



NATO Foundation  
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# BEYOND THE ARAB RISINGS WHAT KIND OF FUTURE?





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*Defense College*



NATO DEFENSE  
COLLEGE FOUNDATION  
**BEYOND THE ARAB RISINGS  
WHAT KIND OF FUTURE?**

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**Gruppo di Lavoro**  
Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo  
Alessandro Politi (editor)  
Sofia Mastrostefano (editor)  
Maria Bagnara  
Federico Berger

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**NATO Defense  
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Via Alessandro Serpieri, 8  
Roma 00197  
web: [www.natofoundation.org](http://www.natofoundation.org)  
email: [info@natofoundation.org](mailto:info@natofoundation.org)  
twitter: @NATOFoundation  
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*Born in 2011, the NDCF is a unique think-tank: international by design and based in Rome, due to its association with the NATO Defense College.*

*The principles stated in the preamble to the Washington Treaty of 1949 are our heritage.*

*Our mission is to promote the culture of stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area and in NATO partner nations.*

*Our aim is to meet the highest standards in contributing to public debate and future deliberations on strategic, security and geopolitical issues.*



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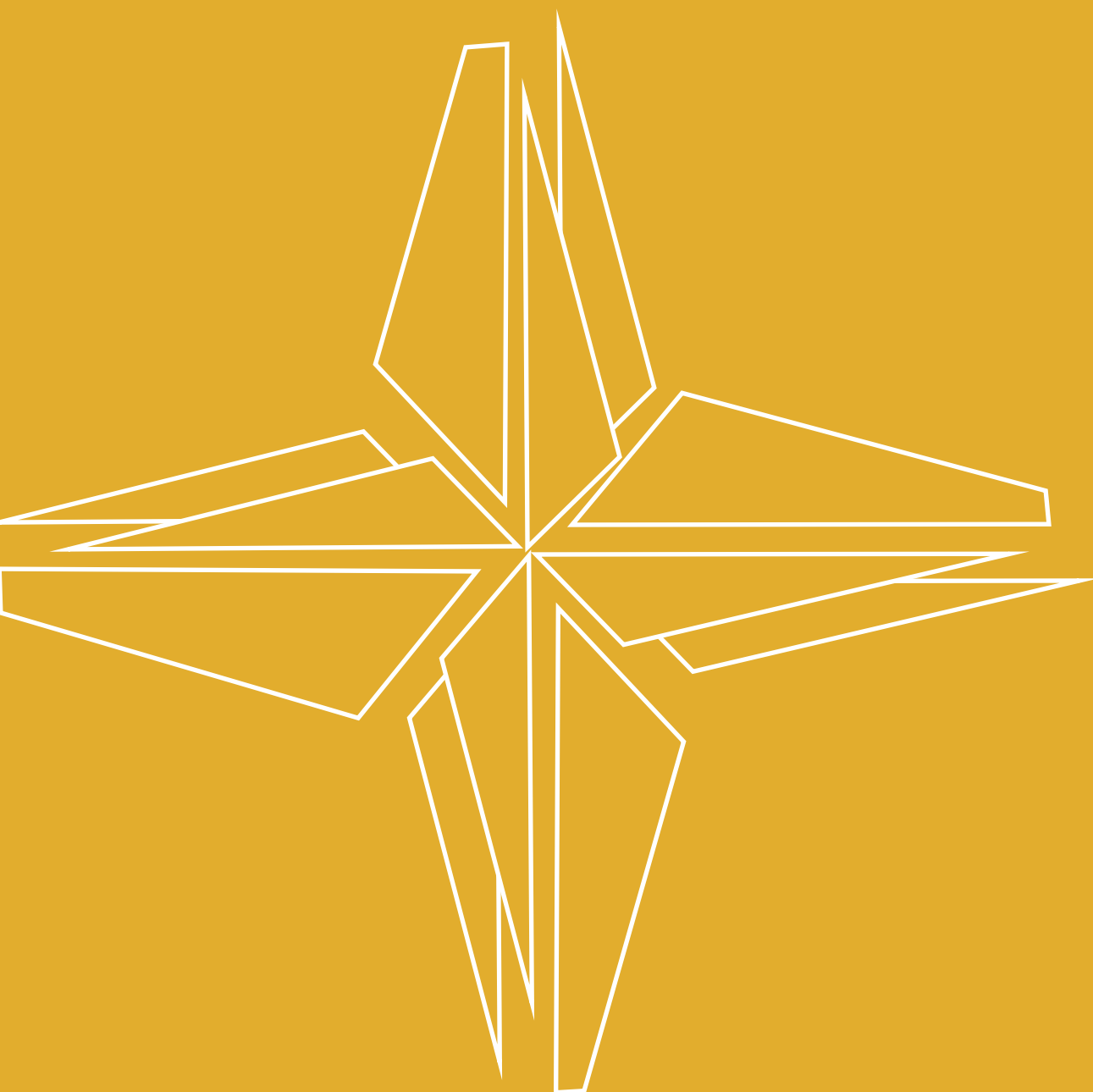




