

Revisiting the Arab Spring

The Cases of Tunisia and Egypt

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Resumé

År 2011 utbröt ett uppror i Tunisien. Senare spreds det snabbt över arabvärlden. Det blev känt som "den arabiska våren". Upproret störtade ett antal långvariga tyranner i Tunisien, Libyen, Egypten och Jemen. Efter dessa första framgångar fick åter de kontrarevolutionära korrumperade eliterna i dessa länder snabbt kontroll. De stöddes av konservativa arabiska regimer som försökte bevara det gamla systemet. Genom att använda sina enorma ekonomiska resurser såväl som sitt politiska inflytande i väst, spelade konservativa Gulfstater, särskilt Förenade Arabemiraten och Saudiarabien, en stor roll i bekämpningen av den arabiska våren genom att bistå de kontrarevolutionära elementen i arabvärlden. I analysen av de nuvarande förhållandena i arabvärlden har författaren valt att använda komplexitetsteorin. Denna är ett användbart och lämpligt verktyg för att ta upp ämnet. Författaren använde verktyget på två länder, Tunisien och Egypten och kom fram till att alliansen mellan kontrarevolutionärer och reaktionära krafter, över hela arabvärlden, lyckades tillfälligt bromsa drivkraften till demokratiseringen av i denna del av världen, dock utan att helt stoppa den. Ändå har det, på medellång och lång sikt, skapats en situation som kan resultera i allvarliga konsekvenser med hot mot säkerheten på den europeiska kontinenten. Författaren drar också slutsatsen att beslutsamheten hos de arabiska massorna fortfarande är levande och att dessa fortsätter att försöka införa en demokratisk nyordning i regionen.

THE ARAB UPRISING of 2011 caught the researchers who are focused on the Middle East region off guard.¹ The earlier successes of the uprising were stunning, leading to the toppling of the dictators of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. However, the counter revolutionary forces regained balance within few months starting from May 2011.² Conservative Arab regimes got involved directly in undermining the revolution through indirect and even direct efforts. For example, the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) intervened directly in Bahrain using military force.³ Even after the 2011, the repressive measurements of the Arab regimes remained unprecedentedly high.⁴ Only Tunisia could consolidate its revolution. But

on 26th of July, 2021, the Tunisian president Kais Saied mounted a coup putting the young democracy in grave danger.⁵ The situation of democracy in the world is monitored through devoted organizations such as Freedom House, based at, New York.⁶ Scales and indices, such as Political Terror Scale (PTS), are used to measure the violation of physical integrity rights in different countries, since 1976.⁷

Types of democracies

One can classify democracies either based on the general framework applied or in relation to the role of the people in the democratic system.⁸

Democracy based om framework

There are four types of definitions for democracy in relation to the general framework: *constitutional*, *substantive*, *procedural* and *process-oriented*.⁹ The constitutional definition of democracy focuses on laws relative to potential activity. Constitutional democracies can be constitutional monarchies, presidential systems or parliament-centered arrangements.¹⁰ The substantive definition of democracy shifts the focus from laws and political arrangements to the economic conditions of the population.¹¹ One may claim that, based on the substantive approach to democracy, that the rich small Arab oil countries can be considered democratic. However, the welfare in these countries is only enjoyed by its citizens, who are not the majority of the population.¹² The procedural definition sheds the light on a narrow range of governmental practices which grants the presence of real competition among a number of candidates with the engagement of larger portion of the population who are eligible to vote in a country.¹³ The procedural democracy has to do with the inclusion of all the residents (citizens and non-citizens) of the country.¹⁴ The last of the definitions of democracy is the process-oriented one. This type of democracy is concerned with the existence a minimum set of processes which must exist on a continuous basis and form a prevailing societal permanent condition.¹⁵ If the four definitions of democracy were utilized in judging the democratization level of the Arab world, they will all be invalid.

Democracy in relation to the role of people

According to this school, there are two types of democracy, when it comes to representation of people: direct and representative.

Direct democracy aims to give people the collective power through determining primarily what are their constitutional rights in society.¹⁶ In direct democracy the role of people stops at the selection of the overall ideology guiding the governing of the society in a detachment from the involvement in everyday politics.¹⁷ Contrary to that, in the representative (or parliamentary) democracy, the parliamentarians pass legislations leaving the concern for the level of infringements on citizen rights to be assessed by the judiciary (or courts).¹⁸ The current president of Tunisia seems more appreciative of the first type than the parliamentary democracy.

USA and the Arab democracy

USA has been heavily involved in the politics of the Arab World since the end of the second world war.¹⁹ Traditionally, the American strategy has been using economic measures combined with low-level support for liberal political change in Arab World.²⁰ The American administration, in line with that policy, selected certain countries to pressure on democratic issues while turned a cheek to the tyrant Arab regimes of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, its two key allies in the region.²¹ The Americans, and to a lesser extent the Europeans, had for long time, a veto on the participation of the moderate Islamic parties in the democratic development of the Arab World.²² This is a problematic, unexamined and unwise stand. One needs to realize that the Arabs were born as one united nation in the seventh century AD, only as result of the birth of Islam.²³ That stands in contrast to the history of the Roman Empire which was an old and highly developed political entity centuries before Christianity became its official religion.²⁴

The democratic development in the Arab World can never mature as long as US and

the EU have not decided on truly packing the well of the Arab people even if the outcomes may be favoring Islamic moderate democratic forces. The consequence of not respecting and undermining the well of the Arab nation is extremism and anarchy as events of the last two decades have shown. In particular the eruption of the Arab spring in 2011 is a stunning proof of this. USA policymakers did not change their priorities even after the events of 2011/2012. U.S. Department of State has set up a new small office, The Middle East Transitions (MET), in the fall of 2011, to address aspects of Arab uprising.²⁵ MET was intended to develop support strategies for Arab countries.²⁶ Despite that effort, USA did not alter its classical stand on the democratization of the Arab world. The American administration saw always its short-term security interests such as energy supplies, U.S. bases in the MENA region and military alliances, as more important than democracy and the human rights' issues.²⁷

