidents who starved the military of resources and limited its operations.

By contrast, Egypt possesses a very large military, with a long august history of political engagement (starting with former president Gamal Abdel Nasser) and an institutional culture that is ambivalent about the notion of civilian supremacy. For this military the susceptibility to authoritarian temptation was much stronger.

This very different historical legacy proved crucial in shaping the countries' divergent trajectories. In Tunisia, the military elite early on announced that it would submit to civilian control and stay out of politics. In Egypt, by contrast, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces grabbed the reins of power when Hosni Mubarak fell; it did not cede power until then-President Mohamed Morsi was able to force it out after its security failure in Sinai during the summer of 2012. Even then the military negotiated a not insignificant policy domain that remained immune from civilian control. Consequently, when politics took a disorderly turn and millions of Egyptians mobilized to protest the Morsi regime in early summer 2013, the military was at the ready to grab the reins of power again.

## **2. Civil Society**

There is no question, at least in the case of Tunisia, that civil society played a central role in nudging the country along in a democratic direction. Civil society played two roles in this process. First, it played a watchdog function, keeping tabs on the regime's performance and holding the regime's feet to the fire when it strayed from democratic ideals. Second it facilitated dialogue and compromise across the political divides when the normal course of

politics in Tunisia's formal political institutions hit an impasse.

Evidence of civil society playing the watchdog function was salient at any number of critical junctures in Tunisia. It was evident during the cobbling together of the constitution – liberal and feminist civil society organizations mobilized thousands of people to protest in the streets of the Tunisian capital of Tunis when religiously conservative elements proposed an article endorsing the principle of gender “complementarity” rather than equality. It was evident in the institutionalization of freedom of the press – the journalists union organized a strike that forced the Ennahda-led government to retreat from the appointment of political cronies to leadership posts at national newspapers. Evidence of civil society organizations facilitating dialogue and compromise across the political divide was also notable: The national trade union movement (the UGTT) played a central role in hosting national dialogues to bring all the parties together and force them to talk through their issues when political discussion over the constitution and governance stalled in 2012. These efforts proved key to getting a rather liberal constitution ratified in early 2013.

By contrast, Egypt did not have the same level of organizational resources at its command to foster this process. Egypt did possess an admirable array of human rights organizations but they did not have the popular depth or historical weight of their Tunisian counterparts and so were not able to exercise the same level of influence in overseeing the behavior of the government or in facilitating dialogue between opposing forces. The Muslim Brotherhood was by far the most organized force in civil society (and it dominated many of the professional syndicates as well). But since the MB constituted a political party as well and was a central political player in 2012-13, it could not very well police itself nor act as a neutral arbiter and facilitator of national dialogue.

Both of these factors, the character of the military and the strength of civil society, are long-term variables that are largely beyond the control of individual leaders and

the exercise of individual choice and initiative. But even this should not be overstated. For example, the UGTT ultimately proved successful in negotiating dialogue and compromise between opposing political forces in Tunisia and facilitating the ratification of a rather liberal constitution. But the UGTT's success in this venture was never a sure thing, ordained by its institutionalized strength. By the report of participants, the UGTT's success at delivering a political bargain was a consequence of the unique authority, charisma, and persistence of the UGTT leader Hussein Abassi who relentlessly insisted on discussion and compromise, virtually hectoring his fellow elites into agreement. Similarly, the decision of the Egyptian military leadership to take over in July 2013 cannot be explained without reference to the personal ambition of then-General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. The military as an institution could have defended its interests without taking the presidential helm. Thus even if we acknowledge the important role played by dissimilar institutional and organizational endowments in explaining Tunisia and Egypt's divergent political paths, we must also acknowledge the decisive role played by individuals and the discretionary choices they made within these institutions to account for the political outcomes observed. Institutional and organizational endowments appear, at best, as permissive rather than deterministic factors in shaping these outcomes.

### 3. Leadership/Norms/Preferences/Ideas

Leadership as well as leaders' normative preferences and ideas are crucial to explaining the different paths taken by Tunisia and Egypt. The different degrees to which leading political actors were committed to democratic institutions and the different degrees to which leading political actors were committed to dialogue, compromise, inclusion over the long durée, dramatically differentiated Egypt and Tunisia.

With regard to normative commitment to democratic institutions, in Tunisia it was absolutely clear that the political elite, secular and Islamist, were committed to the establishment of democratic institutions in the country:

free and fair elections, freedom of speech, and freedom of association. The desire to break with the authoritarian past and embrace a democratic path was evidenced in their declarations and behavior. In Egypt, by contrast, such commitment was less clear. Non-Islamists feared domination by Islamists in popular elections and so leaned toward prolonging a period of "guardianship" under the military. This is also what explains the decision of the High Constitutional Court to dissolve a freely elected parliament just a few months after its election and on the eve of the election of the president. The HCC feared that both the executive and legislative branch would be controlled by Islamists. Islamists also showed ambiguous commitment to democratic institutions. For example, Morsi, the MB president, declared himself, at one point, above legal review by the judicial branch.

Tunisian and Egyptian leaders also diverged in their commitment to dialogue, inclusion, and consensus building across the political divides. For example, Rachid Ghannouchi distinguished himself by reaching out to the non-Islamist camp and by pressing his base to compromise on key issues such as the role of sharia in the constitution, the ban on blasphemy, and the issue of gender equality. He argued quite eloquently that even if Ennahda had had the power to push through its views unilaterally, it should not, that in building the country's foundational political institutions the country ought to come together and strive to build consensus. He counseled his base to take the long view, not to win in the short term only to lose in the long.

By contrast, Morsi distinguished himself by spurning the opposition, refusing to practice inclusion, and failing to make reassuring gestures to non-Islamists. He was strident and embarked on a Muslim Brotherhood power grab. This was evident in his composition of a constitutional committee, his appointment process, and even in the MB decision to run candidates in all districts in the parliamentary elections. This approach deepened the divide between the political camps in Egypt and opened the door later to military intervention.

None of this was carved in stone. These approaches were a

matter of choice, preference, and normative commitment. And they proved crucial in sending the two countries in different directions.

#### 4. Luck

For lack of a better term I will call this fourth factor luck. Here I am referring to factors that occurred by chance but that nonetheless had very important consequences for the two countries' trajectories. I include in this category the electoral results of the first elections in Egypt and Tunisia. In both cases the electoral results were surprising and somewhat random. This was because the process of truly free and fair elections was new and because there were almost no political parties with substantial track records known to either voters or analysts. So it was something of a crap shoot as to how those first elections would go.

In the Tunisian case, there were over a hundred parties competing – most completely unknown with no reputations. People were baffled by the choices and they did not have strong policy preferences for one or the other. In the end 37 percent of the seats went to Ennahda (but no one would say that 37 percent of Tunisian society were hard core Islamists). A good portion of this vote was likely a protest vote. And Ennahda benefitted from that, unlike so many of the pop-up parties, it had an established reputation and was not a totally unknown quantity. That public opinion polls in 2012 and 2013 showed a great deal of political ambivalence and lack of party commitment in Tunisian society confirms just how random these first election results were.

Still, this “random” outcome failed to deliver a majority to any party, including Ennahda. As a result of this lucky outcome, a coalition of parties, secular and religious, had to work together in order to govern. The electoral results fostered accommodation and compromise.

In Egypt, the first elections also delivered a surprise – the strong showing of Salafi parties. Salafis who had

historically eschewed politics suddenly commanded about 25 percent of the seats in parliament. The Muslim Brotherhood coalition commanded about 45 percent of the seats. What this meant was the leading party, the MB, had less incentive to reach out to non-Islamist constituencies in society while governing. But perhaps equally important, the electoral victories of the Islamists meant that the non-Islamist constituencies felt excluded and under threat, and that made them especially receptive to encouraging the military to intervene.

Related to this was the issue of “luck” with regard to the presidential elections. Morsi won by a small margin, only 3.5 percent, over Ahmed Shafiq and some analysts point out that if military men had been permitted to vote (they are forbidden by Egyptian law) then Shafiq would have won the election. This would have sent Egypt down a very different path – perhaps one that would not have involved military take-over.

The point is that these electoral results were somewhat random (they cannot be traced to enduring structural or institutional conditions in the country) though of course they had consequential impact.

#### 5. Timing

A fifth factor that pointed the two countries in different directions concerns the matter of timing. As Amira Yahyaoui argues, that Tunisia faced a critical choice (to ratify a liberal constitution) several months *after* the Egyptian military had ejected (and repressed) the Muslim Brotherhood meant that Ennahda could “learn” from the Egyptian experience.<sup>2</sup> The Egyptian experience served as a cautionary tale for the Ennahda leadership in Tunisia and it persuaded the party's elite to make difficult compromises that they had resisted for the year prior.

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2 Anouar Boukhars, Nathan Brown, et. Al, “The Egypt Effect,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 13, 2014 (<http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/02/13/egypt-effect-sharpened-tensions-reshuffled-alliances/h5ps>).

## 6. International Factors

A final factor that nudged the two countries in different directions was international forces. In the Tunisian case, the IMF, the World Bank, the European Union, and the United States held concerted carrots and sticks over the regime in late 2012-early 2013, just as it was deciding the constitution and whether to embrace a “technocratic” interim government.<sup>3</sup> This was one more finger on the scale nudging it toward compromise and democratic accommodation. By contrast in Egypt, the most important carrot (namely the promise of financial bail out from Saudi Arabia) was linked directly to repressing the MB and reverting to authoritarian rule. Although international factors such as these are certainly secondary in importance (relative to domestic variables) they clearly play a role in shaping the distribution of resources on the domestic front which in turn shapes the calculations and capacities of elites on the ground.

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3 Serge Halimi, “Tunisia: Change But no Change,” *Le Monde Diplomatique* March 2014.

## Conclusion

Tunisia and Egypt have charted very different courses since the inauguration of the Arab Spring in 2010-2011. But while Tunisia’s advantaged socio-economic position was certainly an asset, pointing the country in a more democratic direction, it cannot account for the radically divergent political trajectories observed in the two countries. As 40 years of democratization studies have revealed, economic structure is not destiny. Materially inhospitable contexts can still yield democracy given appropriate leadership, institutional endowment, timing, and luck. And materially favorable contexts can sustain authoritarian regimes long after one might expect them to depart. In Tunisia, a fair number of contingent and agency-based factors delivered the country’s transition to democracy. As such, it should serve as a source of hope and optimism for other countries in the region.

*Eva Bellin is the Myra and Robert Kraft Professor of Arab Politics at Brandeis University’s Crown Center for Middle East Studies.*



# A historical sociology approach to authoritarian resilience in post-Arab Uprising MENA

By Raymond Hinnebusch, University of St Andrews

What explains the failure of the Arab Uprising to lead, as its protagonists expected, to democratization? Neither democratization theory (DT) or post-democracy (PDT) approaches, such as authoritarian upgrading, got the Arab Uprising right: Several authoritarian rulers were removed but rather than democracy, the dominant outcome has been some variant of civil war or authoritarian restoration. Historical sociology (HS) has key advantages in understanding this outcome. It can subsume the contributions of DT regarding the forces pushing for democratization and the insights of PDT on how these have been managed, while overcoming their tendency to teleology and dichotomization and bringing in depth from history and political economy.

## **Path dependency over teleology: The historical construction of authority**

Instead of teleological assumptions of a universal democratic end point of development, HS sees post-uprising outcomes as products of “*path dependency*,” – historically “successful” practices and institutions get *reproduced* and adapted to new conditions. Weber, building on Ibn Khaldun, identified the historically dominant “successful” paths to authority creation in the Middle East and North Africa and certain hybrids of his authority types have been typical of contemporary times, notably the mix of charismatic and bureaucratic authority by which populist authoritarian regimes were founded (with Gamal Abdel Nasser’s Egypt the prototype) and the mixes of patrimonial and bureaucratic authority (neo-patrimonialism) toward which they evolved in their “post-populist” phase. Each of these “solutions” were attempts to “fix” flaws in previous regimes, but also generated new vulnerabilities, driving further adaptation.

*Variations* in these historic state building pathways can be expected to matter for the trajectories of the Arab Uprising. All the republics were neo-patrimonial but the differing balance between their patrimonial and bureaucratic components shaped the short-term outcomes of the Uprising. Where bureaucratic institutions had a degree of autonomy from the leader, as in Tunisia and Egypt, state elites could sacrifice him to save themselves without imperiling the regime and relatively quickly reconstitute their dominance;<sup>1</sup> otherwise, presidents could not be jettisoned without imperiling the ruling coalition and the stability of the state. The balance among the bureaucratic pillars also mattered: Where, as is usual in MENA, the military was the main state pillar, democratization was less likely than a hybrid regime; Tunisia was the exception, where the trade unions, as the main partner of the nationalist independence party in constituting the state, pre-empted the military’s role.

Path dependency also allows us to anticipate the likely medium-term outcomes of the uprising: Weber’s authority practices, the products of learning over long historical periods, will be deployed in efforts to reconstitute regimes – around some combination of charismatic, patrimonial, and bureaucratic authority. None of these proven authority building formulae are democratic, per se, although only patrimonial authority is explicitly non-democratic, while charismatic authority has an element of mass mobilization (with ideological political parties a modern form of charismatic authority) and bureaucracy is built on the principles of merit recruitment, equality before the law, and limits on the legitimate authority of office holders. As these versions of authority constrain patrimonial authority, democratic possibilities increase.

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1 Stacher, Joshua (2012), *Adaptable Autocrats: Regime Power in Egypt and Syria*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 93, 158.

### Variations in power distribution: Getting beyond regime dichotomization

In conceptualizing how the *distribution of power* in regimes may evolve, we need to get beyond the sterile authoritarian-democratic dichotomy and grasp the considerable variety of actually existing regime types in MENA. These are distinguishable by *the two* separate dimensions of power distribution identified by Robert Dahl,<sup>2</sup> namely *elite contestation* and *mass inclusion*, which *need not vary together*, allowing instead for four rather than two possibilities. Thus, in MENA, the post-independence Arab liberal oligarchies had high levels of elite contestation and low levels of mass inclusion. The populist authoritarian regimes that displaced them starting in the 1950s widened mass inclusion in order to narrow elite contestation; in their “post-populist” period, beginning in the mid-1970s, limited political liberalization widened elite contestation (co-optation) in order to narrow mass inclusion. Rarely has polyarchy, high contestation, and high inclusion been approximated in MENA.<sup>3</sup> The greater inclusion of social forces under populist authoritarianism compared to liberal oligarchy should caution us against fixating on political *forms* to the neglect of the *substance* – which social forces are advantaged and disadvantaged.

### The limits of political change: Classical political sociology’s “Iron Law of Oligarchy”

What drives changes in these power distribution dimensions? Modernization theory implicitly posits a *law of rising politicization* whereby socio-economic modernization, in increasing social differentiation and mobilization, creates growing participatory pressures on authoritarian states – to which MENA regimes are by no means “culturally excepted.”<sup>4</sup> However, the Arab states are at levels of modernization in which democracy is *possible*

*but not necessary*: What then decides? Rather than an inevitable evolution toward increasing democratization, outcomes result from a *power struggle*. In the Arab Uprising case, the de-legitimation of authoritarian rule via the West’s democracy discourse at a time when the post-populist exclusion of the masses had made the authoritarian republics especially vulnerable, enabled “political entrepreneurs” to mobilize mass protest. However, classical political sociology tells us that this revolutionary mass activism, at best, infuses elites with new blood from below – and not even this if revolutions leave the class structure intact as in MENA.<sup>5</sup> Even if there are competitive elections, elites’ disproportionate command of resources – control of information, bureaucratic levers of command – enables them to defend and recover their domination against the normally divided or inattentive masses. From the point of view of classical political sociology, failures of or limits to democratization, far from being anomalies, are reflections of the “iron law of oligarchy.”<sup>6</sup>

### Structure over agency: Political economy imperatives

The power struggle is, moreover, conditioned by political economy structures, which only favor democratization under quite specific conditions. HS identifies the deeper structures that determine the political inclusion and exclusion of social forces that give regimes their essential character. Moore showed that where the state joined with the landed oligarchy to repress and exploit the peasantry to serve an agricultural export strategy, the result was conservative authoritarianism, while if the peasants were included in a radical coalition against the landed class, authoritarianism of the left resulted – as in the Arab populist republics.<sup>7</sup> He and others also showed that inclusive democratization requires a balance of class power, including some state autonomy of the dominant

2 Dahl, Robert. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

3 Hinnebusch, Raymond (2010) “Toward a historical sociology of state formation in the Middle East,” *Middle East Critique*, 19(3), pp. 201–216.

4 Huntington, Samuel (1968) *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).

5 Mosca, Gaetano. 1935. *The Ruling Class*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

6 Michels, Robert (1966) *Political Parties: A Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (Free Press).

7 Moore, Barrington (1966) *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press).

classes and a bourgeois alliance with the organized working class to extract power sharing from the state.<sup>8</sup>

In MENA, however, political economy is unfavorable to democratization. First, rentier states produce state-dependent bourgeoisies and clientalized citizens (combined with readily expelled expatriate labor in many cases); indeed, states with copious rent have proved most resistant to the uprising.

Second, the pathway of the earlier populist regimes, under which a more inclusive ruling coalition corresponded to social reform and import substitute industrialization, was cut short by some combination of capital accumulation failures, lost wars, and international financial institutions (IFIs) pressures for “structural adjustment.” The neo-liberal “solution” – re-empowering investors and export strategies that required the repression of labor costs – shaped new state-crony capitalist coalitions to exclude labor as well as deepen dependencies on global finance capital.

While the Arab Uprisings were a *reaction* against this, their outcome, far from reversing neo-liberalism, has made states *more* vulnerable to the IFIs that promote it. Global neo-liberalism, which excludes the big issues of justice in wealth distribution from the political agendas of all states means that MENA states, whether on not they democratize, are sharply constrained within neo-liberal molds; in fact, enforcing neo-liberalism against its victims (and their leftist or Islamist champions), requires a dose of authoritarian power and mass demobilization. In the world periphery, the current global order is most compatible with electoral authoritarianism or, at best, what Robinson calls “low intensity democracy.”<sup>9</sup> It is, thus, political economy that determines the social forces that are included and excluded from regimes.

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8 Rueschemeyer, Dietrich, Evelyne, Huber Stephens, and John D Stephens. 1992. *Capitalist Development and Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

9 Robinson, William I. 1996. *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## **Fragmenting the political arena: The inside-outside co-constitution of stalemate**

For HS, the domestic and the international co-constitute each other. In uprising states outcomes have been contested by the *competitive interference* and trans-state ideological contestation, of rival regional and global powers. The Sunni Gulf Cooperation Council powers and Turkey, themselves split over support for rival kinds of Islamists, and Iran, manipulating a “Shiite crescent,” have deployed sectarian polarization against each other. With neither side able to sweep the board, the result has been both the de-stabilization of states and the fragmenting of publics between secularists and varieties of rival Islamists. This works against polyarchy since institutionalized peaceful elite contestation depends on an underlying shared community and since regimes emerging from communal power struggles will likely incorporate some identity communities in order to exclude others. Moreover, both sides have used rent transfers to bolster anti-democratic forces – the non-oil monarchies, the military in Egypt, the Assad regime, Salafis – across the region.

## **Outcomes: The post-uprising persistence of hybridity**

The Arab Uprisings initiated the remobilization of the masses. Far from this inevitably leading to democratic transition, such an outcome requires a quite demanding set of conditions: a unifying national identity; political institutions able to incorporate mass participation; a balance of class forces, and a pact between soft liners in the regime and the opposition to marginalize hard liners on both sides. Unfortunately, in the case of the Arab Spring, only Tunisia enjoyed some of these conditions.

With transition conditions absent, the outcome, has been an intensification of the power struggle in which rival elites and counter-elites use the mobilizing masses against each other, and in which the rules of the political contest are themselves contested, hence “clubs – armed violence – are trump.” However the outcomes have differed considerably. Where presidents were overthrown but the deep state persisted, mass mobilization chiefly

meant that the techniques for managing popular demands had to be “upgraded” – a “man on horseback” emerges promising to restore order. Elites combine elements of their pre-uprising toolboxes such as populist rhetoric, divide and rule, demonization of oppositions, and electoral authoritarianism, resulting in *hybrid regimes* with limited elite contestation and inclusion.

Where regimes collapsed the breakdown of order stimulated a “security dilemma” in which rival identity groups saw the other as the enemy and a war economy was fueled by rival trans-state funders; a battle of patrimonial regime remnants and charismatic insurgents, via “new wars” in which civilians were not spared, shaping mass inclusion and exclusion on identity grounds. This situation excluded polyarchy.

## Conclusion

The historic MENA authority formulas, adapted via path dependency to changing conditions, encountered, with the outbreak of the Arab Uprising, renewed agency – power struggles between counter-elites and elites. The struggle was conditioned by a political economy context and identity wars fragmenting publics that, together, created exclusionary scenarios incompatible with polyarchy. As such, historic non-democratic power formulas were revived to reconstruct authority, albeit varying according to whether the state survived the uprising or failed. However, none of these efforts appears likely to re-stabilize the region anytime soon.

*Raymond Hinnebusch is the director of the Centre for Syrian Studies and a professor of international relations and Middle East studies at the University of St Andrews.*

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# Mass politics and the future of authoritarian governance in the Arab world

By Steven Heydemann, United States Institute of Peace

*\* A version of this piece appeared on The Monkey Cage, December 4, 2014.*

## Emerging patterns in authoritarian governance in the Arab world

Today, the dominant images of the “Arab Spring” are no longer of exuberant crowds gathered in public squares to demand democracy and social justice, but of masked Islamic State gunmen, brutalized victims of torture, and shrouded corpses. The enthusiasm that accompanied the first democratic elections in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia has given way to electoral spectacles that are distressingly familiar to any observer of Middle East politics. In May, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who engineered the ouster of his Islamist predecessor, Mohamed Morsi, was elected president of Egypt amidst low voter turnout, high public apathy, and accusations of systemic electoral abuse.<sup>1</sup> The following month, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, in a breathtaking display of cynicism, convened elections amidst the carnage and destruction of a brutal civil war that has displaced half of Syria’s population. Nonetheless, according to official figures, some 73 percent of eligible voters cast ballots. To no one’s surprise, Assad was “re-elected” for a third seven-year term.

Widely greeted with enthusiasm in 2011, the resurgence of mass politics in the Arab world is now viewed in much darker terms. Writing in mid-2013, Egyptian filmmaker and blogger Omar Robert Hamilton captured the turn from optimism to despair for those who had celebrated the Arab uprisings as a moment of political transformation

and social renewal. “We thought we could change the world,” Hamilton wrote on his blog, Mada Masr. “We know now that that feeling was not unique to us, that every revolutionary moment courses with the pulse of a manifest destiny. How different things feel today. I will not bury our convictions, but that feeling — youthful optimism? naiveté? idealism? foolishness? — is now truly and irrevocably dead.”<sup>2</sup>

This shift in mood has been widely echoed, not only among democratic forces across the Middle East, but in the media, among policy elites, and among scholars of Arab politics. Initial responses to the resurgence of mass politics in 2011 were largely positive, even as the fall of seemingly entrenched Arab autocrats provoked considerable soul searching among experts, including this author, who had characterized authoritarian regimes in the Arab world as exceptional in their resilience and their capacity to absorb and blunt demands for democratic reform.<sup>3</sup>

As authoritarian regimes across the region seemed to crack under the weight of long-repressed popular grievances, scholars such as Jack Goldstone and Ian Lustick, who have characterized Arab regimes as brittle, fractured, and ripe for collapse, highlighted the features that left them vulnerable to elite defections and mass protests. According to Goldstone, the authoritarian regimes of the Arab world

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1 Democracy International, “Press Release and Preliminary Statement: Disregard for Egyptians’ Rights and Freedoms Prevents Genuine, Democratic Presidential Election.” May 29, 2014. <http://democracyinternational.com/news/press-release-and-preliminary-statement-disregard-egyptians-rights-and-freedoms-prevents-genuine>.

