



## THE FUTURE OF ARAB SPRING, REALITY AND AMBITION

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Mohammad Salim Al-Rawashdeh & <sup>2</sup>Dr. Hani Abdulkareem Akho Rshaidah

<sup>1</sup>Associated Prof. International Relations, Al-Balqa'a Applied University – Amman Collage,  
Jordan-Amman

<sup>2</sup>Associate professor.international relations, D'aar Alhekmah,Political Science DEPT,  
Vice President for Academic Affairs, Jordan-Mafraq.

### Abstract

The Arab Spring revolutions varied according to the social environment and nature of each ruling regime, and depending on the degree of civility in surrounding environments, the momentum in achieving the revolution's goals and was faster when charting the features of such revolutions. The revolts of Tunisia and Egypt were the fastest to take shape despite the apparent control and strength of the ruling class, whose allegiance and connections to the institutions providing security for the regime did not cross professional boundaries, though some officials in these institutions reaped multiple material merits at the individual level.

History tells us that societies cannot overcome their problems unless and until they face them squarely. The toppling of a long-standing authoritarian regime is not the end of a process of democratization but the beginning of it. Even failed democratic experiments are usually critical positive stages in the political development of countries, eras in which they get started on rooting out the antidemocratic social, cultural, and economic legacies of the past. Too many observers today interpret problems and setbacks as signs that an eventual stable democratic outcome is not in the cards. But such violent and tragic events as the French Revolution, the collapse of interwar Italian and German democracy, and the American Civil War were not evidence that the countries in question could not create or sustain liberal democracies; they were crucial parts of the process by which those countries achieved just such an outcome.

The widespread pessimism about the fate of the Arab Spring is almost certainly misplaced. Of course, the Middle East has a unique mix of cultural, historical, and economic attributes. But so does every region, and there is little reason to expect the Arab world to be a permanent exception to the rules of political development. The year 2011 was the dawn of a promising new era for the region, and it will be looked on down the road as a historical watershed, even though the rapids downstream will be turbulent.

**Key words:** *Arab Spring, Arab world, Arab nationalism, Arab crisis.*

### Introduction

The so-called 'Arab Awakening' is a momentous event that surprised both scholars and policy makers. For over a decade the paradigm of authoritarian resilience had dominated studies of the Arab world, almost entirely replacing the democratization paradigm that had been prominent throughout the 1980s and 1990s. This inter-paradigm debate on how best to explain and interpret the politics of the Arab world now calls for a review, in light of the Arab uprisings. The contributions to this themed issue offer a first attempt at highlighting some of the theoretical issues that should inform our rethinking of this debate thus far. Overall the issue thus aims at making a theoretical contribution by providing a deeper insight into the socio-economic-political structures and the new actors that led to the uprisings in the Arab world. It also explores and considers the opportunities and constraints that these structures offer for sharpening our theoretical tools – which may in turn lead us to use the paradigms and models available to us more flexibly. The case studies that this themed issue deals with by no means exhaust all the issues and case studies that need to be re-thought since the Arab uprisings of December 2010 to date. The aim is to provide useful insights for others to apply more broadly across the whole region.

As popular demonstrations swept across the Arab world in 2011, many U.S. policymakers and analysts were hopeful that the movements would usher in a new era for the region. That May, President Barack Obama described the uprisings as "a historic opportunity" for the United States "to pursue the world as it should be." Secretary of State Hillary Clinton echoed these comments, expressing confidence that the transformations would allow Washington to advance "security, stability, peace, and democracy" in the Middle East. Not to be outdone, the Republican Party's 2012 platform trumpeted "the historic nature of the events of the past two years -- the Arab Spring -- that have unleashed democratic movements leading to the overthrow of dictators who have been menaces to global security for decades." Some saw the changes as heralding a long-awaited end to the Middle East's immunity to previous waves of global democratization; Others proclaimed that al Qaeda and other radicals had finally lost the war of ideas.

There is as yet no framework for understanding the outcome of the Arab spring. (Herein referred to as Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Syria. Would be called simply (the Crisis) or more generally the Arab Spring. There are many arguments that are often inconsistent. A framework can help further socio-political and economic analysis and synthesis and will facilitate the convergence of conflicting views on a solution. This article is intended to provide a systemic framework for the Arab Crisis that can be extended to other Arab experiences. Arabs have split into three or more main categories vis-à-vis the Crisis: pro-government, pro-revolt and a silent middle. The contention here that, regardless of classification or intentions, events on the ground and the accompanying political manoeuvres point collectively to the conclusion that the revolt became a tool in the toolbox for Arab realignment ideologically and geopolitically under the pretence of a just revolt. The argument advanced is that there is a plan for the realignment of Arabs that uses the revolt as

an entrance point and a tool in this strategy – whether the Arabs engaged in revolt know it or not. We would like to shed some light upon the Syrian crisis. The Syrian people, the Syrian government and the rebels have borne the entire risk throughout the induced Crisis with no control over aspects of its trajectory. The complexity of the Syrian Crisis comes from two simultaneous confluences: an ideological confluence and geopolitical confluence. In his exposition of this strategy the author posits that, for the plan to succeed, it may be necessary to destroy the fabric of Syrian society by discrediting Syrian nationalism, Arab nationalism and moderate Islamism through supporting sectarianism, sub nationalism, regionalism and Islamic fundamentalism to achieve the desired realignment under the banner of humanitarian intervention. The course of action adopted by the external opposition does not align with a revolution for the people of Syria. The sponsors of the plan discerned here deployed Islamist Jihadism as a universal catalytic enabler of Syria's destruction without appearing to be supporting terrorism for regime change in Syria. The losers are the Syrian people, their infrastructure, their unity and possibly their statehood, and many innocent lives.

