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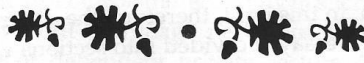
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THE ARAB SPRING AND ITS AFTERMATH

By Babajimi O. Faseke



Introduction

The series of events that started in Tunisia with the self-immolation of the Tunisian vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, in December of 2010 and soon spread across North Africa and the Middle East (the Arab world) — known as the Arab Spring — is both an evolving and sometimes complex story. To start with, there is no consensus as to what to call this wave of events. The term 'Arab Spring' is more commonly used in the West, drawing on the precedence of Eastern Europe in the 1980s when the term 'spring' was used to describe a similar wave of protests that swept across the region, which ultimately led to the fall of communism and the consequent overthrow of despotic leaders. People in the Arab world, on the other hand, prefer the phrase 'Arab Awakening,' an expression with clear antecedents in the social, national, constitutional and even Islamic modernist reforms of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In an attempt to appear neutral some make reference to an 'Arab Revolution'. The problem with tagging this wave of events a revolution is that it bears no direct semblance with notable revolutions in history. The 'revolutions' did not present themselves as socialist, liberal or Islamist, but rather as uprisings against the system with a broad social basis of support. There were no elites at the forefront but citizens across a flat social hierarchy.

Whatever the nomenclature we choose to label the uprisings, it is clear that they were unprecedented largely because the region had been ruled by despots for decades and, more so, it appeared apparent that the people had been accustomed to such despotism, even though they would rather have it differently. It was never in doubt that the Arab regimes were deeply unpopular and confronted with grave demographic, economic and political problems, which made their regimes largely unpopular. But the violent modes with which dissents were repressed by these dictators make the uprisings all the more surprising. This remarkable record of regime stability in the face of numerous challenges had even led to conclusions among academics that the Arab world was incompatible with democracy or liberal ideas. The Arab Spring, however, threatens to debunk this thesis. As at the time of writing, there have been four regime changes: Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, although these countries remain in the middle of massive political and economic instability.

The uprisings across the Arab world share striking commonalities. For example, the demonstrations were largely staged by younger citizens, using cell phones and social networking websites to circumvent state controls. There was also no visible leadership in many of these essentially grassroots movements. Similar slogans and tactics with Arab citizens in other countries were employed. And each learned from the successes of contemporaneous revolutionary movements in other Arab countries. But even at this, it would be misleading to suggest that the 'Arab Spring' was a monolithic phenomenon or that the uprisings constituted a cohesive Arab revolt. The experiences of each Arab state

have been different. As we will find out, in some countries the military defected from the regime (Tunisia and Egypt) while in others, part or all of the military stayed loyal to the president (Libya, Yemen and Syria). Some regimes have virtually succeeded in brutally surprising the uprisings that confronted them (Syria, Bahrain and Jordan) while others (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen) have capitulated. Also, while it would appear each popular uprising began as a strictly local affair, foreign bodies interfered in some: the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), led by Saudi Arabia, intervened in Bahrain and NATO intervened in Libya. In this light, therefore, the different nations deserve special study. The remainder of the essay is divided into sections which discuss the background and regional overview of the Arab world; the historical development of the uprisings in each of the states that experienced regime change; countries that were spared from the 'revolution' and why; as well as an inquest into the unique case of Syria. Finally, the essay assesses the 'aftermath' of the uprisings and ascertains to what extent the 'revolution' has been a success.

Regional Overview: A Background to the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring is best appreciated when the political landscape of the Arab region in the past century or so is explored. As earlier hinted, the region was characterized by long stays of rulers who were autocrats. In fact, among Arab republics, only Algeria, Lebanon, Iraq and Sudan were spared the threat of a revolution (though each witnessed popular protests in 2011); and this was essentially because, apart from General Omar Bashir—who has ruled Sudan since 1989—none is governed by the sort of autocratic ruler with dynastic tendencies as those of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Syria. Muammar al-Qaddafi took charge of Libya in 1969; Hafez al-Assad seized power in Syria in 1970 before passing the mantle to his son, Bashar, in 2000; Ali Abdullah Saleh became president of North Yemen (later united with South Yemen) in 1978; Hosni Mubarak took charge of Egypt in 1981; and Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali became Tunisia's president in 1987. The monarchies have even enjoyed a longer stay, with the Hashemites ruling Jordan since its creation in 1920, the al-Saud family ruling a unified Saudi Arabia since 1932, and the Alaouite dynasty in Morocco coming to power as far back as the seventeenth century.