A good example of the dichotomy of the American strategies in dealing with Arab democratic aspirations is what happened in Egypt after the fall of Mubarak. Initially, the American administration chose, although, half-heartedly, to accept the reality of the popularity of the Islamic parties and their role in building Islamic lead governments in increasing number of states in the Arab region.²⁸ The American policy changed during the Obama Administration from supporting the democratic change in Egypt, which led to the overthrow of Mubarak, to undermining it once the military plan for retaking power succeeded under General Al-Sisi in 2013. Also, the international Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank were utilized to pressure Arab states in exchange for the international loans.²⁹ Arab regimes were encouraged to abandon the poorer segments of society, which composes a high portion of popula-

tion in most countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Neoliberal economic policies are one of the major causes of the unrest in that area.³⁰

In the first section I presented a general background about types of democracy, relating that to the Arab World. In section (2), I visited the major players in the Arab political arena. In section (3) I connected the Arab Spring to the current period. The fourth section discussed the Tunisian case, while the fifth looked at the political development in Egypt in the last ten years. In the sixth section I introduced the methodology used and in the seventh section I displayed my analysis. I concluded with a section in which I discussed the findings and shed light on the perceived consequences of the failure of the Arab-world democratization drive, as manifested in the Arab Spring, on the security of Europe.

The major players in the Arab political arena

Liberalism in Arab world

The liberal tradition in the Arab World and in particular in Egypt extends back to late nineteenth century. It reached its climax in the early years of the Egyptian independence in the 1920s.³¹ The core ideas of this political stream feature classical liberalism. Historically, liberal parties in the Arab world failed to connect with the Arab masses.³² The traditional liberalism,³³ is not that rooted in the Arab world. In contrast to traditional liberalism, liberals in the Arab world consider that Islam constitutes the basic cultural foundation of the Arab masses.³⁴ That is why in Egypt, for example, the liberals accepted the second article of the 1971 constitution which declared that Islam is the religion of the state.³⁵ After Mubarak, liberals

organized themselves in various parties to prepare themselves for the coming elections. The largest were the Wafd, the Justice Party, the Free Egyptians, the Social Democratic Party, and The Egyptian Free Party.³⁶ All these parties competed in the parliamentary elections. Authors who write about Arab political parties used to put all said parties into the category of liberalism which can be misleading. For example, the Arab leftist parties never left the early teaching of communism and the call for monopoly type of democracy as expressed in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels,³⁷ even after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990s.

Islamic political parties

Islamic political thinkers have been trying in the last couple of decades to re-examine their political ideas to align themselves with the democratization project of the Arab world which started to gain momentum starting from the eighties and nineties of the last century.³⁸ Some of the prominent political Islamic scholars moved away from focus on the Islamic laws (known as Sharia laws) to being concerned with human rights and citizens' participation in the democratization of society.³⁹

One of the Islamic political parties which has been very active across the Arab world since the early decades of the twentieth century is Muslim Brotherhood. The founder of Muslim Brother, Hassan Al-Banna was born in 1906 at a small town, Al Mahmoodia, in Al-Behera, one of Egypt municipalities.⁴⁰ In 1928, Al-Banna, who became a religious leader, established the Muslim Brotherhood in the city of Ismailia, one of the major cities of Suez Canal.⁴¹ The movement produced one of the most important and influential radical Islamic thinkers of the twentieth century, Sayyid Qutb.⁴² Muslim Brotherhood

believed in and propagated for the idea that Islam, as an ideology, is the only candidate which can solve the political, social and economic challenge facing the Arab nations.⁴³

This view became prominent in the Arab world after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and its defeat in the First World War.⁴⁴ Arabs felt totally exposed to full colonization at the hands of western power, and in particular Britain, France and to lesser extent Italy. These powers used the Arabs for their purpose but they were never intended to support the Arab peoples dream of a new pan-Arab political entity.⁴⁵ That created a repulsive attitude toward democracy among early Arab and non-Arab intellectuals with Islamic profiles. These thinkers used to consider democracy as only a western product and not a collective human wisdom. This is expressed in the early Islamic writings of influential scholars including Abu La'la Mududi⁴⁶ and Sayyid Qutb.⁴⁷ But this view is really a superficial one. A careful study of the Islamic sources surely would lead one to conclude that the democratic theory is a clear ingredient in the Islamic political thinking since its inception.⁴⁸

Major democratic concepts such as the free election of the peoples' representatives and leaders, the accountability of the top political leaders to the people and the way the legal framework of society is governed strictly by humanistic value are all well-developed in the Islamic political framework of thinking.⁴⁹ Later, and according to Bruce K. Rutherford⁵⁰ the situation changed starting from the 1990s. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the humiliating defeat of the communist experiment as well as a political shift in the Arab collective mind, which materialized during the Arab Spring or 2011, forced the Islamic Arab thinkers to re-examine their position on democracy and modern governance. New waves of Islamic scholars came

to play a greater role in shaping the Arab mind. They included names like, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Tariq al-Bishri, Kamal Abu al-Magd and Muhammad Salim al-Awwa. These emerging figures presented a more modern view of Islam role in politics.⁵¹ Politically, the Muslim Brotherhood presented itself as tenacious and durable opponent of the dominance of the army on the Egyptian political life through the years.⁵²

The Salafists were politically passive prior to the Arab Spring. They were strictly inspired by the classical Islamic traditional view of total loyalty to the leaders regardless of their legitimacy by the writings of classical Salafi thinkers.⁵³ These ideas were shattered as the events of the 2011 started to shake the political arena of the Arab World, Salafists started to present a new view of constitutional order to the public, the so-called Salafi constitutionalism.⁵⁴ The later version of Salafist constitutionalism thinking came much closer to the Islamic constitutionalism propagated by moderate Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood.⁵⁵ Al-Nur Party made sincere efforts to distance itself from the first wave within Salafism. It retained certain aspects of the traditional Salafism but also adopted much of the views of the Muslim Brotherhood and its political party Freedom and Justice Party (FJP).⁵⁶ Esen Kirdis⁵⁷ studied the unexpected rise of Salafism after the Arab spring and its gains in the subsequent elections in Egypt and Tunisia.