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2 Omar Robert Hamilton “Mada Masr” Blog, August 17, 2013.

3 Among the most exuberant responses to the Arab uprisings was Hamid Dabashi’s *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (London: Zed Books, 2012). Also celebratory, if more measured, was Marwan Bishara’s *The Invisible Arab: The Promise and Peril of the Arab Revolutions* (New York: Nation Books, 2012). An early attempt to account for the failure of academic Middle East specialists to anticipate the Arab uprisings is F. Gregory Gause III’s “The Middle East Academic Community and the ‘Winter of Arab Discontent’: Why Did We Miss It?” in *Seismic Shift: Understanding Change in the Middle East*, ed. Ellen Laipson (Washington: Stimson Center, 2011), pp. 11-28. On the resilience and adaptability of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world see Heydemann, *Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World*, op. cite.

represent a specific regime type: “Sultanistic dictatorships.” While such regimes “may often appear unshakable, they are actually highly vulnerable, because the very strategies they use to stay in power make them brittle, not resilient.”<sup>4</sup> Echoing these themes, Lustick described the Arab uprisings as a process in which mass politics had exposed the longstanding “decrepitude” of the region’s authoritarian regimes. According to Lustick, the Arab uprisings are an expression of the “the opening of the masses,” that would bring about the collapse of at least the Egyptian regime: “That regime is not going to last . . . [the regime’s] whole *raison d’être*, is to prevent [the entry of the masses into the political arena]. They’re trying to keep their finger in the dyke.”<sup>5</sup>

In hindsight, such predictions about the imminent collapse of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world were clearly premature. Mass protests confronted regimes with the most significant challenge they had ever faced. The threat of politics from below was all the more potent because it emerged in systems of rule that were explicitly designed to prevent oppositional forms of collective action and spontaneous political mobilization. As Goldstone and others argued, it seemed in late 2010 and 2011 that the strategies Arab leaders had adopted to keep themselves in power, including strategies of authoritarian upgrading, had indeed left them vulnerable to an uncontrollable surge of mass mobilization. Yet by late 2014, even as Arab regimes struggled to manage the aftershocks of mass protests and, in some cases, respond to sustained popular mobilization that has continued, it is clear that authoritarian regimes in the Arab world not only survived the uprisings but adapted their tactics and practices to address the specific challenges associated with the resurgence of mass politics and sustain their hold on power.

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4 Jack A. Goldstone, “Understanding the Revolutions of 2011: Weakness and Resilience in Middle Eastern Autocracies,” *Foreign Affairs* (May–June 2011). <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67694/jack-a-goldstone/understanding-the-revolutions-of-2011>. As a counterpoint to Goldstone see Jay Ulfelder, “Contentious Collective Action and the Breakdown of Authoritarian Regimes,” *International Political Science Review* Vol 26, No. 3 (2005), pp. 311–334.

5 See the transcript of a presentation by Lustick, “The Arab Spring is Actually the Arab Century” at Philip Weiss, *Mondoweiss: The War of Ideas in the Middle East* (October 21, 2013). <http://mondoweiss.net/2013/10/actually-century-lustick.html>.

This paper argues, however, that the reassertion of authoritarianism since 2012 did not come about simply because authoritarian elites in the Middle East held fast to established political routines. The events of the past four years are not merely a back to the future moment in authoritarian governance in the Arab world. In responding to the resurgence of mass politics – processes of mobilization that were in large part caused by popular discontent with failures of authoritarian governance – authoritarian elites have been compelled to adapt. In some cases, regime adaptations drew on but modified established practices. In others, adaptations seem to signal more fundamental changes in elite perceptions about the nature of the threats they face and the changes that would be required to ensure regime survival. In these cases, regime elites seem to have made important, and in some cases potentially transformative, changes in their policies and their tactics to control and contain newly mobilized societies.

These observations about continuities and disjunctures in authoritarian governance since 2012 underscore two important features of arguments about resilient or recombinant authoritarianism that are often overlooked. First, theories about resilient authoritarianism, and the adaptive capacity of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, have never taken the position that current systems of rule are permanent or invulnerable. The appropriate metaphor is of earthquake resistant, not earthquake proof regimes. Second, and of more immediate relevance for the argument developed here, theories about recombinant authoritarian regimes, while recognizing the creativity of incumbents in reconfiguring existing practices, do not assume that adaptive processes are always limited and constrained by such practices: Path dependence matters, but at moments of crisis in particular, regime adaptations can and do move governance beyond the boundaries of current practices. I view the post-uprising period of the Arab Thermidor as representing one such period.

What seem to be emerging, therefore, as these adaptations take hold are two distinctive modes of authoritarian governance, both of which have troubling implications for the political future of the Middle East. In one set of

cases, including Jordan and Morocco, Algeria, and much of the Arab Gulf, shifts in governance are best defined as the extension and deepening of strategies of authoritarian upgrading, reframed in response to the specific challenges posed by the resurgence of mass politics. In a second set of cases, however, including Syria and Egypt, changes in authoritarian governance appear to be more profound. The regimes that are emerging from the most threatening encounters with mass politics are making a sharp, perhaps decisive break with the populist, inclusionary strategies of contained mobilization through which they governed for many decades. What is emerging instead are narrowly-nationalist and exclusionary-repressive modes of authoritarian governance. In both modes, reconfigured authoritarian practices are consistent with the inability of Arab regimes either to sustain redistribution and guarantees of economic security as the basis of state-society relations and conceptions of citizenship, or to establish viable, market-oriented political economies capable of addressing massive, systemic employment crises and ameliorating chronic conditions of economic insecurity that are especially acute among youth.

### **The Arab Thermidor: Back to the future or break with the past?**

To understand why this most recent cycle of adaptations by authoritarian incumbents marks a decisive shift in governance, and to appreciate its potentially transformative effects, it is useful to assess the broader context in which regime elites are acting today and how it compares to the environment that shaped the systems of rule over which they presided until 2011.

In the era in which most post-colonial Arab states were established, newly empowered elites who inherited weak and sharply contested political and economic institutions drew heavily on contemporary understandings about how best to organize a state, manage a national economy, and structure relations between states and societies. At the time, Arab leaders were encouraged by then nascent international financial institutions such as the newly-established International Bank for Reconstruction and

Development, to build large, powerful public sectors as a way to compensate for the weakness of private sectors.<sup>6</sup> They embraced import substitution industrialization, the dominant development strategy for developing economies in the post-WWII era, to promote industrialization and the commercialization of agriculture. To exploit but simultaneously manage and channel the high levels of mass mobilization that had emerged in the course of anti-colonial struggles, the first generation of populist-authoritarian leaders – Gamal Abdel Nasser, Adib Shishakli, Habib Bourguiba, Ahmed Ben Bella, Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr – embraced pan-Arabism, formed mass-based ruling parties, and promoted state-corporatist frameworks of interest representation. They adopted redistributive social policies, consolidating patterns of state-society relations anchored in “authoritarian bargains” that guaranteed economic security in exchange for political quiescence. For almost 30 years, this formula produced extraordinary improvements in social conditions across the Arab world.

By the mid-1980s, these populist-redistributive systems of rule had become increasingly difficult for regime elites to sustain. Economic crises and the fiscal burden of welfare, subsidy programs, and service provision forced authoritarian incumbents to adapt. Beginning in the 1980s but with growing momentum in the 1990s, incumbents responded – as they had in the 1950s and 1960s – by appropriating, adapting, and applying elements drawn from a global repertoire of models of governance and social policy. Mimicking versions of 1980s-era neo-liberal developmental strategies, in form if rarely in content, they introduced selective strategies of economic and political liberalization that gradually moved Middle East and North

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6 Egypt and Iraq were among the first signatories of articles of agreement with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development in December 1945, a full year before the first meeting of the IBRD's board of governors. Syria and Lebanon signed in April 1947. The first World Bank mission to Egypt occurred in March 1949, followed two months later by a mission to Iraq. Jordan joined in 1952. Also in 1952, the Bank created an Area of Operations office for Asia and the Middle East, with a Middle East regional office in Beirut. See World Bank, *The Economic Development of Iraq* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1952), and World Bank, *The Economic Development of Jordan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1952).

Africa political economies toward what the Syrian regime later labeled social market development frameworks.

Precursors of the upgrading strategies of the late-1990s and 2000s, these frameworks combined liberalization of select economic sectors, typically determined on the basis of political, regime maintenance criteria, with weakened systems of redistribution. They were designed to generate the resources required to maintain patronage networks, provide opportunities for predatory rent seeking by increasingly narrow circles of regime insiders, and mitigate the broad social effects of reductions in public expenditure. During these years, the organizational “containers” that had earlier served to manage and channel mass politics decayed. Ruling parties and corporatized associational sectors retained some importance as pathways for patronage, positions, and a declining share of economic privilege, but could no longer provide any meaningful sense of political or economic inclusion. In their place, regimes relied more heavily on the institutions of the mukhabarat, intelligence or secret police, to maintain internal security and repress autonomous forms of political mobilization and oppositional collective action. In effect, the authoritarian bargain of the post-independence era had become an authoritarian compromise, the costs of which were borne by the urban middle class, rural clientelist networks, public sector workers, and residents of peripheral cities, the social groups that provided the backbone of the Arab uprisings.

This potted macro-sociological history of Arab regime formation and reform underscores the importance of the contemporary regional and global context, and its effects on the strategic choices of incumbents in assessing the dynamics of authoritarian reassertion during the so-called Arab Thermidor. Upgrading strategies that served as an effective response to the challenges regimes confronted in the 1990s and 2000s, carried social costs that they could not contain indefinitely. Having confronted these costs during the peak of the Arab uprisings, the principal challenge faced by authoritarian incumbents today is how to manage the enduring, systemic features of what Adam Przeworski, referencing Southern Europe and

Latin America, calls “the politics, the economics, and the culture of poor capitalism.” Evoking conditions similar in important respects to those in the contemporary Arab world, Przeworski describes poor capitalism as a dystopian environment defined by:

... states weak as organizations; political parties and other associations that are ineffectual in representing and mobilizing; economies that are monopolistic, overprotected, and overregulated; agricultures that cannot feed their own people; public bureaucracies that are overgrown; welfare services that are fragmentary and rudimentary. And [he asks] will you not conclude that such conditions breed governments vulnerable to pressure from large firms, populist movements of doubtful commitment to democratic institutions; armed forces that sit menacingly on the sidelines, church hierarchies torn between authoritarianism and social justice, nationalist sentiments vulnerable to xenophobia?<sup>7</sup>

How can regimes respond to the threat of mass politics under conditions of poor capitalism? With ineffectual economic institutions and deep, systemic employment gaps that regimes are unable to close, how can they prevent persistent high levels of anti-regime mass political mobilization?

To contend with mobilized publics and to preserve the selective benefits associated with social market strategies of economic governance, regime elites today have a very different set of models on which to draw. The statist, inclusionary, and redistributive models of controlled mass mobilization that prevailed in the post-independence era – with all they implied about republicanism, egalitarian conceptions of citizenship, and a moral economy relationship between states and citizens – are simply no longer available as viable options for regime elites. Similarly, with implications that have yet to be fully explored for MENA political economies, the condition that

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7 Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 190-191.

economist Dani Rodrik has recently characterized as premature deindustrialization further constrains the developmental options available to authoritarian incumbents in the Arab world, and further reduces the strategies they can use to close the massive employment gaps they confront, generate highly-skilled industrial employment, and enjoy the large spill-over benefits for other sectors that accompany industrialization. As Rodrik writes:

On the economic front, it is clear that early deindustrialization impedes growth and delays convergence with the advanced economies. Manufacturing industries are what I have called “escalator industries”: labor productivity in manufacturing has a tendency to converge to the frontier . . . That is why rapid growth historically has always been associated with industrialization . . . Less room for industrialization will almost certainly mean fewer growth miracles in the future. The social and political consequences are less fathomable, but could be equally momentous. Some of the building blocks of durable democracy have been byproducts of sustained industrialization: an organized labor movement, disciplined political parties, and political competition organized around a right-left axis.<sup>8</sup>

To the extent that MENA political economies are defined by premature deindustrialization, the pathways out of poor capitalism will be very hard to find. The likely outcome is a massive semi-permanent class of underemployed and unemployed who the state will view as a persistent threat to stability, necessitating repressive-exclusionary modes of governance.

Even if MENA countries can escape the trap of premature deindustrialization the alternatives to authoritarianism face strong headwinds. Democratization has been discredited by its association with the Morsi presidency in Egypt, as well as the Libyan and Yemeni experiences. It

has been further undermined by public disillusionment with Western liberalism, and by the declining leverage of Western democracies over regional actors who no longer depend on the West for foreign investment and foreign assistance. Nor can the transnational ideologies that legitimated (and tested) Arab regimes, including various versions of politicized Islam, serve that purpose any longer.

In contrast, market-oriented models of authoritarian governance are seen as viable alternatives. Reflecting regional trends toward sectarian polarization, regime elites in Syria, Egypt, Bahrain, and Libya have sought to reframe mechanisms for containing and channeling mass politics – much of which continues to revolve around demands for economic inclusion, voice, and distributive justice – around combinations of exclusionary, xenophobic, ethno-sectarian, and tribal conceptions of state-society relations and citizenship, policed by newly reinvigorated post-uprising internal security agencies.

Thus, even while emergent models of authoritarian governance in the Arab world exhibit a wide range of continuities, they are moving beyond the authoritarian bargains and the authoritarian compromises of earlier eras, toward repressive-exclusionary systems of rule organized in response to the threat of mass politics under conditions of poor capitalism. To be sure, these emergent models will generate stresses that will test their capacity and their resilience. In their current incarnation, however, the trajectories of authoritarian governance in the Arab world seem to offer little basis for optimism among those who have long hoped that prosperity and democracy would find a firm foothold in the Middle East.

*Steven Heydemann is the vice president of Applied Research on Conflict at the United States Institute of Peace. The views expressed in this article are his own and not those of the U.S. Institute of Peace.*

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8 Dani Rodrik, “The Perils of Premature Deindustrialization.” <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/dani-rodrikdeveloping-economies--missing-manufacturing>.

## Arab transitions and the old elite

*By Ellis Goldberg, University of Washington*

*\* This piece appeared on The Monkey Cage, December 9, 2014.*

“Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come é, bisogna che tutto cambi”

If you want things to stay as they are, they have to change: These are the words challenging an elite faced with ruin which Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa places in the mouth of Prince Tancredi Falconieri in the novel “Il Gattopardo” (The Leopard). Lampedusa’s novel is set in Sicily during the unsettled conditions of the Risorgimento. The problem confronting the old nobility is what to do in the face of the new Italian nationalism and the revolutionary changes to the state and society that the Republican general Giuseppe Garibaldi hoped to impose. To preserve its influence and elite status (that is, to ensure that nothing changes), the family must accept the new forms of governance (that is, accept that everything has changed).

Prince Tancredi’s observation offers a useful framework for understanding the different outcomes of what appear to be similar processes in Tunisia and Egypt. Tunisia has garnered high praise for passing the “Huntington two-turnover” test that every other Arab country has failed: The party that dominated the government immediately after the fall of the authoritarian regime has now peacefully given way to its opposition. Tunisia’s October legislative election therefore marks what political scientists call the consolidation of democracy because it seems that all political actors accept the verdict of the ballot box. This supposed success contrasts vividly with the failure of Egypt’s transition, which ended instead in intense political polarization and a military takeover.

To understand why the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings have had different outcomes, his guidance would be to leave aside the dominant narrative of secularism, Islamism and the political weakness of the youth. Those

contentious and seductive issues lead us astray from the more fundamental and essential role of the ruling elite, without whom no country can make the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. We must think of those old elites, even in a revolutionary uprising, as active participants who are neither passive nor innocent.

This has not customarily been the focus of most analysis. Many have blamed Egypt’s revolutionary youth for failing to gain mass support or to build a solid organization either to compete with the Islamists in elections or push the revolution to its conclusion. But revolutionary youth in Tunisia had little more impact on the outcome either way whereas the old elite had a very large impact. Another common explanation has to do with the nature of Islamist forces in the two countries, as a weaker and more savvy Tunisian Ennahda party avoided the mistakes of a powerful but clumsy Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Both arguments miss who these various Islamist and revolutionary forces threatened. Democratization succeeded in Tunisia because the old elite was neither excluded nor subjected to the threat of political or administrative marginalization. The old elite, not revolutionaries or Islamists, proved to be the pivotal actor.

The underlying thread of many analyses since December 2010 has been that democracy can be and perhaps should be the result of a revolutionary rising. But democracy, unlike revolution, is a profoundly conservative as well as inclusive solution to the problems of social change. Democracy’s success more or less guarantees, for a protracted period of time, that there will be few political solutions – whether in terms of moderate public policy or dramatic institutional change – to economic inequality. An understandable desire by many observers and analysts to conflate a revolutionary uprising with the process of democratic transition has created a narrative that now lacks not only many details but is, in some ways, a significant distortion of the political trajectory of the two countries.

Rather than thinking of revolution vaguely as a rapid and complete change, I prefer a definition proposed by German political scientist Otto Kirchheimer. Does the new regime destroy the possibility that the old regime and its members can return to power? We will gain more traction in understanding the events of the last four years if we focus on a different set of admittedly elite institutional actors: members of political parties, government officials and holders of significant economic resources. The crucial question is whether the political conflicts in the wake of a mass uprising and the collapse of a regime provided a plausible existential threat to any particular group. Are all parties, including the ones ousted by the collapse of authoritarianism, able to contest for governance?

In early 2010 there was every reason to think that Egypt was more likely to experience a successful transition to democracy than Tunisia. Egypt had a far more open press environment, more competitive elections, and had experienced more turnover among government ministers. For example, in 2010 the Tunisian prime minister, Mohamed Ghannouchi, was the same one who had been appointed more than 10 years earlier by then-President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Atef Ebeid, who former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak had appointed as prime minister in 1999 (when Ghannouchi assumed his office) to replace Kamal Ganzouri, departed after a five-year term. Ahmad Nazif, Ebeid's successor, had only served seven years when he was replaced on Jan. 30, 2011. Egypt had had three prime ministers in the two decades during which Tunisia had one.

In both Tunisia and Egypt the authoritarian regime centered on a particular figure who had been in power for decades and around whom an increasingly small coterie of family and close associates clustered. By 2010, wide sections of the political elite in each country had been marginalized by a narrow group at the very pinnacle of authority. In each country the regime maintained its grip on power partly through reliance on the police and partly through the manipulation of a single party (the Constitutional Democratic Rally in Tunisia and the National Democratic Party in Egypt).

The Tunisian Supreme Court first appeared as an actor in the transition on Jan. 15, 2011 when it declared that Ben Ali was not incapacitated but had quit the presidency. Consequently, Fouad Mebazaa, the speaker of the assembly, was installed as president rather than Ghannouchi, who then remained as prime minister. Mebazaa, a member of the RCD central committee since 1988, served as the president of Tunisia until Dec. 13, 2011 when he was replaced by the human rights activist and Ben Ali opponent, Moncef Marzouki. Had the Egyptian Supreme Constitutional Court made a similar ruling when Mubarak left office, it would have declared that either the speaker of the assembly, Fathi Sorour, or Farouk Sultan, president of the court, was his constitutional successor. Both men were as closely associated with Mubarak as Mebazaa was to Ben Ali.

By Jan. 17, Prime Minister Ghannouchi announced a new cabinet that contained 12 members of the RCD including former Defense Minister Ridha Grira, a graduate of the distinguished French institute for training high-level civil servants, the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (a distinction he shares with Adly Mansour, the president of the Egyptian Supreme Constitutional Court who served as Egyptian president from the ouster of Mohamed Morsi in 2013 until the election of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in 2014).

Ghannouchi's replacement was not an outsider by any stretch of the imagination, but an even more central figure from the old regime. The new prime minister, Beji Caid Essebsi, had served in several key positions under the republic's founder, Habib Bourguiba. Essebsi was defense minister from late 1969 until June 1970 and then served as ambassador to France. In Tunisia, as in other former French colonies, the ambassador to Paris is a position of exceptional importance for economic, political and security issues. Between 1981 and 1986 Essebsi was the country's foreign minister. After Ben Ali ousted Bourguiba, Essebsi moved to the legislature where he was president of the Chamber of Deputies from 1990-91. Essebsi, who would be prime minister in 2011 until he resigned to make way for Ennahda party leader, Hamadi Jabali, on December 24 thus played a key role in determining the nature of the

democratic transition. Before the courts in Tunisia (as in Egypt) dissolved the former ruling party in March, the Interior Ministry had already suspended it from official activity. Essebsi thus presided over the liquidation of the party in which he had spent most of his adult career and from which he would draw many of the leaders for the new party he created for the 2014 legislative elections. Essebsi and his associates were quintessentially what Egyptians derided as “feloul” or the remnants of the old regime.

It is possible that Essebsi only pursued this course under the pressure of demonstrations, but nevertheless it was Essebsi and a number of politicians from the old regime as well as some of their long-standing opponents who bore the responsibility for shaping a democratic outcome in Tunisia. Thus, speaking on Nov. 10, 2011 at the African Media Leaders forum, Essebsi noted that it was his government’s responsibility to ensure that the Tunisian revolution did not devolve into a fratricidal conflict nor deviate from what he called its virtuous path.

Among the consequential choices his government made was the exclusion of members of the RCD from participating in the elections for the constituent assembly. Arguably even more important, however, was the decision to encourage human rights activist Kamel Jendoubi to preside over the commission charged with writing the relevant electoral law and carrying out the election itself, the Independent Higher Authority for the Elections, ISIE. Jendoubi and his fellow commissioners chose to employ a particular version of proportional representation that provided Ennahda with the number of seats that corresponded to its share of the vote but that also privileged smaller parties. Other electoral rules, including other versions of proportional representation, would have translated Ennahda’s 38 percent of the popular vote into a majority of seats rather than the plurality it actually received. Ennahda thus, by design, was unlikely to control the constituent assembly without receiving an overwhelming majority of the popular vote.

Ennahda had the votes in the constituent assembly to impose an electoral law banning members of the old ruling

party from engaging in politics. In fact, article 167 was drafted into the organic electoral law by a majority in June 2013. Under the rules of the assembly, however, it was rejected in May 2014 because it failed to gain an absolute majority: 38 of 63 Ennahda delegates present abstained. Such a law would have been an insuperable barrier to the old political elite regaining influence through electoral politics and would have made the creation of Essebsi’s Nidaa Tunis, the largest party after the last elections, impossible. The most widely cited argument for not excluding former members of the RCD was simply that there is, in a democracy, no reason for stripping individuals of their political rights unless they have been convicted of criminal activity. Whether Ennahda representatives were convinced of this argument on its merits or simply took a more hard-nosed view of the likely results of excluding their long-time opponents we do not know, but their decision was consequential.

In Egypt events have worked out quite differently. One obvious and crucial difference was the inability or unwillingness of the Muslim Brotherhood to find a way to compromise with members of the old regime. On the contrary, the Muslim Brotherhood often sought to marginalize and exclude as much of the NDP as possible. These attempts to marginalize and exclude the NDP and its cadre as well as its leadership were highly popular with a significant portion of the Egyptian public. The top NDP leadership included prominent businessmen, religious officials and government officials all of whom were widely derided as corrupt figures of an authoritarian regime.

Days before Mubarak resigned, on Feb. 6, 2011 Vice President Omar Suleiman met with members of the opposition including the Muslim Brotherhood in an attempt to broker an agreement about the future of Egypt. These were the days in which several groups of so-called “wise men,” including some of Egypt’s wealthiest and most important businessmen as well as academic figures and former officials engaged a public dialogue through public statements and occasional interviews. Other opposition leaders including Mohamed ElBaradei opposed the talks, which were unpopular with the demonstrators in Tahrir

Square. The first attempt to broker some kind of agreement or transitional pact foundered.

