

THE SECOND ARAB AWAKENING

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After years of false promises and thwarted hopes significant political reform is no longer a hypothetical possibility but a reality. In the annals of the Middle East, the year 2011 is likely to be remembered for quite some time to come. As the year began protests were accelerating in Tunisia, and on January 14 President Zine al-Abidine Ben 'Ali fled into exile in Saudi Arabia. In neighboring Egypt the Tunisians' accomplishment lent momentum to widespread demonstrations especially after January 25, 2011, designated (following Tunisia's example) as the "Day of Rage" (yaum al-ghadab). Eighteen days later, after more than 800 demonstrators were killed by security forces and government-linked thugs, President Husni Mubarak, who had ruled Egypt for three decades, resigned from office, thereby launching a process of political and constitutional transition that is likely to continue for years. Across the Arab world, emulative protests spread in nearly every country, with varying success and sometimes with horrendous bloodshed. In Libya, a strongman met his demise; in Yemen, a dictator retreated from the presidency; in Bahrain, protesters demanding reform and equitable treatment, were suppressed within weeks by a Saudi-led force that was intended to stymie demands for reform; and, in Syria, chants of "irhal, irhal" (go/scram) were met by brutal government violence and a descent into a civil war that by late 2012 claimed at least 18,000 lives. (Case studies illustrating the widely variant outcomes of popular demands for reform in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria appear below).

In western circles, the burgeoning protests, which typically included the trademark demand "al-sha'ab yurid isqat al-nizam" (the people want the fall of the regime), were styled

an “Arab Spring”, but the seasonal metaphor fails to capture the profound underpinnings of the protests as well as the magnitude of the challenges that still lay ahead. In Arab discourse 2011 has been described by many people as “al-sahwah” (the awakening), or “the second Arab renaissance” (al-nahdah al-thaniyah), or even “al-thawrat al-‘arabia” (the Arab rebellions). All of these characterizations are apt.

Perhaps the keystone of the transformation that is underway is the clamor for respect and dignity (karāmah), arguably the core demand of the protests. All too often, Arab governments have treated their subjects and citizens with disdain, sloughing off their legitimate demands . Whether monarchy or Arab republic, authoritarianism in the Arab world has been characterized by the depoliticization of public space. Other than political humor, politics in many corners of the Arab world has been consigned to private, and even then only broached cautiously with trusted intimates. The depoliticization of public space persists in places like Saudi Arabia, where a hint of dissent provokes an iron fist response (as well as prophylactic cascades of money; in 2011, \$35 billion in new funding and subsidies to address domestic concerns was announced). In many instances however, the citizenry of the Arab world is evincing degrees of empowerment and political sensitivity that have not been seen for generations (one recalls the post-Suez period). Challand succinctly refers to a new sense of collective autonomy, *tasayir dhati*, in

Arab societies.(Challand 2011)⁽²⁾.

Muslims and the Question of Political Reform

There are now over 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, including 450 million in the Middle East, and more than 300 million in the Arab world alone. While it would be convenient if a preponderance of Muslims embraced western secular ideals, not to mention western-style democracy, but the picture is more complex. A relative handful of Arab liberals do share and espouse western ideals, but they do not have a broad constituency. The dominant oppositional forces in the broader Muslim world—not least in the Arab world—have typically been hostile to secularism, particularly when secularism is understood to mean that Islamic values

have no place in politics, but they also embrace representative democracy. In a region in which religion is an important source of personal identity, any opening of the political system brings with it a debate about the proper role of religion in

society and the relationship of religion to the state, but Middle Eastern governments have generally not been willing to experiment in political reform and allow that debate to occur.

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in politics. This prospect generated unease in western circles. At best, major external powers, such as the United States, promoted a go-slow approach, but more typically sought to undermine elections that brought Islamists to power. The cases of Algeria and Palestine are instructive.

Algeria

In the face of horrible unemployment, discontent and economic failure, Algeria attempted democratization in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) had monopolized power for three decades, ever since Algeria won its hard fought independence from France in 1962. The FLN was soundly trounced by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria's first free elections, including municipal and then parliamentary elections. The Algerian army intervened in January 1992 to prevent the FIS from realizing its victory and civil war ensued. It is impossible to know whether the FIS might have ruled competently or incompetently and whether it would have been able to impose its religious values on a divided society split between secularism and religious conservatism.