The military

The Egyptian military is the largest in the Arab world (450,000 active-duty personnel and is equipped with the best suppression tools, hardware and technologies.⁵⁸ USA provides, annually, 1.3 billion US dollars to equipping and sustaining this force. The military in Egypt has infiltrated all aspects of

the Egyptian society since the 1952 military coup. Egyptian army controls an estimated 15-40 percent of the Egyptian economy.⁵⁹ That even increased since general Al-Sisi took power in Egypt in 2014. For long, the Egyptian military, presented by The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), stood neutral at the eve of the Egyptian revolution to end the attempt by Mubarak family to transfer the power to their son Gamal Mubarak. But once that was secured, SCAF move swiftly to protect the interest of the Egyptian armed forces through a number of amendments which gave a specific and protected status of the armed forces. These privileges were later introduced into the constitution itself. In reality, the military in Egypt was never pro-democratic since the 1952 military coup which brought them to power. Once the potential of the anticipated presidency for Gamal Mubarak was eliminated as a result of the 2011 revolution, the military returned to its traditional role.⁶⁰

The Arab Spring

Arab struggle before 2011

Many think that the 2010/2011 revolt, was the first modern Arab revolution”.⁶¹ In reality, the Arab world has been struggling for decades to fight dictatorship and oppression. The term “Arab Spring” was already used in 2005 to refer to events that proceeded the invasion of Iraq in 2003.⁶² Among such events for which the term Arab Spring was used; first post-Saddam elections, Cedar revolution in Lebanon, voting in Saudi Arabia in municipal elections for the first time and allowing for Kuwaiti women to vote for the first time.⁶³

Four major factors that lead to the Arab spring of 2011: food shortage, political failure, neoliberalism, and demography.⁶⁴

Shortage of food

Historically, the Arab world has been not only self-sufficient when it comes to food needs, but it was an exporter of agricultural products for the regions bordering it for centuries.⁶⁵ In the last century the Arab Middle East became more depend on aggregate food imports than any other region in the world.⁶⁶ Egypt currently is the largest world importer of wheat. The percentage of household spending in the Arab world on food is very high compared to other areas of the world (63 percent in Morocco compared to 7 percent in USA).⁶⁷ Since what is called Arab independence, in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, agriculture policies have been disastrous.⁶⁸ For example, forced collectivization of agriculture (from 1964–973) under Bourguiba's minister of planning, Ahmad Ben Salah destroyed the traditional agricultural in Tunisia.⁶⁹ Adding to that the IMF demands which were forced on the Arab countries to reduce its subsidies on food. Furthermore, barriers were created across borders which suffocated cooperation between Arab countries in the area of food security.⁷⁰

Political failure

The Arab uprising was directed by the mass's response in rage to the total failure of the Arab elite. The accumulating social, political and economic crisis of the Arab states agitated the youth. The failure of the Arab regimes in dealing with serious issues related to the Palestinian chronic problem,⁷¹ the Iranian regional strategic ambitions,⁷² and the failure of the Arab-pan political project⁷³ among other urgent numerous political challenges, lead to the violent eruptions in 2011. Further, the Arab leaders are among the rudest and most corrupted dictators of the world.⁷⁴ There is no true political representation as in developed democracies

which facilitates accountability.⁷⁵ The Arab dictators have been using the political successes of the Islamists to legitimize their suppressive and undemocratic behavior.⁷⁶ Even worst, when democratic experiments were attempted, the Arab regimes showed their true colors and despising of the democratic universal principles. Algerian Islamic Salvation Front, or FIS, parliamentary election victory in 1990 was used as an excuse to start a bloody civil war 1990s.⁷⁷ Arab regimes often use scaring tactics to suppress any new political forces which challenge their control regardless of its political color.⁷⁸

Neoliberalism

The international financial institutions which prorogated for neoliberal economic strategies launched two fundamentally destructive mechanisms in the Arab world starting from the 1970s with catastrophic results.⁷⁹ First, it wiped out the social network that provided protection for the poorer segments in the Arab society, composing the largest masses of the Arab countries.⁸⁰ In the process it threatened the middle class which was growing although at a slow pace. The latter occurred as prices started to skyrocket when subsidies for food and fuel were left up on the recommendations of the IMF, The World Bank and other financial institutions, which encouraged the Arab regimes to restore intensive borrowing to deal with its economic crises. This strategy was adapted in the Arab world starting from the seventies.⁸¹ The strategy was launched first in December 1976 Egypt, during Sadat's regime, negotiated a 450 million credit line with the IMF.⁸² This even accelerated during Mubarak's era reaching astronomical level in the current rule of President Al-Sisi.

Secondly, the IMF and other financial institutions push for full privatization of

publicly owned enterprises which composed the backbone of many countries in the Arab world since the Second world War.⁸³ This caused a massive unemployment surge in Arab countries which applied this economic philosophy. In Egypt, in particular, privatization threatened state employment guarantees and led to the creation of conditions contradictory to a free-market situation.⁸⁴ It induced the growth of crony capitalism as the new ownership opportunities were seized by the regime loyalists, who bought the companies at far below their true economic value and then reintroduced the industrial produce on a far higher price level.⁸⁵

Demography

The last factor which prepared the ground of Arab Spring 2011, was the demography of the Arab World. Approximately 60 per cent of the population of the Arab world is under the age of thirty.⁸⁶ More telling of Arab demographic situation if you look at percentage of youth of the ages between 15 and 29 years. In Tunisia, it is 29 percent, in Egypt, 30 percent, in Algeria, 32 percent, while in Libya it is 34 percent. More serious is the fact that the youth, between 15 and 29 in age, make the absolute majority of unemployed in the Arab world. In Egypt it is 90 percent. By 2010 there was a cohort of youth throughout the Arab world which were available for revolution.⁸⁷

The revolution of 2011

In December 17, 2010 Muhammad Bouazizi burned himself in Sidi Bou Zid.⁸⁸ He died on January 4, 2011. His death set fire to the whole of the region. Subsequently, the Arab spring started by the departure of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, on January 14, 2011 after thirty days of protests (Rutherford, 2013).⁸⁹ That sent a shock wave across the

