

THE ARAB SPRING AND THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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The series of protests and demonstrations across the Middle East and North Africa has become known as the "Arab Spring". As of November 2011, governments have been overthrown in three countries: Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. The geopolitical implications of the protests have drawn global attention. This article analyzes the possible evolution in the regional balance of power of the Middle East and North Africa.

Key words: Arab Spring, Middle East, balance of power

Due to its important geopolitical location (linking Asian, African and European continents) and to its diversified rich natural resources the indigenous inhabitants of the Middle Eastern region had been subjected to multi-forms of colonial campaigns since the beginning of ancient times. These inhabitants were subjected to ruthless military occupations, genocides, persecutions, oppressions, enslavements, and ethnic cleansing. Yet the people never surrendered nor gave up. They struggled for their freedom and independence and fought all colonial powers one after the other. Since the beginning of 2011 we are witnessing their latest regionally-sweeping fight against local ruling regimes that are subservient to foreign powers. This has become known as the Arab Spring. Unfortunately, like all their previous struggles, there is a poisonous snake in the background, which covertly is directing and orchestrating this Arab Spring to reap its fruits for itself¹.

Many analysts believe the dramatic changes that the global international system is undergoing now are a continuation of a long-term reconfiguration of the world that started back in the 1980s. The process is spreading along a top-down pattern and gradually embracing increasingly more regions. However, it is highly likely that there are also changes working along the bottom-up model and influencing the entire global international system, which is manifest in the turbulent events occurring in various places².

The structure of Middle Eastern military forces suggests that the Arab revolt is likely to be met with repeated violence and bloodshed and potentially civil war in countries with

¹Dr. Elias Aklah, The Snake behind the Arab Spring <http://www.intifada-palestine.com/2011/11/the-snake-behind-the-arab-spring/>

²<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Moving-From-the-Bottom-Up-and-Back-Down-Again-15327>

competing military forces. That raises the prospect of a decade of instability and strife in a geo-strategically crucial part of the world³.

As of November 2011, governments have been overthrown in three countries. Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia on 14 January following the Tunisian revolution protests. In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak resigned on 11 February 2011 after 18 days of massive protests, ending his 30-year presidency. The Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was overthrown on 23 August 2011, after the National Transitional Council (NTC) took control of Bab al-Azizia. He was killed on 20 October 2011, in his hometown of Sirte after the NTC took control of the city.

During this period of regional unrest, several leaders announced their intentions to step down at the end of their current terms. Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir announced that he would not seek re-election in 2015⁴, as did Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, whose term ends in 2014, although there have been increasingly violent demonstrations demanding his immediate resignation⁵. Protests in Jordan have also caused the sacking of two successive governments by King Abdullah⁶. Another leader, President Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen, announced on 23 April that he would step down within 30 days in exchange for immunity, a deal the Yemeni opposition informally accepted on 26 April; Saleh then reneged on the deal, prolonging the Yemeni uprising⁷. The Arab Spring novelty lies in the spontaneous secular mass movement of young people, mostly educated and liberal, which was not instigated by external influences. This was especially evident in Egypt and Tunisia. At the same time, a few similarities are not a basis for equating what happened in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain and other countries. In some cases it was the revolutionary movement of the youth and middle class, in other situations it was the activity of insurgent tribes, and in still other cases it was a revolt of a religious section, etc⁸.

The geopolitical implications of the protests have drawn global attention⁹. While everyone was worrying about the collapse of the “balance of power” in the region with the

³ <http://www.middle-east-studies.net/?p=22784>

⁴ "[Party: Bashir is not standing for re-election](#)". Gulf Times. 22 February 2011. Retrieved 22 February 2011.

⁵ "[Iraq PM plans no re-election](#)". Voice of Russia. 5 February 2011. Retrieved 27 February 2011.

⁶ "[Jordan king appoints new PM, government quits](#)". Reuters. 1 February 2011. Retrieved 2 February 2011.

⁷ Almasari, Hakim (26 April 2011). "[Yemen Protesters Accept Deal](#)". The Wall Street Journal. Retrieved 27 April 2011.

⁸ <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Moving-From-the-Bottom-Up-and-Back-Down-Again-15327>

⁹ AFP 27 January 2011 (28 January 1986). "[Unrest across the Arab world](#)". *Vancouver Sun*. Canada. Retrieved 29 January 2011.

fear that Iran were acquiring a bomb, the “Arab Spring” is already breaking the balance, albeit with other results, making the future of the Middle East increasingly uncertain. Even the Assad regime in Syria that was regarded as an anti-US and anti-Israel advocate, seemed to have contributed to the maintenance of stability up until now. On Naqba Day of this year, Syria hoped to send a strong message to the West by allowing Palestinian activists and refugees to enter the Golan Heights. This had never happened under the Assad regime and it implies that the fall of Bashar may have serious consequences for Israel. The “stable” order in the Middle East that was taken for granted by the West is starting to falter, and is now revealing its limits. In terms of realism, the “Arab Spring” will bring serious security issues to Israel and would, at some point, convince the Jewish State that they would have to make peace with Arab states if they wish to survival. In terms of liberalism, it was a gesture that the US will support the Arab people’s pursuit of “self-determination”¹⁰.