More than 100,000 people died in the internal war and Algeria became a cautionary tale invoked routinely by Middle East dictators, secularly inclined intellectuals and western officials alike. The failure of the Algerian reform experiment certainly illustrated the likely fate of ruling parties when exposed to reasonably free elections.

Algerian secularists who enthusiastically supported the coup in 1992 now often concede that it would have been far better to permit the FIS experiment to go forward, especially since

the option of intervention on the Turkish model would have continued to be an option for the Algerian generals.

Less noticed is that the debacle in Algeria also prompted a lot of soul-searching amongst Islamist thinkers concerning whether and how they should accommodate themselves to the prevailing autocratic regimes. Some leading thinkers, such as the late Lebanese cleric, Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din argued that FIS erred in seeking power and did not take into account the strong secular impulse in Algerian society. Others urged a path of peaceful political accommodation and playing within the rules of the existing game.

Hamas and the 2006 elections

When Palestinian legislative elections were conducted in January 2006, at U.S. insistence, the unexpected but clearcut winner was Hamas, the Islamist group (Lesch 2007). Palestinian voters were expressing their anger at Israel's occupation and the burgeoning of illegal settlements on occupied

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Palestinian territory, as well as the notorious corruption of the Palestinian Authority and Fatah. Contrary to the sanguine acceptance of the wholly unexpected result, the U.S. led a campaign to isolate the new Gaza-based Hamas government and starve it of funds, which also entails starving large numbers of aid-dependent Palestinians. European diplomats and some U.S. officials urged a path of incremental inclusion instead, but the U.S. rejected any attempt to co-opt Hamas so long as refused to foreswear terrorism or accept Israel's legitimacy. The policy was not successful. Hamas seized complete control of Gaza in 2007, and a rival Fatah-oriented government resides in the still Israeli-occupied West Bank. Despite a series of Israeli raids and bombardments that have killed many civilians, including military campaign in December 2008 and January 2009, and notwithstanding the impoverishment of Gaza, Hamas continues in power and still enjoys significant popular support. Arguably, the path of incremental inclusion (as respected international diplomats urged) rather than exclusion would have been a wiser response to the Hamas electoral triumph. Hamas is indisputably an entrenched player in Palestinian politics.

It is indisputable that the U.S.-led campaign to overturn the 2006 Palestinian election, as well as the West's tolerance for Algeria's repressive government bred deep cynicism in the Muslim world about western avowals of democracy and freedom.

The Spark that Ignited Revolt

Given the at best tepid external support for substantial political reform, particularly entailing the inclusion of Islamist opposition

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groups, and considering the hostility of Arab governments to credible political reform, the puzzle is under what circumstances the ruling structures would be compelled to succumb to popular demands for change? For years, public space in Arab countries has been depoliticized so that even ephemeral attempts to organize or mobilize opposition were met with repression and intimidation. The solution to the puzzle finally came in Tunisia when fruit seller Mohammed Bouazizi set himself alight in a desperate quest for dignity in the city of Sidi Bouzid, on December 17, 2010.

One should note discount the demonstration effects of either the "Green Revolution" in Iran during 2009 when multitudes of Iranians took to urban streets to protest what was seen as a crooked presidential election, or the toppling of the Ba'thist regime in Iraq by the Anglo-American invasion of 2003. The Green Revolution, though thwarted and ultimately suppressed demonstrated the great potential of people power and the importance of social media on the Internet and through ubiquitous cell-phones. The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, while accomplished by foreign armies, underlined that even the Arab world's most-feared dictators were vulnerable.

Tunisia: The Jasmine Revolution

Of all the North African countries, Tunisia would seem to enjoy the best chance for a democratic transformation. The population of 11 million is generally well-educated and there is a sizable middle class, and an impressive civil society. Tunisia has also been a pioneer in its commitment to women's rights, which are arguably more respected in Tunisia than in any of the North African countries. The small Tunisian military, which includes less than 40,000 people under arms, is led by a professional official corps that has not infiltrated the civilian economy in the same way that the behemoth Egyptian military has done.