Arab World and beyond. The Arab nation felt a true awakening. The future looked very bright in the opening months of 2011 after decades of political coma. However, the Gulf states, which were worried about the spreading of the unrest to their countries with demands of more liberal democratic rights, encouraged Arab corrupted elites to re-gain the power. There is clear evidence that these countries used their vast financial resources to facilitate such a re-take of power.⁹⁰ Tunisia and Egypt, initially, had a peaceful regime change while Libya and Syria witnessed a military conflict and the use of force by the regimes.⁹¹

The repression after the eruption of the Arab world, started directly from May 2011, reached to new height after 2013–2014.⁹² A year and a half after Bouaziz's self-immolation on December 17, 2010 (i.e., by June/July 2012) it was apparent that the counter-revolutionary forces have been successful on pushing back the forces of change in all countries that witnessed the revolution except for Tunisia, which began to try to build a viable true democracy.⁹³ That experiment ended with the military coup of Kais Saied in July of this year.⁹⁴ The revolution in Egypt was broken down, by July 2013, by the interference of the army and ousting the legitimately elected president Morsi, replacing him by a puppet president Adly Mansour.⁹⁵ Egyptian military imprisoned the first ever freely elected president in the 5000 years of Egypt's history. Morsi died in his solitary confinement cell in Tora Farm Prison in 17 June 2019, as the result of deliberate medical negligence.⁹⁶ In 2014 the military fully regained its position which it enjoyed for seventy years. General Al-Sisi was elected in a phony election in which there existed no serious political opponent. The first thing he did after his installment of the presidency was to reaffirm the priv-

ileges of the military. The uprising in Libya did not produce a true democracy and the war continued between the different factions. The Syrian revolution was suppressed with active interference and support of Bashar Al-Assad regime by his allies, Russia and Iran.

The second wave of the Arab Spring

In the last four years things picked up again. A new wave of the Arab spring started. In Sudan the revolution of 2018 / 2019 led to the ousting of president Essam Al-bashir. What came of that was a new regime controlled by communist-oriented government which is becoming a new suppressive entity of its own. The revolutionaries in Sudan are aware of that and demonstrations do flare from time to time against the current rulers. Even subsequent revolts in 2018 and 2019 against the central governments in Lebanon and Iraq did not produce true democratic changes in both countries. As the murdered Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi, wrote in 2018 “The idea of the benevolent autocrat, the just dictator, is being revived in the Arab World” (quoted in Tareq Masoud).⁹⁷ The unexpected protests of 2019 in Algeria, Sudan, Iraq and Lebanon showed that Arab spring has become a continuous phenomenon silenced only by extensive repression, unprecedented since 1970s.⁹⁸

The second wave of protests in Sudan, Algeria, Lebanon and Iraq proves that the initial wave of the Arab spring in 2011 was not a one-time event.⁹⁹ In Algeria, the “hirak” or protest movement born in February 2019 succeeded in forcing the president then Abdelaziz Bouteflika to resign.¹⁰⁰ That was followed by a make-up election which produced another president from the same elite. The Algerian protests flare from time and time. They were only hampered by the co-

rona crisis eruption in 2019.¹⁰¹ The Arab spring has not weakened the grip of the dictatorial Arab regimes and today some of the Arab countries, like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and UAE, has become even more oppressive than 2011.¹⁰² The counter-revolutionary forces are active and serious in their war on democracy. Even today, elements of the previous regime of Al Gadhafi are still active in Libya opposing the democratic change in that country using General Haftar against the push to democracy by United Nations. What happened lately in Tunisia is another naked display of the above.¹⁰³ I do admit of a being natively optimistic, by underestimating the commitment of the counter-revolutionary forces in the Arab World, when I first addressed the Arab Spring in 2015.¹⁰⁴

Tunisia, the tyranny is back

Tunisian political conditions before Arab Spring

Bourguiba's era

Tunisia has been a protectorate between 1881 to 1956 under La Marsa Convention of 1883.¹⁰⁵ In the years leading to the independence of Tunisia, the national parties of the country ran negotiations with the French authorities.¹⁰⁶ Among these parties were the New Construction Party and Dustur Socialist Party (PSAD). In 1956, Tunisia became an independent state with the head of the PSAD, Habib Bourguiba (1956–1987) becoming its first president. In 1977 Tunisian (lawyers, academicians and journalists) formed a branch of the organization “International League for Human Rights”, the first such in the Arab world.¹⁰⁷ The organization dealt with human rights violation in the Arab World. That was a great leap to the future. Humanism, appreciation of human value

and care for the human rights is the basic of creating a civilized society.¹⁰⁸

During 1980s the Islamist party, the Harakat al-Itijah al-Islami [Islamic Tendency Movement], played a leading role as an opposition party.¹⁰⁹ The party started as a secret movement in the mid of 1970s and was launch publicly in 1979/1980. Later it was renamed al-Nahda or Ennahda (Rebirth or Renaissance). In October 23, 2011 elections, Ennahda was elected for the National Constitutional Assembly with large majority (ibid).¹¹⁰ During the decades of the 1970s and the 1980s, General Union of Tunisian Workers (or UGTT), the largest and oldest labor organization in the country, played an active role when it departed from loyalty to the government and the president Habib Bourguiba's regime in 1978 and the opposition force. Later, it became one of the major forces which participated in Tunisias 2011 revolution.¹¹¹

Ben Ali's era

Bourguiba was ousted, in 1988, on the claim of medical reasons, and Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali (born 1936) became the new president.¹¹² The Tunisian economy was still agrarian in its nature. In the 1980s, the economic situation in the country became critical. The decline in the oil revenues in the Arab world impacted not only the Gulf Region population but reached beyond, affecting non-oil Arab countries including Tunisia. Many Tunisians who worked in Gulf State contributed to the local economy. The collapse of the oil prices in the 1980s affected their ability to contribute to the Tunisian economy and their money transfer to the country dwindled drastically.¹¹³ Although the Bourguiba regime was a corrupted one, the corruption during Ben Ali ruling became obviously naked, unmasked and heart-breaking with its shameless audacity and sheer scale. There

were, however, some successes in certain areas such as education. In 1991, universal education became compulsory in Tunisia.¹¹⁴ Tunisia was also impacted by the global economic crash of 2008. Furthermore, climate conditions resulted in poor harvest. France, and Europe started to close its door to the youth from Tunisian and North Africa.¹¹⁵ Ben Ali was removed in 2012 as the result of the Tunisian revolution of 2012. Hopes were very high for the success of the democratic experiment Tunisia as the birthplace of the Arab Spring.¹¹⁶ However, the dream was short-lived.