This situation is all the more remarkable when considered that, contemporaneously, these regimes survived over a period of decades in which democratic waves spread across the world, particularly in East Asia, eastern Europe, Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa. Even Iran and Turkey that were proximate to the Arab world experienced tremendous political change during this time, with a revolution and three subsequent decades of political struggle in Iran and a quasi-Islamist party building a more open and democratic system in secular Turkey.⁽⁴⁾

Arab citizens certainly demonstrated the desire and ability to mobilize against their governments. But those governments, before 2011, were extremely successful in co-opting and containing them. The question therefore is, apart from the brutality with which dissents were repressed, how were the despots able to retain political power for so long? Academics have attributed this to two main factors: the military and state control over the economy.⁽⁵⁾ In the wake of the Arab military coups of the 1950s and 1960s, Arab leaders created institutions to exercise political control over their armies and, in some cases, established rival military forces to act as counterweights. These armies were extremely loyal and helped ruling regimes suppress civil unrests and put down

uprisings. In these countries, the logic was straightforward: if the regime falls and the majority take over, the army leadership will likely be replaced as well. The case of Bahrain, a predominantly Shiite country, is a typical example. Here the Sunni-led security forces stood their ground against demonstrators to preserve the Sunni monarchy.

On the economic angle, Arab states with oil reserves and revenues have over the years deployed this wealth to control the economy in such a way that preserved their sustained governance. They built patronage networks, provided social services, and directed the development of dependent private sectors. Also, through these funds, Arab rulers connected the interests of important constituencies to their survival and placated the rest of their citizens with handouts in times of crisis. As we will find out, these strategies have accounted for the exclusion from, or suppression of, the latest Arab Uprisings. What then changed in the case of countries that were involved in the crisis? Our examination of the separate countries would reveal these answers. But on a general level, we can mention the underestimation of the military's tendency to be professional in certain countries (Tunisia and Egypt) as well as the mis-calculation of external military involvement in Libya and Yemen. All this is in addition to the fact that the super-wealthy class that state controlled economy had created greatly upsets a significant segment of the citizenry.

Tunisia: The Trail Blazers and Point of Reference

The dawn of the Arab Spring occurred on the 17th of December, 2010 when a local inspector in the provincial Tunisian city of Sidi Bouzid confiscated vegetable seller Mohammed Bouazizi's cart because he did not have a vending license. As was common in Tunisia and other Arab states, the inspector expected the twenty-six year old vendor to either have strong connections to an influential person or muster enough money for a bribe that probably costs more than he needed to procure a license. His appeals to the local authorities fell on deaf ears. This mixture of humiliation and powerlessness propelled him to the desperate act of publicly setting himself ablaze in front of the local government building. Following Bouazizi's example, in the early days of January, 2011, dozens of other people killed themselves as well. It was, however, the event of December 17 that had the most immediate and profound effect on Tunisia and, by extension, the rest of the Arab World.

In less than two days after Bouazizi's death solidarity rallies sprang up, during which protesters were killed by security forces. Rather than intimidate the people, further protests were carried out and the demonstrators that were killed in earlier rallies were mourned and venerated as 'martyrs'. Arab news channel Al-Jazeera, which became the most important emotion-provoking and mobilizing medium of the Arab Spring, showed clips of the self-immolation and of the related demonstrations that were filmed using cell phone cameras. The protests quickly reached the capital city of Tunis, where bigger rallies and demonstration that called for the resignation of President Zine Abidine Ben Ali were staged. It was from here that similar rallies calling for the same demands spread to neighbouring countries. As was the case elsewhere, the protest had a rich social composition. It included people from all walks of life: while the participants were majorly youths, children, women and the elderly also played significant roles. In addition, though these uprisings— while being the most spontaneous across the Arab world— were the least well-organized across the region, they demonstrated the power and efficacy of the country's labour movement, as repeated strikes compounded the

pressure on Ben Ali. Tunisia's military also played a less significant role in the country's uprisings compared to armed forces elsewhere (Egypt especially). Even so, it was the Tunisian military that orchestrated the ouster of Ben Ali when they chased off his security forces on the 14th of January 2011 and vowed to protect the revolution afterwards. It was on the same day therefore that Ben Ali dissolved his government and fled to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on asylum. The following morning he announced his resignation and power was handed over to the parliamentary speaker, Fouad Mebazaa after Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi had briefly taken over as interim president in the immediate aftermath of Ben Ali's flight.

That the Arab Spring started in Tunisia is a surprise to many analysts, especially when considered that Tunisia's government institutions were relatively healthy compared to those of her neighbours. Though the scale of corruption at the top was alarming, Ben Ali's administration did not depend on the accumulation of small bribes that subverted bureaucracies elsewhere, including Libya and, to a lesser degree, Egypt. The economy was also buoyant and infrastructures were far from deplorable. In fact, Tunisia had the largest middle class and strongest organized labor movement. It had also long enjoyed the Arab world's best educational system. Where the ousted president's administration had erred was that, behind his achievements, he tightly restricted free expression and political parties. In the midst of this he also cleverly cultivated and manipulated the country's international image as a modern, technocratic regime and a tourist-friendly travel destination. More tellingly, the so-called prosperous economy was controlled by a fragmented elite group, which was dominated by Ben Ali's relatives. WikiLeaks recently revealed that the U.S. ambassador to Tunisia reported in 2006 that more than half of Tunisia's commercial elites were personally related to Ben Ali through his three adult children, seven siblings, and second wife's ten brothers and sisters. This network became known in Tunisia as "the Family." Thus Bouazizi's incident of December 17, 2010 had deeper antecedents that reflected Ben Ali's personalization of Tunisia and the large scale corruption that this bred.