North Africa, "the Maghrib" (the West), is a region of remarkable cultural and political diversity. While the population is predominantly Arab, there are also important ethnic minorities, especially the Berbers who comprise important and often restive minorities in Algeria and Morocco (with sizable numbers as well as in Tunisia and Libya). While this may change, within Tunisia, the Arab-Berber divide has been far less important than it is in either Morocco or Algeria, where the Berbers have insisted on education in the Berber language, as well as cultural autonomy.

Tunisia's Islamists are led by Rachid Ghannouchi, who is often celebrated as a moderate figure. He only returned from exile in February 2011 after years of living in London where he played an important role as a voice for Muslim accommodation in Europe. The Renaissance Party (al-Nahdah), which Ghannouchi founded, managed to survive years of state suppression by maintaining a covert presence in society and cultivating a youthful leadership. Tunisia is also known for

its strong labor union movement, one that is without parallel in North Africa, or the Arab world for that matter.

Time and again since December 2010, Tunisians rallied to preserve the momentum of the Jasmine Revolution. The result is that many remnants of the oppressive Ben Ali regime have been expunged.

Transparent and well-designed elections for seats in the proportionately distributed 217 member National Constituent Assembly were held on October 23, 2011. The Assembly is charged with writing a new constitution. Thirty parties participated but six won three quarters of all seats. While al-Nahdah won the largest share with 90 seats, a variety of ideological and regional groups won representation, and 19 seats were allocated to Tunisians living abroad.

While the Secretary-General of al-Nahdah Hamadi Jebali became Prime Minister in December 2011, the Constituent Assembly named Moncef Marzouki, a highly respected human rights activist and physician, acting-President (a weaker position than the premiership).

As in Egypt, and across the Arab world, conservative Salafists have asserted themselves in Tunisia, often targeting secular institutions such as universities for failing to adhere to strict moral standards, including permitting men and women to study together, or for not permitting veiled women to enter campus. While the Salafists are comparably weak in Tunisia, their activism is likely to foment clashes with Tunisian secularists, who in turn will challenge al-Nahdah to exemplify the pluralism that it was avowed.

Arabs are watching developments in

Tunisia closely. The country is a bellwether for the fate of the Arab Awakening; including Egypt where the fall of Ben Ali helped inspire widescale demonstrations.

Egypt: The January 25th Revolution

Egyptians chafed under the Mubarak dictatorship for years. While opposition activities were often stymied by repression and dampened by fear, labor strikes were increasingly commonplace and political activists continued to highlight regime abuses. Within opposition Islamist circles there was much debate and discussion about themes of civil society, democracy and tolerance⁽³⁾.

Using word of mouth, cell phone messaging, and social networking tools, especially Facebook, which had become a locus of opposition communication by the previous fall, January 25 was declared a “Day of Rage”. A variety of groups was involved, but for many the memory of Khalid Said, a young computer activist who was savagely beaten to death by police the previous summer in Alexandria was vivid (see <http://www.elshaheed.co.uk/>). Tens of thousands turned out, especially in Cairo’s Tahrir (Liberation) Square, a central site adjacent to Egypt’s famous archeological museum, where chants of “irhal, irhal, irhal! (scram, get out, leave)” became commonplace. Although the momentum was tenuous, especially when armed thugs were unleashed by the government to foster a climate of lawlessness, the “revolution” succeeded in a mere 18 days to topple Hosni Mubarak, who had ruled Egypt since 1981, when he notoriously pledged to serve only one six-year term.

The old order has been shaken but it

remains to be seen whether a revolution has occurred in Egypt. The massive Egyptian military holds the reins of power and it was the senior generals who told Mubarak that his time was up and pledged to superintend a transition to elections. Yet, the military has a big stake in the present distribution of resources and privileges and it begs credulity to imagine that the uniformed brass will accept any political arrangement that challenges their vested interests. This is a gargantuan constraint on reform.

In March 2011, the Egyptians went to the polls and overwhelmingly approved (more than 77 percent voted “yes”) a series of constitutional amendments intended to permit parliamentary and presidential elections. Despite promises by the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) that the new constitution would be drafted in an open process, the military unilaterally amended 55 articles of the existing constitution after the referendum. The full dimensions of the generals’ agenda became clear on November 1, 2011, when SCAF distributed its “Guidelines” for the drafting of a new Constitution. These guidelines include the following points: there would be no scrutiny of the military budget by civilian authorities and the military would retain veto power over any proffered drafts of a new constitution.

