

# The Journal of International Relations, Peace Studies, and Development

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Volume 3

Issue 1 *The Journal of International Relations, Peace Studies, and Development*

Article 8

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2017

## The Political Dynamics of the Middle East Beyond 2010: The Aftermath of the Arab Spring

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### Recommended Citation

Ebye, Sunday EsosoNsed; Ellah, Timothy Ogbang; and Adams, Peter Akpo (2017) "The Political Dynamics of the Middle East Beyond 2010: The Aftermath of the Arab Spring," *The Journal of International Relations, Peace Studies, and Development*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.arcadia.edu/agsjournal/vol3/iss1/8>

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## **THE POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF THE MIDDLE EAST BEYOND 2010: THE AFTERMATH OF THE ARAB SPRING**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Beyond Tunisia, Libya and parts of the Middle East, the wave of protests emboldened by North African crises have been driven by similar demographic realities, failures of state policies and demands for greater participation, representation and democracy. However, these protests to some extent have failed to effect regime change in some cases. The Arab Spring which started in Tunisia was a historic moment in the politics of North Africa and the Middle East but its aftermath remains unpredictable. This research is an attempt to understudy the Arab spring and its political dynamics on North Africa and the Middle East, with a view to stemming autocratic leadership and replacing that with people oriented government based on legitimacy and democratic values. The methodology adopted was based on secondary sources of data such as reports and articles published within the scope of this study, to identify the main issues raised by scholars on this topical issue. Findings reveal that the aftermath of the Arab spring is a revolutionary Middle East/ North Africa against autocracy. The paper recommends that leaders across the globe should gain from these experiences, and therefore promote democratic institutions and values in their art of governance in order to avert the occurrence of similar revolutionary experiences in their home countries.

**Keywords:** *Arab Spring, Revolutions, Regime Change, Democracy, Regional Dynamics.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring heralded a wave of demonstrations and protests in the Arab world, which began in December 2010. Popular protests have led to the overthrow of regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, a civil war in Libya, civil uprisings in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen, major protests in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and Oman, and civil war in Yemen and in a number of other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions. These protests have been widely seen as a ‘watershed’ event, which have ‘irrevocably changed’ the region and the global political landscape” (Yacoubian, 2011:1). The primary impact of the Arab Spring has been to change the social contract governing the relationship between Arab ruling elites and their people. Cracks in this contract emerged over the last decade, but the Arab Spring has led to a rapid and radical empowerment of Arabs in the grassroots. It is important to note that although other parts of the world face similar problems of economic stagnation, corruption and burgeoning populations, the protests in the Arab world have not so far spread beyond the region. The Arab Spring therefore has demonstrated a strong regional dynamic. Protests have spread within the Arab world because of the cultural affinity felt by Arabs (Hayes, 2011).

This study assesses the impact of the Arab Spring on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions and how it has continued. Methodologically, it is drawn from briefings, reports and articles to identify the main issues raised by scholars. However, based on the fact that the events analyzed here are current and contemporary events, much of the analysis is lacking in rigorous documentary evidence. While this paper focuses on regional impacts and implications of the protests, it also considers the wider global impacts insofar as these have had a knock-on effect on the North African and the Middle East regions.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ARAB SPRING

The Arab Spring, by its 2010-2011 definition, was instigated by a seemingly minor event, a personal tragedy, on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010 when a Tunisian grocery vendor set himself on fire as a reaction to being apprehended by the Tunisian police for selling vegetables without a valid permit. The grocery vendor; a 26 years old Mohammed Bouazizi, a bride winner of an extended family of eight, was beaten up, by the police as they interfered in his affairs; confiscated his cart, and according to witnesses, physically and verbally humiliated him (BBC, 2011). When Bouazizi reported the malpractice to the authorities, he was ignored, and it was when he was shunned at the municipal office that he, in great desperation, resorted to self-immolation. It is highly unlikely that Bouazizi knew the implications of his act; it did however strike a chord with the generality of the Tunisian population.