In contrast to climatic spring, the Arab Spring did not end with the beginning of summer. The main difficulty in predicting its consequences is the lack of clarity about the layout of new regimes in Arab countries affected by popular unrest. One can consider three possible scenarios here:

- a democratic regime;
- an Islamic regime;
- a new and quite possibly military dictatorship.

Theoretically, there is a fourth scenario, albeit rather improbable but not entirely impossible, that implies uncontrollability and chaos. We need to scrutinize the fact that the Arab monarchies have in all evidence withstood the onslaught of protest-motivated activism, which simultaneously victimized Arab republics with democratic institutions that are rather formal and are strictly controlled by the authoritarian regimes. The essence of the matter is larger than the financial and economic capabilities of the monarchies, as they differ from one place to another. The factor of legitimacy plays a tangible role in this case. A full-fledged monarchical regime has more legitimacy than a republic that does not hold democratic elections, which legitimize state power. Along with this, some monarchical regimes are less authoritarian than republics ruled by dictators. In this respect we can compare the Jordanian

¹⁰ <http://arabsthink.com/2011/09/25/the-long-term-perspectives-of-obama%E2%80%99s-unclear-middle-east-policy/>

and Moroccan monarchy with republics like Muammar Gadhafi's Libya, Al Assad's Syria and Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

Another obvious result is the unprecedented strengthening of two countries located on the outskirts of the Middle East – Iran and especially Turkey. Turkey under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose enlightened Justice and Development Party was once again reelected on June 12, 2011, wants to unite Islamic and European values and has scored significant successes in economic development. It is often said that Turkey is turning into a model for countries like Tunisia and particularly Egypt. At the same time, the new elites there have undertaken a thorough scrutiny of the post-Communist experience of Central European and East European countries.

Israel, has conclusively established itself as a dominant military power, but the critical situation in the Middle East conflict voids this advantage of value in many ways. The world community has failed to assess in full the recent rehearsals, including a test by the Syrians of a peaceful assault against the border with the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights (a similar attempt was made from Lebanese territory). One of the top leaders in the Palestinian resistance movement told that the Palestinians can mobilize up to 500,000 people if they find it necessary to stage a peaceful breakthrough march. These “angry young men” will not even be armed with sticks or stones, as they are not supposed to commit acts of violence against the Israelis.

Quite unexpectedly for the West democratic revolutions have swept the Arab world, a region the West thought would never change and where it had long buried the idea of exporting democracy. The educated and liberal youth became the main actors in the events in Tunisia and Egypt. The West interprets the results as its own victory and something that has reaffirmed the attractiveness of liberal democratic values, which previously caused resentment in the East, and the Western model of society on the whole¹¹. It has started allocating sizeable, albeit insufficient, resources to support Arab countries where democratic regimes might take root. The U.S. understands that these regimes may show strong anti-Israeli and anti-American sentiment in their policies. In addition, Islamic political forces will have to play a crucial role in these transforming societies, although no one will venture to predict the degree of that

¹¹ **Vitaly Naumkin**, Moving From the Bottom Up and Back Down Again

<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Moving-From-the-Bottom-Up-and-Back-Down-Again-15327> accessed August 06 2014.

influence even for the short term. For example in Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood comes in power through free election. Another example is the situation from Syria and Iraq in which Islamic political forces have strong position.

The considerable rise of the Islamic factor embodies one more vector of influence of the events in the Arab world on the transformation of the global international system. Naturally, this will have an immediate impact on European Union countries, as it will fuel additional migration from the Middle East and North Africa. Immigration is already a serious problem for Europe, since it is transforming well-shaped European institutions such as the Schengen zone and the overall atmosphere of European politics. It is enough to take a look at the results of elections in one EU country after another where the demand for populist anti-immigrant parties is growing.

It cannot be ruled out that a kind of dichotomy between traditional authoritarian monarchies and new democratic regimes espousing values close to Western ones, although not always friendly to them, will appear in the Arab world if this scenario is enacted. There will likely be a showdown between two development tendencies. One of them is secularism with an Islamic face; the other is Islamic clericalism¹².

Syria, Iran and the Balance of Power in the Middle East.