Subsequently there were occasional talks between leaders of the MB and some of their political competitors and more than occasional claims that the MB had worked out a deal with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces but nothing of the kind ever happened. Talks routinely broke down; bargains once made were scuttled; and a heightened sense of distrust permeated relationships between all the dominant actors during the period after Mubarak left office.

Anger and contempt for the political figures of the old regime were common through the first year of the uprising in Egypt and the MB began to present itself as a party dedicated to reforming Egypt by continuing the revolution. Key to this objective was eliminating the *feloul*. This was surprising to many Egyptians because there was no reason to believe that the MB planned to make significant or rapid changes to the country's economic or governmental structures which would have been the hallmark of a revolutionary party as widely understood in Western as well as Egyptian academic literature.

The MB's reaction to the so-called Selmi document of late 2011 shows how different the situation in Egypt was from what occurred in Tunisia. Ali al-Selmi, at the time deputy prime minister, drafted a proposal that had the backing of SCAF and the government, which was then still dominated by liberal elements of the old regime and a handful of its liberal opponents. He offered a set of supra-constitutional principles to guide the work of the still-to-be chosen constituent assembly which had many substantive similarities to earlier such statements issued by the Muslim Brotherhood, his own Wafd party and independent forces in March 2011. It only allowed the civilian government to consider the total budgetary allocation to the armed forces and it gave SCAF the right to prior review of any legislation affecting the army, an unpopular ratification of the military's hitherto unofficial authority in the new constitution. His proposal also included significant

restrictions on how the still to be chosen legislature could choose the constituent assembly. First, Selmi proposed that elected legislators not be allowed to serve as members of the constituent assembly. He also proposed a corporatist plan through which the SCAF would appoint the bulk of the members of the constituent assembly from the existing institutional framework of Egyptian society in which unions, professional associations and other groups would choose their own representatives.

Selmi's proposal placed mild substantive constraints on what the assembly could write but it egregiously violated one of the few obviously legitimate elements of the transitional process. That an elected legislature would choose the constituent assembly was one of a handful of provisions that had been the object of the March 19 referendum. The MB called for massive demonstrations against the Selmi proposals and hundreds of thousands of people mobilized including sections of the left. Selmi became a lightning rod for protest and mistrust because of his own connections to the old regime. Selmi has a doctorate in economics and had served previously in Mubarak cabinets. He was a prominent member of the Wafd, generally considered a secular pro-business party with a significant Christian base of support. Rejecting the Selmi document placed the MB firmly on the side of electoral legitimacy but it suggested an at best limited tolerance for reaching substantive agreements with the social, political or economic elite of the old regime.

The Muslim Brotherhood initiated demonstrations in Tahrir Square and was able to mobilize significant support against the proposal on Nov. 18, 2011. Police later attacked a sit-in by relatives of the people killed in the initial uprising and protests continued. These included particularly violent confrontations on Muhammad Mahmoud Street, just off Tahrir Square, between the police and youth, many of whom were drawn from the ranks of soccer fans and from poorer neighborhoods, which left 41 people dead and perhaps 1,000 wounded. The Selmi document was another victim and so was the government of Prime Minister Essam Sharaf who resigned

on Nov. 21. He was replaced by Kamal Ganzouri, who had served as prime minister under Mubarak from 1996-99.

The left viewed these events as evidence that the Muslim Brotherhood was uninterested in pursuing the revolution to establish a democratic order. Viewed in the framework of Tunisian politics, however, they suggest a different interpretation: The MB refused to reach an agreement with members of the old regime about the new structure of the state. The mobilization of street demonstrations and the willingness to accept the outcome of the violent confrontations that it had neither solicited nor endorsed placed the MB on a distinct path in the months to come. This was the path of electoral politics, themselves a fundamental process for representative democracy. It was also, however, a path in which elections and demonstrations together could be used to marginalize and diminish the role of other institutions of the state as well as the political opponents of the electoral victors.

Sometime before his tragically premature death I had coffee with Samir Soliman, the respected Egyptian political scientist. In the years since it has become common to argue that the failure of the Egyptian revolution and Egyptian democracy can both be attributed to the failure of the secular left to organize sufficient popular support to challenge the Muslim Brotherhood. Seen in this optic, the tragedy of Egypt is the fault of the middle-class intellectuals who played such conspicuous roles in front of the television cameras in the early days of the uprising in 2011. Soliman had a different view of how democracy, if it was to work at all, would work in Egypt. The only party that could conceivably challenge the MB and alternate with it, he argued, was a conservative party. Committed as he was personally to the politics of the left, he did not that day argue that the liberal left would be a likely counterweight to the MB nor did he mention from where such a party would draw its leaders or members.

In Tunisia, just such a conservative-centrist party has emerged in Nidaa Tunis to challenge Ennahda and its roots are heavily in the old regime although it also boasts

other supporters. In Egypt for a variety of reasons no alternate center-conservative party was built. That would have necessarily been a party with deep roots in the old NDP, the party many of whose members have re-emerged since the 2013 coup. In the absence of a thorough-going revolutionary exclusion, they would likely have re-emerged anyway. The question is whether they did so through elections or as part of an anti-electoral coalition. Attempting to exclude the economic and political elites of the old regime may have seemed like both revolutionary and democratic good sense to the Muslim Brotherhood and to many Islamists and leftists between 2011 and 2014.

Egyptian revolutionaries (in the conventional left-wing sense) and the leaders of the MB feared the re-emergence of the feloul as a political force. They correctly understood that a powerful conservative party with significant support from Egypt's business elite was not a friend. Such a political grouping was not inclined to support either the projects of economic and social equality that animated the left or the projects of creating new state institutions that the MB favored. The MB was committed to elections. As the old elite increasingly re-asserted itself the MB responded by attempting to marginalize both their institutional and electoral capacity. In this it echoed the very old concern of revolutionaries in Europe and Latin America that electoral democracy is not necessarily the friend of movements for economic redistribution nor does it necessarily lend itself to the creation of strong protections for the political, civil or social rights of the poor and the weak.

The idea that democracy is the last station on the revolutionary road remains seductive and it informs a certain idealized understanding of U.S. history and the process of democratization. Representative democracy itself, however, is less likely the successful conclusion of revolution and more likely the premature end of its utopian hopes and dreams. Only if nothing changes, can everything change.

*Ellis Goldberg is a professor emeritus of political science at the University of Washington.*

# Fiscal politics of enduring authoritarianism

By Pete W. Moore, Case Western Reserve University

“In many areas of the Middle East and Latin America, revolutionary pressure continues to build up...The problem which has to be solved, and to which no one has yet found a satisfactory answer, is how to bring about change in the balance of power which is needed to avert revolutions without *having* a revolution.”

– Nicholas Kaldor, “Will Underdeveloped Countries Learn to Tax?” 1963

Fiscal politics is the study of how states and societies extract and distribute resources, and the effect of these policies. This is an interdisciplinary literature in which social scientists and historians from different analytical backgrounds have long recognized the importance of taxation and fiscal regimes for state building, democracy, and rebellion.<sup>1</sup> In the study of the Arab world, a truncated form of the study of fiscal politics, rentier state theory, has dominated. I will outline a different fiscal politics approach, one that focuses on the long-term fiscal crisis of the less resource rich Arab states and how those regimes have responded. My simple claim is that political authoritarianism in the Arab world has come to accommodate strategies of fiscal weakness. I cannot quite argue one caused the other, and at this point I am more interested in tracing the effects. My understanding of fiscal crisis draws on an older literature, such as James O'Connor’s *The Fiscal Crisis of the State*, as well as the late Samer Soliman’s 2011 work on fiscal crisis and political change in Egypt.

(See Figure 1)

Despite decades of economic growth and expansion since the 1970s, Arab states have witnessed steady declines in levels of total public revenue. At the same time, the socio-economic expectations of coalition supporters compelled regimes (to attempt) to continue meeting those demands. This fiscal dilemma and vulnerability to periodic economic crises provides one way to understand regional bouts of rebellion starting in the late 1970s and culminating in 2011. This perspective also reveals political economy structures of authoritarianism, which are likely to deepen after 2011. In the rest of this essay and relying primarily on evidence from Jordan and Egypt, I focus on the dilemmas fiscal weakness has spawned: greater labor market insecurity, privatization of urban infrastructure, and more regressive taxation.

## Accommodating fiscal weakness:

### Labor, infrastructure, taxes

As levels of public revenue began their decline in the 1970s, profound changes in Arab labor markets surfaced. Until the late 1970s, expansion of public employment contributed to gains in equality and income as well as increasing female work force participation. By the early 1980s however, public employment peaked for most of the non-resource exporters and began declining along with public revenue. From the mid-1980s to the 2000s, the share of educated entrants to the work force taking public sector employment in Jordan dropped from 60 percent to 30 percent. In Egypt, the same trend began a few years earlier and went from 70 percent to 20 percent by the 2000s.<sup>2</sup> The few studies on the importance of public employment in the region suggest that the poorest households rely to the greatest extent on public employment to decrease inequality.<sup>3</sup>

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1 See Block, F. (1981) “The fiscal crisis of the capitalist state,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 7; Tilly, C. (1990). *Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990-1990*. Blackwell; Centeno, M.A. (1997) “Blood and Debt: War and Taxation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America,” *American Journal of Sociology* 102:6; Levi, M. (1989) *Of Rule and Revenue* University of California Press; and Kurtz, M. (2009) “The Social Foundations of Institutional Order: Reconsidering War and the ‘Resource Curse’ in Third World State Building,” *Politics and Society* 37:4.

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2 Assaad, R (2012) “The Structure and Evolution of Employment in Jordan,” Economic Research Forum, Working Paper 674, 8.

3 Adams, R.H. (2001) “Nonfarm income, inequality, and poverty in rural Egypt and Jordan,” World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper No 2572

To make up for declining access to secure public sector jobs, political leaderships in both countries embraced domestic and international employment strategies that were less secure and more volatile. In Egypt, much of the shift away from public employment in the 1970s went into the informal sector, where insecurity and volatility are likely the norm. In contrast, Jordan reacted by increasing formal employment in the private sector, so that the 10-12 percent of new workers who started in the private sector in the 1980s had risen to 36-38 percent in 2010.<sup>4</sup> However, because many of these new Jordanian private sector jobs required temporary contracts or no contracts at all, the insecurity and volatility of Jordanian labor resembled the Egyptian flight into informality.

In addition to these domestic labor shifts, governments embraced strategies to export labor, which was also a contributor to overall labor insecurity. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, on average one-third of Egypt's labor force was employed outside the country, and by the new century nearly 20 percent of Jordanian and Lebanese GDPs were comprised of worker remittance income, some of the highest ratios in the world.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the Arab region ranks the lowest in terms of labor protections and the highest in unemployment and particularly youth unemployment.<sup>6</sup>

As disruptive and unsustainable as these labor policies have been, they served as timely adaptations to fiscal decline. Weak labor protection fit with strategies to export labor. Remittance income acts like other forms of exogenous revenue to compensate for declining public goods and revenue. In the short run at least, labor remittances have helped Arab families make up for public investment shortfalls in education and social welfare and allowed political leaders to avoid greater revenue extraction.

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4 Assaad, R (2012), 3.

5 On Egypt's labor force see Benin, J (2001) *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, Cambridge University Press, 149-150; and on remittance income World Bank (2006) *World Development Indicators*, May.

6 Cammett, M and Posusney M. (2010) Labor Standards and Labor Market Flexibility in the Middle East: Free Trade and Freer Unions?" *Studies in Comparative International Development* 45.

Similar to the expansion then contraction of public employment, by the 1970s states across the region had invested significant public revenue into developing urban transportation, communication, and housing to accommodate rapid urbanization. What changed in the decades of fiscal decline has been the evolution of new geographies of urban corruption and inequality. It appears that many of these development projects enriched regime cronies and selected public-private enterprises in the construction business. As annual declines in public revenue normalized in the 1980s, investment and infrastructure upgrading in the region's largest cities began to lag. Jordan and Egypt were paragons in this respect as officials in each country pursued similar fiscal recouping measures: privatization of urban space and decentralization to local authority.<sup>7</sup> Officials crafted parastatal organizations to plan, build, and govern new urban developments. The projects of the 1990s and 2000s aggressively courted private sector alliances with significant tax subventions and opaque property rights transformations. Juridical changes in the capital ostensibly decentralized fiscal decision making to the local level. In the last two decades, leaders put in place elements of these urban privatization policies in Amman, Alexandria, Aqaba, and Qina.

The link to urban revolt and protest grievance was not immediate but the importance of these political geographies to social movements and perceptions of inequality mounted. First, decentralization to the local level failed to generate more public revenue for the localities thereby deepening dependence on dwindling central funding.<sup>8</sup> Second, the opening to the private sector, often involving alliances with public sector officials, came to define these urban renovation projects. In and around Amman and Cairo for example, high-end shopping malls, privately financed parks, luxury enclaves, and "free zones" carved out new urban

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7 Decentralization as a form of delegation can be associated with a strengthening of state capacities but if conducted under conditions of fiscal weakness, delegation may also be a form of retreat

8 Soliman, S. (2011) *The Autumn of Dictatorship: Fiscal Crisis and Political Change in Egypt under Mubarak* Stanford University Press: 76-96.

geographies.<sup>9</sup> According to Jillian Schwedler, “Cosmopolitan neighborhoods near or in proximity to the centers of foreign capital have received a disproportionate share of the new services and infrastructures. These inequalities are highly visible to an already economically fragmented population.” These geographies “create sites of inclusion and exclusion, effectively creating different sets of rights and opportunities for different segments of the population.”<sup>10</sup> Outside the privileged enclaves lie large tracts of decaying 1970s urban landscape. Thus while privatizing infrastructure helped alleviate fiscal pressure, new divisions and inequalities rendered in brick and mortar emerged. Indeed, many of the grievances focused on corruption in 2011 were animated by these privatized urban transformations.

Perhaps the most prominent, yet less analyzed, reaction to fiscal decline has been the effort to reform tax regimes. Though study of the effects of taxation on inequality and socio-economic grievance are limited, there are good reasons to believe these reforms aggravated inequality and contributed to popular perceptions of fiscal unfairness, all the while failing to reverse fiscal decline.<sup>11</sup> There are two tax measures of interest in this sense: total domestic taxation as a percentage of GDP and direct taxation as a percentage of GDP.<sup>12</sup> The total tax take is often used as a proxy measure for state capacity. The general consensus among developmental economists is for a developing state to take 20 percent of GDP in taxes.<sup>13</sup> As a state falls below this threshold or as the economy expands and taxation lags, “a strong momentum sets in...entailing the

substitution of private for formerly public services.”<sup>14</sup> But even if a state’s total tax take is high, important structural inequities can be obscured; therefore, the measure of direct tax over GDP gets at the important political question of who pays and who does not. Direct taxation – usually income collected at the source as opposed to value added taxes, customs duties, or other forms of indirect collection – requires the kind of deep roots in society Michael Mann termed “infrastructural power.” Income tax, in particular, requires a high degree of supervision and information collection, which, in addition to the institutional challenge, also entails a clear political challenge, since in theory direct taxation falls more heavily on the rich than the poor. So how do states in the Arab world match up?

(See Figure 2)

At first glance, the comparison shows that Arab states, similar to other developing regions, fail to capture much public revenue through taxation. But revenue statistics from Arab governments should be taken with a grain of salt as they are likely over estimated. What is actually reported as total tax collection by Arab governments is one problem. For example, Algeria, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Morocco have at times reported as part of taxation revenue proceeds from state-owned monopolies, like airlines, communications, pension funds, mining, and so on. In the case of Lebanon, most observers agree much of the country’s tax collection figures are periodic voluntary contributions not constitutive of a national tax regime. In lieu of a comprehensive review, it is reasonable to conclude that a more accurate measure of overall taxation in the Arab world is well below 15 percent of GDP. Turning to reported levels of direct taxation, there are more problems. For example, it is widely believed that Oman and Qatar’s reported levels of direct taxation are high because they include profits from state-owned mineral companies and levies on foreign corporations.<sup>15</sup> In fact, direct income extraction in the region is rare

9 Parker, C. (2009), “Tunnel-bypasses and minarets of capitalism: Amman as neoliberal assemblage,” *Political Geography*, 28:2, 127; and Soliman 2011;125)

10 Schwedler, J (2010) “Amman Cosmopolitan: Spaces and Practices of Aspiration and Consumption,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 30;3, 269.

11 Bibi, S. and Nabli, M.K. (2010) “Equity and Inequality in the Arab Region,” Economic Research Forum Policy Research Report, February.

12 For a discussion of different taxation measures in comparative studies see Lieberman, E.S. (2002) “Taxation Data as Indicators or State-Society Relations: Possibilities and Pitfalls in Cross-National Research,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36;4.

13 Lewis, W.A. (1966) *Development planning: The essentials of economic policy* Harper & Row

14 Goldstone, J.A. (1991) *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*, University of California Press, 491.

15 Henry, C. and Springborg, R (2012), *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East* Cambridge University Press, 76-79.

with only Jordan and Egypt attempting new income tax legislation in the last decade. Therefore, in the context of fiscal decline Arab states reacted by only lightly taxing their citizens and visitors. And where there are the most extensive efforts at tax reform in Jordan and Egypt, the results have been regressive and unequal. Research by Samer Soliman to access Egypt's disaggregated tax statistics (what actually comprises the levels in figure 2) revealed that over 60 percent of Egypt's reported taxes came from indirect fees and sales taxes. For Jordan, I found a similar pattern approaching 70 percent. Therefore, as revenue declined and public goods provision withered, authorities shifted more of the fiscal burden onto lower income groups and vulnerable consumers.

## Conclusion

Clearly, Kaldor's revolution and tax dilemma remains as fiscal decline has matured over decades in the Arab world. Regressive taxation, labor insecurity, and urban privatization emerged as short-term solutions to long-term problems. With the outbreak of mobilized protests in 2011 and enduring social unrest, the long term may be at hand. For understanding political economies of authoritarianism and its endurance, I believe there are two important implications. Basic rentier state theory holds that regime stability prevails as long as external rents remain in place.<sup>16</sup> When those rents decline, states are expected to turn to greater domestic taxation

entailing all the potential political effects. Building from Soliman's work, this cursory look at fiscal politics suggests those linkages have not panned out; fiscal decline and periodic revolt have proven more tenacious than fiscal strengthening. The popular focus on the effects of external revenue at the expense of a broader fiscal analysis proves misleading. At least in the leadership change cases of Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, there were no sudden or precipitous declines in external revenue. Rather, it was long run total financial decline and failed recouping measures that laid the groundwork.

Second, investigation into domestic tax regimes and public finance offer an alternative to theories emphasizing the strains of uneven modernization as explanation for the kind of rebellious opposition voiced against authoritarianism in 2011.<sup>17</sup> It puts the focus back on the politics and policies of authoritarian leaderships struggling to maintain political coalitions under deteriorating fiscal conditions. It suggests the evolution of a kind of "fiscal social pact" in which avoidance of direct or deeper forms of domestic extraction are replaced with policies clustering at the margins. From this perspective, there is every reason to conclude that the resurgence of the *mukhabarat* state promises continued fiscal decline.

*Pete W. Moore is the Marcus A. Hanna Associate Professor of Political Science and director of graduate studies at Case Western Reserve University.*

16 Morrison, K.M. (2009) "Oil, Nontax Revenue, and the Redistributive Foundations of Regime Stability," *International Organization* 63 (Winter).

17 Campante, F.R. and Chor, D. (2012) "Why was the Arab World Poised for Revolution? Schooling, Economic Opportunities, and the Arab Spring," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 26;12.



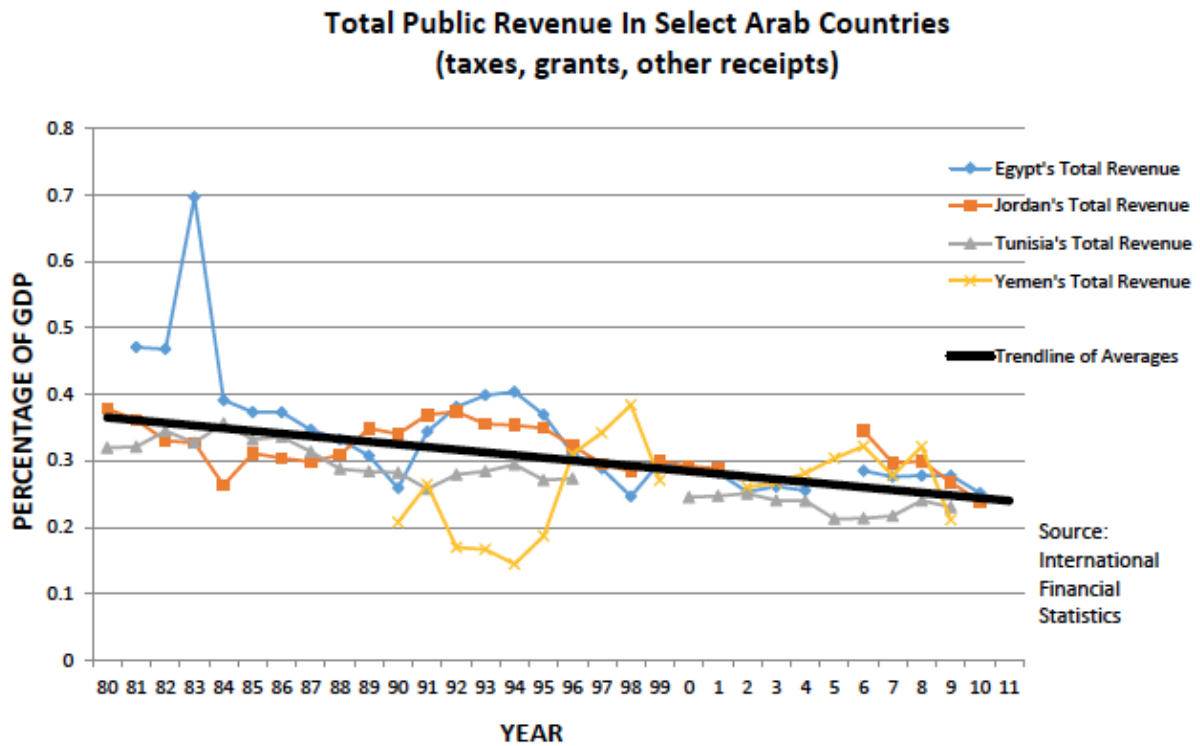


Figure 1

Source: Henry and Springborg, *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East*, 2nd edition, pp. 77-78.