The mentioned act was symbolic of the dire state of affairs for the Tunisian population; Tunisia had overtime experienced widespread unemployment, a highly corrupt judicial system, poor living standards, and a lack of respect for basic human rights (Al-Jazeera, 2011). Bouazizi’s desperate actions led to demonstrations, and while the protests were at first confined to his hometown of Sidi Bouzid it soon spread to the capital Tunis. As the situation worsened President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali visited Bouazizi at the hospital, the images of the Tunisian President at the sick bed, containing the completely gauzed Bouazizi spread across the globe, Bouazizi died just days after the president’s visit. Several youths identified themselves with the desperation of Bouazizi and demanded better living conditions, and that Ben Ali, who had been in office since 1987 step down. In the turmoil that followed, several hundred lost their lives as Ben Ali ever more desperately fought to remain in power. A United Nations delegation put the number of deaths at 219, but this estimate may very well be subject to changes as more organizations get access and official investigation is completed (UN

Report, 2011). The Tunisian uprising removed Ben Ali from power, showing that the will of the people did in the end prevail, and proved to be an important event that encouraged fellow North Africans to revolt against corrupt and autocratic regimes.

The situation in Tunisia after the departure of Ben Ali has been cautiously optimistic, as of recently the people of Tunisia have once again organized demonstrations voicing their discontent with the interim body, led by President Fouad Mebezza, currently ruling Tunisia. According to the Tunisian constitution a presidential election is to be held no later than 45-60 days after the inauguration of an interim president, Mebezza was inaugurated on January 15th, and as of mid-August 2011, well past the stipulated 60 days, no elections took place. The demonstrations have not had the same intensity as the initial demonstrations, but they nevertheless showed that the people of Tunisia will not sit idly if the anticipated democratization is unsatisfactory or progresses in a replica of a snail movement. This development could in fact become an obstacle as the expectations of the system that will replace Ben Ali are high, and the problems that were present in that society are still very real in the post Ben Ali Tunisian era.

On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011 the much anticipated elections in Tunisia took place. The run up to the elections were peaceful and Election Day passed without any major disturbances. Voter turnout was high; reports of up to 70 % were filed, It was a dawn of new era in Tunisia as on that Sunday, Tunisians headed to the polls to vote in the second, countrywide elections since former president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali left power in 2011. The first elections were filled with excitement; the world watched intensely, and citizens – many unpracticed but euphoric – waited patiently for hours to cast their ballots. These were the first assembly elections in the Arab world after the popular overthrow of a longstanding dictator. No one was sure who would come out the winner, although the moderate Islamist Ennahda party was heavily favored, and it was unclear what the future holds for Tunisians, though it was a moment to remember. In the aftermath of the election, the enthusiasm from both the international and local communities in the lead-up to elections waned. The world’s attention now focuses on the civil wars in Syria and the spread of the Islamic State and concerns over insecurity and instability. Inside Tunisia, too, the mood shifted from optimism to concern. Tunisians have seen their economy worsen, inequalities persist and frustrations mount. Perhaps most importantly, the elections saw peaceful turnover of power. The Nidaa Tunis, a party that emerged after uprisings against the Ennahda-led government, emerged the winner, and Ennahda conceded defeat. Negotiations over the Cabinet began, with all the usual haggling, in stark contrast to experiences in Egypt and Libya which had continued to herald civil unrest.

After the initial few months, the Arabian spring started to spread to the east of Suez Canal, to the heartland of the Middle East, gaining momentum over time. The protest then centered on the same issues as in North Africa: democracy, unemployment, food prices and in almost all cases (except Jordan) the ousting of the Monarchy, and/or presidency. The protests in the Middle East started in March, 2011 and, as in the North African cases, were propelled by social media, namely Facebook and Twitter. The demonstrations were met with significant brutality, security forces had shot indiscriminately at protesters, and gatherings have been stormed by riot police. These harsh methods have brought criticism upon the ruling regimes, but there was significantly less action by the international community than in the North African cases.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical postulation that best explicates this research is the frustration and aggression theory. The frustration and aggression theory with scholars such as Mc Dougall, John Dollard (1939), Leonard W. Doob (1939), Neal E. Miller (1939), Abraham H. Maslow (1941), Norman R. F. Maier (1949), J. K. Zawodny (1966), Abram Amsel (1992), among many others, argue that aggression is always a consequence of frustration, and that frustration always leads to some form of aggression. When a barrier is interposed between people and their goals, extra energy is mobilized, which flows over into a destructive behavior (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 1977).

The frustrating barrier target may be physical, psychological, or socially immune to attack a stranger, vested with an aura of authority, and sacred in character.