Although there were about twenty legal parties in Mubarak’s time, few of them enjoyed anything approaching a national organization. Groups that credibly espouse the values of the Tahrir Square have to literally start from the ground up to create a political party. The only opposition group that can boast a national organization is the long outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, which has founded the Freedom

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and Justice Party. A variety of other Islamist parties have emerged, including the Hizb al-Wasat, the reformist Islamist “Center Party” that was finally granted legal status in 2011, after 16 years of struggle.

The growing vitality of Salafist parties is noteworthy. The Salafists are generally contemptuous of profane politics, but have proved quite pragmatic in exploiting political opportunity in order to advance their goal of instilling a conservative Islamic order in Egypt. Salafi groups have long been especially active in Alexandria, but they also enjoy a national following.

Parliamentary elections were concluded in December 2011, and the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party and allied parties won nearly half of the 508 seats with the Salafists coming in second with a quarter of the seats. The secularly oriented groups that played such formative role in launching and sustaining the Tahrir Square demonstrations, came in a distant third with their votes scattered among an admixture of small parties.

Presidential elections followed in June 2012. Non-Islamist candidates for the presidency included former air force general and Prime Minister Ahmad Shafik, a long-term Mubarak ally, Amre Moussa, the former Secretary-General of the Arab League and a former foreign minister, and leftist Hamdeen Sabahi. Non-Islamist voters split their votes between Sabahi and Moussa, so law and order man Shafik came in second and then entered a run-off against Muhammad Mursi, the Brotherhood’s candidate. After days of suspense (and rampant suspicions that the results were being “cooked”),

Mursi was declared the winner with about 52 per cent of the vote. This was a watershed moment in Egypt’s political history.

There is a complex competition for power and public support underway including the new president, SCAF, and a variety of state institutions, especially the judiciary and the Mubarak-era internal security apparatus. The Constitutional Court, in a ruling upheld by SCAF ordered new parliamentary elections, a ruling promptly challenged by the newly inaugurated President Mursi. Nonetheless, the new president proved his mettle in August 2012 when he forced the senior SCAF figures, including Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, into retirement after serious security lapses in the Sinai. No doubt, political power in Egypt will be contested for years to come, and major external powers will wield influence as well, not least the United States, which gives the Egyptian military almost \$2 billion a year in security assistance.

Libya: The “Mukhtar Revolution”⁽⁴⁾

Mu’ammarr’s Qadhafi’s strategy of ruling was premised on weak state institutions and alliances with favored tribes. His self-styled *jamahirriya*—people’s republic—was intended to preclude challenges to his power by diffusing power throughout society. Hence, the Libyan Army was weak and fragmented, particularly the eastern units center around the city of

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Benghazi. The judiciary was fragmented, and the police forces lacked a central authority. As for civil society, any initiative that suggested establishing anything resembling autonomous local actors was suppressed or crushed by the state. This means that any group seizing the state must immediately confront the task of building national institutions, as well allowing impetus to civil society.

In Libya, swelling protests began in mid-February. On February 17, 2011, a proclaimed “Day of Rage” inspired by the models of Tunisia and Egypt prompted deadly response,

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especially against demonstrators in Tripoli’s Green Square. A vindictive Mu’amar Qadhafi promised to tolerate no dissent and declared that his opponents were drug-addled al-Qaeda-led terrorists, and he called on Libyans to fight the “greasy rats”.

As the groundswell of opposition to Qadhafi’s rule expanded in February and March, one could observe an inchoate civil society in formation, but Libya lacks either an established political opposition or established legal institutions other than tribal based traditions of customary law. The Muslim Brotherhood does enjoy considerable

support, especially in the eastern cities, including Benghazi, and Salafist groups have been picking up wind in recent years. The venerable Sufi or mystical orders, especially the Sanusiyya, played an important role in Libyan history, including leading the anti-colonial campaign against the Italians. The Sanusiyya were ruthlessly repressed by Qadhafi, but they are resurging.