Potential Arab democratic transitions will face more substantial obstacles than Eastern Europe did in 1989. Those obstacles include the intense securitisation of the Middle East, the absence of agreed upon models for future polities and economies, the residual power of authoritarian systems, and the limited capacities of newly emerging political and civil societies. Even the poster children of the Arab Spring, Tunisia and Egypt, are not well equipped to imitate the success of Eastern European countries. The Arab Spring of 2011 may thus be more akin to the 1848 failed revolutions than to the democratic transitions set in motion by the crumbling of the Soviet Union in 1989.

The dramatic thawing of the Cold War at the end of the 1980s accompanied by the rapid democratisation of Eastern Europe served as inspiration and model for political transitions in other settings. Now the Arab world, the securitisation of which has kept it frozen in what amounts to a regional cold war long after the global prototype ended, may be entering its springtime of political freedom. Tunisia's 'Jasmine' and Egypt's 'Midan al Tahrir' Revolutions chased established autocrats from power, thus making possible new domestic political orders and substantial reorientations of foreign policies. Imitative uprisings in Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and Syria have thus far resulted in widespread violence, regime retrenchments and even foreign interventions, although prospects do remain for more positive outcomes. Intermittent demonstrations in various other Arab countries, including Morocco, Algeria, Oman, Jordan and Iraq, have typically been met with a political reforms and promises of more to come. So the region is definitely in political ferment, but whether that presages transitions to democracy à la Eastern Europe in 1989, or revanchist reconsolidations reminiscent of those that overwhelmed the 1848 liberal nationalist movements in Western Europe, remains to be seen.

A quick comparison of political conditions in today's Arab world to those that obtained in Eastern Europe in 1989 suggests that democratic transitions in the Middle East will face more substantial obstacles than they did in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia and so on. The broader contexts of 1989 were more favourable and the capacities of the individual countries more substantial than those of today's Arab world. As for the contexts of 1989, they included the end of Soviet occupation, the expansion of the Western security umbrella, promised membership in the European Union plus support for changes required to achieve that, and a region wide, nearly unquestioning embrace of democracy and market-based economies. The ubiquitous, once powerful communist thesis stimulated in Hegelian fashion its pro-Western, democratic antithesis. The receding tide of Russian influence and rising tide of the Western Alliance helped propel even the least seaworthy ships of state of the old Soviet Union in the same direction, albeit at different speeds.

There are no similar, dramatic and powerful external forces currently pushing Arab states toward democracy and market capitalism. No Hegelian dialectic is propelling all Arab states in a westward ideological direction because most have not recently been occupied by a hegemonic, brutal power, neighbouring or otherwise. American and European security concerns, including access to oil, control of immigration, combating terrorism, and a regional balance of power that favours pro-Western regimes, remain in place. It is precisely those concerns that have heretofore caused the Western powers to support authoritarian governments, as suggested by their as yet cautious, sometimes reluctant embrace or even outright rejection of demands by protestors for those powers to support reform or depart. Since Arab democracy is as yet untested, it is by definition an unknown quantity. The West is understandably reluctant to risk its security interests in such uncertain circumstances, especially in so vital a region where radical ideologies of nationalism and Islamism remain prevalent, and notions of a clash of civilisations are entertained by serious actors on both sides. The European Union is not offering the carrot of full membership as an incentive for and roadmap to reform.

As for the economic and political capacities of the Arab states, on average they are substantially less than were those of Eastern European countries some two decades ago. Unemployment rates are higher, industrial transformations and human resource development less progressed, baskets of exports less diverse and dependence upon foreign assistance greater than was the case in Eastern Europe. Amazingly enough, Arab governments are almost as large proportionately to the economies and societies they are ruling, and as inefficient, as were the communist ones of the old Eastern Europe. Arab authoritarianism has probably also been more efficient at extirpating autonomous components of civil society than were at least such Eastern European countries as Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, where labour unions, church and civic organisations were sufficiently powerful and autonomous to challenge communist rule once it weakened, and then to provide foundations for political society when communism collapsed. As for concurrence on the political economy model that should be adopted in preference to the status quo, again the Arab world compares unfavourably. Whereas Eastern Europe envisioned only one alternative, for the Arabs the ideal alternatives include widely varying models, ranging from Islamic theocracies to liberal democracies for political systems, and from nationalist, quasi-autarchic to globalised, free enterprise economies.

Given the comparatively unfavourable context in which the Arab Spring has blossomed, as well as the more limited capacities of Arab states and less consensus on their future form, it is necessarily more difficult to predict their future than it was that of Eastern Europe in say 1990. Back then many Eastern European states appeared headed in the same direction and it could be reasonably assumed that in due course the laggards would fall in behind the leaders, as indeed they all ultimately did. It would take a brave and foolish man to predict such a relatively happy and uniform outcome for

the Arab world. Far more likely is that individual Arab states will go their own ways, some embracing relatively liberal new orders, others reinforcing old authoritarian ones. Neither 1848 or 1989 outcomes can be entirely discarded, as authoritarianism could be reasserted across the region, or reform could gain a second wind and sweep away even the most recalcitrant of the Arab authoritarian orders.

It is beyond the scope of this article to assess the prospects for each and every one of the Arab states, or even for the main categories of them. Instead, some effort to assess future prospects will be undertaken by concentrating primarily on Egypt and secondarily on Tunisia. Thus far, these two countries remain the only ones in which incumbent rulers have been displaced and serious political reforms embarked upon, so their experiences necessarily shed more light on the challenges and prospects for reform across the Arab world, at least once it has commenced. Moreover, Egypt, as the traditional trend setter and model for the Arab world, with far and away its largest population, has the greatest potential to impact the other Arab states, so it deserves particular attention.

### **Historical back ground of Arab struggle for unity or democracy**

The inter-Arab politics during an era dominated by Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser. In another renowned work, *The Struggle for Syria*, Patrick Seale documented the links between Syria's tumultuous domestic politics and the broader contest for supremacy in the region, stemming from factors ranging from inter-Arab conflicts to the global cold war. Today, amid the chaos in Syria and the transformations in the region, these texts, both originally published in 1965, seem all too contemporary. Once again, regional politics shows many signs of an Arab cold war and, once again, that broader conflict is manifesting itself in a struggle for Syria.