However, what constitutes an aggression is not an objective matter, as it often depends on cognition and interpretation by the individual (Berkowitz, 1962). Various types of frustrations may lead to different types of aggressive reactions (Rosenzweig, 1944).

The frustration and aggression theory finds relevance in this study as the grocery vendor- Mohammed Bouazizi became frustrated as a result of the beatings, confiscation of his cart, humiliations, and the inactions of the Tunisians' authority at the municipal office. Furthermore, the revolutionary attitude of the Tunisian population has direct bearing with their unfulfilled desires and general poor conditions of governance.

## **THE ARAB SPRING AND THE POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF THE MIDDLE EAST: CASE STUDIES.**

### **THE CASE OF EGYPT:**

On January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011, tens of thousands of protesters marched to central Cairo to voice their disapproval of long time ruler Hosni Mubarak. The day, which was termed "the day of rage", set off a chain of events that eventually led to the resignation and exiling of Mubarak and his family. The uprising in Egypt was centred in Cairo, more specifically at the Tahir Square. Another feature of the uprisings was the element of social media. The protesters used different social media, like Facebook and Twitter to coordinate and spread information regarding the protests. The use of social media meant that the international press was updated in real time regarding the events in Egypt; this in turn created a huge coverage of the events as they unfolded.

By the end of January 2011, the square became a meeting point for the protesters, and only a week after "the day of rage" an estimated 250, 000 demonstrators had gathered there displaying a pattern that was similar to the Tunisian case of Ben Ali. Mubarak offered concessions to the protesters; sacking his cabinet and promised not to re-run for the election. None of these appeasement offered satisfied the growing number of protesters, and faced by insurmountable domestic pressure Mubarak stepped down on 11 February 2011 (Bush, 2011).

As in Tunisia, the demonstrations and subsequent resignation of Mubarak was coupled with significant bloodshed. The demonstrations were initially met with harsh resistance from the military and other pro-Mubarak forces who launched several attacks on the Tahrir Square. The scenes at Tahrir Square were widely reported around the world; global media was constantly present and able to give up to date information on the situations. Clashes between protesters and pro-Mubarak forces were constant: as the protesters were fired upon, they responded by hauling rocks and Molotov cocktails at the police.

Several people lost their lives at Tahrir Square. The chaotic and tumultuous situation at Tahrir Square was unprecedented as demonstrations and oppositional parties had been banned since Mubarak's rise to power in 1981. Eventually the Egyptian military changed allegiance, and joined the demonstrators. The outcomes of the demonstrations were, as in Tunisia, successful, but the outcome of the larger, democratization movement, is still way too early to be assessed. As a step in dealing with the past administration of Mubarak, a trial was initiated. The legal process includes Mubarak himself, along with members of his family and former cabinet members. Mubarak was accused of several cases of abuse of power and also of murder in the case of the violent repression of the demonstrations on the Tahrir Square. However, Mubarak, from his caged sickbed denied all accusations. Simultaneously with the judicial process, Egyptians flared up. Just as in Tunisia the population was not satisfied with the progress that the military council that ruled Egypt delivered. The military council indeed enacted emergency laws, prohibited spontaneous congregations and postponed the dates for elections. The security situation in Egypt later deteriorated as violence between demonstrators and military police broke out again in Cairo on October 9<sup>th</sup>. Demonstrators, mainly Christian Copts, voiced their discontent with arson attacks on churches. The demonstrations descended into violence and as event unfolded, 24 people lost their lives. The event showed the extreme fragility of the then Egyptian society. The military council was quick to launch an investigation, assuring the Christian minority that there would be no impunity for the attacks on Christians, or on churches. There was also an amendment made to the electoral laws regulating the first elections since the fall of Mubarak, scheduled to take place at the end of November 2011. The amendment clearly stated that no religious rhetoric will be allowed during the elections. The anxiety over the elections and the importance of a successful democratic transition became visible in the Egypt society. The number of candidates for the parliament was staggering and there was indeed a desire to partake in the democratic process.

Egypt had on several occasions declined assistance in organizing the elections and several analysts consider the elections to be extremely important, not only to Egypt, but to the entire region since Egypt is seen as a role model for the other North African countries and the middle East. The week preceding the first round of elections in Egypt was marked by uprisings and anger directed towards the military council ruling Egypt then. The scenes that took place on the Tahrir Square during the latest days have bore a remarkable resemblance to the movement that forced Mubarak out of power at the beginning of 2011. At least 30 people were killed and the temporary parliament was asked to resign, the Military Council was however still in power.