In the post Ben Ali administration, Mebazaa formed a 'National Unity Government' (a coalition government) on 17th January, which consisted of twelve members of the ruling Rally for Constitutional Democracy (RCD) party of Ben Ali. Other members included the leaders of the three opposition parties, FTDL, Ettajdid Movement and the Progressive Democratic Party. Three representatives from the Tunisian General Labour Union were added to round up this coalition government. The inclusion of RCD members still caused ruffles and rancor among the Tunisian people, which led to the eventual withdrawal of the three representatives from the Labour Union. Further protests ensued and on the 9th of March, 2011, the court announced the dissolution of the former ruling party, RCD. A month after Ben Ali was charged with counts of manslaughter, drug-trafficking and corruption. By October 2011, Tunisians voted for the first time in post-revolution era. The previously banned Islamic party under Ben Ali, Ennahda (also Al-Nahda), won the election by capturing 41 percent of the votes. Amidst these developments, a constituent assembly was charged with the responsibility of rewriting the constitution. Ennahda formed a coalition government with two other major political parties: the Congress for the Republic and Ettakatol. The coalition government was only meant to serve as an interim administration pending the time the constituent assembly would complete the rewriting of the new constitution. What was intended to be an interim administration in 2011 still persist as of April 2014, drawing quarters of the Tunisian populace to accuse the

'interim' President, Moncef Marzouki, of deliberately holding on to power. This on itself has bred a number of protests and conflicts. While the prospects of a post-revolution Tunisia might appear bright given their highly educated citizenry and constitutional history, the dust of the Arab Spring is yet to settle therein.

Egypt: the Baton Carrier

Hosni Mubarak was the next president to be implicated in the Arab Spring. Mubarak, like Ben Ali, had been partially successful in delivering economic growth to Egypt. He opened the economy to foreign direct investment and multi-national companies. However, just like in Tunisia, the positive results of such neoliberal expansion were not felt across society. The urban poor did not benefit from the economic openness (*infitah*) while the state-employed middle class were directly targeted by it as inflation grew and taxes increased. This neoliberal economic model only produced a politically connected but small *nouveau riche*, while the majority of the population remained excluded, making them grow increasingly resentful. At the centre of this crony capitalism was Mubarak's son, Gamal, without whom business elitism was near impossible. To make matters worse, the efficacy of Mubarak's regime gradually waned. There was widespread unemployment, increased poverty and endemic corruption.

The immediate trigger of the revolution in Egypt has an even longer antecedent to that of Tunisia. What Mohammed Bouazizi had been to the Tunisian revolution was what Khalid Saied was to the Egyptian uprisings. On the 6th of June, 2010 Saied was dragged out of a cyber café before being brutally mutilated by the local police in Alexandria. He was accused of theft, possession of illegal weapons and resistance to arrest. The state-released autopsy revealed that Saied's death had been self-inflicted, claiming he suffocated in an attempt to swallow hard drugs. Saied's family members insisted, however, that he was killed because he had possession of a video material that implicated members of the police in a drug deal. On visiting his body at the mortuary, Saied's family saw how battered his body had been, further discrediting the state's account of events. His brother took pictures of the corpse using his mobile phone and subsequently released them on the internet. The pictures caused a large national and global outcry. A Google marketing executive, Wael Ghonim, was one of those that vehemently decried the barbaric act. He took it upon himself to create more public awareness and solidarity against such breach of human rights. He created a Facebook memorial page for Saied and tagged it 'We are all Khalid Saied'. The gesture fulfilled its purpose. Because of its large followership and heavy amount of international criticism of the incident, the Egyptian government arranged a public trial for the involved detectives. On June 25, 2010, as a means of pressurizing the government for more results, rallies were held in Alexandria against abuses by the police. In a matter of days the protests extended to Cairo's Tahir Square. At the square, however, thirty of the demonstrators were arrested while several others were beaten by the state police, causing further rancor.