In the Arab cold war of the 1950s and 1960s, inter-Arab relations were characterized by power struggles between "revolutionary" republics, led by pan-Arab nationalist military officers, and more conservative or even reactionary monarchies. The republics saw themselves as the future of Arab politics, with the aim of changing not only the type of regime in Arab states, but also the map of the region through repeated unification efforts. This pan-Arab project led to extensive intervention in the affairs of various states, by both sides, as the republics and monarchies waged proxy wars in civil conflicts in Yemen, Lebanon, Jordan and elsewhere.

Many of the same elements -- power struggles, ideological and identity conflicts, and proxy wars -- are present today. The main difference is that the 2012 version of the Arab cold war does not array revolutionary republics on one side. Over time, the radical republics of the 1950s and 1960s became deep-seated authoritarian states, neither revolutionary nor particularly republican. Many of them have now experienced actual national revolutions, as opposed to the military coups of past decades that tended to be cast as "revolutions." On the other hand, the greatest similarity to the earlier cold war is the mobilization of conservative monarchies attempting to block another wave of change across the Arab regional system.

As the monarchical regimes increasingly cooperate in self-defense, the question is: Against what? Until the 2011 uprisings, the answer seemed to be the non-Arab threat of Iran. Many Arab regimes were concerned not only with Iranian power, but also with Iranian influence and interference in Arab politics. Arab conflicts from Iraq to Lebanon were viewed increasingly in both power politics and sectarian terms: as proxy battles between Saudi- and Iranian-led blocs in the regional balance of power and also as struggles between Sunni and Shi'i alliances in the greater Middle East. The first signs of the new Arab cold war predate the Arab uprisings of 2011-2012, and became especially clear during the 2006 war between Israel and Hizballah. Some Arab states chose to view this Arab-Israeli war, unlike all previous ones, in sectarian terms. While Arab states did not support Israel in the conflict, few rose to the defense, even verbally, of the Iranian-backed Shi'i organization in Lebanon. Yet the 2006 conflict signaled another key shift that was perhaps a harbinger of events in 2011: the clear rift in many Arab countries between state and society. Arab governments (aside from Syria) may not have supported Hizballah, but many Arab publics did. Arab street demonstrations made the link to the earlier Arab cold war period, with placards comparing Nasser in 1956 to Hizballah leader Hasan Nasrallah in 2006. But as André Bank and Morten Valbjørn have noted, this comparison only underscored the differences between the two eras. Nasser was a head of state, with a secular, avowedly socialist approach to pan-Arabism. Nasrallah is head of a mass movement with an Islamist approach to Arabism and Arab identity. Bank and Valbjørn argue further that the differences make clear the shift in the meaning of pan-Arabism itself, from an ideology of struggle used by secular states to a "new societal Islamic Political Arabism." In their formulation:

A societal Political Arabism rising from an Arab-Islamic public rather than a state-led Pan-Arabism constitutes a dominant frame of reference in Middle East regional politics today. Societal actors, not upstart republics, now represent the challenge to the regional status quo. The rivalry is also no longer primarily an inter-state competition, but a cold war between Arab regimes and societal actors led by Islamists with considerable popular support and subscribing to a popularly driven Islamic Political Arabism.

Failure to grasp the continuing importance of Arabism, and its changing form, led many outside observers to miss key dynamics in regional politics. F. Gregory Gause has argued that this interpretive lapse caused most scholars of the Middle East to miss the hints of the Arab uprisings. Scholarship had too often treated pan-Arabism as long dead, missing its continuing salience at the social level and hence at the political level as well.

Today, states, societies and social movements struggle over the meaning of pan-Arab identity. Unlike the Arabism of the earlier Arab cold war, the modern version does not emphasize redrawing borders and revamping governments through unification schemes. Rather, the new struggle more often involves conflicts within domestic politics, sometimes with a dimension of external intercession. Hence, there are multiple levels of meaning in inter-Arab struggles: Conservative monarchies rediscover the importance of Arab unity as a language of mutual protection from regime change; Arab Islamist movements challenge regimes and connect with peers across borders; and pro- and anti-democratization forces work not only within states, but also across states, in their attempts at collaboration.

The Arab uprisings of 2011-2014 have deepened the divisions of the new Arab cold war, including along Sunni-Shi'i lines. And like the earlier cold war, the contemporary one features competing approaches to intervention in the

affairs of other Arab states. But the current version, while displaying sectarian and power dimensions, also includes new dynamics emerging from the Arab uprisings themselves. Today's Arab cold war features not only state-state rivalries, but also state-society conflicts characterized by reemerging Arab identity politics, a public sphere expanded by a revolution in media and communication, a rise of Islamist social and political movements challenging incumbent regimes and, finally, new norms and popular expectations regarding participation in public life.

These dynamics have led to a reassertion of foreign policy activism on the part of conservative monarchies, to the point that one of the most active forces in regional politics today, somewhat amazingly, is the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The GCC is no military juggernaut, but has risen to prominence because the uprisings came at a time when the three traditional (and often rival) power centers -- Cairo, Baghdad and Damascus -- had all receded from the regional balance of power. Each state was overwhelmed with domestic concerns: Egypt with its own revolution, Iraq with the effects of US invasion and occupation, and Syria with its own uprising. Domestic unrest and insecurity had forced the regimes in Cairo, Baghdad and Damascus to cede the stage to Riyadh and, more surprisingly, to Doha. These changes in regional dynamics have had important effects for uprisings in Yemen, Libya, Bahrain and now Syria. And this time, there is no countervailing force to check the conservative monarchies...unless it comes from the people under their rule.