The demonstrations were traced to lack of progress since the ousting of Mubarak, and that there had not been any substantial change since the same elite figures were still in power. Furthermore, the people got enraged because, in the post Mubarak era, civilians were still being charged in military courts.

### **THE CASE OF ALGERIA & MOROCCO**

In Algeria and Morocco - the outcome was quite different. Similar demonstrations as in Tunisia and Egypt took place in Algeria and Morocco, beginning in January, 2011 and escalated up to February, 2011. The demonstrations were however not as successful. Most importantly, the military and riot police retained their loyalty to the state rather than joining the uprising, as compared to the case of Egypt, and to some extent, that of Tunisia.

In Algeria and Morocco, demonstrators were met with reinforced riot police, and even though there were reported deaths in connection to the demonstrations they were not as violent and did not produce

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such high death tolls as in Tunisia and Egypt (BBC, 2011). Albeit that the Moroccan and Algerian demonstrations did not replace the incumbent regimes, they still inflicted a significant change in their respective societies. In Algeria, the emergency rule that came into effect since 1992 was lifted, and in Morocco a promise was made to reduce the influence of the King. A popular referendum was held during the end of June 2011, and the outcome was a landslide victory for the proposed amendments to the constitution limiting the influence and power of the Moroccan monarchy.

### **THE LIBYAN EXPERIENCE**

In Libya, the situation developed quite differently. The wave of demonstrations was sure to reach Libya as it engulfed the northern fringe of the African continent, but the response of the Libyan leadership, led by Muammar Gaddafi, was hard to predict. As in the neighbouring countries, demonstrators demanded better quality of life, more freedom and a higher level of participation in the governance of their countries. What distinguished the case of Libya from its North African neighbours was the particularly brutal fashion in which Gaddafi responded to the popular uprisings. When on February 17<sup>th</sup>, a “day of revolt” was organized it was clear that Gaddafi would not tolerate any scenario that would diminish, or infringe on his absolute power. On the first day of the uprisings Gaddafi released prisoners from jail and hired them as mercenaries to fight the protesters. Furthermore, he also employed a great number of predominantly West Africans as mercenaries to deal with the protesters. Just days after the instigation of the protests, Gaddafi’s son, Saif al-Islam Muammar al Gaddafi appeared on state television warning that the situation might cause a civil war. He blamed the uprising on foreign interest, particularly Israel; he further accused western media of giving a biased picture of the situation in Libya (BBC, 2011).

The situation did not improve after al-Islam’s speech. The attacks on civilian protesters continued and intensified; a large migratory flow towards the borders began to materialize. The fact that Libya hosted a large population of migrant workers made the situation even more precarious. In just a matter of days there were large refugee camps set up on the borders with Egypt. Since Gaddafi had hired West Africans as mercenaries, the situation for migrant workers from that region was especially dangerous as the migrant workers trying to get to the borders were mistaken for mercenaries and consequently met with hostility or even violence by Libyans.

As the situation escalated Gaddafi made an appearance on state television where he delivered a seemingly incoherent speech from his bombed home, a remnant from the 1986 bomb-campaign by the U.S. in which his 15 month old daughter died. In the speech Gaddafi blamed various countries and organisations for the on-going protests. He blamed Al-Qaeda for poisoning the drinking water, causing the youth to revolt, and he also blamed the U.S. along with a majority of the western world for the situation in Libya. He promised to die as a martyr and that he would rather fight with the last drop of his blood than step down.

However, the death of Gaddafi’s daughter, Hana, was staged and on February 24<sup>th</sup>, the rebels announced that they had complete control of the eastern city Tobruk, located not far from the Egyptian border. A few days later; on February 27<sup>th</sup>, the formation of the National Transitional Council (NTC) was announced and it was established as the de facto opponent of the Libyan government. The council, made up of a mixture of freedom-fighters, former politicians, religious leaders and elements of the Libyans Diaspora, elected Mustafa Abdul Jalil as its leader. Jalil had defected from his position as Secretary of Justice in the Libyan government on February 21<sup>st</sup>, because of the use of force against civilians. After the rebel side had established control of Tobruk, the violence on the part of Gaddafi’s

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forces escalated. Indiscriminate shelling of entire towns believed to be strongholds of the rebels commenced, causing great civilian suffering.