With the event of December 17, 2010 in Tunisia and Ben Ali's subsequent relinquishment of power on January 14, 2011, the discontented protesters in Egypt found a genuine opportunity to push their demonstrations to another level. It was again Ghonim who first used his popular blog to publish a call for protest to his followers on 25 January. In the rallies, protesters carried banners and posters displaying the pictures of Saied's corpse. Many Egyptians identified with the course, causing a large segment of the populace to form a uniform opposition against Mubarak on broader issues like police

brutality, harsh laws, absence of free elections, corruption and economic downturn. Their primary demand, however, was an end to the regime. At Tahir Square there were persistent and sometimes violent demonstrations. So was the case in the city of Suez. The curfew imposed by the government was also ignored in the execution of these protests. This pressure impacted on Mubarak, causing him in January 29 to dissolve his government and appoint Omar Suleiman as vice president and former aviation minister, Ahmed Shafik, as Prime Minister so as to quell dissents. However, amidst persistent protests, on February 11, 2011 Suleiman announced the resignation of Mubarak and the subsequent turning over of power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) that had hitherto lent support to the regime's oppositions. On February 13, in response to the demands of the demonstrators, the SCAF seized power and, under the leadership of Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, suspended the constitution, dissolved the parliament and announced that the military would be in charge until six months when elections would be held. Mubarak was subsequently charged to court on a number of counts including murder of protesters and corruption; if convicted he would have been sentenced to death. As it turned out, in June 2012, he was only sentenced to life in prison and acquitted of corruption.

It is instructive to note that of all the Arab countries involved in the uprisings, the Egyptian military played by far the most prominent role. This is partly due to the fact that, unlike in neighbouring countries, the military in Egypt (likewise Tunisia) is not the personal instrument of the ruler; and again, in contrast to other Arab countries, the military is highly respected by the general public. As it assumed control of Egypt after Mubarak's ouster, the army revealed its enormous influence in Egyptian society. This influence is earned by virtue of the fact that the military is run by generals who acquired their reputation in the 1967 and 1973 wars with Israel and who have cooperated closely with the United States since Cairo's 1979 peace treaty with Jerusalem. In the following weeks of SCAF seizure of power, therefore, they were able to curb the revolution from spiraling out of control, putting in place an interim constitution that provided necessary powers to act, as well as firmly suppressing dissents who wanted to sabotage the regime transition process. They also kept to their word by conducting general elections in May/June of 2012, less than a year of seizing power.

Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood party won the presidential elections and assumed office on the 30th of June 2012. In a couple of months, November 22, 2012, he issued a controversial 'declaration', which made his decrees immune to being challenged. This was done, according to Morsi, in an attempt to protect the work of a constituent assembly that was charged with the responsibility of drafting a new constitution. The declaration also gave him the authority 'to take any measure necessary in protecting the revolution.' This declaration was seen by liberal and secular groups as a usurpation of state power. They also feared that it would impose strict Islamism on Egypt since Morsi was a member of the fanatical group, the Muslim Brotherhood. Consequently, protesters again assembled at Tahir Square demanding that the declaration be reversed. The demonstrations led to clashes between protesters and police. By April the following year a youth group had been created, focused on the ouster of Morsi through the holding of incessant rallies. Morsi also had his sympathizers who held rallies in his support. The appeal against Morsi was however stronger and on the 30th of June, 2013 he was removed from office by the Egyptian military. A civilian, Adly Mansour, was thereafter installed as interim head of state. The military, now under

General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, rained heavy crackdowns on Morsi supporters, particularly members of the Muslim Brotherhood. It was also the military that called the big shots in decision making under the interim administration. For his part in what Egyptians refer to as the 'second revolution', el-Sisi was prodded to contest the 2014 presidential elections. This he did and won by a landslide, becoming Egypt's sixth President on June 8, 2014 amidst oppositions and discontent from Egyptian Islamists. It remains to be seen what the import of this holds.

Libya- from Protests to Civil War: the Cost of Deposing a Demagogue

While protesters in Tunisia and Egypt successfully deposed their former rulers, similar efforts in Libya resulted in a protracted civil war. Since 1969 that Muammar al-Qaddafi's seized power in a bloodless coup, standard of living, literacy and life expectancy grew rapidly. In fact, by late 2011 when he was deposed, Libya's population had a per capita income of \$14,000 and their GDP per Capita and literacy rate were better than those of Egypt and Tunisia. Unlike most other parts of the region, also, child marriage was banned and women's rights were promoted to such an extent that they enjoyed equality of status with their male counterparts both at work and in the society at large. Libya also had the best welfare system in Africa, one that allowed access to free education, free healthcare, and subsidized housing schemes. In a somewhat contradictory manner, however, Libya's corruption perception index as recently as 2010 was ranked 146th out of 178 countries, worse than those of Egypt (ranked 98th) and Tunisia (ranked 59th). Years of artificially induced scarcity in everything from simple consumer goods to basic medical care was responsible for this widespread corruption. Libya also had one of the highest unemployment rates in the Arab region. More tellingly, some of the worst economic conditions were concentrated in the eastern part of the country that had prospered in ancient times and had also been where Qaddafi's regime extracted oil. Relatively little infrastructure was developed in this area. Also, as was the case in neighbouring countries, the ruling family had a direct stake in any business enterprise—therefore forming an elite wealthy class that was far above others.