The Saudis and other GCC regimes were so alarmed at regional trends that they reached out to decidedly non-Gulf kingdoms, in Morocco and Jordan, inviting them to join the council. Morocco showed limited interest in joining the faraway alliance, while Jordan scrambled to revive an application that had been on the table for 20 years. It is still unclear if any expansion will occur. The GCC remains, in any case, an alliance of conservative Arab and Sunni hereditary monarchies, this time not against radical Arab republics or even Iranian revolutionaries, but against the restive peoples within their own borders. While not inviting Yemen to join, the GCC did attempt to dampen the fires there by brokering deals to trade partial regime change for an end to unrest. Still, despite Saudi efforts to use the GCC as its main tool in a regional counter-revolution, other GCC states often break with Riyadh and maintain defiantly independent foreign policies. Despite the bilateral Saudi-Iranian cold war, for instance, Oman and Qatar have each maintained cordial relations with Tehran.

The rise of Qatar to at least temporary status as a regional "power" is perhaps the oddest phenomenon in contemporary inter-Arab relations. The tiny but immensely wealthy peninsular monarchy has steadily enhanced its regional and even global role, from hosting rounds of World Trade Organization negotiations in 2001 to landing the World Cup scheduled for 2022. Qatar is also home to the influential Al Jazeera satellite news channel, which has provided exhaustive coverage of most of the Arab uprisings. The Gulf emirate has also positioned itself as broker of peace in conflicts between factions in Lebanon, Palestine and even Afghanistan, with the Taliban opening an office in Doha.

When the Libyan uprising began, Qatar led the call for international intervention. When the wave of revolt reached Bahrain, Saudi Arabia led the counter-revolution and the GCC intervened militarily to support the Bahraini monarchy against pro-democracy and pro-reform demonstrators. Echoing the sectarian logic of 2006, the intervention was framed as Sunni solidarity against Shi'i (and allegedly Iranian) subversion.

While the Libyan revolution led to civil war and outside intervention, including an extended NATO campaign of air strikes against the Qaddafi regime, the Syrian uprising threatens to take an even more dangerous path, both for the Syrian people and the region as a whole. The Syrian crisis began as part of the Arab uprisings, with civilian activists marching for greater freedom and openness in Syria. It was only after the regime responded with violence in Dir'a that protest movements sprang up across the country. These movements, too, began peacefully but were met with force. Eventually, calls for reform became calls for regime change. The Arab League plan asking President Bashar al-Asad to cede power to a deputy was crafted under Qatar's temporary (rotating) leadership of the Arab League council, with strong GCC support. Indeed, the idea of Arab League monitors in Syria had a similar genesis, and the GCC states were accordingly the first to withdraw their monitors in early February (followed closely by GCC aspirant Jordan) when they deemed the mission a failure.

The Syrian imbroglio bears all the hallmarks of the new Arab cold war, including domestic struggle between a regime and opposition each with outside patrons, attempts to fan the flames of sectarianism, and dueling narratives regarding who is really attacking whom. Like the earlier Arab cold war, the conflict is awash in propaganda and disinformation. Even honest media attempts to understand the Syrian revolution too often distill the conflict to a ruthless regime versus the Syrian National Council (a collection of opposition groups in exile) and the Free Syria Army (a relatively small set of army deserters who have now started an armed campaign against the regime). What is missing, more often than not, is the overwhelming majority of Syrians working at the grassroots against the regime and linked to neither the Council nor the Army.

Meanwhile, the GCC states leading calls for international pressure to oust Asad are hardly themselves bulwarks of democracy. Their aim is not to favor democracy over authoritarianism, but rather to topple a largely 'Alawi (and hence, in their view, Shi'i) regime allied with Iran. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and their allies appear to be hoping that a successor regime in Damascus would be predominantly Sunni, indebted to the GCC states and no longer an ally of Iran or Hizballah. Their motivations, in short, seem more in line with those of the new Arab cold war than with the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people. With Iran and Hizballah backing the Asad regime, and the GCC states and Turkey actively opposing it, the Syrian conflict is already becoming a regional conflict. As the United States, Britain and France call for action through the UN Security Council, blocked only by rival imperial powers Russia and China, the Syrian crisis has assumed international dimensions as well.

Still, despite the usual level of disarray and rivalry associated with inter-Arab relations, the Arab League -- led by Qatar and the GCC states -- did manage to create a semblance of unity as it attempted to craft a way out of the Syria crisis. While not calling for military intervention, the Arab League proposal called for Asad to cede power to his vice president, paving the way for a negotiated end to the fighting and the creation of a Syrian unity government. The Russian and Chinese veto of the Arab League proposal in the Security Council, however, ensures that the Syrian conflict will

become more violent and more internationalized, as the Asad regime attempts to crush the rebellion once and for all, Syrian resistance groups turn increasingly to armed struggle, and Arab states and others intervene in other ways -- supplying arms, materiel and financial support to their chosen side.

The battle lines outside Syria are already drawn, with the US, Britain and France in conflict with Russia and China, while regional non-Arab powers Turkey and Iran similarly back opposite sides. Israelis are torn between which outcome is worse for them, while Arab neighbor Jordan is perhaps in the weakest and most dangerous position of all, wedged between Baathist Syria and the GCC, and deeply vulnerable to the instability engulfing its northern neighbor.