In an extraordinary meeting on March 12, the Arab League voted to support international action to protect Libyan civilians, which was followed five days later by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973. The resolution enabled the U.S.-European intervention to create “no-drive” and “no-fly” zones to stop attacks on Libyan civilians. The NATO effort evolved into a transparent campaign to destroy the military apparatus of the Qadhafi regime in support of opposition forces that were literally engaged in a dangerous on-the-job training.

Qadhafi’s capture on October 20, 2011, and his bloody ignominious end came amidst reports not only of government atrocities and mass executions, but scores of summary executions of regime loyalists by opposition militias. The legacy of disregard for legal processes and disrespect for fundamental human rights by both sides suggest that rocky days lie ahead in liberated Libya, where many militias resist disarming.

The partners in power will include religious groups and the tribes, and inchoate political parties. The importance of tribal affiliations were clear in the national elections that were organized in June 2012. The victorious and relatively liberal National Alliance is led by Mahmoud Jibril, a US educated member of the large Warfalla tribe who served as

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interim prime minister following the toppling of Qadhafi. Jibril's victory was shortlived. A coalition of tribes and Islamists managed to wrest control of the parliament and sideline Jibril.

After demonstrations erupted in Arab countries and across the 'ummah against a hateful if amateurish anti-Islam film made in California and distributed by YouTube, the U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens was killed in Benghazi in September 2012. His killers, purportedly affiliated to al-Qaeda, launched an opportunistic but skillful assault on the U.S. consulate. Stevens was reportedly a popular diplomat in Libya, and his death prompted a strong reaction against some Islamist militias, but it remains to be seen if there will be a lasting impact on the centralization of competent security institutions in Libya.

“The Syria Revolution”:

Following the death in 2000 of Hafiz al-Asad, who ruled Syria for twenty-seven years, there was hope that his son and successor Dr. Bashar al-Asad would shepherd Syria toward more freedom. Whatever Bashar's intentions, he promptly revealed his dependence on the authoritarian structure of power that his wily father had mastered. After a flush of excitement in 2000, opposition voices were soon stifled by the state.

The chant that became famous in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya was “al-Sha'ab yurid isqat al-nizam” [the people want the fall of the regime], but in Damascus the regime was smugly confident that Syria would not be affected by the upheaval. Not only were the many agencies of the security apparatus vigilant to control dissent but President Bashar al-Asad presented himself as a reformer. In 2011,

he gave a long interview to the Wall Street Journal, in which he argued that Syria was stable:

“We always say that we need reform but what kind of reform. This is first. Second, if you want to make a comparison between what is happening in Egypt and Syria, you have to look from a different point: why is Syria stable, although we have more difficult conditions? Egypt has been supported financially by the United States, while we are under embargo by most countries of the world. We have growth although we do not have many of the basic needs for the people. Despite all that, the people do not go into an uprising. So it is not only about the needs and not only about the reform. It is about the ideology, the beliefs and the cause that you have. There is a difference between having a cause and having a vacuum. So, as I said, we have many things in common but at the same time we have some different things⁽⁵⁾.

February passed with only a few small demonstrations, but by March it became clear that Syria was by no means immune as a surge of demonstrations began in the southern Houran district of Syria, particularly in the Sunni town of Deraa. The demonstrations were provoked by the arrest and heinous mistreatment of teenagers who had been nabbed by the police for posting anti-regime graffiti. The initial protests evoked a bloody response from the regime, but the demonstrations spread throughout the southern region, despite widespread arrests and indiscriminate killings by the army and police. As in Egypt, government thugs, known locally as “shabiha”, were commonly employed as well. By the end of March, President al-Asad had sacked his cabinet and made empty

promises of reform, which he periodically repeated.

The army remains loyal to the regime, although desertions and defections indicate a gradual erosion of support among non-Alawi soldiers and officers. For more than forty years the Syrian regime has been dominated by the minority 'Alawi community, which accounts for about eleven percent of Syria's population of 21 millions, and the 'Alawis control all senior positions in the army. The 'Alawi sect is an offshoot of Shi'i Islam, but the sect is quite unique in its practices and structure. For generations, the 'Alawis were poor and disadvantaged, but their path to influence and power was the military. Unlike either Tunisia or Egypt, where professional army officers broke with the president, this is unlikely to happen in Syria. The two most important army divisions are controlled by relatives of Bashar al-Asad, particularly his brother Maher, who has taken the lead in attempting to brutally crush the growing insurrection.