Qaddafi's four-decade-long effort to consolidate his power and rule by patronage to kin and clan was also one of the immediate backgrounds to Libya's uprisings. He was a master of tactical maneuvering, placing relatives and loyal members of his tribe in central military and government positions, at the expense of others. This manner of administration produced widespread and deep-seated suspicion. Libyans' trust in their government and in one another, eroded, and they took refuge in the solace of tribe and family. Libyan society was fractured, and every national institution, including the military, was divided by the cleavages of kinship and region. To make matters worse, as opposed to the situation in Tunisia and Egypt, Libya had no system of political alliances, network of economic associations, or national organizations of any kind. In the absence of any public-sector bureaucracy—including a reliable police force—therefore, kin networks provided safety and security as well as access to goods and services.

The first protests against Qaddafi occurred between the 13th and 16th of January, 2011 in the 'marginalized' eastern region of the country: Bayda, Derna, Benghazi and other neighbouring cities. They were occasioned by the irritation at the delay in the completion of housing units as well as the political corruption in Tripoli. Though the government responded soon afterwards by issuing several millions for the project's completion, the protests as well as events in adjacent Tunisia and Egypt had served as a springboard for more far-reaching demonstrations. In late January, Jamal al-Hajji, a political

commentator, called on the internet for demonstrations to be held in support of greater freedom in Libya. He was arrested a few days later, causing international criticism. This was followed by series of riots. On the 15th of February, following the arrest of another human rights activist, Fathi Terbil, over 600 demonstrators protested in front of Benghazi's police headquarters. The protesters were armed with a number of dangerous weapons and were generally violent in their demonstrations, demanding an end to Qaddafi's regime. This led police to respond in an equally violent manner, injuring several protesters. Two days later, a group formed by Libyans on exile, the National Conference for the Libyan Opposition, organized what was tagged 'a Day of Rage', where all groups opposed to the Qaddafi government publicly demonstrated against previous 'injustices'. At the rallies – which were held in Benghazi, Ajdabiya, Derna, Zintan, and Bayda – Libyan security forces fired live ammunition into the armed protests, killing a number of people. The protesters on their part burnt a number of government buildings, including a police station. By the following day, the fervour of the demonstration had overwhelmed Qaddafi's army and security agents, leading them to vacate and surrender Benghazi as well as Bayda to the protesters.

The demonstrators were joined by military units and commanders that had defected from the Libyan army. General Abdul Fatah Younis, who was later assassinated in mid 2011, was the most prominent of these defectors. Together they formed fighting units to defend themselves against Qaddafi's army and to ultimately defeat his administration in Tripoli. On the 27th of February 2011, the National Transitional Council (NTC) was established and chaired by Abdul Jalil. Its objective was not to form an interim government, but to coordinate resistance efforts in the different towns that the rebels then controlled (Benghazi, Bayda, Zintan etc). More importantly, it gave a political 'face' to the opposition that the world could identify with. From its establishment the NTC served as the *de facto* government of Libya, providing the required day to day administration. Though the NTC controlled essentially the eastern region, they made post-war plans that would have affected the whole of Libya, including the preparation for general elections.

While the rebels under the NTC made quick inroads throughout February, Qaddafi's army made speedy recoveries in March, pushing the rebels as far back as Benghazi, which was on the verge of being recaptured. When it had become apparent that the NTC was at risk of losing the war, foreign military interventions took place. On the 19th of March, 2011, a multi-state coalition began a military intervention in Libya as a means of implementing the UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which gave legitimacy to the act of intervention in Libya. The major participants were USA, Britain, Canada and France. NATO joined the anti-Qaddafi campaign in March 23, enforcing a no-fly zone across Libya. Fearing defeat, in June of 2011 Qaddafi offered a compromise to NATO and the rebels of conducting fresh elections and stepping down if defeated. This compromise was turned down by both parties, with NATO proceeding to bombard Tripoli. By early October the NTC had gained control of most of western Libya, including Tripoli. On October 20, the city of Sirte that Qaddafi had been hiding was captured. Qaddafi himself was publicly maimed and killed the same day. His stronghold of Bani Walid was captured in January the following year.

Post-Qaddafi Libya is still largely an unsettled one. In the immediate aftermath tribal factions combated themselves. The NTC tried to put in place a post-war order. Serving as an interim legislature in the transitional period, it prohibited publications that criticized

the revolution, questioned the authority of Libya's governing organs, or praised Muammar Qaddafi, his family, his government, or his ideologies. Elections were held in July 2012 and Ali Zeidan was sworn in as Prime Minister four months later under a make-shift government structure known as the General National Congress (GNC). The GNC's primary aim was to set up a constituent assembly, which would draft a new constitution. This constitution drafting process is still in the offing. Libya, however, cannot claim to be better off than they were under Qaddafi as reports suggest that the country has fallen into worse political and economic crisis since the war. The production of oil has almost completely stopped and the new government is losing control of large areas to tribal militias who have refused to cooperate.