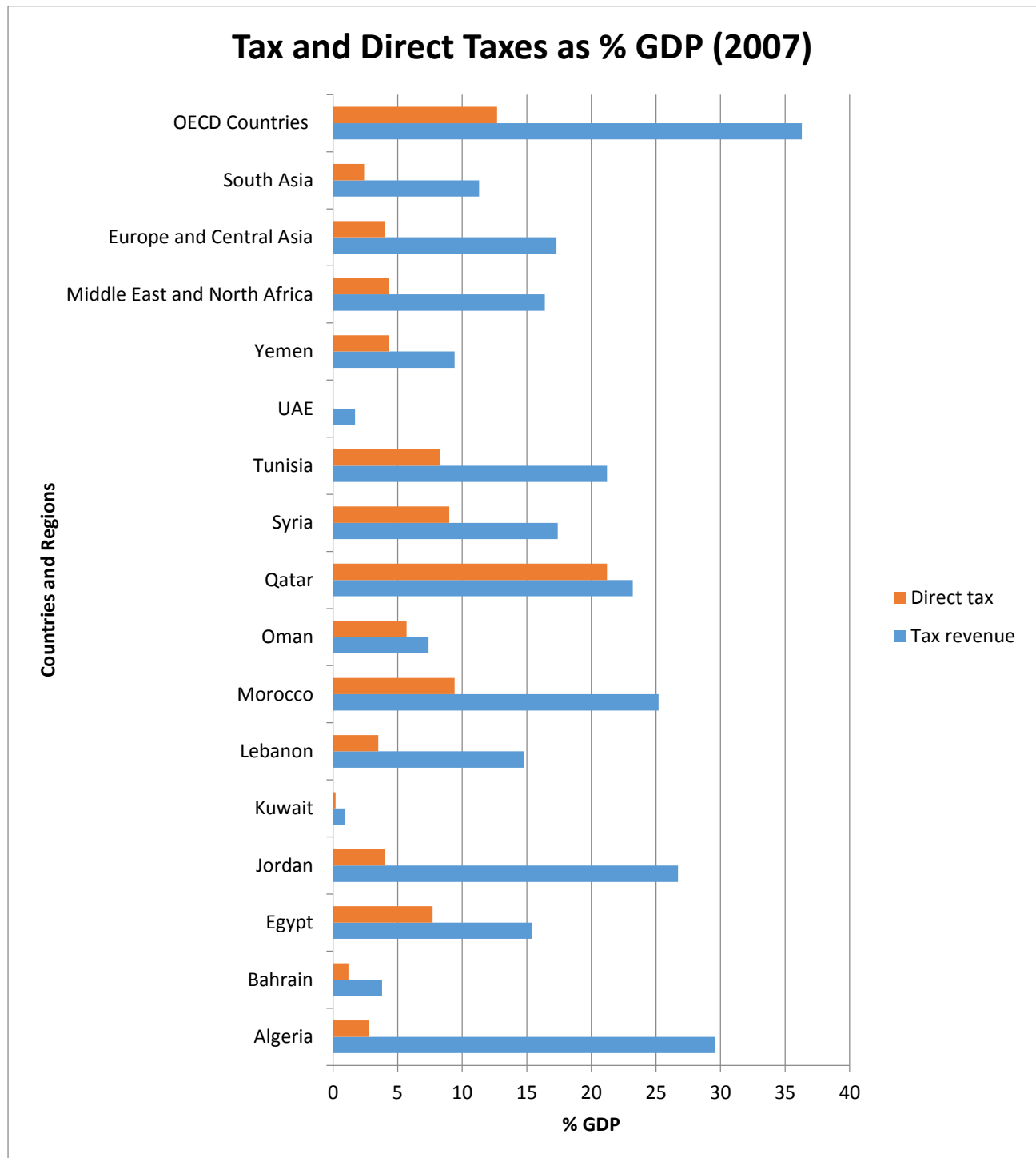


Figure 2

Source: Henry and Springborg, *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East*, 2nd edition, pp. 77-78.

# The role of militaries in the Arab Thermidor

By Robert Springborg, Sciences Po

*\* A version of this piece appeared on The Monkey Cage, December 5, 2014.*

If the subtitle of this workshop, “The Resurgence of the Mukhabarat State,” is meant to imply that resurgence of security and intelligence services is the key institutional feature of Arab “Thermidors,” it is misleading. It is the power of Arab militaries and militias, not *mukhabarat*, that has been dramatically enhanced in reaction to “Middle Eastern revolutions.” Egypt, now led by the former field marshal, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, is only the most obvious case in point of a region-wide trend that includes most other republics as well as monarchies. The Tunisian military, which served as the midwife of the “revolution,” enjoys much more status now than under either former presidents, Habib Bourguiba or Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Were the bumpy transition presently focused on end of year elections to derail yet again, the military might end up as at least the arbiter, if not the beneficiary of the ultimate allocation of political power. The struggle over command of the Lebanese military has been as intense, if rather less public, than the conflict over the presidential succession, suggesting the centrality of that institution to the country’s identity and politics.

In the other republics, whose states in general and militaries in particular have traditionally been less institutionalized than in those of Egypt and Tunisia, the resurgence of coercive power has been manifested in militaries and, to a greater extent, in militias. The Algerian military, the most robust of those in these other republics despite its internal divisions, has reasserted its centrality to *le pouvoir* at the expense of the Ministry of Interior’s Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (DST), the presidency, and even its very own Department of Intelligence and Security (DRS), over which the deciders generals have tightened their control. The fate of the shadowy forces allied to the military that formed shock troops against Islamist rebels during the civil war is

unknown, but presumably they continue to exist and could be mobilized again if necessary. Remnants of the Libyan military, an institution subordinated by Moammar Gaddafi to the autonomous *kataib* (battalions) commanded either by his sons or tribal allies, then further marginalized by the victorious militias, are now trying to stage a comeback under General Khalifa Hifter or with his allied militias based in Zintan. This reconstituted military-militia, however, is facing stiff opposition from Ansar al-Sharia and other tribally and regionally based militias that have prospered in the vacuum of state authority, key of which are those centered in Misrata.

Militaries and militias in pre- and post-Arab Springs in Syria and Yemen are similar to those in Libya. In both countries the national military was cleaved into *kataib* commanded by presidential allies tied to him by blood, tribe, or sect. Civil war in Syria elevated the role of the *kataib* most closely connected to President Bashar al-Assad, while marginalizing the broader military whose role has been assumed by a newly created National Defense Force trained by Iran, Hezbollah fighters, and mercenaries. The Yemeni military, through which former President Ali Abdullah Saleh exercised his tribally based power, supplemented by tribal militias, appears to be the last remaining sovereign institution standing between continued territorial integrity and a failed state, as frantic U.S. efforts to shore it up attest. In reality, however, after the collapse of General Ali Mohsen’s forces in September, the only remaining hard core of that military is the division commanded by Saleh’s son Ahmad, as militias associated with the Islamist *Islah* movement are becoming the principal armed forces of northern Sunnis. The rising strength of militias connected to the Zaidi Houthis’ Ansar Allah movement in the North and Hiraq secessionists in the South, to say nothing of various jihadi forces of which the strongest is al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, and of growing tactical alliances between these various challengers, suggest that like the Syrian military, the Yemeni one will be insufficiently

institutionalized to survive post-Arab Spring challenges in a unified, coherent form.

The Iraqi military, rebuilt on the foundations of the one disbanded by U.S. “Pro-Consul” Paul Bremmer, seemed to be a rather sturdier structure than the Syrian or Yemeni militaries, primarily because it was the main focus of U.S. state building efforts, hence the most important vehicle through which Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki could impose his control on the country. The collapse of much of that military when confronted by Sunni tribal militias and those of the Islamic State this spring and summer, however, revealed how fragile are the foundations a sectarianized state provides for its national military. Maliki and his successor, Haider al-Abadi, like their Syrian and Yemeni counterparts, were forced to turn increasingly to loyalist militias in the increasingly Hobbesian conflict in their country. And it is to those very same Shiite militias to which the United States has had to turn in its patchwork effort to contain the Islamic State in Iraq.

In the republics, men with guns are on the march. In Egypt and Tunisia the vast majority of them serve in national militaries that remain under a unified command and which continue to underpin national sovereignty. Although militias spawned by Islamist militants have emerged, in neither country do they pose a mortal threat to the military or the state. In Lebanon the army retains symbolic power as the embodiment of national sovereignty, as well as considerable coercive capacity. The latter is circumscribed, however, by Hezbollah and the military’s own internal divisions, key of which is that the largest source of recruitment into it is provided by northern Sunnis, the very community most alienated by the military’s increasingly intense combat with Syrian and Lebanese Sunnis fighting against Assad’s forces along the border. Algeria’s opaque military appears to have reasserted itself following the civil war and a struggle for power with President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and elements of security services allied to him, but it is neither as unified nor as central to the national narrative as the Egyptian or Tunisian militaries.

It is only in Egypt where the military was strong enough on its own to beat back forces unleashed by the Arab Spring. In Tunisia the military has essentially guarded the political arena in which contesting forces have vied for power, while simultaneously confronting various jihadist elements. In Algeria there was no Arab Spring to challenge indirect military rule, so the military has lain low, undermining other competitors for power within the state. But in all the other republics militaries have fragmented in greater or lesser measure, so are unable to serve as the key instrument of any attempted Thermidor, a role that is increasingly assumed by militias of various sorts. Whether in militaries or militias, however, power in the republics both before and after the Arab Spring has been exercised by those commanding armed forces, so it is their relationships to social forces, such as tribes and sects, and to other state institutions that determine the character of the regimes over which they preside.

In the monarchies, by contrast, power has been held by ruling families, not militaries or militias. At first glance royal power appears largely undisturbed by neighboring revolutions. This view, however, may be myopic. There are indications of what could be a historic power shift from royals to officers, possibly analogous to that which occurred some two to three generations ago in most of the republics. Frightened by Arab upheavals, royals have bolstered their militaries, not only enlarging them, in some cases via conscription, but also by providing them with yet more hardware, and by placing greater emphasis on the security dimension of their domestic and foreign policies. The focus on counter-terrorism, with lines being drawn in the sand between patriots and jihadis, real and imagined, raises political stakes and tensions while creating conditions associated with the realization of Max Weber’s “paradox of the sultan,” whereby a ruler’s growing dependence on the forces of coercion ultimately results in his subordination to them.

In this brief paper I explore the re-militarization and militiaization of the republics and apparent militarization of the monarchies as key features of the Arab Thermidor. The republics will be further divided into the categories

of “bullies” and “bunkers” that Clement Henry and I, and hopefully others, have found useful. Were space to permit, the monarchies would be divided between the paradoxically “liberal,” yet in some senses more militarized Morocco and Jordan, on the one hand, and those of the Gulf Cooperation Council, on the other. Alas, it does not, so the eight Arab monarchies shall be considered together. In all cases speculation will be offered on both the causes and potential consequences of regime militarization.

### **The “bully” republics: Egypt and Tunisia**

True revolutions, if by that we mean those resembling the French, Russian, or Iranian ones, can only occur when states are sufficiently strong, cohesive, and institutionalized for their power to be seized and then exercised by an alternative social force. In less integrated, weakly institutionalized states, assaults on regimes will likely exacerbate underlying socio-political tensions, resulting in fragmentation of power and even of the nation state itself. In the Arab world, therefore, only Egypt and Tunisia were likely sites for true revolutions. In the others, revolutionaries would not only have to seize state power, they would have to build it. In Egypt the revolution has obviously failed, while in Tunisia the prospects for a democratic transition, which may or may not be tantamount to a revolution, remain alive. It is from the Egyptian case, therefore, that we can draw more decisive conclusions about the causes and consequences of the failed revolution as they pertain to the role of the military.

The key actors in Egypt’s “coup-volution” of 2011 were then-President Hosni Mubarak and the presidential establishment associated with him and his family, the military, the Ministry of Interior, the remainder of the state apparatus, key of which was the judiciary, the Muslim Brotherhood, and secular “revolutionaries.” The onset of the coup-volution was unexpected by all, as similar upheavals were in other Arab countries. The revolutionaries did not see themselves as such, at least at the outset, when their self-perception was as protesters. They were thus not Bolsheviks, “Garibaldi” of 1848-49 Roman Republic fame, or Khomeinists and their fellow travelers in Iran in 1978-79. In these historical instances

opponents of the regime had been such for years and in all cases had come to the conclusion that they would have to overthrow incumbents by force. To do so they would have to neutralize if not altogether destroy the regime’s military. The revolutionary strategy thus focused on removing not just the ruler, but at least the high command, if not all of the military. In the case of the Iranian Revolution, for example, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini himself is reported to have thought long and hard about how to neutralize the military, ultimately devising a strategy intended to drive a wedge between commissioned and non-commissioned officers, attracting the latter to the revolutionary cause. In this he succeeded brilliantly, recruiting to the revolution non-commissioned air force technicians, *homafars*, who much begrudged their low status and poor pay and resented their much indulged, commissioned officers. The *homafars* then served as shock troops, wedging further open the commissioned, non-commissioned divide, contributing substantially to the military’s collapse.<sup>1</sup> The Bolsheviks did much the same, relying on mutinous naval officers, while Garibaldi recruited, among others, defectors from various forces on the Italian peninsula to defeat armies loyal to the Papacy and their Bourbon protectors before then being overwhelmed by invading French forces collaborating with counter-revolutionary Austro-Hungarian ones.

Egypt’s “circumstantial” revolutionaries, by contrast, were reformers surprised by their own success. They had no strategy other than calling for the fall of the regime once they had tasted power in Tahrir Square. Instead of devising ways and means to divide and conquer the military, they welcomed it, with its high command still in place, into the bosom of their revolution, where they hoped it would protect those demonstrating and fighting on the street from the forces of the Ministry of Interior. For its part the high command had its own reasons to dump Mubarak and bring the Ministry of Interior to heel. The Muslim Brotherhood constituted the third component of this coalition of unanticipated opportunity, into whose hands power was transferred on Mubarak’s

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1 On the vital role of air force technicians (*homafars*), see Stephanie Cronin, *Armies and State-Building in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2014, pp. 133-135.

departure. This minimum winning coalition of three, however, quickly became two, as the military and the Brotherhood jettisoned other “revolutionary” forces, of which they were both contemptuous and frightened, on the assumption that acting in concert they could govern and contain further opposition. Over the following two years the minimum winning coalition was reduced to one, the military, as the Brotherhood rendered itself vulnerable to exclusion and the revolutionaries fragmented yet further into political disorder and disempowerment. During that period the main battleground between the military and the Brotherhood was the state itself, key components of which were the Ministry of Interior, the judiciary, and the sprawling local administration, in that order. The Brotherhood made greatest headway in the ministry, where then-President Mohamed Morsi finally succeeded in late 2012 in appointing Major General Mohamed Ibrahim as Minister of Interior, who, if not an active sympathizer, was at least someone who would follow Morsi’s orders.<sup>2</sup> Fearing that its temporary political ally but long time mortal enemy, the Brotherhood, would begin to consolidate control over the Ministry of Interior’s large if rather disorganized and poorly trained armed forces, the military began in earnest to prepare the grounds to strike back, doing so in summer 2013. Presenting its coup as the fulfillment of the destiny of the January 25, 2011 revolution, the military thus succeeded in not just overwhelming the Brotherhood, but in subordinating the Ministry of Interior, the judiciary, the local administration apparatus, and other elements of the state to its control, to say nothing of the revolutionary remnants in civil society.

The military base being too narrow upon which to build a new regime, President Sisi will now have the luxury of selectively inviting into his winning coalition of one those state and non-state actors who will be of political, economic, and administrative use, with the candidates including crony capitalists, the broader bourgeoisie, other remnants of the Mubarak regime, Islamists other than the Brotherhood, traditional and tribal notables, unionists,

etc. This wide range of options attests to the remarkable strength of the military and profound weakness of other actors, the former’s prodigious superiority built on both soft and hard power. Indeed, the military has paid rather greater attention to bolstering the former than the latter, knowing that receptivity to its rule is more vital than its ability to fight. Key to burnishing its image has been distancing itself from its primary external supporter, the United States, against which it has positioned itself as the embodiment of a new Nasserism. The contradictions in this posturing, including real dependence on both the United States and the Saudis, the latter of whom were Nasser’s most important Arab opponents, to say nothing of Sisi’s cultivation of Egyptian “feudalist” equivalents to those expropriated by Nasser, will presumably become more evident to Egyptians as time passes. At present, however, the general willingness to gloss over such contradictions attests to the profound imbalance between the military and all civilian actors, and to the desperate hope for better lives, which only the strongman from the military is thought capable of delivering. Both these conditions are, however, likely to be temporary, as civil society will reconstitute itself and most lives are unlikely to be dramatically improved. Ultimately real pre-revolutionary conditions, both political and economic, may emerge. Those conditions would likely favor a hypothetical “proletarian” revolution rather than the “bourgeois” protest movement of 2011. In that case, unlike over the past three years, the military would be *a* if not *the* primary target of the revolutionaries, rather than its hoped for accomplice. In the meantime, however, the military is the only institution left in the state and the broader polity sufficiently coherent to exercise power, a condition that attests to the de-institutionalization of even the most structured of Arab republics.

### **The bunker republics**

As in Egypt, upheavals in the bunker republics were instigated by protesters, not hardened revolutionaries. But unlike in Egypt, rulers drew upon trusted kataib in efforts to crush those protests, thereby converting these confrontations into all out or near civil wars. The resulting pressure on these weakly institutionalized militaries neutralized or divided them, with the task of repression

2 Ibrahim El-Hudaiby, *Changing Alliances and Continuous Repression: The Rule of Egypt’s Security Sector*. Arab Reform Initiative, Debating Egypt (June 2014) [http://www.arab-reform.net/sites/default/files/Houdaiby\\_-\\_Egypt\\_Security\\_Sector\\_-\\_June\\_2014.pdf](http://www.arab-reform.net/sites/default/files/Houdaiby_-_Egypt_Security_Sector_-_June_2014.pdf)

assumed by existing or newly formed militias, whether from within the military or from society at large, or even from outside the country. For their part the protesters turned fighters formed their own militias and like the regimes, also drew upon external supporters. The entire process was thus one of militization, fragmenting not only militaries, but states and nations as well. “Tribes with flags” as these states had been – although their true, heterogeneous nature disguised by the homogenizing repression of their authoritarian rulers – these states are now dissolving into numerous tribes with their many flags. Nowhere has a reconsolidation or new consolidation of power occurred. Indirect rule by militaries has thus been replaced by direct or indirect rule by militias, either associated with or in opposition to preexisting states. As in Egypt, the resultant chaos may create a longing for the certainty and relative safety of direct military rule, but in the bunker republics social divisions combined with near or total collapse of regimes and militaries may prevent that from occurring.

### The monarchies

Arab monarchial coup-proofing strategies have included a mix of placing members of ruling families in command of militaries, keeping armies relatively small, counterbalancing militaries with security services and dividing the military itself, and recruiting mercenaries. With very occasional exceptions, such as in Morocco in 1971 and 1972, these strategies have met with success, as the continuation of these monarchial regimes attests. Possibly it is the confidence based on this success that has caused the key monarchs in the GCC, led by the Saudis, to bolster militaries – their own and others – to counter upheavals, without any apparent regard for the consequences for control over their militaries. In December 2013, the GCC announced the formation of a Joint Military Command to be headquartered in the Saudi Arabian capital of Riyadh. Saudi Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah, promoted by his father to minister of his country’s National Guard as part of the intricate positioning for succession, stated that 100,000 officers and men would be recruited for this new command. He added “the National Guard is ready

for anything that is asked of it.”<sup>3</sup> In March 2014, the GCC invited Jordan and Morocco to form a military alliance in return for unspecified “financial aid.” In theory this would bolster GCC forces by 300,000 men. Most of the GCC states have also announced intentions to build up their military capacities. In April Kuwait, which by 2014 had rebuilt its forces to the pre-1990 level of 17,000, announced it was establishing an office in Pakistan to recruit Pakistani trainers for Kuwaiti soldiers.”<sup>4</sup> In March 2011, Kuwait had supported the Saudi-led “Peninsula Shield” invasion of Bahrain with naval forces. Qatar in November 2013 and the United Arab Emirates two months later announced that conscription would be introduced, while Kuwait indicated that it was considering this step.<sup>5</sup> The UAE declared in early 2014 it was doubling its defense imports to \$3 billion by 2015.<sup>6</sup> Since 2007 the UAE has been second only to Saudi Arabia in acquiring U.S. military hardware through the Foreign Military Sales Program.

These and other measures reflect a large quantitative, possibly even qualitative change in the role of monarchial militaries, at least in the GCC. They are being assigned the key role in implementing an “Arab Thermidor,” wherever it should be needed, as has already been seen in Bahrain. It might well be that members of these ruling families also are motivated by the perceived utility of personal control over at least some component of the military in anticipated succession struggles. Saudi King Abdullah’s attempts to ensure succession through his line, for example, appears to rest heavily on control over the National Guard, which during his rule has been developed into a more potent force than the military, to say nothing of it becoming the personal fiefdom of he and his sons. Al-Khalifa control of

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3 Awad Mustafa, “GCC Seeks to Form Military Bloc with Jordan, Morocco,” *Defense News* (April 14, 2014) <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140414/DEFREG04/304140018/GCC-Seeks-Form-Military-Bloc-Jordan-Morocco>

4 Kenneth Katzman, “Kuwait: Security, Reform, and U.S. Policy,” Congressional Research Service, *CRS Report*, 7-5700 (April 29, 2014), p. 15.

5 Ola Salem, “UAE Cabinet Introduces Mandatory Military Service for all Emirati Males,” *The National* (January 20, 2014) <http://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/uae-cabinet-introduces-mandatory-military-service-for-all-emirati-males>

6 Caline Malek, “UAE Defence Imports to Double to \$3bn by 2015,” *The National* (February 27, 2014) <http://www.thenational.ae/uae/uae-defence-imports-to-double-to-3bn-by-2015>

the Bahraini military, al-Sabah control of the Kuwaiti one, and so on throughout the GCC, is likely also to become steadily more relevant to leadership succession as these ruling families multiply and divide and contestation for power between princes intensifies.

Monarchial militaries, in other words, are becoming double-edged swords. Increasingly capable of subduing revolutions at home or in the near abroad, they are being drawn more directly into intra-elite politics, where they could end up cutting into monarchial rule. As the stakes of militarization and military intervention steadily increase, so does the possibility of intra-family divisions between moderates and hard liners grow, as seems most apparent in Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Such intra-family divisions may in turn open up possibilities for non-royal officers, or even for non-commissioned officers working in league with revolutionary forces, as in Iran. In sum, monarchial militaries have as a result of Arab upheavals been substantially strengthened. At present they remain firmly under monarchial control, but their potential to intensify divisions within these ruling families and thereby to create opportunities for rule by commoners, whether officers or civilians, grows in tandem with their size.

### Implications and conclusion

Arab upheavals and reactions to them have resulted in a profound militarization of the Arab world. In the republics this has taken the form of remilitarizing Egypt, further entrenching the power of Algeria's military and possibly preparing the Tunisian military for an unaccustomed role in the future. In the other republics a Hegelian dialectic has pitted the kataib of regime supporting militaries against militias emerging from protest movements, with both sides attracting external support, including additional militias. In the monarchies ruling families have bolstered their militaries by increasing their capabilities and by roping them together in collective commands. They have done so primarily to confront and put down further upheavals, wherever in the Arab world they might occur, but probably also as part of intensifying intra-family power struggles. Lying atop this militarization is the U.S. presence in various forms, included as primary supplier and trainer, operator

of autonomous bases, or orchestrator of counter-terrorist campaigns.

This is a novel and dangerous development for the Arab world. The very existence of several of its key states is now in question as civil wars and insurgencies rage on. Those conflicts have already sucked in external forces and threaten to draw in more, while destroying whatever cohesion once existed in their militaries and other state institutions. Militaries that in the past were either parade ground forces, such as those in Tunisia or several GCC states, or that had through peace lost their *raison d'être*, such as in Egypt, are now being reinvigorated not only to combat internal threats, but as possible expeditionary forces to confront "terror" and instability in neighboring countries. This growth of military power may in many, if not all, cases be at the expense of whatever civilian control, whether royal or commoner, now exists. Re-imposition of direct military control will trigger civilian oppositions likely to take the form not of protest movements akin to Arab Springs, but of more classical revolutionary types, in which violence directed at instruments of coercion is a fundamental tactic. The temptation for regimes to rely more upon coercive power domestically and to project it beyond the border will grow stronger as militaries are strengthened. U.S. policy toward the region, increasingly focused on counter terrorism, is not restraining any of these processes. Indeed, it is contributing to them.