The struggles of the earlier Arab cold war were particularly virulent in Syria, from independence in 1946 to the coup d'état that established the authoritarian regime of Hafiz al-Asad in 1970. As both Kerr and Seale demonstrated, Syria during those years was a key battleground in regional struggles between republicans and monarchists, among nationalists, communists and Baathists, and between global superpowers. Coup after coup toppled governments in Damascus as rival civilian political parties and military officers maneuvered against one another, aided and abetted by local and global cold war dynamics. Today, if anything, the dynamics seem even worse, as external powers including the GCC, the Arab League, Iran, Israel, Turkey, the United States, Britain, France, Russia and even China spar over Syria's future. A plunge into full-scale civil war would be all too reminiscent of Lebanon (from 1975 to 1990) or Iraq (after the 2003 US invasion). A negotiated diplomatic solution stipulating some level of regime change and a more inclusive government -- one that ousts Asad but manages to allay the fears of 'Alawis, Christians and Muslims alike -- seems essential to avoid a similar endemic conflict in Syria. While much will depend on the efforts of Syrians themselves, today, as in the earlier cold war period, much will also depend on the cooperation—or rivalry—associated with external Arab, regional and global powers. Indeed, if Syria is allowed to tip into the abyss, there could be a disaster comparable to Lebanon's or Iraq's, as the struggle for Syria once again widens the fissures of an Arab cold war, the dynamics of which may doom the hopes of the Syrian people.

## The Syrian Crisis

There is as yet no framework for understanding the Syrian Crisis (herein referred to as 'the Syrian Crisis'; the Syrian Crisis or simply 'the Crisis') or more generally the Arab Spring. There are many arguments that are often inconsistent. A framework can help further socio-political and economic analysis and synthesis and will facilitate the convergence of conflicting views on a solution. This article is intended to provide a systemic framework for the Syrian Crisis that can be extended to other Arab experiences. Syrians have split into three main categories vis-à-vis the Crisis: pro-government, pro-revolt and a silent middle. The contention here that, regardless of classification or intentions, events on the ground and the accompanying political manoeuvres point collectively to the conclusion that the revolt became a tool in the toolbox for Syrian realignment ideologically and geopolitically under the pretence of a just revolt. The argument advanced is that there is a plan for the realignment of Syria that uses the revolt as an entrance point and a tool in this strategy. The Syrian people, the Syrian government and the rebels have borne the entire risk throughout the induced Crisis with no control over aspects of its trajectory. The complexity of the Syrian Crisis comes from two simultaneous confluences: an ideological confluence and geopolitical confluence. In his exposition of this strategy we have posited that, for the plan to succeed, it may be necessary to destroy the fabric of Syrian society by discrediting Syrian nationalism, Arab nationalism and moderate Islamism through supporting sectarianism, subnationalism, regionalism and Islamic fundamentalism to achieve the desired realignment under the banner of humanitarian intervention. The course of action adopted by the external opposition does not align with a revolution for the people of Syria. The sponsors of the plan discerned here deployed Islamist Jihadism as a universal catalytic enabler of Syria's destruction without appearing to be supporting terrorism for regime change in Syria. The losers are the Syrian people, their infrastructure, their unity and possibly their statehood, and many innocent lives.

The Syrian Crisis has attracted tremendous international attention along with the other Arab uprisings, which are referred to henceforth as 'the Arab Crises'. The attempts to pass United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions on Syria failed by virtue of three successive vetoes by Russia and China; the third, British-sponsored, draft resolution came in July 2012 and called for economic sanctions on Syria under Chapter 7 and essentially authorized military intervention to enforce the resolution. Susan Rice, US Ambassador to the UN, said that the veto signified that 'two permanent members of the Council are prepared to defend Assad to the bitter end. Sergey Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister, commented that 'advancing democracy with iron and blood just does not work. The Syrian Crisis has generated contradictory political positions, like those of the Georgetown Law Center (2012), descriptions of bloodshed and atrocities from Human Rights Watch (2013), and accusations of the most primitive and savage practices.

The Syrian Crisis has produced heinous crimes, terrorist acts, intentional humiliation of Syrians, oppression and torture, targeted misinformation, deception, and uncountable psychological abuses, manipulations, and the claimed use of chemical weapons (UNifeed-UN Multimedia 2013). There are enough contradictory reports to make any case against participants in the conflict. The Syrian Crisis is a highly complex socio-political problem developed by a combination of truly dissatisfied and angry Syrians, Western powers disgruntled and frustrated with Syrian government policies and its allies, an opportunistic and sympathetic 'East', vengeful Arabs, and thousands of Jihadists, opportunists and professional criminals. All basically agree on nothing, be it ideological or political. Yet what is indisputable is that, prior to the Crisis, Syria was a peaceful and functioning sovereign state, albeit in need of deep reform, and that the Syrian upcoming elections are scheduled to take place in 2014.

Based on volumes of contradictions and multiple perspectives, it is natural that there has been controversy about what to call the events in Syria. These have been referred to as a revolution, international conspiracy, uprising, armed insurgency, religious rebellion, democratic reform movement, civil war, terrorist attacks, a form of coup d'état, or a deliberate plan of destruction. Taking into consideration the relative nature of such assessments, there are some actions that cannot be a matter of perspective. Such actions and patterns conform to aspects of one classification but simultaneously negate others. For example, blowing up a school bus full of children cannot be a matter of perspective – it

is terrorism regardless of the reasons behind it. Killing or torturing prisoners is not a matter of perspective – but to say so smacks of aspects of a revolution. Supporting terrorist organizations on the border of a neighbouring country to cross those borders and blow up people, hospitals and army soldiers is also not a matter of perspective – but an illegal interference in the interior affairs of a neighbouring country, borne of intentions more in line with the destruction of a country, not the promotion of freedom and democracy. Oppressing Syrian people who do not agree with a particular point of view is not a matter of perspective – it constitutes a rebellion against oppression only if the opposition would respect other points of view, which has proven not to be the case. Changing the flag of a sovereign country without reference to the people is not a matter of perspective – but rather a call for neo-colonial occupation, subdivision and loss of Syria's sovereignty. Giving away a seat in the League of Arab States (LAS) is not a matter of perspective – but a conspiracy to destroy the Syrian state and Arab unity. Most importantly, steering away from putting into effect mechanisms by which to discern what the Syrian people really want, and avoiding the Geneva II accord on Syria, makes this a plan to perpetuate the internal fighting as long as possible.