A successful Revolution outside Africa: the case of Yemen

The Yemeni uprising was the only successful revolution in the Middle East outside Africa. It was also inspired by the Tunisian revolution and occurred contemporaneously with the revolution in Egypt. Unlike Tunisia, Egypt and Libya where revolutions took place, Yemen was very much in a mess economically and politically. With the exception of Sudan Djibouti and Mauritania, Yemen was the poorest of all Arab countries. Also bedeviled with corruption, it is ranked 146th in the Corruption Perception Index. In addition, she faces a battle with terrorism, coming particularly from al-Qaeda. Yemen also suffers fissiparous tendencies, with southern Yemenis threatening secession and a return to the independent state of South Yemen, which had been amalgamated with North Yemen in 1990. In the midst of this, the country remained a den of rebels, with the Zaidi rebels (also known as Houthis) being the most prominent. In fact, probably in view of all these, Yemen was ranked 8th in 2012 Failed States Index. Ruling this troubled nation for thirty years preceding the revolution was Ali Abdullah Saleh, who before the uprisings had also prepared his son, Ahmed Saleh, as successor.

Following the ouster of Tunisia's Ben Ali in January, the discontented Yemenis citizenry found a reference point to displace a dictator. By January 12, 2011 major protests were held in streets of the Yemeni's capital, Sana'a, demanding a regime change. From the capital, protest moved to the traditionally aggressive south, particularly in cities like Aden and Ta'izz. The protests became nationwide, growing larger by the day and reaching its peak by January ending. It was also probably the demonstration that witnessed the highest level of youth participation, with over 10,000 Sana'a University students alone being actively involved in the protest. By February, the major opposition leader Tawakel Karman called for a 'Day of Rage' similar to what obtained in both Tunisia and Egypt. This turned out to be a great success, with over 20,000 demonstrators. The happenings in Egypt as well as the impact of the demonstrations in Yemen led Saleh's forces to unleash live ammunition at the protesters. Continued deaths of demonstrators were recorded as a result of Saleh's offences in the coming weeks. Consequently, by February ending, several major tribes in Yemen had joined the anti-government protests, to the extent that rallies sometimes boasted of a representation of over a hundred thousand people.

In April, the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), a regional organization which Yemen belonged, attempted to mediate an end to the crisis, drafting several proposals for a transition of power. Though Saleh verbally accepted these terms he failed to implement them, therefore holding on to power. By May 23, 2011, Saleh's stubbornness prompted Sheikh Sadiq al-Ahmar, the head of the Hashid tribal federation, one of the most powerful tribes in the country, to declare support for the opposition. His armed supporters,

therefore, came into conflict with Yemen security forces in Sana'a. In the following weeks the conflict escalated tremendously, to the extent that on June 3, Saleh only narrowly escaped death having had his presidential palace bombed by the opposition. The victim was severely injured and then flown to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia for treatment. The Yemeni President was to return to his home country on the 23rd of September. But during the interregnum, the Joint Meeting Parties (a group that has functioned as an umbrella for many of the Yemeni opposition groups during the uprising) as well as the Alliance for Yemeni Tribes (a group that harmonized different tribes in Yemen as one single opposition) tried in vain to seize power.

Finally, on November 23, 2011, Saleh returned to Riyadh to sign the Gulf Co-operation Council plan for political transition, which he had previously ignored. The implication was that he legally transferred the power of the presidency to his Vice President, Abdurabbo Mansour al-Hadi and officially stepped down as President by the time of the presidentially elections in February 2012. In exchange for this transition, neither Saleh nor any member of his family will be prosecuted for any wrong doing while in office. The February 21 presidential elections saw al-Hadi claim almost all the available votes to emerge Yemen's first democratically elected President. As part of the agreement, al-Hadi was to oversee the drafting of a new constitution and serve only two years, until new parliamentary and presidential elections are held in 2014. It is yet to be seen how this pans out, as conditions suggest that al-Hadi is likely to remain in office beyond his two-year tenure because 'reforms needed for transition to democracy need more time'.

Exceptions to the Rule: who survived the Arab Spring and Why?

If the events of early 2011 did not produce a domino effect around the Arab world, it came pretty close. But only four countries witnessed a regime change. Barring minor protests, a number of Arab governments were able to escape being toppled. Among the Arab republics for instance, only Algeria, Lebanon, Iraq and Sudan managed to avoid the threat of a revolution. These very different states share common traits. Each has suffered from intense civil conflict in the recent past that might have made their citizens more cautious in challenging the status quo. And, aside from General Omar Bashir, who has ruled Sudan since 1989, none is ruled by the sort of autocratic ruler with dynastic tendencies that governed Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Syria (Syria's case is given special attention in a subsequent section of the essay).

For the monarchies within the region, as events were unfolding in North Africa, they were adapting to new conditions. In Bahrain demonstrators that converged at Pearl Square were brutally crushed on the 14th of March 2011 after the majority Shiite citizenry had tried to depose the minority Sunni rulers. Bahrain had to request the help of Saudi Arabia and other GCC members in curbing the insurrections from spiraling out of control. This was followed by a crackdown on the opposition that included conducting thousands of mass arrest and the brutality of the masses.