Kais Saied military coup

The scheme that occurred in Egypt in 2013, was repeated but this time with a Tunisian context. The elected president of Tunisia, Kais Saied, lunched a military coup, in the night of 25/26 July, 2021, with a camouflaged pretension of his desire to save the country.¹¹⁷ That is truly surprising because Saied was elected democratically in 2019 as the new president of Tunisia.¹¹⁸ The pretext for the coup was limited demonstrations against both the Tunisian parliament, with Ennahda as its main party, and the government of El Masheshi. The Tunisian recent military coup shows unmistakable resemblance to the events that took place at June/July 2013 in Egypt. Events which brought Al-Sisi dictatorship into being. Saied sacked the prime minister, dissolved the Tunisian parliament, appointed himself as the head of the Tunisian judicatory and proclaimed curfew. He utilized a specific paragraph, article 80, in the Tunisian constitution which meant to be used only if the country faced extreme threat to its existence. But the country was not facing an external military threat nor internal serious unrest. In one blow, the supposedly-elected president wiped out the

last hope for democracy to the Arab masses. If Saïed succeeded in his plan, which is currently ongoing, the 2011 Arab revolution would have witnessed its final death, at least for the foreseeable future. Although I am totally convinced that in the long run, the democratization of the Arab World, including Tunisia, is a historical eventuality.

The Tunisian leftists supported Saïed's coup out of their hate for the Ennahda and their inability to compete with it in the free elections of 2019. Their position is directly coupled to their antagonism toward political Islam, resembling in that the Egyptian left. The Tunisian liberals, which were in alliance with Ennahda, surprisingly stood against the military coup. It's not clear whether the Tunisian army supported the coup. However, the Tunisian president appeared with generals from the army and high officials from the interior ministry in his TV appearance when he announced his measures.¹¹⁹ Next day, the 27th of July, the now, illegal president of Tunisia, as the opposition see him, sacked the defense and the interior ministers and appointed two men who are personally loyal to him.

The response from the western powers, particularly USA, is again, as in 2013, not truly up to the seriousness of the situation in Tunisia and the Arab World. It seems that the top politicians in these countries did not mind what happened, in the illusion that such a move will get rid of Ennahda and its influence in the Tunisian society. The position of the western countries in regard to the role played by Islamic parties in the political arena in the Arab world has been at least vague and obviously naïve. Tunis is in its way to be another Egypt with what that would imply in relation to the human rights' violations and the fate of the democratization of the Arab world. I will address at the end of the paper the implications and consequences of

the failure of the Arab Spring on the intermediate and long-term security of Europe.

Egypt and the lost golden chance

Nasser's dictatorship

Egypt was the key country which followed on the Tunisian inspirations in 2011. To understand the events of that year and beyond, within the Egyptian context, one needs to reflect on the politically dramatic changes which took shape in that country in the early year of 1950s. In 1952, the free officers ousted King Farouk of Egypt and put Colonel Jamal Abdel Nasser as a president ruling with absolute, unquestionable power.¹²⁰ In seventy years of the rule of Abdel al-Nasser and the subsequent regimes of Sadat and Mubarak, the military have penetrated every aspect and corner of the Egyptian society.¹²¹ Nasser, and his precedents governed through a specific social contract.¹²² According to that contract the state is to provide economic and social opportunities for the masses in return of total political loyalty. However, Egypt population kept growing from 1950s by roughly 1.3 million newborn every year, the state ability to care for its citizens deteriorated and finally collapsed in the last years of Mubarak's era.¹²³

The pre-revolution years

In 1990s the United States and Europe agreed to help Egypt through bilateral and multilateral assistance¹²⁴ as a reward of the support of Mubarak to the western and Gulf state position in the first Gulf war 1990.¹²⁵ Beside that and as a condition for this assistance, Egypt had to open its economy to a more export-oriented strategy¹²⁶ and in the process undermine the true needs of its

citizens. In 1991 Mubarak introduced a neo-liberal reform plan which was crafted by IMF. The plan called for selling the public sector, cutting the subsidy system and reducing, and actually, ending the state's role in economy. The plan backfired and failed miserably.¹²⁷ By mid-2000s the social contract of Nasser era has become obsolete and the basis for Mubarak's regime legitimacy has long gone.¹²⁸

To suppress political opposition both Sadat and Mubarak relied heavily on their security apparatus.¹²⁹ In Egypt the tight alliance between the political arms of the regime, National Democratic Party (NDP) and the intelligence services created the conditions for preserving the dictatorship of the country. The corporation of the two entities enable the regimes of Sadat and later Mubarak to build a wide circle of supporters and to keep opponents at bay. The Egyptian military, represented by SCAF, turned away from interfering as long as its interests were granted.¹³⁰ Beside the political parties, there existed also civil society organizations, extending from professional associations to charitable groups to labor unions.¹³¹ Among the most active such civil associations was the independent labor movement, which organized labor actions. Another was Kefaya movement, which organized in 2005 demonstrations calling for the resignation of Mubarak. Kefaya was formed as a clear civil opposition movement on April 6, 2008.¹³²

The Egyptian Arab Spring of 2011/2012

For the January 25, 2011 uprising to succeed the Egyptian level of desperation needed to reach to a point where people would be willing to take personal risks with an anticipation of even losing one's own life. Also, the demonstrators had to believe that the survival of

Mubarak's regime was no longer inevitable.¹³³ The two conditions converged in the early weeks of January 2011. The Egyptian revolution succeeded and Mubarak was forced to abdicate.¹³⁴ SCAF assumed all executive and legislative power on February 11, 2011. It suspended the constitution and disbanded the parliament.¹³⁵ In late 2011 early 2012, parliamentary and presidential elections were conducted. the Muslim Brotherhood won the majority of the seats in both the lower house (the people's Assembly) (45percent) and the upper house (The Shura Council) (58percent). The Salafi movement's main representative, the al-Nur Party came second. The liberal parties lagged behind into third place with a large margin.¹³⁶