We are now moving toward a reckoning with the consequences of American troops withdrawal from Iraq. The reckoning concerns the potential for a massive shift in the balance of power in the region, with Iran moving from a fairly marginal power to potentially a dominant power. As the process unfolds, the United States and Israel are making countermoves. Questions remain whether these countermoves will stabilize the region and whether or how far Iran will go in its response. Iran has been preparing for the U.S. withdrawal. While it is unreasonable simply to say that Iran will dominate Iraq, it is fair to say Tehran will have tremendous influence in Baghdad to the point of being able to block Iraqi initiatives Iran opposes. This influence will increase as the U.S. withdrawal concludes and it becomes clear there will be no sudden reversal in the withdrawal policy. Iraqi politicians' calculus must account for the nearness of Iranian power and the increasing distance and irrelevance of American power. Resisting Iran under these conditions likely would prove ineffective and dangerous. Some, like the Kurds, believe they have guarantees from the

¹² *Ibidem*, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Moving-From-the-Bottom-Up-and-Back-Down-Again-15327>

Americans and that substantial investment in Kurdish oil by American companies means those commitments will be honored. A look at the map, however, shows how difficult it would be for the United States to do so. The Baghdad regime has arrested Sunni leaders while the Shia, not all of whom are pro-Iranian by any means, knows the price of overenthusiastic resistance. The situation in Syria complicates all of this. The minority Alawite sect has dominated the Syrian government since 1970, when the current president's father - who headed the Syrian air force - staged a coup. The Alawites are a heterodox Muslim sect related to a Shiite offshoot and make up about 7 percent of the country's population, which is mostly Sunni. The new Alawite government was secular, socialist and built around the military. When Islam rose as a political force in the Arab world, the Syrians -- alienated from the Sadat regime in Egypt -- saw Iran as a bulwark. The Iranian Islamist regime gave the Syrian secular regime immunity against Shiite fundamentalists in Lebanon. The Iranians also gave Syria support in Lebanon, and more important, in its suppression of Syria's Sunni majority.

Syria and Iran were particularly aligned in Lebanon. In the early 1980s, after the Khomeini revolution, the Iranians sought to increase their influence in the Islamic world by supporting radical Shiite forces. Hezbollah was one of these. Syria had invaded Lebanon in 1975 on behalf of the Christians and opposed the Palestine Liberation Organization. Syria regarded Lebanon as historically part of Syria, and sought to assert its influence over it. Via Iran, Hezbollah became an instrument of Syrian power in Lebanon.

Iran and Syria, therefore, entered a long-term if not altogether stable alliance that has lasted to this day. In the current unrest in Syria, the Saudis and Turks in addition to the Americans all have been hostile to the regime of President Bashar al Assad. Iran is the one country that on the whole has remained supportive of the current Syrian government.

There is good reason for this. Prior to the uprising, the precise relationship between Syria and Iran was variable. Syria was able to act autonomously in its dealings with Iran and Iran's proxies in Lebanon. While an important backer of groups like Hezbollah, the al Assad regime in many ways checked Hezbollah's power in Lebanon, with the Syrians playing the dominant role there. The Syrian uprising has put the al Assad regime on the defensive, however, making it more interested in a firm, stable relationship with Iran. Damascus finds itself isolated in the Sunni world, with Turkey and the Arab League against it. Iran - and intriguingly, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki - has constituted al Assad's exterior support.

Thus far al Assad has resisted his enemies. Though some mid- to low-ranking Sunnis have defected, his military remains largely intact; this is because the Alawites control key units. Events in Libya drove home to an embattled Syrian leadership -- and even to some of its adversaries within the military -- the consequences of losing. The military has held together, and an unarmed or poorly armed populace, no matter how large, cannot defeat an intact military force. The key for those who would see al Assad fall is to divide the military.

If al Assad survives - and at the moment, wishful thinking by outsiders aside, he is surviving - Iran will be the big winner. If Iraq falls under substantial Iranian influence, and the al Assad regime - isolated from most countries but supported by Tehran - survives in Syria, then Iran could emerge with a sphere of influence stretching from western Afghanistan to the Mediterranean (the latter via Hezbollah). Achieving this would not require deploying Iranian conventional forces - al Assad's survival alone would suffice. However, the prospect of a Syrian regime beholden to Iran would open up the possibility of the westward deployment of Iranian forces, and that possibility alone would have significant repercussions.

Consider the map were this sphere of influence to exist. The northern borders of Saudi Arabia and Jordan would about this sphere, as would Turkey's southern border. It remains unclear, of course, just how well Iran could manage this sphere and what type of force it could project into it. Maps alone will not provide an understanding of the problem. But they do point to the problem. And the problem is the potential - not certain - creation of a block under Iranian influence that would cut through a huge swath of strategic territory.