Since its very beginning in 2011, the Middle East and Deep Maghreb have been a fundamental priority for the Foundation.

As this year marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Arab uprisings, our Dossier wants to provide a meaningful understanding of the future dynamics of an area that, despite several positive attempts, is still affected by major instability.

Gathering the perspectives of a pool of distinguished regional and international analysts, this publication dives into the socio-economic and political conditions that showed the aspirations of a civil society, often stifled by old problems and emerging challenges. Despite the very different outcomes of the uprisings, new ways ahead are possible.



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# Foreword

## ALESSANDRO MINUTO-RIZZO

President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

Our point of departure is a great region going from the shores of the Atlantic to the Arab Gulf and beyond, crossing a number of countries rich in history and relevant in today's world. Sometimes the experts call it an arc of crisis, but we would like it to become an arc of opportunities.

Ten years ago, there was a moment when everything seemed to the point of changing, but it did not happen. There were leaders in power since 30 or 40 years and it seemed obvious that they should go. But things went in another direction and we proved wrong on the overall political analysis.

Today the region is fragmented, authority does not seem based on a popular mandate. There are many national teams in the region, but each team has only one player. Some of those players envision a magic role for their country when facts are running short of the ambition. Unfortunately, there is not a shared interest in cooperative security and regional cooperation is not yet there. Kingdoms are more stable than republics but this is little comfort. This is not the entire reality, of course, and there are signs that things can change for the better. First of all, a vast young population has emerged everywhere and is looking for op-



### Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo

is an Italian diplomat who served as Deputy Secretary General of NATO from 2001 to 2007 and as interim Secretary General of NATO from the 17th of December 2003 to the 1st of January 2004. Prior to be appointed Deputy Secretary General, he acted as Ambassador of Italy to the Western European Union and to the EU Political and Security Committee (PSC).

portunities and it will be increasingly difficult for local leaders and elites to close their eyes before this reality.

Since some time, social networks are of common use and people are much more informed than it has ever been the case. The young population is acquiring habits very similar to those in use in other parts of the world. A certain tendency towards secularism seems to gain wind. In some countries we see a growing role of the middle class and women. All these signals go in the good direction.

In conclusion a complete reading is difficult and sometimes wrong. An overall appraisal of the political-economic-social scenario tends to be critical. On the other hand, we should also look below the surface, try to better analyze specific sectors. We cannot judge only at what appears at first sight but to look also at trends making their way across society.

This is the reason why the Foundation has decided to launch the present dossier. We have the modest ambition to contribute, in a positive way, to connect and to explain; other initiatives will follow going in the same direction.

We believe in a bottom-up approach to promote concrete examples of cooperation and mutual understanding. We are not new in this kind of endeavors with a good feed-back. We are convinced that it is possible to agree on strategic interests.

The Arab region has been the focus of our activities since many years, the title of our first conference was “NATO and the Arab spring”. The objective being to dispel the image of an Alliance as a hard security only organization. The Strategic Concept states that “cooperative security” as such is a first-class priority.

There are practical experiences already behind us like the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. They speak with success about practical and useful cooperation, a two-way street, human minds thriving to share the same view on important objectives.

This “Dossier” has no pretention to say everything, nor to be comprehensive but comprehensible.

Mainly a sort of index pointing at the Arab world in some of its basic features at the present day. Perhaps to suggest some roadmap. Sometimes looking back at the experiences of 10 years ago when useful.