The Arab Thermidor, in sum, has stimulated militarization and militiaization that threaten the region's state system, to say nothing of its citizens. This growth of coercive power is in many if not most instances supported by a United States and Europe frightened of terrorism being projected against them or infesting failed states à la Afghanistan or Somalia. Militarization and militiaization may also come to be supported by other external actors interested in playing an enhanced role in this volatile region, not the least being Russia and China. By comparison the original Thermidor of July 27, 1794 looks pretty tame and simple, even if devastating for its victims, then and afterward.

*Robert Springborg is the Visiting Kuwait Professor at the Paris School of International Affairs at Sciences Po in Paris.*

# Militaries, civilians and the crisis of the Arab state

*By Yezid Sayigh, Carnegie Middle East Center*

*\* This piece appeared on The Monkey Cage, December 8, 2014.*

The civil-military relationship has proven central to the politics of many Arab countries, both those that underwent transition in 2011 and those that did not. The attempt to renegotiate constitutional frameworks and set up new political arrangements under conditions of profound uncertainty notably intensified existing patterns in their civil-military relations, to the point of transforming them. Those transformations also come in response to the longer-building crisis of the state, structural trends of social transformation and changes in global military affairs and security agendas pre-dating the Arab Spring.

The breakdown of authoritarian control and transition in systems of governance weakened political and legal constraints on the military in the Arab Spring countries. In Egypt and Tunisia, characterized by relatively strong state institutions and highly formal militaries, this enabled the latter to play a major political role. In Libya and Yemen, with their weak states and mutual penetration by strong societal forces, in contrast, the uprisings deepened tribal and regional cleavages within the military, accentuating its paralysis and disintegration. The outcome, in every case, has gone beyond changes in degree, to usher in a qualitatively new phase in civil-military relations.

The civil-military relationship is concerned centrally with questions about how to organize and use the means of violence controlled by the state, and against whom violence may be legitimately employed. For this reason, the nature and form of military organizations are intricately tied to the composition, internal balances and distribution of capital within their states and societies. The Arab Spring represented a moment of decisive rupture in systems of political and administrative control that triggered or enabled significant shifts in civil-military relations.

That rupture took place in the context of much longer-developing trends, however. Neo-liberal economic policies converged with two other long-term trends affecting civil-military relations in all Arab states. First, major demographic changes in Arab societies over the past four decades have generated massive urbanization, changing the nature and scale of security challenges and imposing new requirements on state agencies of coercion. This has converged, second, with the global “revolution in military affairs” and the rise of the counter-terrorism and security sector reform agendas since the 1990s. Together, the two trends have had transformative effects on Arab militaries, and altered the context within which their relations with civilian authorities and societies are conducted.

Starting in the early 1990s, emerging challenges prompted significant budget and manpower increases for the internal security sector in most Arab states, reflecting its growing political importance. In parallel, the relative decline of inter-state wars since the 1991 Gulf war and the re-launch of the Arab-Israeli peace process brought into question the purpose and utility of Arab armed forces. Although overall levels of defense spending did not drop among Arab states as a group, armies were increasingly refocused on regime maintenance and domestic law and order tasks. But as the Arab Spring later made graphically evident, their organization, training, armament and doctrine were highly inappropriate for intervening in large, densely populated metropolitan areas and diverse social constituencies.

Consequently, national armed forces in several Arab countries have been undergoing structural changes, as select units have been re-equipped and retrained for their new role. The growth of special forces, increasingly separate from conventional army branches, has accelerated since 9/11 as counter-terrorism has emerged as a central defining element in relations with Western security partners and providers of military technology and assistance. This coincides with the marked expansion

of militarized police and constabulary units in virtually all Arab countries, reflecting a shift within the internal security sector too, from old-style, under-funded and generally poorly-trained police forces toward specialized SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) and counter-terrorism units.

The trend is transforming some Arab armies – and most internal security sectors – into two-tier structures. On one hand, elite units comprising a small portion of total military manpower are privileged with better weapons, and training, pay and professional status. This moreover ties in with the impact of the global revolution in military affairs seen to be underway since the 1990s, in which new technologies are both enabling and necessitating the adoption of novel combat doctrines and tactics and their associated organizational forms. On the other hand lie the bulk of army personnel and conventional armor, artillery and infantry units, in many cases fielding aging equipment, mothballed heavy weapons and shrinking procurement budgets. The cumulative effect is to alter how the military relates to those in power and to society. Top tier units are by definition closest to the regimes they help maintain, and therefore often share the same sectarian, regional, or tribal outlook and threat perception of other communities within their own societies. For the much larger, lower tier, military employment offers a residual welfare system amidst the sharp reductions in social services and publicly funded job creation and widening income disparities that have accompanied the “retreat” of the state since the 1990s.

Paradoxically, the security sector reform agenda promoted by Western partners complicates matters: The impetus to disband or restructure regime maintenance units that are authoritarian holdouts or guilty of sectarian and other abuses deprives armies facing complex new security threats of their more effective assets, while neo-liberal policies and shrinking public revenue make it increasingly difficult to maintain existing military welfare systems for the majority at a time of deepening social strain and polarization.

As trends of demographic change converge further with

evolving security agendas in coming years, in a political economy setting characterized by distorted neo-liberal policies that further concentrate wealth and widen the gap between rich and poor, the organizational and doctrinal shifts discussed above will strain the political alignments and social alliances that underpinned past civil-military relations, opening the way for new kinds of relationships.

Among the 22 members of the League of Arab States, Algeria, Lebanon, Iraq, the Palestinian Authority, Somalia and Sudan remain in one phase or another of post-conflict transition, and Mauritania still lives out the consequences of its 2008 military coup d'état. In these countries, the relationship between military and civilian actors has shifted amidst the erosion of constitutional frameworks and agreed “rules of the game” for the conduct of politics, the hollowing out of the state in varying degrees and a drastic retreat of social pacts.

The resulting security dilemma has prompted the emergence of communal militias – based on sect, ethnicity, tribe or region. Some armed non-state actors have pursued alternative forms of state-building, the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Islamic State being two, diametrically opposed examples. In Iraq too, as in Syria, Libya, Sudan and Yemen, hybrid forms of “localized security” have emerged as governments have “deputized”<sup>1</sup> national defense and regime protection to a variety of communal militias, further undermining the central state and its armed forces.

The consequences are graphically illustrated in Iraq and Syria, where rebuilding broken armies and renegotiating the civil-military relationship has been an integral part of reconstructing the state and renegotiating its relationship with society as a whole in the former since 2003, or inevitably will be in the latter. In both countries, as indeed in others such as Libya and Yemen since 2011, this makes the reconstitution of a unitary, national military hostage to foundational struggles between diverse political and social forces. Attempts by new state leaders to use the armed

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1 Terms from Fred Wehrey and Ariel Ahram, “The National Guard in Iraq: A Risky Strategy to Combat the Islamic State,” September 23, 2014.

forces as a power base in Iraq and Yemen, for example, have been met with counter-moves by political rivals to mobilize the means of violence within their own social bases, further fragmenting national politics and deepening insecurity.

In Libya, the army was shaped by two main trends in the 20 years preceding the 2011 uprising: heavy recruitment from tribes and regions loyal to the country's leader, Col. Moammar Gaddafi, and marginalization after its failures in the 1980s border wars with Chad and the appearance of Islamists in its ranks in the early 1990s. The army divided along these fissures and effectively ceased to exist as a single operational force in 2011, with the brunt of the fighting being borne by revolutionary volunteer militias and regime maintenance forces, especially Gaddafi's "security battalions."

Since Gaddafi's overthrow, the same tribal, regional and institutional dynamics have completely stymied efforts by the transitional government to reestablish a national army. Instead, coercive power is divided once again between parallel military and security structures based on various revolutionary militia coalitions on the one side, and rump units of the regular army that are widely regarded as a refuge for *ancien regime* loyalists. The frailty of the Libyan state continues to be reflected in its official military, and vice versa, pointing to an outcome in which a new form of hybrid armed forces exists within an equally hybrid state, with the locus of power within the civil-military relationship devolved from the national to the communal or regional level.

The Yemeni army revealed a broadly similar pattern of determining recruitment and command appointments on the basis of regional and tribal affiliations. But it also differed in a significant respect. Until his departure from office in 2012, former president Ali Abdullah Saleh allowed his partners within the elite triumvirate that formed Yemen's ruling bargain to maintain separate fiefdoms within the army. Its paralysis during the 2011 uprising reflected the breakdown of this partnership, as its members aligned on opposite sides.

The same dysfunctional dynamic was reproduced as the same key elite players – with the addition of Saleh's successor, and now rival, interim President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi – competed to retain their influence in the context of the military restructuring process launched in 2013. The outcome was the collapse of the army as a command structure in the face of a totally new player, the Houthi rebels, who seized the capital and much of the country in summer 2014. In upending Yemen's power structure, and devising a *modus vivendi* with autonomous army commanders in some regions of the country, they have set its civil-military relationship on a new course.

Because of the centrality of violence in all these cases, military organizations of one kind or another will become increasingly prominent, if not primary, as institutional actors – whether this is in relation to national states or to increasingly autonomous and militarized sub-state communities. This promises to reverse the pattern established under authoritarian leaders such as Saddam Hussein, Hosni Mubarak, Hafez and Bashar al-Assad, and others, who asserted their suzerainty as civilian or civilianized presidents over the armed forces, marginalizing the latter politically. In turn, as military institutions once again become a central political actor – again, whether on the level of unitary states or of self-governing sub-state communities – factional struggles *within* their ranks may revive, possibly leading to a rerun of the fratricidal politics of many Arab armies from the 1950s to the late 1970s.

In Arab states with less visibly divided societies, other social trends and dynamics are shifting the pattern of civil-military relations. In Egypt and Algeria – and arguably also in Morocco – national armies that moved decades ago from "permanent coups d'état to influence and self-enrichment,"<sup>2</sup> as stated by Jean-François Daguzan, have seen their officer corps join their countries' "new" middle class. This presents a complete contrast to the era of the 1950s-60s in which lower-ranking officers from upwardly

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2 Jean-François Daguzan, 'Armées et société dans le monde arabe: entre révolte et conservatisme,' *note* n°05/13, Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, February 2013, p. 3.

mobile classes used their control of the state apparatus to bring about radical changes in the distribution of economic wealth and social power. Most Arab militaries are instead wedded today to the status quo underpinning neo-liberal economic and social welfare policies – that may co-exist comfortably with Islamism as a conservative social ideology – and willing to defend it to serve their own self-interest.

Long regarded as effectively ruling Egypt,<sup>3</sup> the Egyptian Armed Forces has asserted its formal suzerainty over the Egyptian state since February 2011, when outgoing president Hosni Mubarak transferred his powers to it. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces was reluctant to govern but equally unwilling to empower the transitional civilian cabinet it appointed, and proved grossly incompetent in its handling of the political process, economic recovery and reform of the state apparatus. Having been forced from its sheltered and largely apolitical position under Mubarak, it sought to reproduce its legal and institutional autonomy from civilian oversight by formalizing this in a series of constitutional amendments and provisions in 2011-14.

The overthrow on July 3, 2013, of then-President Mohammad Morsi, the first civilian to hold the post since the establishment of the republic in 1952, has led to complete military dominance of the Egyptian state. Since then, the “officers’ republic”<sup>4</sup> that had evolved in the Mubarak era – colonizing huge swathes of the state’s civilian bureaucracy, local government, general intelligence and central security forces, and state-owned commercial companies – has moved to the foreground and expanded further. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has appointed senior officers to additional positions – such as speaker of parliament – and assigned sweeping new powers to the EAF in the realm of domestic security and law enforcement. In the absence of an elected parliament and

senate, and following the loss of the relative constraints and balances of the Mubarak system and the dissolution of the country’s two largest political parties – the Muslim Brotherhood and National Democratic Party – Egypt is heading into an unambiguous military dictatorship.

Tunisia has been an outlier among the Arab Spring countries in the relative stability and progress of its democratic transition, but it too has undergone a subtle shift in its civil-military relations since the army helped oust former president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. The military eschewed a political role after Ben Ali’s ouster, instead transferring power to interim civilian bodies that assumed full responsibility for managing the transitional process. Senior officers attributed army neutrality to a strong republican ethos of obedience to legally constituted civilian authorities. But they also anticipated having a bigger, albeit advisory say in government policy in spheres that could arguably affect national security such as trade and education. And with an Islamist current within its own officer corps, the army will not remain immune to the political and ideological struggles underway in society. Its decades-long marginalization and insulation have come to an end.

The Tunisian army has already gained in importance as new threats loom. Countering illicit flows of refugees and arms from Libya and jihadist insurgency on the border with Algeria has brought an unfamiliar convergence with the Ministry of Interior, which had played the key role in monitoring the military prior to 2011. This coincides with a significant shift in Tunisia’s political landscape: The Islamist Ennahda party was overtaken in the general elections of October 2014 by the Nidaa Tunis party, a loose coalition comprising disparate secular and leftist political forces and figures associated with the Ben Ali era, and its preferred candidate for the presidency came second in the first round of elections in November to Nidaa Tunis head and former Ben Ali loyalist Beji Caid Essebsi. The army remains unlikely to play an overt political role, but may well become the balance holder between the rival secular-republican and Islamist camps – much as its counterpart in Lebanon does.

3 As argued, for example, by Steven Cook, *Ruling But Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey*, Johns Hopkins University Press for the Council on Foreign Relations, 2007.

4 For a brief discussion on the Egyptian case, see my *Above the State: The Officers’ Republic in Egypt*

In Jordan, conversely, an officer corps squeezed relentlessly by deepening neo-liberal policies played a key role in shaping the socio-economic and political demands of the grassroots protest movement that pressed the monarchy for genuine reforms in 2010-13. The challenge was ultimately contained, in part because the officers sought an adjustment of privileges more than a fundamental change in the social pact or political economy, but it demonstrated the potential for military activism and for a critical rupture within a well-established and highly stable ruling order. Conversely, the failure of democratic transition in Egypt, or in Algeria two decades earlier, revealed that the social conditions needed to underpin a transformation of civil-military relations – such as happened in Turkey by 2002 following the rise of a powerful “new” bourgeoisie autonomous from the state within a neo-liberal context – are not yet present in most Arab states.

The challenge to the Arab state is large and growing, even where the state is not in immediate or obvious crisis: Arab populations today are roughly three times their size in 1950-70. They are more than double what they were in 1973-74, at the start of the massive oil-funded expansion of the state sector, including the armed forces, and every aspect of society, bureaucracy and economy has become more diverse and complex. Civil-military relationships that were viable previously are becoming less sustainable, while the trend toward building “new” armies specializing in the

technologies of population control signals a bifurcation within the military that corresponds to multiple bifurcations within societies.

Crucially, these trends tend to work against, rather than for, peaceful or democratic transition, making progress toward *democratic* civilian control over armed forces even more difficult and painfully slow. Whether the military’s political role in association with autocratic regimes and powerful socio-economic elites is overt or not, its legitimacy or lack of it among the general public will derive not from abstract notions of the rule of law, subordination to civilian authority, and support for democratization, but from the tangible perception among important societal sectors that the military protect them from challengers who promote an alternative social order they regard as fundamentally threatening.

This is the tragic lesson of Egypt, Bahrain and Syria since 2011, and yet the gradual move toward a more balanced civil-military relationship in Tunisia, and even the turbulent hybrid reformulations of the civil-military relationship in Yemen and Libya, also point to other possible trajectories.

*Yezid Sayigh is a senior associate at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut.*



# Authoritarian populism and the rise of the security state in Iran

By Ali M Ansari, University of St Andrews

## Introduction

Debate persists as to the accuracy of the term “security state” to the contemporary Islamic Republic. At one extreme some continue to define the state as a functioning “Islamic Republic” albeit frayed at the edges and securitized inasmuch as its needs to respond – as Western states do – to the threats posed by terrorism and regional instability. Others argue that on the contrary, the Islamic Republic has become a militarized state in which the main decisions are now decreed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Perhaps the clearest advocate for the existence of a security or securitized state is President Hassan Rouhani, whose election platform in 2013 was in large part predicated on alleviating the excesses (if not dismantling altogether) of what was widely considered to be a “securitized” state (a term actually used by his mentor former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani).<sup>1</sup> Indeed Rouhani made extensive promises in his campaign to release political prisoners (at one stage caught up in the excitement of a rally he appeared to go further and promise to release *all* prisoners), as well as improve the position for students, academics, and the press.<sup>2</sup> Accepting its existence, the precise characteristics remain contested in what some regard as political rhetoric intended to damage the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, while others see its bases within the fundamental structures and transformation of the Islamic Republic itself. It is perhaps best to see it as a product of a structural transformation of the state, both ideationally and materially, taken to excess by the ideological zeal of the Ahmadinejad presidency. A fundamental distinction of the Iranian security state is the *arbitrary* exercise of repressive power, reflecting perhaps the political culture from which it has emerged.

1 See for example Shaul Bakhash, “Election: What Rouhani Victory means for Iran,” USIP, Iran Primer, June 15, 2013 <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2013/jun/15/electionwhat-rouhani-victory-means-iran>

2 See for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0CluzrbPJk>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqj5i40jsf0>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yble-i9Tx-c>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFGmzJwPqmw>.

## Origins

The constitution of the Islamic Republic is perhaps unique among modern constitutions in that it seeks to marry two quite different political ideas within one system. This is distinct from a system that seeks to combine different elements into a coherent whole drawing on its separate facets to deal with particular issues (as in, for example, the Roman Republican constitution which allowed for a temporary “dictatorship” in particular circumstances), or one that recognizes a separation of powers in which each constituent part recognizes its own limitations. On the contrary, the constitution of the Islamic Republic contains two contradictory pulls that are in explicit and deliberate tension with each other. We may term these the Islamic (authoritarian) wing centered on the Guardianship of the Jurist and the revolutionary organs of government, and the Republican (democratic) wing centered on the presidency and the orthodox institutions of government. Although the jurist, or Supreme Leader, enjoys constitutional precedence, considerable debate existed on the precise role of the jurist within the system and the balance of power between the two wings. The Iran-Iraq War and the charismatic authority of then-Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (which was accepted by broad portions of the revolutionary elite whether “Islamic” or “republican”) ensured that this difficult question was deferred, not least because Khomeini saw considerable merit in arbitrating between these tendencies in order to reinforce his own authority and power. After his death in 1989, the balance shifted emphatically toward the Republican wing in large part because of the forceful personality of the standard bearer of the republican side, Rafsanjani, and the weakness of Khomeini’s successor, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The high tide of republicanism came under the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, when a bold attempt to institutionalize the tendency established by his predecessor was attempted.

Rafsanjani has sought to establish a political settlement on the country in which the republican institutions would enjoy a pre-eminence over the revolutionary structures, which Rafsanjani sought (but failed) to curtail and subsume. A good example was the merger of the Revolutionary Guards within the military hierarchy and structure of the regular military. The intention was to integrate and discipline this hitherto and somewhat wayward force that owed its allegiance to the Supreme Leader and the “revolution” (loosely defined), as opposed to the state. The move was not popular and its limitations were to be revealed when it soon became apparent that for all practical purposes it was the military that was subsumed under the distinct political culture of the IRGC and not the other way around. Similarly, if more dramatically, the pro-Khatami Iranian press revealed in 1999 that “rogue” elements in the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence (*Etelaat*) had been pursuing a policy of assassinating intellectuals in an effort to derail the Reform Movement and the drive toward republicanism. The emerging scandal resulted in the closure of the newspaper involved and a student uprising. Although observers have concentrated on the suppression of that uprising, less attention was paid to the government investigation that followed, which not only exonerated the students, but led to a wholesale purge of the Intelligence Ministry. With the dramatic landslide victory of the Reformists in the 2000 parliamentary elections, it seemed as if the Republican wing had triumphed. It was a triumph that proved to be both Pyrrhic and premature.

### Constructing a culture of paranoia

The purging of the Ministry of Intelligence, apparent curbing of the power of the IRGC, along with the restrictions of the power of the Supreme Leader implicit in the institutionalization of the republican organs of government, all effectively conspired to yield a calculated, determined, and highly strategic backlash with the avowed intention of not only reversing the democratic trend but of eliminating it altogether. The strategy involved the provision of a renewed ideological justification for the establishment of an authoritarian security state in which an atmosphere of fear provided both the “problem” to be

solved, and the solution. In sum, a culture of paranoia both justified the security state and sustained it.

Few events exemplified this process at work as well as the serial murders that took place in Kerman in 2002. There had been repeated attacks on what we might term the agents of change for a number of years and students and journalists roved especially vulnerable to the vagaries of the repressive state apparatus. But in the aftermath of the chain murders of 1998-99 the activities of state agents had been curtailed as far as wider society was concerned. Indeed, insofar as a culture of fear was encouraged the hardline state had targeted political opponents; the most obvious and egregious was the assassination attempt on the architect of reform, Saeed Hajarian in 2000 (in the immediate aftermath of the parliamentary election victory). This attack at point blank range that failed to kill Hajarian (but left him as a paraplegic) had a profound effect on Khatami and arguably proved a turning point in his own willingness to pursue dramatic change. But the serial murders in Kerman targeted society in general with the aim of instilling widespread fear. In the aftermath of the chain murders, religious scholars such as the cleric Mohsen Kadivar, had publicly argued that in an Islamic state, assassinations and extra judicial killings authorized through the issue of a fatwa were illegal.<sup>3</sup> It was true that the head of the Ministry of Intelligence was traditionally a cleric able to issue fatwas just for this purpose but it was not intended for the prosecution of political enemies within, only in exceptional cases in which the security of the state may be threatened from without. But these murders only engaged agents of the state in the loosest sense and more worryingly suggested that the state had outsourced its “monopoly” of violence to vigilantes.

The vigilantes in question were members of the local Basij militia who had decided to take to heart the admonishment of a particularly hardline cleric to root out social corruption. Their idea of social corruption was the least broadly defined, and the hapless victims found themselves murdered on the most casual of social infringements. The

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3 Kadivar M *Bahā'ye Azadi: defa'at Mohsen Kadivar (The Price of Freedom: the defence of Mohsen Kadivar)* Ghazal, Tehran, 1378, p 188.

local authorities, astonished at such behavior, had the Basijis arrested, charged, and convicted. This was tragic, but it was what happened subsequently that stunned the legal profession in Iran and alerted anyone paying attention that some quite astonishing developments had been taking place in the political fabric of the country. The Basijis appealed to the higher court in Tehran in 2007, which overturned the conviction on the basis that the burden of proof lay with the deceased. In other words, the motives of the assailants had been genuine and it was put to the victims to prove they had not been sinful! This judgment caused widespread consternation in the legal community.<sup>4</sup> After further appeals the convictions were eventually restored though the punishment meted out proved light (the payment of modest blood money), but the fact that the higher court in Tehran could issue such a ruling in the first place reflected just how diminished any sense of human security had become.

### **Authoritarian populism and the rise of the security state apparatus**

The author of the original admonishment was reportedly Ayatollah Misbah-Yazdi, the hard-line cleric tasked with providing the ideological framework and justification for the elimination of reformism and the establishment of an authoritarian security state. One of the central pillars of his ideology was to declare all supporters of reformism – and Western ideas in general – to be heretics and therefore beyond the legal protection of Islam. With a wave of the theological wand major sections of Iranian society were deemed beyond the pale and therefore legitimate targets of the most repressive coercion and exercise of state terror. None of this was explicitly stated but just how widespread the sentiment was felt among key sections of the security forces was made clear during the presidential election crisis of 2009, when hitherto conservative Ayatollah Sanei (turned reformist) gave a now famous sermon on the uses and abuses of the term *kufri*.<sup>5</sup>

4 Nehmat Ahmadi;Negahibehparvande-yeghatl-hayemahfeli-ekermanazaghaztakoonon'(A look at the file of Kerman serial murders from the beginning to the present), *Etemad*, 29 Farvardon 1386 / April 18, 2007.