In general, based on observable trends, revolutions follow three distinct stages that can be summarized as politicize, radicalize and militarize. The process of making a group of people revolt, for their own good or bad, seems to follow similar stages regardless of the intentions behind a revolt. In this contemporary era of super-connectivity it is possible to induce a revolt based on socio-political intelligence and engineering. Some basic ingredients are needed to effect that inducement. The most common and basic ingredients are poverty, illiteracy, injustice, corruption and tyranny. Without any external complications in a country, an increase in the intensity of some or all of these basic ingredients would indeed be a cause for a natural revolt. So why make this seemingly superfluous distinction between induced revolution and spontaneous revolution? The answer is simple: an induced revolution is an intentional external act that leverages internal dissatisfaction for a purpose that may or may not achieve the interests of those who rise up. On the other hand, a spontaneous revolution by the people should be mostly for the people. It is a matter of who the stakeholders are and what the governance of a revolt is that distinguishes it as induced or spontaneous. A useful spontaneous revolution needs free and liberating leaders and followers while an induced revolution, by contrast, needs workers, employees, payrolls, managers, weapons and sponsors who have bigger plans.

Arab Crises are accompanied by the absence of a frame of reference and ensuing chaos and Syria is no exception. However, chaos itself is not new to mass mobilizations. The Arab Spring can be seen as a realization of the political 'creative chaos' delineated by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in 2005 – wherein creative chaos is posited 'as a revolutionary end-game for the Middle East' and her July 2006 statement on the destruction of Lebanon as the 'birth pangs' of a new Middle East. In the face of such transformation, according to Rice, 'whatever we do, we have to be certain that we're pushing forward to the new Middle East, not going back to the old Middle East.

In the words of Michael Ledeen, 'creative destruction is our middle name' and '[F]reedom is our most lethal weapon, and the oppressed peoples of the fanatic regimes are our greatest assets. The ingenuity of the creative or constructive chaotic approach is that it transfers the cost and risk of war by traditional means of invasion to the host country while keeping the regional geopolitical balance under control throughout the intended internal ideological/geopolitical transition. There is no need for the use of formal armies or external intervention until all effective military forces of the targeted country have been neutralized internally. The carnage is totally Syrian.

Chaos can be spontaneous or induced as well. We have contended that in the case of Syria, chaos was induced to achieve Syria's geopolitical realignment or else destroy it. This is one of the reasons that the revolt in Syria lacked a declared intellectual direction. The Syrian revolt does not seem to be in need of national thinking or thinkers. It does not seem to need national intellect or intellectuals, it does not need a sufficiently clear path of change and it certainly does not need a destination. It is a change from a state of dissatisfaction to an unknown state of randomness wherein the scavengers of chaos can create new opportunities – monetary, economic, geopolitical and vengeful. This set up is a necessary condition to justify humanitarian intervention.

One of the purposes of any theory is to interpret past events and predict, with reasonable accuracy, future events. As a result, it can also be a valuable tool for finding solutions, effective strategies and management. In the case of Syria a theoretical framework is even more needed due to the complexity of the Syrian Crisis and in order to analyse and synthesize its events. The framework, introduced in this paper, can deconstruct the complex scene ideologically and geopolitically and can help explain the following points or contentions: The theoretical framework proposed in this paper follows a systemic approach and can be extended, quite readily, to other Arab countries. It is worth noting that just prior to shifting the pretext for humanitarian intervention from democracy to sectarian strife and as of June 2012, unilateral military intervention was ruled out as:

The Obama administration argues that the same criteria [applied to Libya] don't apply to Syria and there's consensus that military action in Syria would be far riskier than it was in Libya.

In effect the Syrian opposition and its military factions and helpers shifted their role from providing the pretext for intervention to becoming the intervention itself.

In this sense the Syrian opposition groups, including their military wings, did not seem in charge and they were not in the decision-making seat in this Crisis. That aspect of incapacity to make decisions nationally rules out use of the term 'revolution' to refer to the Syrian revolt and turns it into an armed disturbance to effect a regime change whose other geopolitical objectives happen to meet with those of the sponsors of the bigger project. Essentially there must be a plan in place – or as some would have it, a conspiracy. And to be clear, the difference between a conspiracy and plan is irrelevant – since a conspiracy is really a hidden plan, often associated with malicious intent. It would be negligent to think that countries that have interests in Syria do not have plans to participate in changing Syria to align it better with their interests.

The genius of the plan in this case is that all the destruction committed is both self-inflected and self-contained. The Syrian opposition forces were used as a facade that was conveniently placed and moved around first to politicize the Syrian population (the democracy phase) and present a case to the wider world, and then to radicalize Syrians (the

sectarian phase). The drift of Syrian opposition, from the espousal of a peaceful revolt to the point where it was decided to militarize their base, was not a natural transition. It was a purposeful transition that took no regard of the Syrian government response, including calls for reform and dialogue. The Syrian government realized immediately the need for reform or it would face its own demise. The opposition had two possible choices at that time: the first was to accept the reform path while keeping up the pressure for more reform, or adopt the second choice, namely to insist on regime change regardless of cost. However, the first choice, to adopt the path of reform, would not allow external stakeholders to exercise a dominant role in shaping the outcome. The second choice, i.e. regime change, had to be the only choice, regardless of efforts by the government to reform, for several reasons, namely:

- 1- Regime change is not achievable by the opposition on its own, which forces the opposition to seek regional and international help, in preparation for humanitarian intervention.
- 2- Pursuit of regime change could evolve into a militarized and sectarianized conflict and thence allow for the formation of paramilitary forces, thereby pitting the Syrian armed forces against rebellious Syrians.
- 3- Regime change, if successful, with the help of regional and international support, allows for the sponsors to have more say in the decision on 'who rules Syria'.
- 4- Regime change, by dictation from outside Syria, destroys Syria's sovereignty and independence – a strong reason to politicize and radicalize the population.
- 5- Regime change, if not successful, will lead to a civil war in which all the risks are borne by Syrians. It is known that there are as many Syrians who support the regime or support reform as those who are seeking regime change. And the probability of a critical balance of forces can easily be achieved by increasing arms supplies to the rebel forces as needed, until self-destruction is reached. The opposition militarized and founded the Free Syrian Army (FSA) as early as July 2011 (Landis 2011). Judging by the outcome, however, this militarization has served the objectives of the sponsors more than those of the SNC for freedom and democracy. On 22 February 2012 the Middle East Channel website quoted Steven Heydemann warning that, 'If the militarization of the Syrian uprising is not managed, the hope for meaningful change in Syria may be lost' and 'it would be a mistake to view the FSA as having control over the militarization of the Syrian uprising. Evidently, the militarization was indeed mismanaged to the extent that Saudi Arabia would ask Jordan to spearhead its drive to channel arms into Syria in support of the FSA to stop the increased threat of al-Qaeda-linked groups. Then: Splits in the Syrian opposition were highlighted when four opposition factions – the Syrian Revolution General Commission, the Local Coordination Committees, the Syrian Revolution Coordinators Union and the Supreme Council for the Leadership of the Syrian Revolution – issued a statement complaining about the Syrian National Coalition, saying The Syrian National Coalition has failed to fulfill its responsibility to represent the great Syrian revolution at the organizational, political, and humanitarian levels.

We can postulate that a Syrian ideological space can be spanned by eight dimensions: Syrian nationalism (al-watanyyah alSouriya), Arab nationalism (al-qawmyyah al Arabiya), Islamism, Sub-nationalism, Sectarianism, Isolationism, Universalism and Regionalism. This is an axiomatic construction and we do not include all possible ideologies that may appear in the Syrian ideological landscape but rather include what is of relevance to the Syrian society in this timeframe. The choice of dimensions is not arbitrary. It is now explained what is meant by each of these ideological dimensions in the Syrian socio-political context.

### **Syrian nationalism.** (al-watanyyah alSouriya)

In the context of this study, Syrian nationalism (al-watanyyah al Souriya) refers to the general sense of belonging to the Syrian society and culture and the extent to which this sense supports an ideology that believes that Syrians constitute a nation by themselves. We can distinguish between the narrow sense of Syrian nationalism, which refers to belonging to the Arab Syrian Republic and the wider sense of Syrian nationalism, which refers to the Greater Syrian sense of belonging. The narrow sense Syrian nationalism refers to nation-state nationalism while in the wide sense Syrian nationalism refers to the Levant Syrian nationalism or Natural Syrian nationalism. The Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) initiated in 1932 is an example of a movement that aims to reconstitute Greater Syria. The SSNP uses the word national to mean qawmi Souri not the word watani.

### **Sectarianism**

In this context we view sectarianism as the antithesis of national unity. In that sense sectarianism refers to the disintegration of common goals that provide for the sense of belonging to a country in favour of the sense of belonging to the sect. The strength of sectarianism is inversely proportionate to the strength of national unity, which is normally bonded by common aspirations and purposes and communicated through a form of social contract. The systemic risk of disintegration of national unity is highest when there is no agreement among societal constituents on a social contract. In the context of this study we refer to sectarianism as the divisive practices based on sects within Islam or based on Christian-Islamic belonging in Syria. This issue deserves a separate study.

### **Arab nationalism.** (al-qawmyyah al Arabiya).

In the context of this study, Arab nationalism or pan-Arabism (al-qawmyyah al Arabiya) refers to the general sense of belonging to the Arab nation that exists in Syria as well as ideologies that support that sense of belonging. Gamal Abd el-Nasser was the champion of Arab nationalism based in Egypt and Al-Baath Arab Socialist Party (BASP) was its champion based in Syria and Iraq, although both movements go beyond the boundaries of their respective countries to affect all Arab movements.

Pan-Arabism reached its peak in popularity and support in the days leading up to the 1967 Six-Day War, or 'Nakseh' (Disaster), which signalled the beginning of the decline of pan-Arabism as the dominant paradigm.



### Isolationism

In the context of this study, Arab isolationism refers to the antithesis of pan-Arabism. Arab isolationism prevents most forms of constructive connectivity among Arab countries such as defence and intelligence, alliances, economic cooperation, trade agreements, sharing of human resources, and travel restrictions (border controls). The League of Arab States (LAS) is supposed to increase cooperation amongst Arab states and decrease forms of isolationism. However, it proved to be a failure on many levels including its implicit endorsement of Arab isolationism in contradiction to its explicit charter objectives culminating in expelling Syria from the LAS in November 2011.

### Islamism

This is a wide topic that deserves a separate investigation. However, and for the purpose of this framework, we give a working definition of the term and the ideological impact on the Syrian landscape. Islamism is a term that has been invented in the 20th century to refer to any ideology that claims to be Islamic-based. Islamism is the extrapolation of some Islamic principles from various perspectives to form a socio-political and economic ideology. Some authors prefer to use the term political Islam not Islamism. Furthermore, because Islam has multiple schools of thought and sects, it is natural to have multiple ideologies that claim to be equally Islamic. We can easily identify three major and competing 'Islamisms' all emerging as organized entities in the 20th century and maturing towards its end. The first kind of Islamism finds itself in the Muslim Brotherhood founded in 1928. The second kind of Islamism comes from the ideology that produced the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The third kind of Islamism can be viewed as the category of Islamist Jihadism whose famous brand is al-Qaeda. Those three categories play a dominant role in the current Syrian Crisis in its Islamist dimension and its regional dimension. There is no national conservative movement in Syria that represents the aspirations of conservatives in the political arena.