However, the international community did not stand idly by as Gaddafi was embarking on what was described as a warfare against his own people. The issue was brought before the United Nation Security Council, which on March 17<sup>th</sup>, voted in favour of imposing a no-fly zone over Libya, restricting Gaddafi from using his air force against the Libyan population. The vote was certainly controversial, as five countries chose to abstain; Brazil, China, Germany, India, and the Russian Federation (Blanchard, 2011). This notwithstanding, resolution 1973 was passed and the responsibility of enforcing the no-fly zone was distributed amongst the member states of the UN, with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as the commanding head. A broad coalition of countries made themselves available, among them Sweden. The no-fly zone indeed eased the suffering of the civilian population of Libya. However, Gaddafi still targeted civilians and there were reports of him using banned cluster-bombs when shelling villages and towns. The situation was worthwhile; it became a stalemate going back and front. Control of the coastal towns of Misratah, Sirte, Ajdabiya, and Benghazi East of Tripoli, on several occasions switched hands. This devastating stalemate brought severe suffering to the civilian population of Libya and the imposition of the no-fly zone was, yet, to make a substantial difference in terms of rebel successes (Blanchard, 2011).

The mission to enforce the no-fly zone over the Libyan air-space was gradually been broadened, not officially but the actions and missions undertaken by NATO forces allude to a significantly wider area of operations. Intense bombings of central Tripoli sought to kill Gaddafi, and France admitted to air-lifting weapons and other supplies to the rebel forces of the National Transitional Council. These actions were in no way sanctioned by resolution 1973, they were however carried out within the realms of that mandate (BBC News, April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

The rebel side, the National Transitional Council, suffered infighting as the conflict became protracted. On July 28<sup>th</sup>, the rebel General and former Interior minister in the Gaddafis' government, Abd al-Fatah Yunnis was mysteriously killed. The murder made visible a possible rift in the rebel ranks. No motive was established, neither was anyone arrested for the act. However, rumours were rife; some sources mentioned that Yunnis had information that Algeria was supplying Gaddafi with weapons. Others claim that the General was in fact a double agent sabotaging the rebel cause. Regardless of the motive, the fact that there were apparently internal problems within the National Transitional Council might, was a sign of weakening resolve from the rebel side (Bayat, 2011).

The situation in Libya then is by no means easily analyzed here. Gaddafi was notorious for his erratic behaviour and his blatant disrespect for human rights and freedoms, a mixture that was and bode of nightmare scenario for Libya, its people and the entire region. As Gaddafi was removed from power, his erratic behaviour and self-image as an almost god-like person is even more troubling. As the National Transitional Council took over de facto control of the Libyan state, Gaddafi went into hiding. His whereabouts were unknown, but he did not give up the struggle to regain control. The fact that he was apprehended, caused unnecessary suffering amongst the civilian population of Libya. Even when in hiding, Gaddafi continued to make inflammatory speeches urging those loyal to him to fight to the bitter end, a calling that severely limits the possibilities for a peaceful retreat of Gaddafi-loyalists. The manhunt for Gaddafi then was a high priority for the newly installed government of Libya; a Gaddafi at large will inevitably endanger the stability in the entire region. The situation later turned in favour

of the rebels, as much of Tripoli fell in the hands of the Transitional Council which on August 26<sup>th</sup>, announced the movement of their base from Benghazi to Tripoli (Hayes, 2011).

Despite the successes of the rebels, it was still difficult for Gaddafi to be caught as there were still pockets of resistance within Libya, most notably in, and around Gaddafi's hometown; Sirte, and the city of Sabah as well as Bani Walid.

On October 20<sup>th</sup>, a decisive step was taken towards the rebels' victory as the last city belonging to Gaddafi loyalists; Sirte, fell. Furthermore, it turned out that Gaddafi was hiding among his loyalists in the city, as he along with his entourage tried to flee, he was captured and later shot. The circumstances of his death are unclear. Motassim Gaddafi was also killed in the final battle for Sirte. Following the death of Gaddafi, the National Transitional Council declared, officially, the liberation of Libya on October 23<sup>rd</sup> (Anderson, 2011).