It should be remembered that in addition to Iran's covert network of militant proxies, Iran's conventional forces are substantial. While they could not confront U.S. armored divisions and survive, there are no U.S. armored divisions on the ground between Iran and Lebanon. Iran's ability to bring sufficient force to bear in such a sphere increases the risks to the Saudis in particular. Iran's goal is to increase the risk such that Saudi Arabia would calculate that accommodation is more prudent than resistance. Changing the map can help achieve this.

It follows that those frightened by this prospect - the United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey - would seek to stymie it. At present, the place to block it no longer is Iraq, where Iran already has the upper hand. Instead, it is Syria. And the key move in Syria is to do everything possible to bring about al Assad's overthrow.

Until recently, the most significant opposition activity appeared to be outside of Syria, with much of the resistance reported in the media coming from externally based opposition groups. The degree of effective opposition was never clear. Certainly, the Sunni majority opposes and hates the al Assad regime. But opposition and emotion do not bring down a regime consisting of men fighting for their lives. And it wasn't clear that the resistance was as strong as the outside propaganda claimed.

It is interesting that an apparent increase in activity from armed activists - or the introduction of new forces - occurred at the same time relations between Iran on one side and the United States and Israel on the other were deteriorating. The deterioration began with charges that an Iranian covert operation to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States had been uncovered, followed by allegations by the Bahraini government of Iranian operatives organizing attacks in Bahrain. It proceeded to an International Atomic Energy Agency report on Iran's progress toward a nuclear device, followed by the Nov. 19 explosion at an Iranian missile facility that the Israelis have not-so-quietly hinted was their work. Whether any of these are true, the psychological pressure on Iran is building and appears to be orchestrated¹³.

The US and France, particularly, had pushed for many harsh sanctions against Syria through the UN. But they could not obtain a military interference under the excuse of protecting Syrian citizens, as was done in Libya, because of the Russian and Chinese veto threat. So the Arab League was pushed to play pressuring active role in Syria. The Syrian government had accepted the Arab League plan. The oppositional Syrian National Council rejected the plan and intensified its violence against the Syrian army inviting harsh retaliation. So the Arab League suspended Syria's membership and threatened economic and political sanctions. It has become obvious that the Syrian oppositional groups are divided and have different aspirations some of them are conflicting and confusing. This division and confusion are due to the background of each oppositional group. The genuine oppositional groups reject any foreign interference fearing the same fate of Libya, and seek drastic reform through dialogue¹⁴.

¹³ <http://www.middle-east-studies.net/?p=22784>

¹⁴ Dr. Elias Akleh, The Snake Behind the Arab Spring <http://www.intifada-palestine.com/2011/11/the-snake-behind-the-arab-spring/>

Israel Position.

Israel—surrounded by a newly unstable Arab world and confronting a Palestinian march toward statehood—faces uncertainty on every front. If the Israeli-Palestinian peace process were in better shape and it had bold Palestinian and Israeli leaders willing and able to find common ground, it would help to relieve some of the impending pressure. But it doesn't. Weak leaders, big gaps on the core issues and a Palestinian Noah's Ark, in which the Palestinian national movement has two of everything (prime ministers, constitutions, security services), will pose huge challenges to a breakthrough agreement. America, now fighting three wars, burdened with other priorities and election politics, won't be able to redeem an agreement neither side is willing or able to pay for. The Jews will keep their state, but the region in which they live will never let them completely enjoy it¹⁵.

Of all the players in this game, Israel's position is the most complex. Israel has had a decent, albeit covert, working relationship with the Syrians going back to their mutual hostility toward Yasser Arafat. For Israel, Syria has been the devil they know. The idea of a Sunni government controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood on their northeastern frontier was frightening; they preferred al Assad. But given the shift in the regional balance of power, the Israeli view is also changing. The Sunni Islamist threat has weakened in the past decade relative to the Iranian Shiite threat. Playing things forward, the threat of a hostile Sunni force in Syria is less worrisome than an emboldened Iranian presence on Israel's northern frontier. This explains why the architects of Israel's foreign policy, such as Defense Minister Ehud Barak, have been saying that we are seeing acceleration toward the end of the regime. Regardless of its preferred outcome, Israel cannot influence events inside Syria. Instead, Israel is adjusting to a reality where the threat of Iran reshaping the politics of the region has become paramount¹⁶.