The more established monarchies in the region were far more circumspect than Bahrain. In response to protests they partially met the demonstrators' demands by scapegoating and displacing underperforming ministers or entire governments, or by promising constitutional reforms. They sought support by reversing cutbacks to state subsidies for staple foods and energy sources, introducing new subsidies, rapidly creating new jobs and promising wage increases. In Saudi Arabia, for example, King Abdullah announced two programmes totaling 130 billion US dollars, through which he would pay additional salary to civil servants, introduce support for the unemployed, create more than 60,000

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new jobs, renovate mosques, and finance a building project for more than 500,000 apartments. In Oman, also, Sultan Qaboos responded to labour protests in Sohar and Salaleh by increasing wages, expanding social benefits and pledging to create 50,000 new jobs: measures that by the end of May 2011 had stabilized the country's unrest. In gaining domestic popularity and credibility, the emir of Qatar, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, even supported the revolutionary transformation by financing the Al-Jazeera satellite station, participating in the military operation against the Qaddafi regime, and taking a leading role in preparing the sanctions against the Syrian regime. The calculus for the oil-rich state was simple: by increasing the number of citizens with a stake in the status quo they could easily quell any emerging protest movement.

For countries that lack oil-wealth like Morocco and Jordan, they responded to the regional crises by promising and initiating constitutional reforms. Both announced measures to promote the independence of the judiciary, to establish an elected government with the prime minister chosen by the electorate rather than the monarch, and a legislature with genuine law-making powers. By so doing, King Abdullah II and King Mohammad VI of Jordan and Morocco, respectively, managed to prevent isolated demonstrations from degenerating into revolutionary movements within their domains.

The Curious Case of Syria

The case of Syria deserves special attention. While the demonstrations abound all over the Arab world in 2011 and beyond advocating for general political and economic reforms, the most far-reaching demand for regime change came only in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria. Of all these, only Syria's al-Assad has thus far been able to retain power. Since assuming power in 2000 Bashar al-Assad has tried to liberalize Syrian economy, but without engaging in political reforms. Public-private partnership increased particularly in the oil sector increased, but there were no defined policies and adequate tools that were adopted to carry the economic rejuvenation through. Al-Assad's Baath Party and secret services gained increased power in administrative and economic decisions, to the end that only a minute section of the populace profited from the status quo. Consequently, Syria remains a developing country with a weak economy and poor results in sectors such as housing, education and employment. One third of the Syrian population lives on two dollars a day or less; 65 percent are under the age of thirty; and food insecurity and youth unemployment is a lingering problem. However, the immediate trigger of Syria's demonstrations was the arbitrary punishment of school children in the small town of Deraa for drawing graffiti that were inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian revolution. What started as a demonstration like any other across the region in March 2011 has, in a matter of months, developed into a civil war between loyalists to the Baath party (controlled by the minority Alawite) and those seeking to oust it (dominated by the Sunni majority). It is a war that has paled into a stalemate.

So what were Assad's survival strategy and what made Syria different? After the deposition of both Tunisian and Egyptian presidents in January and February 2011 respectively, the Syrian President formed a special committee which concluded that the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes had fallen because they failed to crush the protests immediately they began. Such a view influenced Assad's resort to a war of attrition against his people and the subsequent delay tactics he adopted. As soon as the first major protest broke out in the southern city of Deraa on 18 March 2011, the Assad regime started shooting and continued to take every necessary step in hanging on to power. As the civil war wore on the regime further made use of state-controlled Internet and

telecommunications infrastructure to disrupt communications among regime opponents, identify and target opposition supporters, and disseminate pro-regime propaganda.⁽⁵²⁾

Assad's survival also owes much to the strategic relationship it was able to develop in the heat of the crises. He formed alliance with Iran and Hezbollah both for direct military and financial assistance and also for expertise and training in specific modes of repression, including urban and cyber warfare, where his own security sector lacked experience. In a similar fashion, Syria exploited its strategic and diplomatic relationship with Russia and China. This gave the regime sources of direct military and financial support as well as advocates who acted on her behalf within the UN – a role that neither Iran nor Hezbollah is able to play. The immediate effect of this was that the Assad regime became protected from the force of UN-backed sanctions that might otherwise have impeded her ability to retain control of Syria.

Assad's hold to power was most threatened when in mid-2012, opposition forces made major inroads, seizing most of Damascus. While Assad's collapse looked imminent, he recalibrated his military tactics. He integrated loyalist *shabiha* (thug) militias – including a wide array of armed criminal and informal elements – into a formal paramilitary known as the National Defense Forces (NDF), which came under direct regime control. Since mid-2012, of NDF members have gone through combat training in Iran.⁽⁵³⁾ Also, Iranian and Hezbollah consultants were employed to teach local commanders the acts of crowd control, urban warfare, and insurgent tactics. The regime further expanded its dependence on Hezbollah combat units, enabling it to regain control of previously lost sites. Furthermore, the chemical attacks in Ghouta and Khan al-Assal (where hundreds of civilians were killed), among other locations – though not confirmed Assad's regime had any involvement – could be indications of how far Assad was willing to go.