The aftermath of the killing of Gaddafi is complex. The UN demanded an independent investigation since there were evidences suggesting that he was shot while in captivity. The issue of disposing the body also became affected. Initially the NTC promised to honour Muslim traditions concerning the corpse of the former dictator. This promise was reneged as the process was stalled. An autopsy was carried out and the time the corpse of Gaddafi and his son had become somewhat of an attraction as they lie in a meat freezer in the city of Misrata. The manner in which Gaddafi's remains were treated gave an indication to how the interim government of Libya will manage the difficult post conflict phase that Libya was to face. The situation in Libya today is volatile, as there is an abundance of weapons and an extreme shortage of employment. The unifying goals of ousting Gaddafi having been fulfilled, there is subsequently a great responsibility that rests on the interim rulers of Libya, to collect weapons, offer employment, and keep the unity.

These tasks are of course extremely difficult but the level of accomplishment in these endeavours will likely determine the future of Libya. Libya is a Nation that is bless with abundant natural resources and where one should expect peace. Ironically, this has become a dream that has to a greater end eluded Libya and had thrown it into an internecine civil war at the exit of Gaddafi.

### **THE ARAB SPRING AND THE POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF NORTH AFRICA**

The impacts of the Arab Spring on countries across the North African region have been varied, reflecting the significant diversity that characterizes the region (Anderson, 2011). The revolutions that occurred in Tunisia and Egypt have not been easily replicated in Libya, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. While international military forces are supporting rebels in the civil war in Libya, Saudi military support has helped the Bahrain regime to suppress protesters. Nevertheless, even in states such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen, which have so far resisted revolution, the power of the state has been constrained (Hayes, 2011).

Much of the available literature on the Arab Spring is concerned with the future prospects of the Arab Spring and the extent to which it is likely to spread or be sustained. Many scholars argue that the fall of incumbent regimes in Bahrain, Libya, Syria and Yemen is inevitable in the long term. They agree that oil-rich Gulf States such as Saudi Arabia will remain resistant to major political change, using a combination of repression with handouts to maintain their grip on power.

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Those Arab countries that have some experience of democratic institutions (Palestinian Territories, Kuwait, Iraq and Lebanon) illustrate the pitfalls of flawed democracy in the Arab world. In each of these cases factional infighting has led to prolonged periods of political gridlock and civil war (EIU, 2011).

Nevertheless, it is already possible to identify a few concrete changes in governance that have resulted from the Arab Spring, particularly in relation to the role of women in politics. In Tunisia, for example, parties are now required to have equal numbers of men and women in their electoral lists and positions. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood; even though it has been declared as a terrorist group by president Asisi, has grown stronger and had gone ahead to hold discussions on how to include women in their Consultative Council, although no women sat on the commission to change the constitution. Although the Arab Spring has had a profound impact on the political settlement in many countries of the North Africa and the Middle East, it has arguably failed to bring about any major changes in the regional power structures. This lack of change can be attributed to a number of factors: the oil supply is secure, Israel continues its occupation, and there are even more ways at the disposal of the US and European states to keep governments in tune with Western interests, than in times of US-backed dictatorships, as could be seen in the Asisi government in Egypt which presently is still align to the US. While many scholars have made comparisons with the third wave of democratization in Eastern Europe in 1989, US influence in the region is not crumbling in the same way that the Soviet Union's influence over Eastern Europe fell apart during that region's democratic transition (Hamid, 2011).

Experts have identified a number of emerging trends in regional power relations in the region under study in recent times. Crocker had argued that the Arab Spring is likely to lead to the re-emergence of Egypt as a leading Arab power (Crocker, 2011). Others have also argued that, developments in Egypt will have a significant impact on the wider region, either providing a blueprint for reform in other regions if the transition is successful, or encouraging anti-democratic opposition if the transition stalls. While there are signs that the military are consolidating their position in Egypt through the Asisi regime, the decision of the government to try and detain the former Presidents demonstrates the continued power of Arab protests (Crocker, 2011).