Israel's first strategic priority has always been and remains security—its physical, material and social well-being. In the current set of crises in the Middle East, Israel will need to look at three things: One, it must find the right tone and content for its relationship with its two peace partners, Egypt and Jordan. Two, the immediate challenges with both Lebanon and Syria are quite severe. Lebanon has the most immediate destabilizing potential. Israel can neither find partners in Lebanon, nor an opening for diplomacy. In the minuet that Israel and

¹⁵ <http://www.momentmag.com/moment/issues/2011/06/IsraelsNextMove.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.middle-east-studies.net/?p=22784>

Hezbollah dance all the time, Israel has to define what its red lines really are and what it should do if they're crossed. The issue is very much deterrence. With Syria, questions of diplomacy always lurk. The defense establishment continues to believe the Syrian track should be given priority, but the political echelon disagrees because of Syria's relationship with Iran. Natan Sharansky argues that you can't make peace with dictators, but despite what happened in Egypt, whether or not the other government is democratic can't be the basis for negotiations. In the real world, there are things you can't control, so you consider if your opponent is stable, if you can trust him, if an agreement is likely to last for a long time. Israel has gotten 30 years of peace with Egypt, so it is not sure it's such a bad thing if it can get that with Syria. Israel could use the new developments in the region to its advantage against Iran, first and foremost by restarting peace negotiations with the Palestinians and stopping settlement activity. This would seriously boost Israel's position with the new government of Egypt, whom Iran is trying to court, and complicate Iran's efforts to boost its position in other countries such as Lebanon by presenting itself as the leader of what it calls the "resistance movement." Most important, it would make it difficult for the Iranian government to use the Palestinian-Israeli card to distract attention from internal troubles. The current regime's loss of legitimacy would be magnified, which would also decrease Iran's influence abroad. Even if there were peace with the Palestinians, Iran would not recognize Israel, but it would have to face a very bleak reality in which it was weakened.

Peace would also mean that Israel would find it easier to become part of an anti-Iran nuclear camp in the region. As we saw from WikiLeaks, countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and even Bahrain are as much, if not more, against Iran's nuclear aspirations as Israel is. But they are not willing to join Israel's camp because they don't agree with Israel's current strategy toward the Palestinians.

For Iran's leadership, peace between Israel and the Palestinians is a nightmare that Israel can deliver on a silver plate, through FedEx, flying through Turkey. It's important for Israel to have some regional partners in the predominantly Muslim Middle East to legitimize the notion that peace with Israel is okay. It's a mistake for Israel to treat Turkey as a newly Islamist country. With eight to nine percent economic growth and expanding ties with its neighbors, Turkey has increasingly become a regional power, offering a significant alternative and probably a long-term strategic rival to Iran. The Mavi Marmara [flotilla] incident was a bigger deal than it needed to be; Israel went out of its way to insult the Turkish ambassador in

Jerusalem, and it needs to find a way to undo some damage, even if it means apologizing for the flotilla affair and offering compensation to the families. Turks are angry, particularly at the Netanyahu administration, but they don't call Israel's existence into question. Israel must take Turkey seriously—it'll be around for the long term. You never know when it's going to come in handy. One day Israel might want to pass a message to Iran or Hezbollah or Hamas through a trusted friend. Right now, Israel doesn't have that, even though the United States. One thing Israel can do to bring Turkey back into a constructive role, to reduce Iran's sway in the region and to curb Hezbollah's clout would be to make a concerted effort to get an Israeli-Syrian peace deal going, assuming circumstances in Syria make that possible. Syria wants Turkey to mediate. The deal is 90 percent done—they just have to go back to the 2000 negotiations and reopen that chapter. Most of it is in writing. But Israel will need to swallow hard and give up the Golan Heights¹⁷. Iran is, of course, used to psychological campaigns. We continue to believe that while Iran might be close to a nuclear device that could explode underground under carefully controlled conditions; its ability to create a stable, robust nuclear weapon that could function outside a laboratory setting (which is what an underground test is) is a ways off. This includes being able to load a fragile experimental system on a delivery vehicle and expecting it to explode. It might even be intercepted and create a casus belli for a counterstrike. The main Iranian threat is not nuclear¹⁸. It might become so, but even without nuclear weapons, Iran remains a threat. Ahmadinejad's administration has been dogged by allegations of a fraudulent election, which handed him a second four-year term in office in 2009. Iran has also been hit by a wave of sanctions by the US and the European Union over its nuclear programme, which many Western states suspect is intended to make an atomic bomb¹⁹.

The Oil Monarchy Position.

Saudi Arabia is the most important oil-rich country. There were — it's the most repressive, extremist, strongest center of Islamic fundamentalism, missionaries who spread ultra-radical Islamism from jihads and so on. But they're obedient, they're reliable, so they can do what they like. There was a planned protest in Saudi Arabia. The police presence was so overwhelming and intimidating that literally nobody even was willing to show up in the

¹⁷ <http://www.momentmag.com/moment/issues/2011/06/IsraelsNextMove.html>

¹⁸ *Syria, Iran and the Balance of Power in the Middle East* <http://www.ihavenet.com/World-Middle-East-Syria-Iran-and-the-Balance-of-Power-in-the-Middle-East-SFOR.h>