Mohamed Morsi, the candidate of Muslim Brothers backed by the revolutionaries, won 52 percent of the vote in the presidential elections in Spring of 2012. While the military candidate Ahmad Shafiq got 48 percent.¹³⁷ For the first time in Egypt's long history, the Egyptians elected a national leader from among its people.¹³⁸ After the success of the uprising, the Egyptians faced two alternatives to deal with Mubarak's loyalists. The first strategy was to eliminate Mubarak's men in key positions at the state level which would have paralyzed the Egyptian state. The other strategy was to accommodate Mubarak's state and try to reform it slowly. The revolutionaries in Egypt followed the second strategy and they paid a high price for their naivety as the unfolding of events have shown.¹³⁹

Interference of the Egyptian military and Al-Sisi's dictatorship

After the 2012 elections, SCAF engaged immediately to act in order to undermine the authority of the newly elected president and his Freedom and Justice party (FJP).¹⁴⁰ First,

The Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) issued a ruling which declared on June 16, 2012, that the elections of the lower house of parliament that was conducted late 2011, early 2012 were unconstitutional.¹⁴¹ Based on that ruling SCAF dissolved the People's Assembly, in which Muslim Brotherhood had half of the seats. Many saw such move as direct evidence that SCAF intended to deny the largest opposition force its influence in the political life of Egyptian after Mubarak.¹⁴² The SCAF took over the legislative authority previously held by the parliament. It was given total control of all matters related to the military, granted immunity from civilian oversight, and was rewarded with the capacity to block any policy initiative that president Morsi might pursue. These amendments gave also the SCAF an important role in the drafting of the new constitution, which would otherwise have been drafted solely by the parliament and then submitted to the public for approval.¹⁴³

Prior to the events which lead to June/July 2013, the liberal parties in Egypt were well-represented in media (both TV and newspaper) as well as in the legal community.¹⁴⁴ These parties initially allied themselves with the military, based on their historically antagonistic and ideological-driven position toward the Islamic political streams. They hoped to utilize the latter in getting rid of the legitimate political power of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁴⁵ The military was aware of the way the Egyptian liberal and social parties thought and their enhanced expectations and utilized it for their scheme. Ultimately, the military regained control of the country in 2013, establishing the Al-Sisi regime. The liberals and socialists themselves became the victims of the oppression of the military.¹⁴⁶ It is stunning that the same is repeating itself currently in Tunisia. The unconditional support that Al-Sisi has enjoyed under Trump

presidency, between 2016-2020, has even worsened the political situation in Egypt and gave the military rulers of the country the freedom to even increase their violations of human rights. Such excessive suppression of political rights is feeding into the coming catastrophic eruption. One that is gaining strength at an accelerated pace.

Methodology

As I explained in the first section of this paper, I will be using the complexity theory in my analysis. Complexity theory was developed from natural sciences (such as physics and chemistry)¹⁴⁷ but then it transitioned to the fields of management and strategy.¹⁴⁸ C. Gersick,¹⁴⁹ showed how applying theories borrowed from the natural sciences can be used in the social sciences. Other researchers doubted the wisdom of using theories emerging from the natural sciences in social studies.¹⁵⁰ Complexity theory conceives organizations as complex adaptive systems.¹⁵¹ Adaptive complex systems are self-organized, which implies that they correspond to non-linearity by being flexible and adaptive.¹⁵² Adaptive complex systems are driven by both positive and negative feedback.¹⁵³ While negative feedback seeks to stress rationality and stability, pushing the organization toward equilibrium, the positive feedback moves away the organization from the desired state to explore new avenues. Positive feedback is more prominent in informal systems¹⁵⁴ and organizational shadow systems.¹⁵⁵

Complexity theory represents a departure from the classical strategy theory, which downplays the unpredictability in the evolutions of organization.¹⁵⁶ The classical complexity theory sees organizations as natural complex adaptive systems striving to produce a novel ordered system.¹⁵⁷ Chaos is

an important component of the complexity theory.¹⁵⁸ The complexity theory is very suitable to be used in studying the Arab spring because the theory deals with unpredictable and unforeseen events, of non-linear nature.¹⁵⁹ I argue that that complexity theory can be utilized to study change and development for a whole set of organizations, i. e., whole societies.

Social systems normally seek equilibrium and not adapting as in classical strategic thinking.¹⁶⁰ They use, for example hierarchy in re-arranging and creating equilibrium. Democracy is actually a free-selected type of hierarchy. Countries can be considered as a mega informal social system. In classical way, events, activities, routines, behaviors and human interactions form, at specific point in time, the initial conditions for the birth of the future social system conditions.¹⁶¹ Some of these elements in the initial stage can be amplified through positive feedback while others are dissipated as a result of the negative feedback conditions.¹⁶² I also use that analogy in my analysis and deal with the countries I am running my analysis upon as a mega form of an organization and thus complex adaptive system. In this paper I am using the four dimensions of the complexity theory to describe the development in of two selected countries, Tunisia and Egypt, in relation to the Arab spring over a period of ten years. These dimensions are: sensitivity to initial conditions, negative and positive feedback, disequilibrium, and emergent order.¹⁶³

Analysis using complexity theory

In this section I will use complex theory to look at the four dimensions of: sensitivity, feedback, disequilibrium and emerging order. I am explaining what these four dimensions

mean and the level they can attain in *Table 1*. I shall proceed to apply the complexity theory to the situation in Tunisia and Egypt in regard to all the four definitions. The analysis itself is displayed in *Table 2*. Before I proceed, I wish to point out that I high-lightened the levels of the different dimensions in the table, such as sensitivity, when they are at medium and high level by shadowing them and left the boxes where the sensitivity is low without shadowing. As thus, the low level of sensitivity shall be then the default level. I did the same also for the other dimensions. For all these dimensions the most applicable level is the default level.