The Arab spring has created regional competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, with the latter becoming increasingly fearful of the threat posed by the Shia rebellions in Bahrain and Yemen. Saudi Arabia's moves to invite Morocco and Jordan to join the Gulf Cooperation Council is seen as an attempt to constrain Iran's influence in the regional enclaves (Diamond, 2011). The Arab spring has continued to add to the divide between the Shia and the Suni Muslims in North Africa and the Middle East and also a continuation in the proliferation of armed groups especially in Libya, Egypt and Syria. It has popularized the Islamic Brotherhood making them central in every discussion as it relates to the Arab spring and the Middle East.

Although some Islamist groups such as the Islamic Brotherhood (IB) in Egypt or Al-Nahda in Tunisia were involved in the protests, the Arab Spring has largely transcended Islamist politics. Bayat characterizes the uprisings as post-Islamist' revolutions, where religious rhetoric is largely absent and where the protesters central aim is to establish a democratic government (Bayat, 2011).

Although these groups were marginalized from the initial uprisings, most scholars agree that existing Islamist movements, especially the well-organised (IB) in Egypt, are likely to be major players in the post-uprising political landscape of the Arab world. Their role will vary significantly from country to

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country. Islamism is best understood as a catch-all term that encompasses a range of positions, from a belief in theocracy to the idea that Islam should be a source of values.

Islamist movements that were formed under authoritarian regimes had faced internal challenges and tensions had emerged from younger activists, some of whom had supported greater pluralism and openness. Nevertheless, when state authority is radically challenged, power lies with those who command weapons and a disciplined organization, and in many countries in North Africa, Islamist organizations are the only ones that can claim ready access to both of these resources.

Although social media savvy youth played an important role in driving the protests in most countries, their role is likely to diminish as political transitions play out in the region. Youth movements lack leaders and policy platforms to drive their agenda. The fact that formal civil and political society played such a minimal role in the protests (with the exception of Bahrain) has implications for the long-term trajectory of the Arab Spring and the Arab world. While the prominence of social media and young people helped to bring together diverse social and political groups, the amorphous nature of these groupings mean that they will be difficult to sustain. Youth movements will need to reach out to conservative voters in rural areas who constitute the majority of the electorate in many North African countries. In Egypt, these new political movements stand little chance of being able to build competitive party structures in time for future elections (UN Report, 2011).

Furthermore, the challenges facing Tunisia, Egypt and Libya are enormously different. While Egypt and Tunisia will focus on building political institutions (constitutions, political parties and electoral systems), Libya will need to construct a civil society from scratch owing to the civil war and factionalisation in the country. In the short term, the economic consequence of the Arab Spring favours the oil-producing countries that have experienced the least instability. Egypt and Tunisia require external support to shore up suddenly fragile fiscal and balance of payments positions. This shortfall has been caused by the short-term reductions in production, trade and services. Egypt has also suffered a 45% drop in tourist arrivals, which it has been estimated may lead to a 1.2% decline in GDP (Oxford Analytical, 2015). These trends may be partly replicated in other major tourist destinations in the region such as Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Libya.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has attempted to underscore the Arab spring and its dynamics on the North African and the Middle East politics. The situations in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, has proven to the world and Africa that authoritarian regimes are definitely gone and are at present obsolete. Things will never be the same again. A taboo has been broken. The image of the “Father of the Nation” is shattered.

In the future, Africa should see fewer leaders wielding too much power, building a system of patronage and a culture of corruption while failing to address problems facing the ordinary people. Also gone are the days of so-called model economies and showcases of the west such as Tunisia. The end of showcase has come. Africa presently demands more accountability, and donors are busy revising their models.

The Arab/North African spring has without any doubt influenced politics in North Africa and the Middle East regions. Since the beginning of 2011, bemused Africans have seen “permanent” dictators such as Ben Ali or Mubarak fall. Africans have watched closely what happened in Libya and how they succeeded in changing things in that country. Gaddafi used to be, if not an admired figure, at least a

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feared leader not only in his country, but also in the whole of Africa, where he financed a number of investments (as well as coups and revolutions). Gaddafi's fall had weakened some dictators who benefited from his financial and military support. Opposition movements and pressure groups in North Africa and the Middle East have all seen the opportunity arising from all these changes and are trying to reorganize the people, with some success in some countries and the outbreak of civil war in some. The researchers may be bold to state that the era of autocratic leadership has been over taken by people oriented government based on popular support. However, governments of other regions should therefore gain from these experiences, and build on their governmental structures with the hope of advancing / promoting institutions with democratic values.

To be forewarned is to be fore armed: the time to act is now.

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