After examining at length pros and cons we have come to the conclusion that the Arabs should not be left alone with their problems sometimes extremely difficult to solve. We have a duty, quietly and friendly, to walk together when possible.

“There is a wealth of humanity that deserves our best wishes and is not easy to forget: the people who live among the ancient mosques in Cairo, the Roman cities of Jordan, the pearl islands of the Arabian Gulf, and the deserts of Mauritania. We face a great world in flux, which requires us to take a long view, out towards a new horizon in our history”.

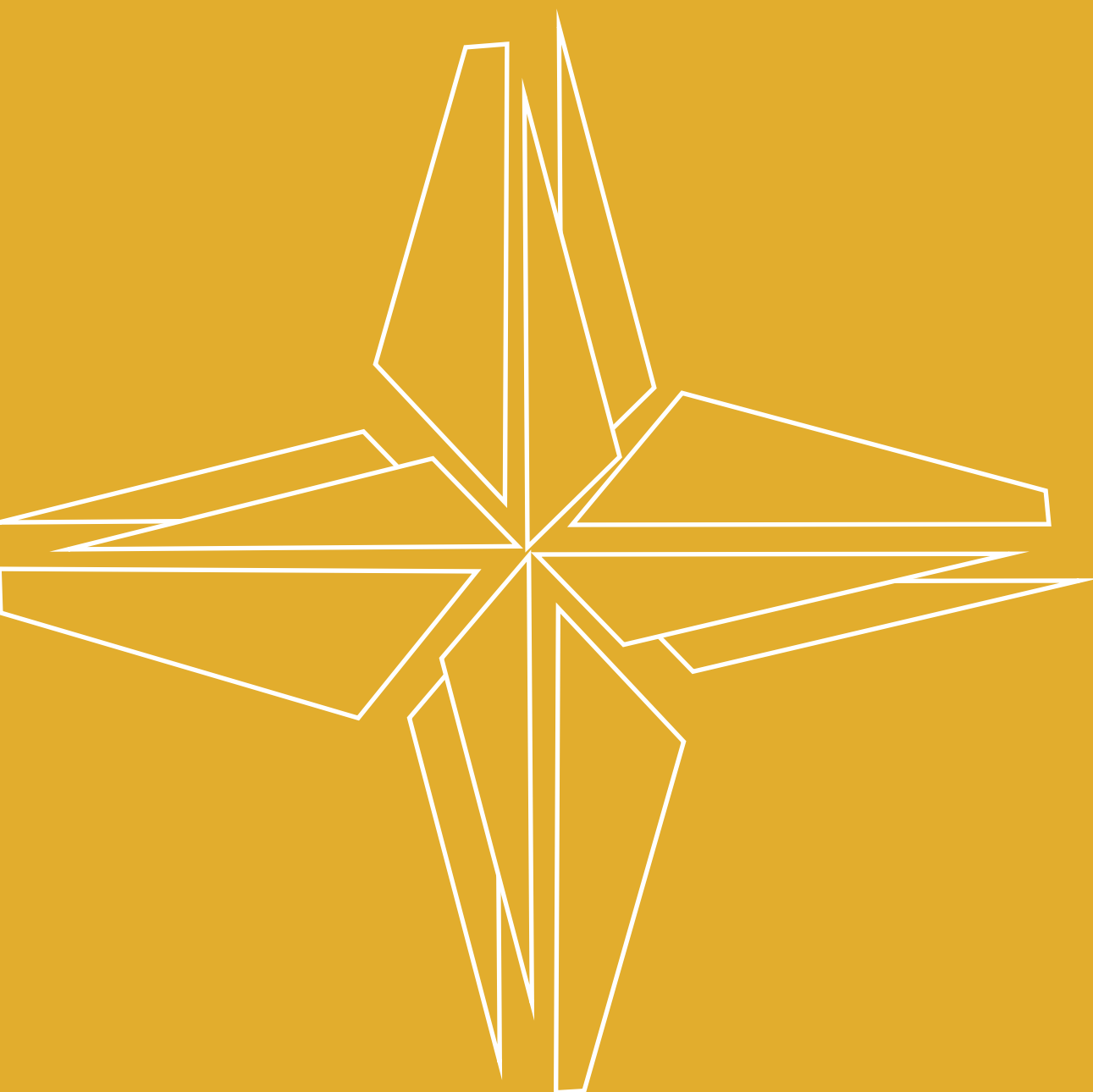
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<sup>1</sup> NATO and the Middle East. The making of a partnership. New Academia. Washington DC. 2018.