### Universalism

In this context universalism refers to the collection of religious and philosophical concepts and ideologies that have universal reach and applicability. Islamism stands in competition to the rest of universal ideologies including the rest of religious doctrines. As an ideology it stands also in tension and sometimes in agreement with respect to aspects of secularism, Christianity, Zionism, Communism and globalization. We can also adjoin internationalism to universalism for completeness. Part of universalism is global governance and the 'new world order'. It is likely that the Syrian Crisis resolution will lead to a new formulation of the new world order.

### Regionalism

Regionalism refers to a political ideology that aims at maximizing interests in a region by creating alliances and subdivisions. For the Syrian case it refers to regional powers such as Turkey and Iran and their influences on Syria. Regionalism in the Syrian Crisis aligns perfectly with divisions of Islamism as outlined in the description of Islamism above. Turkey aligns well with the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood while Iran aligns with its own revolutionary Islamism and resistance movements, and 'Moderate Arab states' align with selective utilitarian Jihadism. The three regional forces have representatives on the ground in Syria to advance their diverse agendas there. The Syrian internal ideologies and forces subdivide according to their loyalties to the regional powers except for parts of the Kurdish population. In this case the regional powers concerned are all Islamists in ideology.

### Subnationalism

Subnationalism in this context refers to the state of subdivision that results from regional alignments as reflected by the fragmentation of the Syrian population, polarization and self-organization. In the case of Syria in particular we find a subdivision of alignment along ideologies sponsored respectively by Turkey, Iran and Arab states, which creates a state of Subnationalism in Syrian political positions. The Kurdish Subnationalism becomes stronger with weaker Syrian nationalism and weaker Syrian economic performance, while Kurdish Subnationalism becomes weaker in the face of stronger regional agreements. All Subnationalism issues are used by regional powers as a means of influence.

### The Future Scenarios

What, then, might the future hold for the Arab Spring nations? There are three important points to start with. The first is that many of the issues that underpinned the uprisings – stagnant economies, a lack of employment prospects and weak rule of law – remain in those five countries. The second is that they cannot be tackled in sequence: they must, in fiendishly complex acts of political juggling, be tackled together.

The third is that while each country was part of a common context of protests, the future challenges for each are very particular.

At one end of the spectrum is Libya, with a small population and vast energy resources, and Tunisia, a small country with a sizeable middle-class and strong ties to Europe. At the other, Yemen, a populous nation with significant poverty, and Egypt, a vast country with a bloated bureaucracy. Each of the four is struggling with security and the rebuilding of institutions – in Tunisia, the institutions are strong, in Libya non-existent.

All have opportunities – Tunisia has an educated population, Egypt a viable manufacturing sector, Yemen a strategic location, Libya energy resources – but all require a rebuilding of political authority and social harmony before they can be exploited.

Compounding the question is what, even if those could be fixed, the political trajectory would be. In countries like Tunisia and Libya (as in Iraq 10 years ago), the old political ideas and foundations were obliterated, leaving the nations to rebuild even as they rethink their political direction.



None of this is easy to do. It requires skilled politicians, navigating complex societies and delicate geopolitical balance. In Egypt, for example, rebuilding the economy comes against the background of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the American influence that emanates from this.

Thus the future economic outlook for the Arab Spring countries varies enormously. They may have commonalities, born from the cauldron of revolution, but they are likely to have very different trajectories for their recovery and development.

Now that the Arab world has witnessed unprecedented political changes that culminated in a series of historic revolutions, the so-called "Arab Spring," what can one say at this point about the upheavals? There is no doubt that an assessment should take into account the results that could be realized in the long run and not merely those that have been achieved in the wake of the revolutions, because significant outcomes do not appear out of the blue, especially in countries where underdevelopment is an essential part of society structure.

One main scenario is the emergence of Islamic parties. Islamists realize that democracy is a tool to achieve two aspects essential to their mission: access to power, something unprecedented in modern history. Another is the legitimization of their stance, both nationally and internationally, which could help them establish a stronger base in the midst of internal divisions. To that end, Islamists may find no harm in adopting the practice of democracy as long as it serves their agendas.

There are no indications that they will abandon their religious ideals, and if that were to take place, it would be the result of domestic and foreign pressure and not of their own desire. Foreign pressure, mainly from the West, would change very little. For one, Westerners undeniably have faith in democracy, freedom and individual liberty. For another, they prefer and wisely so, to act in a manner that is not contradictory to their mantras; otherwise they lose their credibility.

## Conclusion

The hope that the Arab world would become democratic as quickly as Eastern Europe did 20 years ago has not been fulfilled. But fears that the countries of North Africa and the Middle East -- from Morocco in the west to Oman in the east -- would sink into chaos one after another have also not materialized.

Instead, the picture is more confusing than ever. In Damascus and Aleppo, a secular bourgeoisie -- the same class that supported the uprisings elsewhere -- fears the consequences if Assad is overthrown. The royal family that rules neighboring Jordan behaves as if it were unaffected by the general turmoil. Yemen, a tribal country that ousted its longstanding president, is being praised as a model of a peaceful transition, even though al-Qaida sometimes controls entire provinces. And in Tunisia, the land of the Jasmine Revolution.

As confusing as the events may seem at first glance, there are some recognizable patterns. After experiencing a political earthquake, the Islamic Middle East can be divided roughly into three seismological zones. First there are the "emergency zones" -- Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen -- countries that have already survived the initial shocks and are now trying to rebuild. The people in these countries want to reorganize themselves and find stability with whatever elements of society that are still functional, even if it's the military.

The second zone contains the "unshakable countries" -- the seemingly stable regimes in Saudi Arabia, the other Gulf monarchies, Morocco and Jordan. This is the zone of the reactionaries, who are attempting to solidify their positions with money, repression and cosmetic reforms.

Then there is the zone of the "traumatized." It includes countries like Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon and, on the fringe of events, Iran and Sudan -- countries that have already looked into the abyss of civil war in their recent history and which now prefer to take a cautious approach.

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