Sensitivity

The level of understanding of the change occurring in the Arab world differs depending on what actor you are addressing. It is highest among the Islamic parties in both Tunisia and Egypt. Actually, these actors have been awaiting the Arab Spring to ascertain their political contribution to the governance of the Arab world which they were deprived from since the end of the first world war. The liberals in Tunisia showed a moderate understanding of the significant of the Arab revolution of 2011. They tried, in a pragmatic way, to corporate with the Ennahda in securing the stability of the democratic experiment in that country. Both the liberals (Qalb Tunis) (Heart of Tunisia) and Ennahda were united in delegitimizing the latest changes in Tunisia. Both accused president Saied of mounting a military coup.

In Egypt, on the contrary, the liberals were, together with the socialists behind the demonstrations which were utilized by Al-Sisi to launch his military coup. I assigned both parties the lowest level in sensitivity in the Egyptian case. That is valid even for the Tunisian socialists. On the other hand, the

labor movement was not heartily supportive of the military coup in Egypt because of their history of struggle with the Egyptian military during Sadat's and Mubarak's era. That is why I assigned to it a moderate level of sensitivity. What is notable is that the Tunisian labor movement was not that antagonistic against the recent coup in Tunisia, though they tried to put a masked face of warning for the new dictator of Tunisia to keep the human and political rights of the Tunisians intact. The Tunisian labor movement, as thus, deserved a low sensitivity designation. The rest of the actors in both Tunisia and Egypt attained, in relation to sensitivity, a low level (the default value).

Feedback

Feedback, the second dimension of our analysis, is about the attitude of the different actors toward change in society. This attitude can be positive or negative. Positive feedback is about pushing for change to deal with stresses. Negative feedback seeks to preserve the existing conditions (see *Table 1*).

In relation to the Tunisian situation, Ennahda and Qalb Tunis (i. e. the moder-

ate Islamists and the liberals) had high positive feedback and worked hard through these ten years to support the democratic process in Tunisia. That is why both were critical of the recent military coup mounted by president Saied from its first moments. The most negative toward change are the other two players, the socialists, because of their core hate of the Ennahda in particular, as well as the military, who acted negatively to the democratic change. The military's support of the coup in Tunisia is very mystical and it confirms the prevailing view that there was foreign entanglement and external financing of the counter-revolutionary influential elements of the Tunisian society.

In Egypt, all political parties as well as the labor movement longed for change in the political arena. I designated for them a high level of positive feedback. The socialists and liberals were not really willing to deliver, exclusively, the political power to the Egyptian army, when it took power in military coup in 2013. Rather they wanted to end the control of the Muslim Brotherhood as the largest party in the country. The position of the Egyptian army, in launching its military coup of 2013, is understandable.

Prospective	Explanation	Possible levels attainable	Code used in Table 2
Sensitivity	Understanding the current change occurring in the Arab world	High, Medium, Low of understanding	HU, MU, LU
Feedback	Positive feedback (pushing for change to deal with stresses)	High positive feedback, low positive feed back	HPF, LPF
	Negative feedback (preserving the existing conditions)	High negative feedback Low negative feedback	HNF, LNF
Disequilibrium	How organizations involved in the Arab World's politics and governance are able to adapt to the current changes	High, Medium and low level of flexibility	HF, MF, LF
Emerging order	How did the new conditions impact the organization	Positively, negatively, not affected	P, N, NA

Table 1: Explanation of the four dimensions of the complexity theory and the levels they may attain in relation to the Arab Word.

It is embedded in its desire to preserve the massive economic interests of its officers and generals. That is why I assigned to it high level of negative feedback. The same cannot be said about the Tunisia army. It is a professional army with no real involvement in the Tunisian economy.

The Egyptian church supported the popular revolt against Mubarak in 2011. But once it was clear that the Islamists were gaining politically, they changed their position and supported the Egyptian army coup in 2013. The Church felt that the best protection of the Egypt Christians is through a strong military rule. This is despite the assurances of the Muslim Brotherhood that they would not allow for the restriction of their rights in the new Egypt. Anyhow, the Muslim Brotherhood failed in eliminating the feeling of insecurity among Egypt Christians. Despite that position, many revolutionary Christians in Egypt went against the position of the church. They participated actively in the uprising and some of them became martyrs. I designated high negative feedback for the Egyptian church. The other actors in both societies were interested in true change of political life in both countries but they were not against the military coups both in Egypt (2013) and Tunisia (2021). They were given a low positive feedback level (being the default value).

Disequilibrium

Disequilibrium is about how organizations involved in politics and governance are able to adapt to the change. It has to do with the flexibility and adaptability. Among all the actors in the Tunisian context only the Islamic parties (in particular Ennahda) and the liberals showed a moderate level of flexibility and adaptability to the new situation. The Tunisian socialists, together with the rest of

the actors showed a rigid response and their support for the military coup in Tunisia is a witness to that. Only a limited segment of the leftist forces in Tunisia objected to the coup, and in an almost apologetic way. In Egypt, the liberals aligned themselves with the socialists and the other segments of the Egyptian society and all took a rigid position. Only the Islamists, and in particular Muslim Brotherhood tried to be flexible and adaptable. The Salafists after 2013, sided totally with the Egyptian liberals and socialists in their hate and antagonism toward the Muslim Brotherhood. The rest of the actors were assigned a low level of flexibility (the default value).

Emerging order

The emerging order covers the issue of how the new conditions impact the organization. In both Tunisia and Egypt, the Islamic parties, and in particular Ennahda in the first and Muslim Brothers in the second were impacted positively at the initial phase due to the sudden opportunities opened for them. For the first time these political forces could participate in the political life of their respective societies. That turned later into negative conditions due to military coup of Egypt in 2013 and the latest coup in Tunisia, 2021. The Egyptian military has benefited and was impacted positively by what happened after 2013, while the same cannot be said in regard to the Tunisian military. It's involvement in the current military coup of 2021, under president Saied changed the way the Tunisians would be looking at their army. On the other hand, there is no true direct economic benefits for its officers as their involvement in the economy is null. It does not exist. As thus the military coup of 2021 would impact them negatively, as I see that.