¹⁹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/201156113955925329.html>

streets of Riyadh. The same in Kuwait. There was a small demonstration, very quickly crushed. Actually, the most interesting case in many respects is Bahrain. Bahrain is quite important for two reasons. One reason, which has been reported, is that it's the home port of the U.S. Fifth Fleet, major military force in the region²⁰. The US has possibly the largest marine/air force base in Bahrain, where the Fifth Fleet provides support to all war ships of the US Naval Forces Central Command (USNACENT) to patrol the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean²¹. Another more fundamental reason is that Bahrain is about 70 percent Shiite, and it's right across the causeway from eastern Saudi Arabia, which also is majority Shiite and happens to be where most of Saudi oil is. Saudi Arabia, of course, is the main energy resource, has been since the '40s. By curious accident of history and geography, the world's major energy resources are located pretty much in Shiite regions. They're a minority in the Middle East, but they happen to be where the oil is, right around the northern part of the Gulf. That's eastern Saudi Arabia, southern Iraq and southwestern Iran. And there's been a concern among planners for a long time that there might be a move towards some sort of tacit alliance in these Shiite regions moving towards independence and controlling the bulk of the world's oil. That's obviously intolerable. So, going back to Bahrain, there was an uprising, tent city in the central square, like Tahrir Square. The Saudi-led military forces invaded Bahrain, giving the security forces there the opportunity to crush it violently, destroyed the tent city, even destroyed the Pearl, which is the symbol of Bahrain; invaded the major hospital complex, threw out the patients and the doctors; been regularly, every day, arresting human rights activists, torturing them, occasionally a sort of a pat on the wrist, but nothing much²². To keep the status quo in Bahrain Obama's administration encouraged Gulf States to send the Peninsula Shield Force to Bahrain to crush the demonstrators. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE were happy to oblige and send their troops to Bahrain²³. That's very much the Carothers principle. If actions correspond to American strategic and economic objectives, that's OK. America can have elegant rhetoric, but what matters are facts²⁴.

²⁰ Noam Chomsky: "The U.S. and Its Allies Will Do Anything to Prevent Democracy in the Arab World" http://www.democracynow.org/seo/2011/5/11/noam_chomsky_the_us_and_its

²¹ Dr. Elias Akleh, The Snake Behind the Arab Spring <http://www.intifada-palestine.com/2011/11/the-snake-behind-the-arab-spring/>

²² Noam Chomsky: "The U.S. and Its Allies Will Do Anything to Prevent Democracy in the Arab World" http://www.democracynow.org/seo/2011/5/11/noam_chomsky_the_us_and_its

²³ Dr. Elias Akleh, The Snake Behind the Arab Spring <http://www.intifada-palestine.com/2011/11/the-snake-behind-the-arab-spring/>

²⁴ Noam Chomsky: "The U.S. and Its Allies Will Do Anything to Prevent Democracy in the Arab World" http://www.democracynow.org/seo/2011/5/11/noam_chomsky_the_us_and_its

USA Position

The current escalation originated in the American decision to withdraw from Iraq and was intensified by events in Syria. If Iran abandoned its nuclear program tomorrow, the situation would remain as complex. Iran has the upper hand, and the United States, Israel, Turkey and Saudi Arabia all are looking at how to turn the tables.

At this point, they appear to be following a two-pronged strategy: Increase pressure on Iran to make it recalculate its vulnerability, and bring down the Syrian government to limit the consequences of Iranian influence in Iraq. Whether the Syrian regime can be brought down is problematic. Libya's Moammar Gadhafi would have survived if NATO hadn't intervened. NATO could intervene in Syria, but Syria is more complex than Libya. Moreover, a second NATO attack on an Arab state designed to change its government would have unintended consequences, no matter how much the Arabs fear the Iranians at the moment. Wars are unpredictable; they are not the first option. Therefore the likely solution is covert support for the Sunni opposition funneled through Lebanon and possibly Turkey and Jordan. It will be interesting to see if the Turks participate. Far more interesting will be seeing whether this works. Syrian intelligence has penetrated its Sunni opposition effectively for decades. Mounting a secret campaign against the regime would be difficult, and its success by no means assured. Still, that is the next move. But it is not the last move. To put Iran back into its box, something must be done about the Iraqi political situation. Given the U.S. withdrawal, Washington has little influence there. All of the relationships the United States built were predicated on American power protecting the relationships. With the Americans gone, the foundation of those relationships dissolves. And even with Syria, the balance of power is shifting²⁵.