Hammamet Medina streets with blue walls. Tunisia, North Africa.





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# Political Summary

## ALESSANDRO POLITI

Director, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

The Arab Risings (more colloquially called Arab Springs) that unfolded in 2011 and their avatars in 2018-2021, named also Arab Summer, were a wave of protests, revolts, rebellions and revolutions that touched practically every country from the Atlantic till the Persian/Arab Gulf. In their un-coordinated development and mixed outcomes, they resemble very much the revolutions of 1848 that swept across Europe.

Their structural causes are a dangerous mix between: demographic explosion, youth education and unemployment, hardships imposed by structural adjustment programmes by WB and IMF (rising prices of first necessity goods and steeper inequality), consequent middle-class frustration and the breakdown of the social contract by authoritarian regimes (political acquiescence by the ruled people in exchange of subsidized goods and jobs).

This political and social gap made populations intolerant to pre-existing autocracy and corruption, spurring to ask forcefully in essence for dignity.

These factors were multiplied by the social media information diffusion and the imitation effect spawned by different demonstrations; ini-



### Alessandro Politi

is Director of the NATO Defense College Foundation. A specialist in political and strategic affairs, he has worked with different top decision makers in Italy and abroad both in public institutions and private companies. He teaches geopolitics, geo-economics and intelligence at the Italian MFA-affiliated SIOI School.

tial heavy-handed reactions by the regimes further inflamed the situation. In the background the action or inaction of armed forces was a crucial element for the success, failure or descent into civil war of the risings.

The first protests started in Tunisia by December 2010, bringing to an end the consolidated dictatorship Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali by February 2011 after the skilful media exploitation of the suicide of a street vendor. Contrary to what happened during the Cold War, the protests were quickly broadcast through mobile phone networks and social networks.

By the end of that month, protests erupted against corruption and autocracies and for political freedom in Libya, Egypt, Israel, Yemen, Bahrein, Kuwait, Iraq and Iran. The protesters, venting a long-repressed anger against the establishment, organised in several cities what were called the “Days of Rage”. The Egyptian rais Hosni Mubarak had to relinquish power

In March 2011 people were demonstrating also in Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Oman, while one month later the twin civil wars in Libya and Syria were becoming a permanent feature of the region for the years to come.

By the end of 2011 also the government in Yemen changed, even if large sectors of the country were fearing the risk of yet another civil war. Three years later, in fact, the risk became reality, while Iraq and Syria were partly occupied by the self-styled Caliphate and in Egypt a military coup, followed by elections, changed the local government again.

The second wave of demonstrations touched particularly Algeria (previously not involved in the movements) and Sudan, where another government was forced to quit (2019).

The end results have been rather diverse with three countries plunging into civil war (Libya, Syria, Yemen), seven witnessing protracted unrests (Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Algeria, Jordan, Sudan), Tunisia with an embattled democracy and the rest trying to reform by different degrees. in order to defuse further tensions.

The dry conclusion is that, while the balances and borders that were generated by the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) and the Balfour Declaration (1920) are still visible, the changed social underpinnings make most of the surviving political structures simply unsustainable.

Strategically one can witness a relative and probably persistent decline of influence by major external actors in favour of opportunistic coalitions vying for power in the Gulf, the Levant and North Africa, that must be considered as three very distinct regions in lieu of an all-encompassing misleading Middle East concept.

Energy importing countries across the Mediterranean will still continue to be interested in the security of supply for their industries (no matter if fossil or renewable), but cannot taken for granted neither their old alliances with existing elites nor the traditional assistance programmes that propped up those elites. Just the presence of relatively new actors like Beijing or returning ones like Russia, is a strong incentive to find new convincing instruments of collaboration with partner countries.

China, India, Japan, South Korea, Australia and the USA have also their

interest in the area, but have different stakes according to their energy suppliers' portfolio. UN consensus remains very difficult to achieve in this situation.