In Libya, the army was kept weak by design, but the standing Syrian military, with an active force of 400,000 is no pushover, even if a US-led NATO force had the appetite to intervene militarily, which is certainly not the case. The Syrian National Council has begun to coordinate between the loosely aligned admixture of secular, nationalist, and Islamists elements that comprise the opposition, but it remains unclear what a new Syrian government would look like.

In November 2011, the Syrian government accepted an Arab League brokered initiative that called for dialogue and for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from the dissident cities; however, the ink was hardly dry before the government killing continued in Homs, while

calling for all Syrians to turn in their weapons. There is no evidence that Bashar al-Asad and his entourage have any plan to stop short of vanquishing the opposition, and the likelihood is that the bloodletting will not only continue, but probably become much worse as opposition forces increasingly meet government bullets with their own. No happy ending is in sight.

Renewed Minority Dissent in Saudi Arabia

Significant demonstrations took place in Saudi Arabia and in Bahrain. In Saudi Arabia, the minority Shi'i Muslim community of the Eastern Province, who may account for ten percent of the country's population, mounted a "Day of Rage" on March 11, which was also styled as "the Hanin Revolution of March 11". The latter is a reference to a document drafted by Shi'i intellectuals in 2010 that was presented to King 'Abdullah. The document calls for respect for the civil rights of the Shi'a, including the end of long-term imprisonment without trial (citing the case of some prisoners who have been held for 14 years without trial). The police responded to the protests by about 800 people by arresting several dozen protesters, some of whom were alleged to have been involved in the 1996 bombing of the al-Khobar Tower barracks.

The government in Riyadh was also concerned that restive Sunni citizens would be inspired to protest. By March, several obliging senior clerics in the holy city of Mecca issued a religious opinion declaring that it was forbidden to protest because this undermines security and stability. Simultaneously, King 'Abdullah announced a large stimulus package of \$66.7 billion to be spent creating jobs, housing and medical facilities. Subjects

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were also threatened with punishment if they mounted illegal demonstrations (and there is no possibility of “legal” demonstrations).

In June, a group of reformist women renewed efforts to have the ban on women driving their own cars lifted. Earlier efforts in 1991 prompted harsh retaliation by the authorities, but the rejoinder a bit milder in 2011, but the government clings to the view that banning women from driving “protects them from vice.” From the standpoint of many Saudi women, the ban is hugely inconvenient and expensive because it forces them to hire male drivers or depend on male members of the household to drive them. King Abdullah attempted to offer some solace in September 2011 by promising that women would be permitted to vote and stand for local elections, but only beginning in 2015.

The Tragedy of Bahrain

In the small Gulf state of Bahrain many of the complaints coincide with sectarian differences and disparities in privilege that are extraordinary because they are so readily noticed. Although the Shi'i Muslims account for nearly 70 percent of the small population (excluding expatriate workers, the Bahraini citizens number about 600,000), they have typically been on the short of the stick in terms of access to government employment and favors. Travel from cosmopolitan capital of Manama to the predominantly and very distressed Shi'i city

of Sitrah, and the differences are abrupt and stunning. Sitrah, along with many of the Shi'i villages in Bahrain, is a dreadful place to live. Unemployment and per capita income data for speak volumes about the inequity that defines Bahraini society.

On February 14, 2011, protests were mounted by predominantly Shi'i demonstrators, although they were also joined by some reform-minded Sunni Muslims. Many of the demonstrators gathered around the Pearl Roundabout, a downtown Manama landmark where a white concrete pedestal held aloft a pearl, recalling earlier days when Bahrain was a world center for the harvesting of natural pearls. The demonstrators were overwhelmingly peaceful, and police efforts to dislodge them were largely unsuccessful, despite police violence that killed five protesters on February 18. The government—

urged on by the United States—sought a negotiated end to the protests. Crown Prince Salman took the lead in negotiations to initiate a serious dialogue about reform, particularly with Shaikh 'Ali Salman, the soft-spoken and moderate head of al-Wefaq (the Compact),

which held all the elected opposition seats in parliament. Hardliners on both sides were skeptical of the proposed dialogue and it was stymied.