In Noam Chomsky opinion the U.S. and its allies will do anything they can to prevent authentic democracy in the Arab world. The reason is that across the region, an overwhelming majority of the population regards the United States as the main threat to their interests. In fact, opposition to U.S. policy is so high that a considerable majority think the region would be more secure if Iran had nuclear weapons. In Egypt, the most important country, that's 80 percent. Similar figures elsewhere. There are some in the region who regard Iran as a threat

²⁵ *Syria, Iran and the Balance of Power in the Middle East* <http://www.ihavenet.com/World-Middle-East-Syria-Iran-and-the-Balance-of-Power-in-the-Middle-East-SFOR.h>

— about 10 percent. So, the U.S. and its allies are not going to want governments which are responsive to the will of the people. If that happens, not only will the U.S. not control the region, but it will be thrown out. It is obviously an intolerable result. As long as they can control their populations, fine. They can have campaigns of hatred; American friendly dictators will keep them under control. That's the reaction not just of the diplomatic service in the State Department or of the media who reported this, but also of the general intellectual community. In fact, coverage of these polls is precisely zero in the United States, literally. There are a few comments in England, but very little. It just doesn't matter what the population thinks, as long as they're under control²⁶.

The United States has three choices. Accept the evolution and try to live with what emerges. Attempt to make a deal with Iran - a very painful and costly one. Or go to war. The first assumes Washington can live with what emerges. The second depends on whether Iran is interested in dealing with the United States. The third depends on having enough power to wage a war and to absorb Iran's retaliatory strikes, particularly in the Strait of Hormuz. All are dubious, so toppling al Assad is critical. It changes the game and the momentum. But even that is enormously difficult and laden with risks.

The 2011 global international system has not only demonstrated its unpreparedness to promptly react to changes that no one could have predicted, but on top of that there is its insufficient governability. Given the conditions of increasing divergence and uncertainty, common claims about the formation of a “global government” comprising leading international players are utopian. The use of military force, including in the form that has not received a mandate from international institutions, did not disappear into the past after the George W. Bush administration had bowed out. Today more than ever unconventional threats to international security, such as religious extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking and the possibility of new regional outbursts of instability, remain quite pressing²⁷.

²⁶ Noam Chomsky: "The U.S. and Its Allies Will Do Anything to Prevent Democracy in the Arab World
http://www.democracynow.org/seo/2011/5/11/noam_chomsky_the_us_and_its

²⁷ <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Moving-From-the-Bottom-Up-and-Back-Down-Again-15327>

We are now in the final act of Iraq, and it is even more painful than imagined. Laying this alongside the European crisis makes the idea of a systemic crisis in the global system very real²⁸.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

"[ISIS have] probably eclipsed Al-Qaeda, which for all intents and purposes, started with a big bang on September 11th and sort of went downhill," noted Ed Blanche, a terrorism expert, in an interview with Al Arabiya News, adding that ISIS has learnt a lot from the al-Qaeda movement. Reportedly, ISIS was formed in 2004 as a branch of al-Qaeda, however, it evolved into a self-sufficient organization soon after. Since the beginning of the Arab Spring the radical movement has strengthened and expanded significantly. According to Al Arabiya, in late 2013 tensions arose between al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri and ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Eventually, al-Qaeda cut off all relations with ISIS in February 2014. Meanwhile the US intelligence officials have reported that ISIS militants are demonstrating "good" governing skills in conquered regions. Apparently, the Islamic State has adopted Hezbollah's strategy, "devoting considerable human and financial resources toward keeping essential services like electricity, water, and sewage functioning in their territory," Foreign Policy notes. Moreover, extremists are improving region's infrastructure by building new roads, opening hospitals and initiating small-business programs, the media outlet stresses. At the same time the ISIS is enforcing harsh and inhuman laws, murdering Christians, Shia and representatives of other religious minorities because of their beliefs. ISIS have a state-building agenda and an understanding of the importance of effective governance," underscored David Kilcullen, a counterinsurgency expert, as quoted by Foreign Policy. On the other hand, the movement may soon face serious obstacles, some experts claim. While ISIS is enjoying increasing support from the radical Sunnis, its "land-grabbing" strategy may considerably decelerate its growth, deems David Mack, a former US ambassador. ISIS is a Sunni militant group, which had been fighting in Syria until recently, led an attack on the western and northern regions of Iraq. ISIS militants captured Mosul, the capital of the northern Iraqi province of Manawa, a part of the Salah al-Din province, including its administrative center, the city of Tikrit and other territories. The militants also announced their intention to march

²⁸ *Syria, Iran and the Balance of Power in the Middle East* <http://www.ihavenet.com/World-Middle-East-Syria-Iran-and-the-Balance-of-Power-in-the-Middle-East-SFOR.h>

on Baghdad. Recently ISIS declared Caliphate in captured territory and renamed itself as "Islamic State"²⁹.