In this context NATO, while pursuing a necessarily more structured collaboration with the EU, has to invest seriously in its existing partnerships firstly because these countries belong to the immediate neighbourhood of the European Allies; secondly because Russia's presence has quickly extended towards Syria and Libya, instead of seeking improbable successes on the Baltic (which is different from supporting Minsk in case of necessity) and thirdly because any sensible cooperative security endeavour in the Indo-Pacific need safe lines of communication across the strategic choke-points of Suez, Bab el Mandeb and Hormuz.





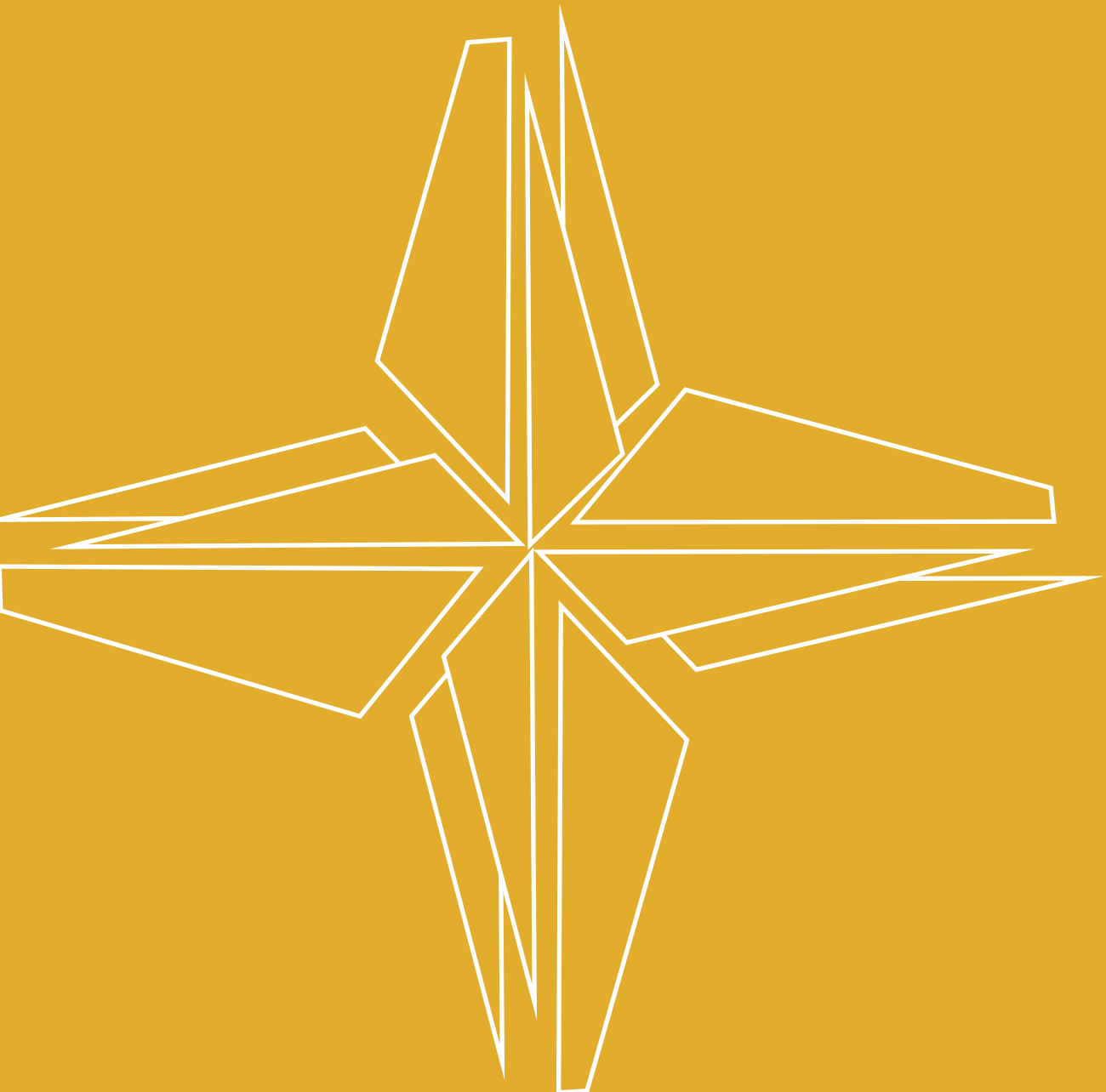
The interior of the 14th century Ben Youssef Madrasa in Marrakesh