5 See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piTnluYQtos>.

The construction of the security state had three dimensions; the first and arguably most important was an ideological framework. This was the task delegated to Misbah-Yazdi and he focused on consolidating the authority of the Supreme Leader as a counterweight to the popularity of reform. The concept of the *velayat-i-faqih* (the theological basis of the Supreme Leader) was redefined as pillar of the faith, belief in which was mandatory for all “true” Muslims. Moreover the Vali-e Faqih acted on behalf of and indeed in place of the Hidden Imam and enjoyed all the latter’s powers, such that by 2009, and much to the embarrassment of many mainstream commentators in Iran (lay and religious), Misbah-Yazdi could claim that obedience to the Supreme Leader (and whosoever he anointed – in this case the president) was therefore the equivalent of obedience to God.<sup>6</sup> It is a remarkable irony that in a theological innovation many orthodox Muslims would consider blasphemous, Misbah-Yazdi provided the device by which those who did not “believe” could be designated heretics. Belief in the Vali-e Faqih was necessary not only for the defense of Iran but for the wider Islamic world against the depredations of the materialist West (the Great Satan broadly defined) and effectively became a sanctuary against a violent and oppressive world, against which all “true” believers had to remain vigilant. This ideology was extended to a cult of personality around Khamenei in which the latter became not only the shield, but the route to salvation.<sup>7</sup> In simple political terms it allowed those in authority to define those within and those without. Given the suspension of rationality required to believe in such an ideology (and it was often taken to extremes to test that “faith,” the more blind the better), it is not surprising that those considered on the outside emanated in large part from the universities and journalism: those areas where critical thought had been encouraged.

A second important aspect was the expansion and entrenchment of the security apparatus. The purge in 2000

6 “Misbah Yazdi: eta’at az rais jomhur, eta’at az khodast!” [Misbah Yazdi: obedi- ence to the President is obedience to God], *Tabnak*, August 13, 2009 [www.tabnak.com/nbody.php?id=8792](http://www.tabnak.com/nbody.php?id=8792)

7 See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUyaL1wfyQ>.

had resulted in many operatives simply moving to other institutions such that within a few years the Ministry of Intelligence became the least harmful of all the security establishments (Iranians joked that at least it had remain [technically] accountable). Many rogue elements went to work in a new intelligence wing of the hardline judiciary, still more went into the security services of the IRGC, and it was this organization that basically took over the running and oversight of the various intelligence and security organizations (as it had effectively taken over the running of the armed forces). These agencies were ultimately accountable to Khamenei who was in turn only accountable to God.

The final and perhaps most difficult and controversial element came with the desire to popularize this transformation and eradicate the social roots of reformism once and for all by providing for a popular authoritarian who would weaken the republican institutions of government. This was achieved by Ahmadinejad, a hitherto unknown political aspirant with a popular touch, well connected with the Basij militia (itself long since drawn under the wing of the IRGC), and a devotee of Misbah-Yazdi. Ahmadinejad's function – the limitations of which he never fully appreciated – was to effectively replace Khatami and the reform movement in the hearts of the people. While he had limited success in this regard in large part because of his lack of empathy or sympathy with the very target groups (students and journalists) that Khatami had cultivated, the hardline press, and the Supreme Leader spared no effort in eulogizing the popularity of the new president as a man with the popular touch with “real” Iranians (a narrative seized upon and endorsed by sections of the Western media). Indeed as an extension of Misbah-Yazdi's theological distinction between true believers and heretics, Ahmadinejad developed a notion of us and them, identifying “them” as rabble, societal rubbish, and ultimately in 2009 as seditionists (fitne-gar) an identifier that neatly combined the secular with the theological. Ahmadinejad's main device in this period however was the near complete subjection of the republican organs of government to the revolutionary or shadow government identified with the Supreme Leader. Economic interests

were effectively wholesale transferred to the IRGC while the mechanisms of accountability were diminished or removed. As with the army and the IRGC, a movement in one direction had effectively reversed into a consolidation of the Supreme Leader's authority justified on the basis of an ever present threat that needed heightened security.

## 2009

All these strands effectively came to a head during the presidential election crisis of 2009. A reformist reaction through the ballot box was effectively and ruthlessly crushed on the basis that reformists were at least Western fifth columnists determined to diminish of, not eradicate altogether, the office of the Supreme Leader, and at worst heretics. Faced with the prospect of a populace losing its fear of the authorities a determined strategy of terrorization was implemented by which arbitrary killings took place combined with abductions and tales of torture (along with threats to family members) and in the last measure, a narrative of impending anarchy if the protesters were left unchecked. The authorities constructed a complex paranoid narrative about the roots of seditions, which extended into the universities, and the entire world view of reformist or Western ideas, that needed to be ruthlessly uprooted. Show trials in the summer of 2009 went so far as to try the long dead German sociologist Max Weber for sedition!<sup>8</sup> The tragic irony of all this was it was the very development of the securitized state through the first decade of the 21st century that generated the very existential reaction the authorities all feared: a culture of paranoia that has proved dangerously self defeating and that the election of Rouhani in 2013 has done little, as yet, to ameliorate.

*Ali M Ansari is a professor in the School of History at the University of St Andrews.*

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<sup>8</sup> For the full indictment against the Islamic Iran Participation Front, see “Matn kamel keifar khast aleye ozaye mosharekat va mojahedin enqelab” [The complete transcript of the indictment against the members of the Participation Front and the Islamic Mojahedeen], [www.ayandeneews.com](http://www.ayandeneews.com) August 25, 2009.

## Is Libya a proxy war?

*By Frederic Wehrey, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*

*\* This piece appeared on The Monkey Cage, October 24, 2014.*

Recent reports of Egyptian military aircraft bombing Islamist militant positions in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi have highlighted once more how the Mediterranean state has become a contested site of regional proxy wars. The projection of Middle Eastern rivalries onto Libya's fractured landscape has a long pedigree, dating back to the 2011 revolution and perhaps even further, when Moammar Gaddafi's propaganda apparatus portrayed the country as a plaything at the mercy of predatory imperialists. During the uprising, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar jostled for influence, with their respective special forces supporting disparate revolutionary factions with intelligence, training and arms. Initially, the choice of actors had less to do with ideological affinity and more with expediency, history and geography. Libyan expatriates residing in each country shaped the channeling of funds and weapons.

As the revolution wore on, these interventions had a profound effect on its trajectory and aftermath. The availability of outside patronage reduced incentives for factional cooperation and consensus-building on the ground. It sharpened preexisting fissures in the anti-Gaddafi opposition: Revolutionary factions competed for arms shipments, withheld foreign intelligence and targeting data from one another, and tried to outmaneuver one another in the revolution's endgame – the liberation of Tripoli.

But the intra-regional tussling of the 2011 revolution pales in comparison to the intensity of today's proxy war. Back then, the factions and their foreign backers were at least united in the common goal of toppling a universally despised tyrant. Today, the outside powers are engaged in a struggle far more divisive and consequential: a war of narratives.

A dangerous scenario looms ahead. Backed by Egypt and the UAE, the Libyan government is extending the narrative of its counter-terrorism struggle against jihadists in Benghazi to include what is effectively a multi-sided civil war in Tripoli and the western mountains – of which Islamists are only one player. It is a multifaceted struggle that is only partially understood, and for which the literature on proxy interventions does not fully account.

Political scientist Karl Deutsch forwarded an early definition of proxy wars as: “an international conflict between two foreign powers, fought out on the soil of a third country; disguised as a conflict over an internal issue of that country; and using some of that country's manpower, resources and territory as a means for achieving preponderantly foreign goals and foreign strategies.” Recently, Andrew Mumford criticized this definition for being “too state-centric,” arguing instead that proxy wars are “conflicts in which a third party intervenes indirectly in order to influence the strategic outcome in favor of its preferred faction.”

In the Libya case, however, neither definition is satisfying because they leave out the crucial element of narrative.

The inflection point in Libya's post-revolutionary narrative arguably came from outside the country, in the rise of now-President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in neighboring Cairo. Without meaning to intervene, at least initially, the Egyptian strongman cast a long and ultimately polarizing shadow over Libya's unsettled politics. In both word and deed, he was an exemplar to embattled and desperate segments of the Libyan population: The ex-regime officials, key eastern tribes, federalists and younger liberals, who began idolizing the military uniform, the proverbial “man on horseback,” as the salvation for the country's worsening violence and, less nobly, a way to exclude their ideological opponents from power.

To be sure, the maximalist positions and immaturity of Islamist politicians in Libya's dysfunctional parliament, and especially their channeling of funds to revolutionary militias and, in some cases, U.S.-designated terrorist groups like Ansar al-Sharia at the expense of the regular army and police, bear much of the blame for this desperation. But the narrative shift imparted by the "Sisi Effect" meant that previous debates in Libya about dialogue, disarmament and reintegration were replaced with the more toxic and unyielding discourse of a "war on terror." And perhaps most importantly, the rise of Sisi created a new part in Libya's narrative script, waiting for an actor to play it.

That actor, as is well known, is Gen. Khalifa Hifter, the septuagenarian commander of Libya's disastrous intervention in Chad, defector, and 20-year resident of northern Virginia who returned in 2011 in an unsuccessful bid for military leadership. In May 2014, Hifter announced the launch of Operation Dignity, a coalition of eastern tribal militias, federalists and disaffected military units, which began shelling the positions of Ansar al-Sharia and Islamist militias in and around Benghazi. In both tone and action, Hifter tried to align himself early on with Egypt's military regime, which has been fighting its own Islamists in Egypt. Hifter also directly called on Egypt to use "all necessary military actions inside Libya" to secure its borders. At the same time, he declared Operation Dignity to be aimed at preventing Islamists from threatening "our neighbors in Algeria and Egypt," further emphasizing the regional aspect of his campaign. There were echoes of neo-Nasserism in his rhetoric. He claimed that he and Sisi agree that fighting terrorism is a way to "emphasize our Arab identity." He pledged that he would not permit any anti-Egyptian militants to exploit Libya's eastern border as a safe haven.

Egypt has very real security concerns about the porous Egyptian-Libyan border. Multiple media reports and U.N. investigations have long singled out the border as a major entry point for weapons and militants destined for the Sinai, Gaza and onward to Syria. Gunmen reportedly based in Libya killed 21 Egyptian border guards in July.

But as I recently argued, Egypt's motives in Libya follow a timeworn tactic of deflecting internal problems onto an external source. Much of Egypt's border insecurities lie on its side of the frontier: Its governance deficiencies in the Western Desert – specifically, its policies of co-opting local tribal and religious elites without addressing deeper structural problems related to land ownership, infrastructure and employment.

Ironically, Hifter's anti-Islamist campaign in the east, while originally intended to reduce the threat to Egypt, may have actually heightened it. The campaign has compelled Islamist militias in Benghazi to combine their firepower into a single coalition, undermining the political space for the more pragmatic Islamist factions. It sparked a counter-mobilization in Tripoli, the so-called Operation Dawn, a coalition of militias from Misrata, Amazigh factions, western towns and Islamists. This coalition attacked Tripoli International Airport, which was controlled by Zintani militias allied with Hifter. Having seized the airport, certain Dawn factions have taken their campaign into the western Nafusa mountains, even reportedly going so far as to conduct airstrikes of their own on Zintan.

Egypt wanted a reliable partner to fight Islamists in Libya, but Egyptian leaders are not impressed with Hifter's campaign. Egypt has found its local proxies rife with competing agendas and deficiencies in competence. There are now increasing signs that Cairo is distancing itself from Hifter. One retired Egyptian general complained that while Hifter "is doing his best ... he has not proved that he can really put the Islamist radicals in their place."

More recently, Sisi has invoked the anti-Islamic State clause to justify Egyptian support to Libya's government. The Egyptian president's recent offer of military assistance to Operation Dignity was explicitly framed as part of a broader anti-Islamic State fight. Leaked documents in mid-September purportedly showed that this was not merely an offer but rather a formalized agreement of military cooperation between the two states. The Egyptian media has bolstered the narrative as well. Cairo is home to several pro-Dignity media outlets, including the Libya Awalan

TV station owned by Hasan Tatanaki, a Libyan business magnate with a virulently anti-Islamist outlook, and a more recent addition with the giveaway name of Karama (Dignity) TV.

A recent emphasis in the Egyptian media has been on the burgeoning presence of the Islamic State on Egypt's border, particularly after the Islamic Youth Shura Council, a jihadist faction in the Libyan port city of Darna, announced that Darna was a territorial dependency of the Islamic State. This is an alarming development but one that should be tempered by the questions that still remain about what this means operationally for the training and facilitation of fighters, given the geographic space that separates the two and that the Islamic State has yet to respond to the Darna group's unilateral declaration. Moreover, the jihadi field in eastern Libya, particularly in Darna, has been rife with fissures and debates about tactics and also fealty to the Islamic State. Most significantly, the Islamic Youth Shura Council has been engaged in a running battle for influence in Darna with the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade, which rejected its claim. Recently, three members of the brigade fled Darna after the Shura Council sentenced them to death for not pledging allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The Shura Council's recent appeal to the supra-nationalism of the Islamic State smacks of a bid to outmaneuver its local rival for popular support. Ansar al-Sharia, in both Darna and Benghazi, has yet to come down one way or another on support for the Islamic State.

For its part, the UAE has been both a partner and an instigator of Egyptian intervention. The UAE's activism is informed by a broader concern about the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and the growing influence of its rival Qatar in Libya's post-Gaddafi order. Yet it too has framed its involvement in Libya as part of a broader fight against al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Emirati military links inside Libya have a long pedigree, dating back to the 2011 revolution, when its special forces channeled support to the Zintani militia brigades that are currently allied with Hifter against the Misratan, Amazigh (Berber), Islamist and Nafusa-based armed groups comprising the Dawn coalition. The UAE has long hosted politicians hostile

to the Brotherhood and allied with Operation Dignity, including Mahmoud Jabril, chairman of the National Forces Alliance (NFA) and Aref Ali Nayed, currently the Libyan ambassador in Abu Dhabi. In the wake of Hifter's campaign, the UAE intensified its military involvement. Operation Dignity's stalling in Benghazi and the apparent advances of Misratan armed groups in the battle for Tripoli's airport prompted the Emiratis to respond with a series of nighttime airstrikes on the Misratan positions. Emirati special forces also purportedly launched cross-border raids to demolish a jihadist training camp outside of Darna.

Qatar has reportedly stepped up its assistance to the Dawn faction, allegedly acting in coordination with Turkey and Sudan. As a forthcoming edited volume on the history of the Libyan Revolution makes clear, it was Qatar's growing support of the network of Islamist revolutionaries clustered around the Doha-based cleric Ali Sallabi that pushed Jibril and Nayed to solicit greater backing from the UAE, France and the United States. Qatari aid also induced splits in the opposition as Ismail Sallabi – Ali's more radical younger brother and the commander of a Benghazi based militia – tussled with Hifter over weapons shipments. The two are now bitter foes in the ongoing fighting in Benghazi. In the Nafusa mountains, there were similar fissures: The UAE set up an operations room and channeled support to Zintan, while Qatar favored nearby Nalut because of the presence of fighters from the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). Contrary to common assumptions, Doha did not back the former muqatilin (fighters) from the LIFG because of an Islamist project but because it assessed them to be among the more cohesive and capable of the revolutionary factions. Qatar also opened up independent channels of support to Misratan notables and revolutionary leaders, many of whom are now key in the anti-Hifter Dawn coalition.

Operation Dignity attacks in Tripoli have been accompanied by allegations of Qatari support to Tripoli-based Misrata and Islamist factions, using Turkey and Sudan as intermediaries. With Tripoli's airport non-operational, Qatari cash and weapons shipments are

believed to be funneled through the Matiga airport, on the eastern flank of Tripoli, which is under the control of Islamist militias. The alleged support from Qatar has produced an escalatory response from Operation Dignity forces, with dire consequences for civilians caught in the crossfire. As early as June, Hifter asked Turkish and Qatari citizens to leave eastern Libya within 48 hours, claiming “those with Qatari and Turkish passports are intelligence agents and consultants supporting the Islamist forces.”

In many respects, the war of narratives underway in Libya is a mirror of the polarization that is underway in the Gulf itself and in the broader Arab world. In tandem with Saudi Arabia, the UAE has erected what amounts to a legal, political and military cordon sanitaire against Islamist political mobilization, specifically from the Brotherhood. What is remarkable about Gulf intervention is the brazenness of it and that the opposing Gulf states – UAE and Qatar – are both members of the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition. Together with Egypt, the UAE, Qatar and Turkey were among the signatories of a recent 13-country statement pledging non-interference in Libya’s internal affairs. But such oaths ring hollow in the face of recent airstrikes and the under-the-table shipments of funds and weapons.

More recently, the dragnet against activists in the UAE has extended to Libyan opponents of Operation Dignity; at least 30 Libyan nationals have been arrested in the UAE, including an Al Jazeera employee. At least two of those arrested were Libyan businessmen who had been residing in the UAE for more than 10 years, and their links to Libyan political actors, let alone radical groups, have yet to be corroborated. Human rights organizations have expressed outrage at the extrajudicial nature of the detentions – conducted without warrants – and warned of the potential for the prisoners to be tortured like Egyptians who were arrested a year before. As the arrested Libyans remained missing as of early October, Human Rights Watch issued a call for the UAE to reveal the locations of the “disappeared” Libyans.

Meanwhile, Thinni recently vowed to “liberate” Tripoli, and the Libyan parliament in Tobruk voted to bring Hifter and his forces under the purview of the government. Having realized the limits of airstrikes in dislodging entrenched opponents in an urban setting, the Dignity forces are now calling for tribal and societal mobilization in both Benghazi and Tripoli. U.S. commentators have argued that Washington should lend greater military support to the Dignity forces, throwing its lot behind the UAE and Egypt in their intervention. But such a policy would invariably throw the country deeper into chaos and intensify the very radicalism that the United States is keen to combat.

For now, the United States is steering a middle ground. In repeated statements, U.S. officials – along with the United Nations and Western diplomats – have emphasized political reconciliation rather than military force as the solution for Libya’s conflict. But future U.S. engagement is fraught with pitfalls. Plans for U.S. military assistance to Libya are guided by a broader counter-terrorism strategy, which relies heavily on training and mentoring local special operations forces. Undertaking such an effort now, amid Libya’s fractured politics, risks falling into the narrative trap being set by one side in the struggle, with the support of its outside patrons. Injecting a new military force into an already divided security sector will likely perpetuate the conflict without decisively resolving it. The United States should hold off on training the Libyan military until a national reconciliation is enacted and a unified government is in place. It should work toward creating security forces that are representative of all of Libya’s tribes and regions, and it should ensure that these forces are placed under the close control of an inclusive, civilian and elected government with broad national representation.

*Frederic Wehrey is a senior associate in the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a frequent visitor to Libya.*

## Elite fragmentation and securitization in Bahrain

*By Toby Matthiesen, University of Cambridge*

*\* This piece appeared on The Monkey Cage, December 5, 2014.*

In February 2011, Bahrain probably had the highest ratio of protesters as part of the citizen population of any of the Arab countries. In the preceding decade, its security establishment, while never totally absent from politics, had become less visible. In mid-March 2011, however, the security forces were able to instigate a broad clampdown against the mobilized public and ensure the survival of the regime within a matter of days. How can this be explained? And what are the enduring consequences of the resurgence of Bahrain's security state?

The general phenomenon of popular challenge and regime crackdown in Bahrain is not new, of course. Bahrain has experienced mass movements for democratic reform throughout much of its modern history. In most cases, harsh repression and the awarding of extraordinary powers to the security forces effectively ended those cycles of protest. In 1956, the leaders of a cross-sectarian reform movement, the High Executive Committee, were arrested and exiled, and many others were imprisoned at home. In 1965, a broad-based workers' uprising that paralyzed key parts of the economy was suppressed. Thereafter, the British government installed Ian Henderson, a colonial police officer who had participated in the suppression of the Mau-Mau rebellion in Kenya in the 1950s, as head of security in Bahrain. He would oversee the creation of a special investigations unit to track domestic opponents. This unit was also key in protecting the regime after the ruler Sheikh Isa bin Salman al-Khalifa aborted the parliamentary experiment from 1973-75 and abolished parliament.

Until the late 1970s, the main opposition to the al-Khalifa had come from revolutionary Arab nationalists and communists, and to a certain extent both groups had a cross-sectarian and cross-ethnic base, ensuring that

most groups of citizens would be subject to surveillance. But in the late 1970s and in the 1980s, when Shiite Islamists started to become the most powerful political opposition force on the island, security forces started to disproportionately target and police Shiite villages and urban quarters. This intensified during the intifada from 1994-99. But, intriguingly, this was the only period of major political mobilization on the island that was not stopped through a widespread security clampdown and the declaration of martial law. Instead, the accession of King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa to the throne led to a general amnesty for political prisoners and exiles, and limited political reforms. In the 2000s, the security services took on a reduced and less visible role. Torture, which was common practice before 1999, largely ceased to be used as a punitive measure against political detainees.

The regime's answer to the 2011 uprising again brought to the fore the role of the security forces, and the security-minded members of the ruling family. In February 17, 2011, it seemed as if the security forces had retreated and left the Bahraini street to the protesters. Less than a month later, a state of emergency was declared, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) troops mainly from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates moved in, and security forces started the perhaps largest crackdown in the history of the island. While the Bahraini Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa was trying to reach a negotiated agreement with the opposition, other members of the al-Khalifa family, and the security apparatuses, were preparing for the security-solution to the mass protests. As in 1956, 1965 and 1975, the crackdown landed many dissidents and those suspected of being political activists in jail, drove many into exile and radicalized a new generation of activists, some of whom started to advocate the use of violence as a revolutionary tool.

The intensity of this crackdown is explained in part by factional politics within the ruling family. The faction

that has its power base in the various security institutions felt deeply threatened by the protest movement. The security minded-factions of al-Khalifa are centered on Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa, as well as in a branch of al-Khalifa known as the Khawalids. The Khawalids stem from a different branch of the al-Khalifa family than the king and the crown prince – they are descendants of Khalid bin Ali al-Khalifa and feel disenfranchised in the succession to the throne. They were sidelined by the British but have regained increasing importance over the past decade, and they now hold key positions: Royal Court Minister Khalid bin Ahmad al-Khalifa; Commander of the Bahrain Defense Forces, Khalifa bin Ahmad al-Khalifa; and Minister of Justice Khalid bin Ali al-Khalifa are all Khawalids. Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman, who has been in his position since 1970, was a focal point of protesters, who were calling for his resignation. So while the king and his son, the crown prince, could have expected to survive in their positions and even potentially be strengthened through a political settlement, the prime minister and the Khawalids would have been weakened, and might have lost their positions. So the “security solution,” which they subsequently imposed on Bahrain, and which led to the dismissal and imprisonment of thousands of people, the deaths of dozens, and the exile of many others, was in some ways a result of elite fragmentation.

Still, Bahrain could not have gone down the securitization route without the strong support of external backers, which for decades have strengthened the security apparatus and provided political cover for rights abuses and authoritarian rule. Despite their large numbers, the protesters could not withstand the crackdown by the security forces militarily. Even though the regime claims the contrary, the vast majority if not all protesters were unarmed. The geography of the small island with no natural hideouts does not lend itself to armed struggle. In addition, the sheer number of the security forces would have been overwhelming (and thousands more have been recruited since 2011). Because they are largely made up of foreigners or naturalized officers, who feel little sympathy with the uprising, there was little danger that

they would defect or resist orders. In addition, the arrival of GCC military units and most likely Jordanian Special Forces tinted the military balance even further in the regime’s favor. Finally, the regime increased the sectarian rhetoric and reinforced sectarian divisions that managed to split the island’s population more or less according to sectarian lines. This ensured that while the majority of the population felt alienated by the crackdown, a significant number of (mainly Sunni) citizens supported or at least tacitly accepted it.