Islamic State militants are carrying out "a wave of ethnic cleansing" against minorities in northern Iraq. ISIS and allied Sunni rebels have seized large swathes of Iraq and Syria. Thousands of people have been killed, the majority of them civilians, and more than a million have been forced to flee their homes in recent months. At least 1,000 members of the Yazidi faith are thought to have been killed in recent weeks, with close to 2,750 kidnapped or enslaved. Following an ISIS attack on an Iraqi air force base near the city of Tikrit, more than 1,500 young soldiers went missing; many bodies were subsequently found in the Dijla River. At least 650 male inmates of Badouch Prison in Mosul were murdered by ISIS; witnesses say inmates claiming to be Sunni were transported away, while Shia or members of other religious and ethnic communities were ordered into ditches and shot. The mainly Yazidi village of Cotcho, south of Sinjar, was attacked by ISIS fighters; survivors say at least 100 men were killed, and hundreds of women and children were abducted³⁰. In Iraq, the United States has several advantages that could make airstrikes against the Islamic State reasonably effective, including reliable Kurdish allies, the chance of standing up U.S.-trained Iraqi defense forces, intelligence assets, U.S. special operators on the ground, and at least a chance to forge a political reconciliation in Baghdad that might ease the disaffection and alienation of Iraqi Sunnis on which ISIS now feeds. Syria has none of these. And none are soon coming, even if the United States gets serious about training and equipping those elusive Syrian moderates or creating an entirely new military force. Syria has always been a witches' brew of negatives. And it's tough to see that changing now, even with a belated and more focused U.S. effort to provide weapons and support to the moderate rebels. Just look at a few of the obstacles to consistent support: a dizzying array of divided and dysfunctional rebel groups, external backers whose motives are diametrically opposed (see: Saudi Arabia and Qatar), and a Free Syrian Army that in the words of the *Monkey Cage's* Marc Lynch was always more

²⁹ Islamic State Growing Larger Than Al-Qaeda Ever Thought They Could - Experts
http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2014/08/mil-140826-rianovosti04.htm?_m=3n%2e002a%2e1196%2egy0ao050ku%2e13h0

³⁰ Iraq crisis: Islamic State accused of ethnic cleansing
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29026491>

fiction than reality. This landscape has fueled the Islamic State's rise and has simultaneously limited the effectiveness of outside intervention, including airstrikes³¹.

Nine NATO states, including the US, and Australia began discussions on 5th September 2014, at NATO Summit in Wales, to form a military coalition to fight ISIS. The meeting stopped short of committing to supply “boots on the ground” but discussed other military options including coordinated air strikes and greater efforts to train and support the Iraqi forces where necessary³².

CONCLUSIONS

The Arab Spring was a historic moment in the politics of the Middle East but its long-term impact remains unpredictable. With the decline in the popular influence of Marxism and state-driven agendas for revolutions from above, there has been a shift away from political mobilization designed to push for social transformation. The demands for full citizenship, for the recognition of individual political rights, were a powerful unifying. The internationally dominant cliché of an Arab Spring revolutionary was a young, network-savvy, college educated member of the middle class theme across the Arab revolutions. The ‘demonstration effect’ which drove protest from Tunisia into Libya and Egypt and then on into the Gulf was powered by an older form of technology, satellite television. Al Jazeera was heralded as revolutionary when it launched in 1996. However, its long-terms effects may if anything has been more influential. Broadly comparable to the Sawat al-Arab radio station under Nasser, Al Jazeera and other Arab satellite stations played a key role in recreating a region-wide Arab public sphere, which amplified the demonstration effect of Ben Ali’s departure.

The events of the Arab Spring have given hope to millions of people across the Middle East and beyond that meaningful political change for the better is a distinct possibility. Those said, of all the Arab countries effected by this wave of political protest, only two, Egypt and Tunisia, are now in what looks like political transitions to a more representative form of government. Two more, Syria and Libya, were driven into civil war with Yemen also showing

³¹ Aron Arab Miller, The Islamic State’s home-field advantage, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/08/25/the_islamic_state_home_field_advantage_syria_iraq

³² Sam Jones, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/2f4e5522-34e6-11e4-aa47-00144feabdc0.html?ftcamp=crm/email/201495/nbe/WorldNews/product&siteedition=intl#axzz3CX2k51Vo>

some signs of following them. The rest of the countries of the Middle East retain the ruling elites they had before the Arab Spring started.

The balance of power in this region suffered a little change. The basis for U.S. dominance in the region rested on both capacity (i.e., military power) and legitimacy. As for legitimacy, the past several presidential administrations have tried to gain the “buy-in” of Arab states for U.S. hegemony because that would bring greater security and a resolution of the “core dispute in the region – the Arab-Israeli conflict. The U.S. has not fulfilled these promises, and in fact, the U.S. wars in the region have eroded support. Instead, the United States today is widely seen in the Middle East as enabling an Israeli national security doctrine that requires regional hegemony for Israel as well as the United States, with the means of permanent occupation and the freedom for Israel to use military force unilaterally and disproportionately.

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