Country	Actors	Sensitivity	Feedback	Disequilibrium	Emerging order
Tunisia	Political parties - Islamists	HU	HPF	MF	P, N
	Political parties- socialists	LU	HNF	LF	N
	Political parties- liberals	MU	HPF	MF	N
	Labor movement	LU	LPF	LF	N
	Bureaucracy	LU	LPF	LF	NA
	Military	LU	HNF	LF	N
	Official religious institutions- Islamic	LU	LPF	LF	NA
	Official religious institutions- Christians	LU	*	*	*
Egypt	Political parties – Islamists	HU	HPF	MF	P, N
	Political parties- Socialists	LU	HPF	LF	N
	Political parties- Liberals	LU	HPF	LF	N
	Labor movement	MU	HPF	LF	N
	Bureaucracy	LU	LPF	LF	NA
	Military	LU	HNF	LF	P
	Official religious institutions- Islamic	LU	LPF	LF	NA
	Official religious institutions- Christians	LU	HNF	LF	P

Table 2: Analysis of the Arab Spring development after 2011 using the complexity theory.

Bureaucracy in both societies was not impacted by the change in other countries. The Islamic institutions also were not impacted at all in both countries. They kept their level of authority and significance in their societies as the same level. The church in Egypt however, gained positively due to the emergence of a tight alliance with the Egyptian military, after 2013. All the other actors were impacted negatively. Their role became less significant. In Table 2, I displayed the result of this analysis. When it came to church in Tunisia, I did not attempt to make any evaluation because church in Tunisia is not really a significant actor. The Christian minority in Tunisia are of less power and significance compared to Christians of Egypt.

I need to stress that the analysis is done as the current situation in both Tunisia and Egypt incline. Segments of both societies have changed their positions many times in the ten years since the eruption of the Arab spring. The military coup in Tunisia in 26 July this year changed also the way I would perceive the position of the different actors in Tunisia.

Conclusion

In this paper I tried to revisit and re-address the conditions in the Arab world after ten years of the sudden eruption of the Arab masses which started in December 2010. An event that became known in history as "the Arab Spring". During the last ten years, and

since I first wrote about that phenomenon, the area witnessed a bitter and deadly struggle between the new forces of democratic change and the conservative old counter-revolutionary elements of the Arab society. In the first camp there resides the Arab youth with their precious dreams, the emerging political forces, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood, and the modern Salafists, and the new liberal parties. The actors of this camp are supported globally by the progressive thinkers, researchers and civic and human rights' organizations. These parties are keen to see the Arab world leaving the years of dictatorship and antidemocratic conditions and enter into the modern area where people are truly represented in their political systems. On the opposite camp, there resides the Arab antidemocratic and conservative elite; in particular, in countries like Egypt, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. These anti-democratic regimes are politically, and even financially in case of Egypt, supported by governments in USA, and to less extent in Europe.

The last scenario of this round of the old struggle is the military coup of president Kais Saied which occurred while I was preparing the draft of this paper for publication. It is apparent that the military coup in Tunisia was supported by regional and international powers. The coming days will tell us more about these entities who saw in such a coup something of a benefit to the region in a repetition to what happened in 2013 in Egypt. This situation came about, partially, because the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda did fail in showing the required skills in conducting good political strategies. They allowed for the antidemocratic forces to act in a destructive way in Tunisia and Egypt. The moderate Islamic parties, as well as the liberals, in both countries failed to understand the true nature of the anti-democratic coun-

ter-revolutionary forces in the Arab world. They did not comprehend how strongly these streams are embedded and deeply-rooted in within the Arab society and its upper class.

The success of the Arab counter-revolution in destroying the Tunisian democracy this year, after it succeeded in suffocating the democratic Egyptian experiment of 2011 has grave future consequences for the security of European continent, if it is allowed to solidify its gains. In this context, I wish to point to the two most apparently clear security threats, leaving the others for maybe a future analysis, as I am limited in the space available for me in such a concise article.

Firstly, the clear insistence of the Arab conservative regimes of depriving the moderate Islamic parties from participating actively in the democratization drive in the Arab world will enhance and strengthen the anti-democratic streams within the Islamic intellectual body. It will enforce a view propagated for by the extremists that the only way to express the Islamic view in politics is through violent means. Such development will be sad and tragic although a logical one. The Arab youth who are adherent to the Islamic way, and they are a strong voice to account for in that region, would feel desperate and marginalized. Even Christian Arab youth can be sucked into ideas of extremism and intolerance, through the radical left and the radical right or through the extreme nationalistic intolerant doctrine, as they feel their hopes undermined and violated in a barbaric way.

Secondly, if the antagonism between democratic and antidemocratic forces in the Arab world was not resolved in a peacefully way, violence could erupt, tearing apart Arab countries, like Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia. Some of these countries, like Egypt with its more than 100 million inhabitants, are very populated. That would lead to mass migrations similar to what happened in the Syria

in the period 2011 and 2016, with millions of desperate people fleeing the endless civil wars and violent unrests. Waves of immigrants will be moving toward the European continent invading its borders. One needs to remember that Europe is only separated from the Middle East region by the Mediterranean to the south. The continent is bordered by countries to the East and North which would not hesitate to use its proximity to the heart of Europe to exploit the immigrants' issue to pressure the EU for political compromising and surrender to their will. The last actions of the current government of Belorussia are a clear witness to that.

The above two risks require from European leaders and politicians act in a constructive way. That clearly means supporting the Arab people's legitimate longing for a democratic political system that expresses their true will. The Arab nation will continue its struggle with or without the support of the west. The difference would be in the way the coming generations of the Arabs will see the role played by the western political elites in their hours of despair. Would they see a Europe

which stands for its principles of humanism and support of democratic principles? Or a Europe which, in the name of caring for the short-sightedness of its self-interest, would stand by and protect anti-democratic Arab regimes. The choice is ours as Europeans.

Acknowledgement of a noble soul

I wish to present this work to the noble soul of a very dear friend of mine who passed away, hastily, a couple of weeks ago when he became infected with Corona Virus. He was kind enough to help me shed light on the past and current political situation in the Arab World. Without his insight such an article would not have been completed in time. Out of care for the security and well-being of his family members, I shall abstain from giving his name nor will I point to his country of origin. His soul shall sense this acknowledgement.

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