Crucially, the international condemnation of the crackdown also remained limited. Political cover by GCC and other Arab and Sunni allies (such as Jordan and Pakistan), as well as important business partners of the GCC in the West, and in particular the old colonial power Britain, ensured that sanctions or any other severe consequences in the international arena did not materialize. Bahrain was also helped by the sheer number of world-historical events unfolding in a short span of time, and attention quickly shifted elsewhere in March 2011, particularly to Libya, where the uprising against Moammar Gaddafi gained pace. Indeed, in her memoir, former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton acknowledges that the UAE had threatened to pull out of the coalition against Gaddafi if the United States had taken a harsher stance toward the Bahraini regime.

The security forces have since 2011 also been used to further entrench preexisting divisions between urban and recently urbanized and rural areas, and between broadly pro-uprising and pro-regime areas. The heavy policing of pro-uprising neighborhoods and villages, the checkpoints at the entrances to these areas, and the at times total lockdown of such areas for days or weeks and the extensive use of tear gas as a form of collective punishment have become key features of life on the island. These practices are the result of transformations in Bahrain’s urban geography over the past decades, which have seen the massive reclamation of land from the sea and a radical transformation of the built-up areas fueled by, and fueling, real estate speculation. These developments had negative byproducts for villages that were formerly by the sea and

for the quality of life in many other areas (groundwater levels, pollution, etc.). In essence, this “spatial-demographic revolution,” as it has been termed, has been a key driver of the uprising, and the security forces have since 2011 been used to strengthen the spatial divisions that Bahrain’s urban planning attempted to achieve in the first place.

Since mid-March 2011 then, the protests have been confined to the villages and outlying suburbs of Manama, while the urban centers of Manama and Muharraq, and the business district, have been policed so heavily that protesters refrain from going there, except for brief flash-mob-like protests that are quickly dispersed. The occupation of Pearl Roundabout, which was a briefly successful attempt to reclaim public space in a country dominated by private and commercial property developers, ended with the destruction of the Pearl Monument and the creation of a (heavily guarded) traffic intersection. So the crackdown and the ensuing heavy policing have further entrenched divisions on the island, and driven the protests out into the periphery. There, however, they continue on a daily basis and with no political solution in sight seem likely to continue for the foreseeable future. A dialogue process that included parts of the opposition has stalled, arguably because the ruling family was not prepared to

make significant concessions. Elections for municipal councils and the lower house of the bicameral parliament were boycotted by the opposition, and as a consequence highlighted the political polarization of the island.

The securitization of Bahrain seems difficult to reverse, particularly because it has shifted the power in intra-ruling family struggles more toward the security-minded branches of the family. Shiites are being marginalized even more in key state institutions, while naturalization of Sunnis is ongoing. So the Shiites, who had been one of the constituencies that King Hamad and the crown prince had wooed in the past decade, are becoming less and less important as potential bases of support in intra-regime power struggles. In essence, the security sector has learned to live, and indeed thrive, off the constant demonstrations and the on-going uprising. And so the impetus for a political solution to the grievances that fueled the uprising in the first place is becoming less and less strong, particularly while international pressure on the regime is limited.

*Toby Matthiesen is a research fellow in Islamic and Middle Eastern studies at Pembroke College, University of Cambridge.*



# Security dilemmas and the ‘security state’ question in Jordan

By Curtis R. Ryan, *Appalachian State University*

Even in its darkest hours, the Jordanian version of the security state never reached the level of totalitarian police state associated with Bashar al-Assad’s Syria or Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. Yet the Hashemite regime has relied on several key institutions to ensure its own security: the armed forces, national police (Public Security Directorate – PSD), and its intelligence services (the General Intelligence Directorate [GID] or mukhabarat). Jordan is a small country, but its armed forces are among the best trained in the region, its police force often trains the police of other Arab countries, and its GID has extensive ties to both the CIA and MI6 and is considered to be among the most efficient and capable intelligence services in the region. Indeed, many opposition and democracy activists argue that the *mukhabarat* is far too efficient and too pervasive, and that it is, instead, the key actor blocking attempts at liberalization and reform in the Hashemite Kingdom.

By the summer of 2013, Arab regimes in Syria and Iraq remained under siege in varying degrees, the counter-revolution was well underway in Bahrain, and the military and security state staged a huge comeback in Egypt. Yet at this same time, in Jordan, the Hashemite regime almost seemed to exhale. The regime felt that it had in fact survived the Arab Spring, by carving out a “third way” between revolution and counter-revolution. Jordanian officials argued that Jordan had avoided the worst excesses of the violent turn taken by the regional Arab Spring, via a palace-led reform process that responded to public demands for change. In addition to the reform process, top regime officials pointed to several other key sources of state security: the efforts of policing and intelligence agencies to use a “soft” approach to security, extensive economic and military support from powerful external allies, and a base of popular support within Jordanian society.<sup>1</sup>

Jordan’s “soft security” approach even persisted amidst the regional crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (all Jordanian allies). In Jordan, in contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood and its political party, the Islamic Action Front, remained legal and active within Jordanian politics. Even that moderate stance seemed to shift, at least partially, with the arrest of Zaki Bani Irshayd, a key leader of Jordan’s Muslim Brotherhood. While the organization remained legal and active, Irshayd was arrested for “harming relations” with a key ally, after he posted comments on Facebook that sharply criticized the UAE and its policies.

Even as the Jordanian regime prepared for a post-Arab Spring politics, it was confronted by a new version of an old threat: the Islamic State group (also known as ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh). As the security forces mobilized to confront both internal and external manifestations of the Islamic State group many democracy activists worried that Jordan would sacrifice liberalization and reform in the name of national security. Citing national security, countless states worldwide have at various times followed a path of deliberalization, backsliding on reforms, and curbing media civil liberties, while enhancing the roles of intelligence and security agencies. But what happens when the security threats are real? Jordan’s security concerns are by no means hypothetical, but as they intensify they also carry the danger of destroying even the regime’s own narrative of reform, consensus, and soft security.

Jordan’s King Abdullah II has noted in frequent media interviews that the Arab Spring was not so much a threat as an opportunity. The regime poured its energies into a new political narrative of a monarchy that responded to public demands for change with a sweeping set of reforms designed to lay the groundwork for “democratization” in Jordan. These reforms included new laws on political parties and elections, revisions of the constitution, and the establishment of a Constitutional Court as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Author’s interviews with palace and government officials, Amman, June 2014.

an Independent Electoral Commission. The latter was charged with cleaning up the Jordanian electoral process, in response to widespread allegations of rigged elections in 2007 and 2011. In 2013, with yet another new electoral law in place, the IEC did indeed oversee a much cleaner electoral process.<sup>2</sup>

But many in Jordan's activist community questioned the depth and breadth of the reform process. Elections were cleaner, to be sure, but the electoral law remained problematic and parliament remained weak relative to the monarchy or, for that matter, the security services. More controversially, the regime introduced in 2013 new laws on media that effectively shut down hundreds of electronic news sites. All those that failed to register with the government, and receive its approval, were blocked. Jordan also amended its counter-terrorism law to include online activism as well as membership in or support for any organization deemed "terrorist." These new measures were put to use as the state began to move against alleged Islamic State activists in the kingdom.

In August, in an odd pairing of reformist and security legislation, Jordanian legislators gave overwhelming approval to two new constitutional amendments – with minimal opposition and minimal deliberation in parliament. One expanded the role of the IEC to cover local and municipal, as well as national, elections.<sup>3</sup> Expanding the role of the IEC to cover local elections seemed very much in keeping with a reform program moving forward.

It was the second of the two amendments, however, that was far more controversial, as it gave the king sole authority to appoint the chiefs of the military and intelligence services. Previously, these appointments

were made, at least in principle, in consultation with the government, and based on the recommendations and nominations forwarded by the prime minister. The amendment removed the role of government, and in particular, the role of parliament in key security appointments.

Supporters of the measures argued that they were in keeping with the reform process by improving the separation of powers, and allegedly "removing" the military and intelligence services from politics. Others, perhaps more candidly, agreed with the move simply out of distrust of the make-up of future parliamentary governments – these, some argued, could not and should not be trusted with such matters as national security and national defense. But opponents of the amendment, who included many reformers and democracy activists, felt that the measures simply concentrated still more power in the monarchy, away from the government, the parliament, and from public accountability. Opponents, in short, saw the new amendment as an alarming reversal in the reform program, and one that had been carried out with startling speed – by a parliament not known for its ability to be speedy on any other issue.<sup>4</sup>

### **An abundance of security threats**

Jordan in 2014 remained mired in a deep economic crisis, and one that was augmented by the presence of more than a million Syrian refugees in the kingdom.<sup>5</sup> But crises and wars also increased across most of Jordan's borders: The Syrian civil war continued unabated, Iraq seemed to be descending once again into violence and civil strife, while another war erupted between Israel and Hamas, including extensive Israeli bombardment of Gaza.<sup>6</sup> While Jordanians

2 Curtis R. Ryan, "Jordan's Unfinished Journey: Parliamentary Elections and the State of Reform, POMED Project on Middle East Democracy, Policy Brief, March 2013 <http://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/POMED-Policy-Brief-Ryan-March-2013.pdf>

3 In Jordan's 150-member lower house of parliament, 118 voted for the amendments, 8 voted against, and 3 MPs abstained. "Lower house endorses constitutional amendments," Ammon News, August 24, 2014 <http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleno=26439#.VDFeE1xldi>

4 Osama al-Sharif, "Jordan's King pushes to expand military, intelligence authority," al-Monitor, August 25, 2014 <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/08/jordan-king-constitution-amendments.html>

5 Curtis R. Ryan, "Jordan's Security Dilemmas," Foreign Policy, Middle East Channel, May 1, 2013 [http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/05/01/jordans\\_security\\_dilemmas](http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/05/01/jordans_security_dilemmas)

6 Curtis R. Ryan, "Still Between Iraq and Hard Place," Middle East Report Online, July 14, 2014 <http://merip.org/still-between-iraq-hard-place>

followed all these events with concern, it was the rise of the Islamic State group that was the cause of greatest worry within Jordan. Border clashes effectively announced that the Islamic State group had arrived on Jordan's eastern border, making it more and more of a territorially-based threat. Unlike other terrorist organizations, this one had declared itself a state and announced the restoration of the caliphate. And Jordan was clearly in the sights of the "Islamic State" as part of what the militant group saw as its natural territory, and also as an enemy regime – one that maintained a peace treaty and full relations with Israel, while also allowing U.S. troops to deploy on its soil.

By the summer of 2014, that threat seemed ever more imminent, both at the borders and within the kingdom. Flags of the "Islamic State" were raised by protesters in Maan, in the south of Jordan. Jordan's large Salafi movement had lent thousands of jihadi recruits to fight for either the Islamic State group or Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria. The Jordanian regime may not have minded the departure of thousands of jihadis, but now it worried that they intended to come back. Responding to incidents of "attempted infiltration" along its Syrian and Iraqi borders, Jordan increased its border security with troops and armored units, and opened fire on any armed groups or individuals approaching its borders. Yet at the same time thousands of civilian refugees continued to pour across the borders, joining the approximately one million Syrian refugees already in Jordan.

For some Jordanian security officials, the real problem was simply sorting through myriad security threats, and determining which were truly the most pressing. For some, the threat was already within Jordan's borders, either in the form of pro-Assad sleeper agents or anti-Assad jihadi militants among the vast refugee population. Others remained focused on the traditional Islamist opposition within the kingdom – the Muslim Brotherhood – arguing that Jordan should follow the lead of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and UAE in banning the group outright. But these perceived threats seemed to pale in comparison to the Islamic State group itself. And Jordan seemed very much in the sights of the "Islamic State" across both its Syrian and

Iraqi borders and even from within.

In August, after seeming to allow various pro-"Islamic State" demonstrations to take place without state interference, the regime then began to move rather suddenly against people the security services had identified, not just as Salafis or even Salafi jihadists, but specifically those alleged to have declared support for the Islamic State group. In August alone, security forces arrested at least 70 Salafis for their support of the Islamic State group. Legally, they were also able to do so under the strengthened counter-terrorism laws, allowing those arrested to be referred to the State Security Court (rather than civilian courts) for membership in an illegal organization and on suspicion of intent to engage in or support terrorism.<sup>7</sup>

Yet Jordan had also released prominent Salafi leader and thinker Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, even as it was rounding up other alleged jihadis. Similarly, after years of controversial efforts to arrange for the extradition of another Salafi jihadi leader, Abu Qatada, from Britain to Jordan, Jordanian courts dropped charges against him on the basis of insufficient evidence. In a previous in absentia trial, Abu Qatada had been convicted of planning millennial bombings in Amman and had been sentenced to death. Now, both Abu Qatada and Maqdisi were freed from Jordanian prisons. Some activists and analysts speculated that perhaps Jordan's mukhabarat was trying to divide the Salafi jihadi movement in the kingdom, as many believe it already had done to the Muslim Brotherhood. Abu Qatada and Maqdisi each condemned the Islamic State group (while supporting al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra), but each also condemned Jordan itself, when the kingdom joined the coalition against the "Islamic State." Maqdisi was later rearrested for online "incitement" after he wrote a blog post condemning coalition bombings and suggesting the "Islamic State" and Jabhat al-Nusra should join forces.

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7 Taylor Luck, "50 Salafists Arrested," Jordan Times, August 27, 2014 <http://jordantimes.com/50-salafists-arrested>

### The “reformist” security state in Jordan

In September, the Royal Jordanian Air Force joined in the air strikes launched by an international coalition against the Islamic State group. Many Jordanians feared that retribution would follow in the form of terrorism within Jordan. That fear was rooted in real experience. On November 9, 2005 – in what Jordanians sometimes call “Jordan’s 9-11” – a predecessor to the Islamic State group, al-Qaeda in Iraq, carried out three simultaneous bombings of hotels in Amman, killing 60 people and injuring more than a hundred others. That moment in Jordanian history has been forgotten by no one in Jordanian society, and certainly by no one in the security services.

Others, however, fear that Jordan’s fears of terrorism, and its attempts to ensure regime and national security, would be the undoing of the already-limited reform process. Activists and reformers feared that the severity of the Islamic State threat would lead the state to clamp down further on media, public assembly, and dissent in the name of counter-terrorism and regime security.

For many democracy activists, this is becoming an old and predictable story: with constant talk at the highest levels of a clear reform path, various achievements cited, goals noted, and all with much fanfare. Yet many in Jordan’s grassroots reform movement argue that there is much noise but little substantive progress. The 2014 version of reform and liberalization, they argue, isn’t even as far along as the original 1989 version. The regime, however, argues

that the present differs profoundly from the past, and that the reform agenda has even reached the intelligence services. Former mukhabarat chief Muhammad al-Dhahabi, for example, was arrested and convicted of corruption. His replacement, Faisal al-Shobaki, has been tasked with modernizing and reforming the GID.

Today, Jordan again confronts security threats from without and within. Yet that is not a particularly unusual situation in Jordanian history.<sup>8</sup> But wherever one stands on the question of depth of reform in the kingdom, it is clear that the security apparatus is alive and well, and active in many aspects of public life. And it thrives in insecure situations like the Islamic State threat. In Jordan, state security institutions did not stage a Thermidorian comeback, but then again they didn’t have to, since they hadn’t left. But that too can be read in both positive and negative ways: Jordan’s security and intelligence services are viewed by some Jordanians as the only things standing in the way of myriad threats; while other Jordanians fear that these same institutions, while focusing on national and regime security, may be the main obstacles to greater domestic political reform and change.

*Curtis R. Ryan is a professor of political science at Appalachian State University.*

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8 “Arab Uprisings: Jordan, Forever on the Brink,” POMEPS Briefing 11, May 9, 2012 <http://pomeps.org/2012/05/09/arab-uprisings-jordan-forever-on-the-brink/>



# The authoritarian impulse vs. the democratic imperative: Political learning as a precondition for sustainable development in the Maghreb

By John Entelis, Fordham University

The resurgence of the *mukhabarat* state in the three years after the Arab Spring revolutions has inspired several competing explanations ranging from dysfunctional leadership to external interference to radical Islamism to recalcitrant militaries, among others. What few analysts have investigated are the *cultural* roots of an authoritarian impulse that continues to defy a democratic imperative; an imperative that can only be institutionalized through a systematic and sustained process of political learning begun at childhood and extended throughout adulthood.

The Arab Spring revolutions exposed the desire to overcome the authoritarian impulse but without a democratic foundation to replace it. That foundation is virtually absent at the level of the mass public and only superficially inculcated among the educated elite. This paper will argue that the absence of a democratic political culture, arrived at through a foundational commitment to political learning, virtually guarantees that authoritarianism, whether secular or sectarian, will be the default governance style in the Arab world more generally and North Africa more specifically. This suggests that neither authoritarianism nor democracy are “natural” expressions of political life but, instead, must be learned, inculcated, and practiced from early life through adulthood. In North Africa political learning is transmitted indirectly through authoritarian practices experienced at home, school, mosque, and civil society. Until such practices are overturned to be replaced by a participatory, egalitarian, and open minded political culture, democratic institutions and processes will have little chance of being legitimized.

Democracy matters for human development because people everywhere want to be free to determine their destinies, express their views and participate in the decisions that shape their lives. These capabilities are just as important for human development—for expanding

people’s choices—as being able to read or enjoy good health.<sup>1</sup>

Democracy has at least two distinct meanings: one normative, the other procedural. In either case, democracy must be learned if it is to have long-term significance. Democracy learning involves a complex process of political socialization utilizing different but reinforcing agents: family, school, religious institution, work place, community, and political system. Whatever agency is involved, the content of that learning must involve a basic understanding of and internalization to democracy’s essential core – the primacy of human freedom and individual choice articulated through a framework of representative government and the rule of law. This democratic core can never be assumed but must be firmly embedded within democratic institutions whose practitioners exemplify these principles both in words and deeds. Only when such a pedagogical propensity to democratic values finds institutional expression can other aspects of human, social, and economic development proceed. It is in this light, that democratic values, representative institutions, and sustainable development fuse into a seamless pattern of human progress.

## Democracy defined

For our purposes we will be using a procedural definition of democracy to understand how political learning impacts positively on sustainable development. A basic definition of democracy refers to the mechanism by which people choose political leadership. Citizens are given a choice among rival political leaders who compete for their votes. Between elections, decisions are made by politicians. At the next election, citizens can replace their elected officials.

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1 United Nations Development Program. 2002. *Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. NY: Oxford University Press, p. 1.

This ability to choose between leaders at election time is democracy.

Yet this bare-bone definition fails to capture the broader cross-cultural context in which democracy finds root. Where poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment prevail, democracy's purpose has to transcend mere institutional design and constitutional engineering. Democratic autonomy requires both an accountable state and a democratic reordering of civil society. It foresees substantial direct participation in local community institutions as well as self-management of cooperatively owned enterprises. It calls for a bill of rights that goes beyond the right to cast a vote to include equal opportunity for participation and discovering individual preferences as well as citizens' final control of the political agenda. Also included are social and economic rights to ensure adequate resources for democratic autonomy.

Whether utilizing a narrow politically-focused or comprehensive socioeconomically-focused understanding of democracy, both require clearly defined mechanisms of accountability, participation, and representativeness if political, social, and economic opportunities are to be achieved. In this regard the government's responsiveness to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals, is a key characteristic of democracy. Such responsiveness requires that citizens must have opportunities to formulate their preferences, signify their preferences to their fellow citizens and the government by individual and collective action, and have their preferences weighed equally in the conduct of the government.

Given this background, political democracy thus becomes a system of government in which the following conditions apply: meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies; and a level of civil and political liberties such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom to form and join organizations sufficient to ensure the integrity of

political competition and participation.

As important as the structural and institutional components of democracy are to ensure both political choice and socioeconomic opportunity, they assume saliency only in the context of a well informed and politically educated citizenry. This implies not only a literate and educated population but also one infused with an inherent sense of citizenship, civic mindedness, participation, compromise, and social justice. In other words, while political socialization encompasses the political knowledge, values, and beliefs of citizens, something more concretely has to exist that highlights the level and content of what it means to be a participatory citizen engaged in advancing not only individual interests but, more significantly, the collective interests of society including its economic well-being and developmental goals. This process of "citizen consciousness" of democracy I label as "political learning." Political learning derives from political socialization but incorporates a more explicit participatory dimension of citizenship including trust in governmental institutions, incumbents, and processes.

### **Political socialization**

Political learning is an explicit part of political socialization in which the political self begins to inculcate, from childhood to adulthood, the values, norms, and expectations of citizenship, participation, and collective responsibility. A child's exposure to authority figures both at home and in the public sphere has a decisive impact on the way he or she is socialized to politics as an adult. Thus political learning begins in the most intimate setting, that of family, home, and community.

If a child views authority figures in a benevolent way and those figures behave accordingly, a positive image develops that carries into adulthood. Trust, confidence, and respect for political authorities thus become essential components to the development of a democratic political culture that subsequently serves to animate a participatory spirit critical for sustainable development. If, on the other hand, a child grows up within a politically hostile environment at

home, school, and religious institution, one that views non-familial authority figures with suspicion, fear, or distrust, it will be difficult for the adult to develop a political self predisposed to democratic values and true citizenship. Thus even if such an adult joins political parties, participates in political activities, and votes regularly in elections, the absence of democratic values embedded in spirit and practice established through sustained political socialization will reduce such procedural practices to nothing more than routine exercises in compulsory behavior.

### **Pathways to political learning**

There are at least two pathways to political learning: one direct, another indirect. Direct political learning involves an individual's direct exposure to and experience in political life. While an important dimension to political learning, direct methods have a positive impact on participatory citizenship only if indirect methods have first established a participatory foundation. Thus the inculcation of democratic values occurs indirectly within a broader environment of social upbringing particularly in the home and school. Subsequent agents of political socialization including the influence of peer groups, involvement in civil society, the role of mass media, and the impact of other secondary associations, reinforce democratic trends established early in life. The causal pathway argued in this paper begins with the formation of a participatory orientation in childhood while at home and in school that is reinforced later in life through direct exposure to politics that then prepares citizens to involve themselves constructively and creatively in the process of democracy-building, good governance, and sustainable development. Democratic citizenship cannot be imposed from above or ordained by fiat if its foundation is lacking in political learning initiated indirectly in childhood.

The combination of indirect and direct ways in which political learning is communicated serves to instill a positive, trustful, and participatory orientation among citizens. Only when such a foundation has been firmly established can democracy's institutional practices

such as forming political parties, running candidates, allowing equal access to the media, and holding free, fair, and transparent elections have genuine significance for a country's citizens. Once these two preconditions of political learning and political democracy are institutionalized sustainable development can take hold, thus serving as the launching pad for political freedom, social autonomy, and economic opportunity to endure.

### **Sustainable development**

In the modern period, sustainable development has referred to a mode of human development in which resource use aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come. Analytically such development can be broken down into four separate but related domains: economic, ecological, political, and cultural sustainability. It is clear that the world can no longer be sustained under conditions of global inequality where certain world regions and collections of countries monopolize power, resources, and skills at the expense of those lacking or minimally possessing such resources.

Pathways to sustainable development require global cooperation among the have and have-not states in order to create a level playing field in which all nation-states have the opportunity to advance the human condition. Yet for such a level playing field to exist, domestic political orders must possess popular legitimacy, democratic institutions, and bureaucratic accountability. For its part, this architecture of democratic authority can only be established and sustained once political learning has infused the citizenry with a participatory orientation, one free from intimidation, coercion, or fear. The causal pathway is thus clear: Political learning socializes citizens to democratic values; democratic institutions provide popular legitimacy from which economic and social resources are distributed equitably; a democratic polity maximizes human resources that empower the nation-state to engage in the world as a legitimate global partner. The result is the establishment of the conditions that allow sustainable development to take place.