On the opposition side, the rival al-Haq movement declared that its goal was to overthrow the monarchy, while within the regime, Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman,

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the uncle of King Hamad bin Isa, and who had served in his post for four decades from the very beginning of Bahraini independence, was hostile to the prospect of reform. The reputedly corrupt prime minister, who enjoys close ties to Saudi Arabia, has long frustrated reformist efforts, not least by his grand nephew the Crown Prince. U.S. efforts to encourage the reform dialogue seemed to be bearing fruit in early March, but any talk of dialogue ended on March 14, when Saudi and UAE troops crossing the causeway linking the main island to the mainland to lead a crackdown on the demonstrators. The Saudi-led incursion was clearly a riposte to the United States, which King 'Abdallah felt was much too quick to jump on the bandwagon of reform and far too reticent to support old friends (including President Mubarak of Egypt). Within days, the very symbol of the protests, the Pearl monument was demolished.

All talk of reform came to a crashing halt. About 1,850 Shi'i employees were dismissed from state jobs as punishment for having demonstrated, and hundreds were arrested. Health professionals, who treated injured demonstrators and accused of trying to overthrow the regime, were tried by military courts and sentenced to long terms in prisons. Under international pressure, some of the most egregious military trials have been overturned and referred to civilian courts, but little has been done to address the underlying disparities that gave rise to the protests, which continue periodically. The risk is that the majority Shi'i population, which has long been surprisingly

moderate, especially given the discrimination they face routinely, will be radicalized and that charges of foreign meddling by Iran will prove to be self-fulfilling.

Conclusion

The Arab world seems to be entering a new historical phase, one in which the contours of political power will be reshaped as more governments face demands for accountability and responsiveness to citizens' demands. Never in the modern history of the Middle East have so many millions demanded the dismantling of their autocratic regimes with such unanimity, perseverance, and, it must be emphasized, courage.

The Arab awakening plays out in societies where the embrace of piety (taqwa) is common, but the content of that piety is actively contested and re-imagined, especially among youth. Islam has become increasingly personalized under conditions of growing urbanization, globalization, and the commercialization of identity, not to mention a new horizon for political imagination. (White 2012) Political groups cannot help but be influenced by what Asef Bayat calls the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary", whereby subtle individual actions resocialize religious movements and governments and thereby

create new identities and opportunities for change. (Bayat 2010)

The dynamics of change underway in the Arab world, including the re-politicization of public space, a new collective autonomy,

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radically changing terms of reference for politics, and new political imaginaries, we need to insure that our assessments allow due deference for surprise. Democracy may be the political solution in some cases, notably Tunisia, or Egypt, but that remains to be seen. It is not difficult to imagine other paths that stress stability and order at the cost of newly won dignity, or even in the name of that dignity.

In his seminal article, Dankwart Rustow conceptualised the process of democratisation as a process of habituation whereby the players learn and grow used to democratic rules of the game (Rustow 1970). This is an important insight because it is unrealistic to presume that democratic systems begin with all parties fully imbued with democratic principles. Indeed, even mature democracies are still evolving, still democratising.

Indigenous and exogenous factors point to a process of liberalisation and democratisation that will play out over decades. Missing until now have been élites committed to serious rather than cosmetic reform. What is not in doubt is that, given the opportunity, the quest of Middle Easterners for a better life, and for politics free of corruption and coercion will continue.

Footnotes

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- (2) Benoit Challand, B. (2011). «Counter-Power of Civil Society and the Emergence of a New Political Imaginary in the Arab World.» *Constellations* 18(3).
- (3) Ashraf el-Sherif, (2011). «Will Islamists Accept Political Pluralism?» *Current History* 110(740): 358-363.
- (4) Omar Mukhtar was a revered leader of the anti-colonial struggle against the Italians and he was hanged in 1937.
- (5) See 'Interview With Syrian President Bashar al-Assad: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703833204576114712441122894.html?KEYWORDS=bashar+interview+Syria> (accessed Oct. 8th, 2012).

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