It is important to point out that Assad's 'success' thus far is not solely down to his ingenuity, the inefficiency of the oppositions have had a huge part to play. Assad has benefited from an opposition that is divided along many different lines yet increasingly dominated by Islamist extremists. Some of them are terrorist groups affiliated with al-Qaeda such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Ahrar al-Sham, whose vision for Syria's future is just as repressive and exclusionary as that of Assad.⁽⁵⁴⁾ The opposition leadership that has emerged outside Syria, including the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition forces (Syrian Coalition or SC) reiterated to create a civil democratic Syria.⁽⁵⁵⁾ However, the external opposition has largely failed to establish its credibility, or earn the trust of Syrians as they have not seen their commitment to civil, inclusive democracy that is sufficient to persuade them to abandon Assad's regime and join the uprising.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Furthermore, political authority within opposition-held territories has become increasingly concentrated in the hands of those who command local battalions, the largest and most effective of which are affiliated with Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham, Liwa al-Mujahideen, and other Salafist groups that openly reject democracy, espouse strict adherence to rigid interpretations of Islamic law. They have themselves been accused of atrocities, and have contributed to the intensification of ethno-sectarian tensions within the opposition – a trend that the Assad regime has avidly exploited.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Concluding Remarks: Reflections and Projections

Three and a half years after the December 2010 incident in Tunisia the dust of the Arab

Spring is still unsettled. The democratic transitions have generated their own problems, with new sectarian cleavages cropping up. Also, apart from the general neo-liberal idea of freedom and equality, the revolutionaries across the region seem to lack contemporary revolutionary ideologies that bind these movements together. This is evinced by the absence of what precisely an alternative order should look like in the transiting states. In Libya, for example, decades of international isolation has left the generation likely to take over the mantle of leadership poorly educated. Libya's position gets less promising when considered that her primary challenge is not one of a mere regime change but state formation and genuine democratization after four decades of Qaddafi's regime had set them further from that target than imaginable. Egypt's experiment with Morsi was proof that a successful transition to 'true democracy' in a region that has had a long antecedent of dictatorial rule was never going to be easy. And only time can tell how well his successor, el-Sisi would fare after being newly elected. Yemen's transition, while appearing smooth on the surface, raises certain concerns. Abdullah Saleh was succeeded by al-Hadi, the latter's former deputy, and there is no guarantee that his tenure would be significantly different from his predecessor. Of all the transiting states Tunisia appears to have the brightest prospects of establishing a true democracy. The methodological way in which they have set up the transition process, with the use and respect of the constituent assembly charged with the responsibility of drafting a constitution that is compatible with democracy, is a reflection of highly educated and experienced her citizenry is.

It is apposite to note in general, however, that two major factors could sabotage the process of transition across the region. One is the prevalence and preeminence of Islamic parties with extremist tendencies. Successive dictators across the region had refused to allow the development of real political parties or independent civil society associations. Religious organizations were among the only fora among which average citizens could express themselves. This explains why, after the collapse of these dictators, only Islamist had the infrastructure in place to mobilize supporters effectively. The events across the region have demonstrated that post-revolution elections were won by Islamist parties and not the youths that had fought for the revolution. The implication is that the liberalist ideas that had informed the revolution are unlikely to be pursued by these parties. Secondly, crony capitalists empowered by the old regimes might act as a counter-revolutionary force, as has been the case in Egypt. As has already happened here, major indigenous business elites may use their collaborators within the state to place clear limits on how transformatory the post-revolutionary governments should be. This will overtly or covertly influence the path democratic transition will take.

Having mentioned all this, while the Arab Spring cannot be said to have delivered on its promise, it is perhaps too early to tag it a failed exercise or to arrive at the conclusion that the Arab world is incompatible with democracy. A democratic government is indeed possible in the Middle East as anywhere else. New democracies should not be treated as blank slates, much of their dynamics and features are inherited rather than chosen. It is the legacies of the deposed dictators that have occasioned the stormy transition to democratic rule across the region. In this regard, the new democracies have only allowed the distrust and bitterness built up under authoritarian regimes to surface. When the new democracies are firmly rooted these challenges will drastically subside. The western world that has set the benchmark for 'true democracy' have not always had it smooth-sailing in the immediate decades following the French revolution of 1789, the new

established republic failed. Italy and Germany experienced similar challenges after World War I and the British and the United States even experienced far more problems in reaching the level of democratic sophistication they presently boast of. In a nutshell, failed democratic experiments are usually essential positive stages in the political developments of states. It is this process that the Arabs are currently experiencing.

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