### Sustainable development in the Maghreb: A political learning deficit

In 2004, the United Nations Development Program and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development published a scathing assessment on the status of knowledge, learning, and education in the Arab world entitled *The Arab Human Development Report 2003: Building a Knowledge Society*. Produced by a distinguished group of Arab public intellectuals, scholars, academics, and journalists, the report exposed the major failings in the way knowledge is produced, learning is processed, and education is administered in the modern Arab world indicating that “the most important challenge facing Arab education is its declining quality.”<sup>2</sup>

The report highlighted the totalistic character of the challenge that Arab education confronts. It noted, for example:

Key knowledge dissemination processes in Arab countries (socialization and upbringing, education, the media and translation), face deep-seated social, institutional, economic and political impediments. Notable among these are the meager resources available to individuals, families and institutions and the restrictions imposed upon them. As a result, these processes often falter and fall short of preparing the epistemological and societal environment necessary for knowledge production.<sup>3</sup>

The above quotation makes clear that deep structural, political, and institutional obstacles make it nearly impossible for average men and women in the Arab world including the Maghreb to achieve the quality and quantity of education required for citizens to participate actively and constructively in their societies thereby providing opportunities for personal advancement for themselves but, more importantly, empowering society and polity to achieve the level of sustainable development necessary

in an increasingly competitive globalized environment. While political learning is not explicitly identified in the report, it is clear that the inculcation of participatory, autonomous, and democratic values are visibly absent in the socialization of young and adult Arabs. In this regard the report is unambiguous.

Studies indicate that the most widespread style of child rearing in Arab families is the authoritarian mode accompanied by the over protective. This reduces children’s independence, self-confidence, and social efficacy, and fosters passive attitudes and hesitant decision-making skills. Most of all, it affects how the child thinks by suppressing questioning, exploration and initiative.<sup>4</sup>

A deeply embedded patriarchal system has highlighted the relations of authority, domination, and dependency in the structure of Arab social relations.<sup>5</sup> The work of Arab psychologists, for example, has repeatedly demonstrated the “lostness” of the individual in the father-dominated family. “The family is relentless in its repression,” the Lebanese psychologist Ali Zay’our has written. “The child is brought up to become an obedient youth, subservient to those above him—his father, older brother, clan chief, president.”<sup>6</sup> In describing this condition of psychological subservience, analysts are not suggesting that this is the product of some natural condition but instead the result of social construction that can be changed. There is thus a need for critical self-knowledge that serves as the precondition for possessing the appropriate consciousness through which individuals can transcend their patriarchal legacy.

The above passages serve as templates on the need for political learning, in this context understood as the ability of individuals to calculate risk, weigh choices, and grasp at opportunities. If anything democracy is about risk taking as it requires individuals to put aside loyalty and trust on

2 United Nations Development Program. 2004. *Arab Human Development Report 2003: Building a Knowledge Society*. New York: UNDP, p. 3.

3 UNDP, 2004, p. 3.

4 Ibid.

5 Sharabi, Hisham. 1988. *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*. Oxford University Press, p. 41.

6 Zay’our, Ali. 1977. *The Psychoanalysis of the Arab Self*. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Tali’ah, p 4(Arabic).

the basis of familial ties or communal connections but, instead, direct one's political fidelity toward legitimate institutions headed by democratically elected officials. For such choices to be made rationally and objectively individuals must be socialized to a freedom environment – free to be themselves, free to think independently, free to make choices, free to express their opinions without fear of intimidation or coercion. Such an environment must be created in early childhood through a socialization process that rewards initiative and individual effort. Once routinized, this process must be reinforced in adulthood through reinforcing agents such as school, work place, house of worship, or civic associations. Only in this way do citizens provide the human capital to make democratic institutions work as representatives of the popular will, not merely as formal structures of government. Simply put, sustainable development cannot exist in a non-democratic environment and a democratic environment cannot exist without democratically-oriented citizens. Political learning is thus, first and foremost, about inculcating citizens with such democratic values.

### **The Maghreb: Comparative political learning**

While the political systems of the Maghrebi states of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia may appear to be different, all three possess an equal deficit of political learning. As such, their ability to achieve a level of sustainable development will be difficult regardless of the status of their principle resource base whether it is hydrocarbons in Algeria, agriculture and tourism in Morocco, or tourism and small manufacturing in Tunisia.

One author, in reviewing the status of educational reform in Morocco, cited the World Bank Middle East and North Africa report *The Road Not Traveled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa*. That report indicated that North African Arab education had fallen behind the rest of the world despite that governments had devoted significant resources to education. The World Bank report concluded that Arab public education systems were “not yet fully equipped to produce graduates with the skills and expertise necessary to compete in a world where

knowledge is essential to making progress.”<sup>7</sup>

Referencing the pessimistic conclusion of the World Bank report, Charis Boutieri noted that Morocco “ranked among the worst performers.”<sup>8</sup> In response to this critical assessment of Morocco's educational performance, Morocco's High Council for Education announced in 2008 an Emergency Reform Plan for 2009 to 2012 involving a restructuring of public education “that would remodel student competences.”<sup>9</sup> Yet, despite this highly visible effort at educational restructuring, the Moroccan media remained highly suspicious that anything of consequence would be achieved. One Moroccan press report, for example, openly declared the “total failure of education in Morocco.”<sup>10</sup> Boutieri argues that, “despite constant chastising by the press and seemingly ongoing efforts on the part of the government, Moroccan education is considered, to this day, to be in a state of serious crisis.”<sup>11</sup>

What is most interesting in Boutieri's perceptive analysis of the failings of the Moroccan educational system has less to do with school budgets, textbook selection, teacher competence, or administrative efficacy, but, more decisively, on the critical role of “political learning” in the broader educational process. The author seeks to redirect attention “away from the technical diagnostics of international policymakers and toward the *political nature of all learning* (emphasis added). Given the affinity between the experiences of education and citizenship, [Boutieri] maintains that an ethnographically and historically informed portrayal of this educational crisis is central to an understanding of contemporary Moroccan society.”<sup>12</sup>

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7 The World Bank. 2008. *The Road Not Traveled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa*. Washington, D.C. The World Bank, p. 3.

8 Boutieri, Charis. 2012. “In Two Speeds (*à deux vitesses*): Linguistic Pluralism and Educational Anxiety in Contemporary Morocco,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 44, no. 3 (August) p.443.

9 Ibid.

10 Mokhliss, Brahim and Mohammed Zainabi. 2008. “La faillite totale de l'enseignement au Maroc,” *Le Reporter* (April 24), pp. 22-27.

11 Boutieri, 2012, p. 443.

12 Ibid, p. 445.

Boutieri's granular and textual deconstruction of the historically-determined and ethnographically-influenced nature of sociocultural production in Morocco is equally applicable to the situations in Algeria and Tunisia. In all three countries the existing educational environment, more often than not, reinforces the socialization practices of early adulthood in which authoritarian values are both directly and indirectly imposed. Educational reform efforts rarely emphasize the need for the development of personal identity, autonomous action, and independent thinking that allows political learning to create engaged citizens, cognitively aware of their political environment but also affectively and evaluatively able to express feelings and opinions about the political world.

Has the Arab Spring altered this learning environment in the Maghreb? Not really. Although three different forms of political systems exist in the Maghreb – constitutional monarchy in Morocco; a socialist republic in Algeria; and an incipient democracy in Tunisia – the authoritarian socialization processes discussed earlier that impact the child's view of the political world is still very much in place. Indeed, it will take some time before this process is fundamentally altered, made even more difficult by the preoccupation of governing elites to stabilize, regularize, and institutionalize existing political arrangements in order to prevent further social unrest, economic decay, and political chaos. In whatever direction democracy emerges, it will need a democratic political culture to ensure its survivability and long-term endurance. For that to take place, political learning must be a central undertaking both in the home and school. It is this combination of political learning that creates a democratic political culture upon which democratic institutions are built and, ultimately, from which sustainable development can take place.

### Prospects

What are the prospects for popular democratic governance and sustainable development in the post-Arab Spring Maghreb? One avenue of understanding the Maghreb's future during this delicate period of democratic transition whether achieved through bottom up revolution as in Tunisia or constant civil society pressure as in Algeria

or top down evolutionary change as in Morocco, is to compare similar experiences that occurred in post-Communist East Europe. In *The New York Times*, Anne Applebaum provides an enlightening perspective. She writes that in their drive for power:

The Bolsheviks and their East European acolytes eliminated or undermined churches, charities, newspapers, guilds, literary and educational societies, companies and retail shops, stock markets, unions, banks, sports clubs and centuries-old universities. If nothing else, Eastern Europe's [post-World war Two] history proves just how fragile human organizations are.<sup>13</sup>

As a result of this damage, Applebaum writes:

Post-Communist countries required far more than elections, political campaigns and political parties to become functioning liberal societies again, and far more than a few economic reforms to become prosperous. They also needed independent media, private enterprise, flourishing civic life, a legal and regulatory system, and a culture that tolerated independent groups and organizations.<sup>14</sup>

It is this latter feature, in particular, that serves to inform our understanding of the link between a democratic political culture and sustainable development.

She notes that although post-totalitarian Europe has little in common with the Arab world culturally and politically, both regions do share this: "their dictators repressed (or tried to repress) civic activism and independent organizations."<sup>15</sup> In the wake of the Arab *intifadas* and the emergence of new political actors, especially Islamist ones, what kind of governance structures will be put in place? Will they recreate the methods of the autocracies and suppress other organizations? Or will they encourage a wide range of civic activism?

13 Applebaum, Anne. 2012. "After Tyrants, the People Must Act," *The New York Times* (November 3, 2012).

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

These are central questions given the long history of autocracy in the Arab world including the Maghreb. Preliminary evidence as observed in Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, and even Algeria is that a wider social mobilization of citizens is taking place in which people are engaging in civic activism in order to determine their own social, political, and economic destinies. Perhaps such efforts will help the Maghreb “build a political culture that is democratic in the best sense—with citizens participating in decisions that affect them. But the infrastructure required for such activity is complex.”<sup>16</sup> To sustain it, the Maghreb countries will need “good laws on nonprofit organizations, regulation of charitable donations, a press that is free and professional enough to chronicle such efforts, and government officials who respond to the public.”<sup>17</sup>

However much it may seem desirable, the outside world is of limited use in supporting the changes identified above. Those aspiring to both democracy and development, inasmuch as both are deeply intertwined, must charter a course of their own creation. If they are to succeed in the face of long-standing political repression, Maghreb

societies need a motivated populace if they are to become politically vibrant again. Applebaum’s concluding assessment captures accurately the challenges facing Maghrebi societies if they are to attain the democracy and development they so fully deserve, when she writes that such societies need “patriotism, historical consciousness, education, ambition, optimism and, especially, patience. The destruction wrought by totalitarian governments always takes decades even generations to repair.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, newly emerging democrats will have to take into account that the everyday activity of individuals within the new institutional order will have been shaped by habits developed mostly in the old one. The Arab Spring examples testify to this condition as the total loss of trust in the political system that led to the downfall of the authoritarian orders lingers as a lack of trust in the developing democratic system – a distrust of politics and politicians in general, whether authoritarian or democratic.

*John Entelis is a professor of political science  
and director of the Middle East Studies Program  
at Fordham University.*

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



# The resurgence of police government in Egypt

*By Salwa Ismail, SOAS, University of London*

The mass mobilization in Tahrir Square and other public squares in Egypt was only one facet of the revolutionary uprising that began on Jan. 25, 2011. Another facet was the clashes with the police around Tahrir, but also in the popular neighborhoods of large cities throughout the country. In the first few days of mass protests, popular confrontation with the police culminated in the burning down of 99 police stations. As targets of popular anger and opposition to the regime of then-President Hosni Mubarak, police officers withdrew from the streets. In the aftermath of Tahrir, while revolutionary activists and citizens pressed for political and social rights, a host of actors, including the police, coalesced to counter the revolutionary movements and their demands. The reassertion of the police was a key part of the counter-revolutionary mobilization that paved the road for former Field Marshal Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's assumption of the presidential office.

Under the rule of President Mubarak (deposed in 2011), the police emerged as an apparatus of government. Police government in Egypt rested on the articulation of security politics with neo-liberal government. The resurgence of the police following Mubarak's fall confirms that this articulation of the politics of security with economic liberalization has survived the spectacular mobilizations of the last four years. However, it is not that the revolution has failed, but that the dynamics of mobilization and counter-mobilization have unfolded as an ongoing struggle between competing social forces over social, political and economic rights. Against this struggle, dominant social and political forces have coalesced to protect their interests through a particular mode of government – police government.

As an apparatus of government, the police's remit extends far beyond matters of law-and-order and civic and national security. The security and intelligence services are only one component of a large and powerful apparatus of

government, which has presence in the everyday life of Egyptian citizens. Police government is a form of everyday government which is intrusive and extensive. Police departments have power to oversee a wide range of mundane activities. In addition to the security and intelligence services, there are other specialized police forces such as the municipality police, utilities police, electricity police, transport police and public morality police. The scope and reach of these specialized units mean that the police apparatus has virtual control of public space and maintains oversight of social, economic and cultural activities.

Prior to January 2011, everyday encounters with the police were formative of citizens' political subjectivities. These encounters were marked by humiliation, and often involved the use of force and violence. The encounters took place on the streets, in residential neighborhoods, in outdoor markets, in public transport, among many other spaces. The increased power of the police was partly due to the role that they assumed in countering Islamist movements. In the 1980s and 90s, police engagement in the pursuit of Islamist activists was associated with their investment with greater powers of investigation and arrest under the emergency laws and with the use of administrative detention and similar repressive measures. With Islamists operating out of informal neighborhoods, the police sought to have greater presence in these spaces through surveillance activities, which entailed the recruitment of a large number of informants.

The security operations coincided with intensifying campaigns of public order by various police departments such as the municipalities and utilities police. Police carried out sustained campaigns on outdoor markets to manage the use of public space, as well as monitor the use of electricity and other public utilities. The intensification of policing of the social was linked with the expansion of neo-liberal economic policies, which brought about

the privatization of public sector companies, and the retrenchment of state provision of social services. A concomitant development was the growth of the informal economy, in particular in the service sector. In turn, the activities in this economy were regularly found to be in contravention of some public regulation. It is in relation to this socio-economic context that police intervention in the government of the social intensified.

The experience of encounters with the police thus became formative of political subjectivities. It was integral to being a subject of government in Egypt and it elicited understandings and feelings about government. These feelings and understandings informed the opposition to government that was manifested in the 2011 Revolution. Repertoires of action from earlier encounters with the police were played out in Tahrir, in its backstreets and in popular and informal neighborhoods where police stations were burned down.

The other facet of police government is the security services, which work in tandem with various police units for the purposes of political containment and stifling dissent. Intelligence and security services, in line with the Ministry of Interior's role in protecting the Mubarak regime, devoted their work to surveillance of activists, gathering information on dissidents and political opponents, and rounding them up and falsifying charges against them. Detention centers held thousands of political activists alongside anyone who questioned police power. The use of torture in these centers, as in police stations, was widespread. Thus, while, ordinary citizens attacked and burned down police stations, following the removal of Mubarak, activists stormed the State Security Investigation Headquarters and seized thousands of files that documented the security services' violations of human rights.

In the euphoria of the early days of the revolution, activists and political opposition put forward demands for police restructuring. Restructuring proposals included recommendations for the removal of top police leadership, investigation into wrongful police practices, as well as

the abolition of the Central Security Forces and police departments dealing with mundane civil matters, such as the electricity police and the supply and trade police. In the same vein, restructuring plans favored the removal of police oversight of the media, and over travel. Further, and most importantly, demands centered on the need for an overhaul of policing practices to end torture and falsification of charges. Restructuring plans pushed for appointing a civilian from outside the police force as minister of interior and proposed establishing a civilian audit body to conduct an overview of the police.

These demands were taken up by the short-lived Isam Sharaf government, which was initially viewed as representing the revolutionary forces. Successive governments, including government of Hazem al-Beblawi in 2013, paid lip service to the demands. However, these proposals for police reform do not seem to have advanced far under these interim governments or under the presidency of Mohamed Morsi. In 2012, Karim Ennarah pointed out how the now ousted President Morsi endeavored to reach an accommodation with the police. To this end, Morsi refrained from bringing about any change to the procedures of selecting the police leadership – normally drawn from the Security Services – and he showed no intention of reforming the institution.

Yet, concerted action on the part of the police to undermine Morsi's presidency started early. Various police units throughout the country went on strike against what they called the politicization of the police, referring to the use of police to break up demonstrations, primarily those supporting the president and the Muslim Brotherhood. They also voiced objections to *akhwanat al-shurta*, or the takeover of the police by the Muslim Brotherhood. Some police units, in Asyut for example, demanded the removal of Minister of Interior Mohammed Ibrahim, thought of at the time as a Muslim Brotherhood appointee. Notably, the Central Security Forces went on strike against the alleged Brotherhood plot and called for the instatement of "a new leadership that is allied to the ordinary citizen." There were also demonstrations for better pay and working conditions and more "appropriate" arming. The police strikers

demanding that a law be passed for the protection of police personnel. This was pursued by the Ministry of Interior as soon as emergency rule was lifted in 2012.

In the analysis of the counter-revolutionary forces that mobilized to undermine efforts for radical social and political transformation, the police have been seen as part of the so-called deep state in Egypt, that is, an entrenched apparatus of rule with high-stakes in existing power structures and arrangements. While the use of the concept of “the deep state” in the Egyptian context needs further consideration, it does help to point to the existence of deep interests in the reassertion of the police. Yet, to understand this reassertion, it is more helpful to look at the coalescence of a number of factors. First, there is the set of political economy factors that have to do with the protection of existing economic arrangements that privilege a small segment of the population. As a popular movement for social transformation, the revolution continued with wide-scale mobilization for social and economic rights. This mobilization did not only consist of demonstrations and the occupation of Tahrir, but took diverse forms including the expansion of squatting on public and private land, and the appropriation of commercial streets by informal vendors in central Cairo and in many city neighborhoods. Further, communities took initiatives to improve living conditions, which encroached on the purview of public authorities, such as the building of exit ramps on highways to allow access to their neighborhoods.

Although these facets of popular mobilization persisted for four years, they were countered by the redeployment of the police to reassert “the awe of state” or “haybat al dawla.” Illustrative of this strategy were the campaigns against informal vendors. Regular police attempts to regain the awe of state have been conceived in terms of regaining control over the streets and removing the vendors. In turn, the environment of mobilization has facilitated greater resistance on the part of the vendors in defense of better opportunities for making a living. In some instances, these latter took up arms to resist police efforts to remove them by force. Police use of armored cars in these campaigns and

having high-ranking officers in command are indicative of the high-value of the stakes, above all the control of space.

The emergence of divisions between politically-oriented activism, on one hand, and forms of popular mobilization focused on economic rights, on the other, were manifested in differentiated positioning in relation to the police. For example, informal vendors did not necessarily cooperate with activists in clashes with the police, and protesters for social and economic rights did not approve of their protests being taken over by political activists. These paradoxes of mobilization should be taken into account.

Though the police reduced their street visibility for an extended period between 2011 and 2012, their use of violence eventually returned to the same level as prior to the revolution. A report by al-Nadim Centre for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of the Victims of Torture on the first one hundred days of Morsi’s presidency reveals the extent of violence perpetrated in police stations. Much of this violence was aimed at ordinary citizens and related to contests over social and economic rights. The report documented 11 deaths while in police custody and 30 cases of torture in the early months of Morsi’s presidency, providing evidence that the police practices of violence that were routine in the pre-revolution period persisted under the elected president. Among the more known and prominent examples are the campaigns in the Cairo neighborhood of Ramlet Bulaq, which took place on the heel of a shooting incident that resulted in the death of one of its residents. In response to the inhabitants’ demonstrations, the police conducted a number of raids on the neighborhood and arrested over 50 young men. The residents viewed police action as an attempt to empty the area of its youth – especially those considered to be most challenging to the police. The Ramlet Bulaq case is illustrative of the conjunction of the objectives of enforcing a particular vision of public order and the protection of the economic interests of privileged segments of the population.

The police’s implication in episodes of violence such as the February 2012 massacre of the Ultra supporters of the Ahli

club at a football match in Port Said is also understood as linked to their efforts to reassert control and power. In this case, the police appeared to be pursuing a vendetta against the Ultras football supporters, in particular the Ahli Ultras who were at the forefront of the revolutionary confrontations and whose challenge of the police at the symbolic level was very effective. For example, Ultras songs effected a leveling of the police, as with the song “ya ghurab yam’ashish guwa bitna”(O’ crow that is nested in our home).

The restructuring of the Ministry of Interior was one of the declared goals of revolutionary activists and popular forces that participated in the revolution. Countering the struggle to reform policing, the ministry undertook to restore its grip over the population, and, in doing so, it followed a similar route to that taken under Mubarak. In the 1990s, the ministry sought the normalization of the state of emergency through the law, enshrining emergency rule in the legal system. Laws, such as the Baltaga law of 1998, extended police powers of arrest. The Baltaga law was particularly aimed at young men from popular neighborhoods who were thought of as recalcitrant subjects.

With the end of emergency law in 2012, the ministry prepared a raft of laws to reinstate the state of emergency. These included the law on the Protection of Society from Dangerous Persons, the amendment to the law on the Protection of Places of Work that was introduced in 2011 and intended to limit strikes and demonstrations, the amendments to the law on the Protection of Places of Worship, and the amendments to the Penal Code which would give impunity to the police. The reintroduction of emergency rule under new labels was to facilitate the return of unconstrained powers that the police had under Mubarak-era emergency rule – powers of arrest, detention, and impunity from prosecution for the use of torture and violence.

The intransigence of the police and their resistance to the calls for restructuring was more recently confirmed in the statement made by a top aid to the minister of interior.

In May 2014, General Ashraf Abdallah, first assistant to the minister and head of the Central Security Forces asserted in an interview on an Egyptian television program that the term “restructuring the police apparatus” is “an impolite term.” Abdallah’s articulation of such unequivocal rejection to the reform of the institution whose practices united Egyptians in opposition to the Mubarak regime can be partly understood against the background of the counter-revolution narratives of plots and conspiracies that highlight threats to national security led by the Muslim Brothers. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Abdallah acted as mediator in the Central Security Forces’ strike under Morsi, viewing it sympathetically as a message against the politicization of the police at that time, and that today he leads the Central Security Forces’ efforts to stifle protest by university students including the use of live bullets. Additionally, he oversaw the consolidation of the forces with the appointment of 600 lieutenants trained in “the dispersal of demonstrations according to international standards” and “educated in the ethical and legal conduct of the police” as reported in Egyptian media.

The reassertion of the police apparatus in its pre-revolution form is undoubtedly part of the counter-revolutionary mobilization. Shored-up by a media discourse on chaos, violence and insecurity, and social breakdown, and working in conjunction with dominant economic interests, the police have been able to gradually reassert their control. In this, they have been aided by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, by the Morsi government, and again by the former Field Marshal who is now in power. It would be simplistic to argue that the reassertion of the police translates into a return to pre-revolution Egypt. Rather, it indicates that the structural conditions and the affective aspects of relations with government that motivated popular action in the early revolutionary period persist as grounds for oppositional action.

*Salwa Ismail is Professor of Politics with reference to the Middle East in the Department of Politics and International Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.*

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The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) is a collaborative network that aims to increase the impact of political scientists specializing in the study of the Middle East in the public sphere and in the academic community. POMEPS, directed by Marc Lynch, is based at the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University and is supported by the Carnegie Corporation and the Henry Luce Foundation. For more information, see <http://www.pomeps.org>.