# Policy Paper



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# Arab risings and beyond

**CLAIRE SPENCER**

Visiting Senior Research Fellow, King's College, London

The uneven results of the 2011 and subsequent uprisings across the Arab world have been mainly registered at the political and strategic levels (whether through régime conservation, change, implosion or civil war), but the deepest changes have happened at the social level, very much like the 1968 revolts. Few of the protestors remain engaged in politics but the failure of existing governance structures and leaderships to connect with their societies has left a legacy of individual and collective self-reliance that was neither widespread nor apparent before 2011. It means that a radical shift in perceptions has moved Arab societies from seeing their governments as ultimate providers to being enablers, at best, or obstacles at worst to creating the eco-systems for the socio-economic transformations already underway. Will governments understand their new role in order to keep social and political peace? Perhaps only four countries in the 22 of the Arab League show some understanding of this predicament.

Over the next decade, change is also less likely to be driven by the street, as by the disruptive effects of new technologies, culture, innovation and new business models, all of which will impact the macro-economic climate, and hence politics of the post-global pandemic world.



**Claire Spencer**

Dr Spencer is currently an independent consultant with the British Council working on the Hammamet series of conferences that fosters greater links between the UK and North Africa. She is a member of a number of advisory boards and associations relating to the MENA region. Dr Spencer is a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.

The rapid decline of hydrocarbons in favour of renewable sources of energy will also disproportionately impact the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in ways few of the region's leaderships are prepared for. The most ambitious critics of linear projections foresee radical changes taking place within a matter of years. The authors of the RethinkX report *'Rethinking Humanity'* of June 2020 summarise their thinking as follows:

*'The five foundational sectors [information, energy, food, transportation, and materials], which gave rise to Western dominance starting with Europe in the 1500s and America in the 1900s, will all collapse during the 2020s. These sector disruptions are bookends to a civilization that birthed the Industrial Order, which both built the modern world and destroyed the rest. Furthermore, we are experiencing rising inequality, extremism, and populism, the deterioration of decision-making processes and the undermining of representative democracy, the accumulation of financial instability as we mortgage the future to pay for the present, ecological degradation, and climate change – all signs that our civilization has reached and breached its limits. The response from today's incumbents to these challenges – more centralization, more extraction, more exploitation, more compromise of public health and environmental integrity in the name of competitive advantage and growth – is no less desperate than the response from those of prior civilizations who called for more walls, more priests, and more blood sacrifices as they faced collapse.'*<sup>1</sup>

This vision – of widespread and disruptive contests over power and the failure as well as inability of governments to respond to the expectations of their citizens - is echoed in the more prosaic language of the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 4-yearly projection *'Global Trends 2040'*<sup>2</sup>. Timeframes may differ, but no one doubts we are entering an age of acute instability. Thus, the spread of violence in the MENA cannot be discounted, nor, given the volatility of the young demographic of the region can further street-level protests, new forms of extremism, populism, terrorism and the emergence of non-state actors be excluded.

Of most immediate concern to security analysts are the biotechnology and cyber security threats that are already emerging as the downside of new and devolved technologies. For every advance in alternative food production and meat substitution through stem cell technologies foreseen by RethinkX and others, there are concerns about the 'escape' of new viruses and the deliberate spread of biological warfare enabled by emerging technologies<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> James Arbib and Tony Seba *'Rethinking Humanity'* June 2020 <https://tonyseba.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/RethinkXHumanityReport.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> US Office of the Director of National Intelligence *'Global Trends 2040: A More Contested World'* March 2021 <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/gt2040-home/emerging-dynamics/state-dynamics>

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Kathleen M. Vogel and Sonia Ben Ouagrham-Gormley, *'Anticipating emerging biotechnology threats'* *Politics and the Life Sciences*, Fall 2018, Vol 37, No. 2 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/politics->



Cyber security also conflates a number of risks and threats, as summarised in a recent World Economic Forum agenda paper: *'(t)he complexity of digitalization means that governments are fighting different battles – from "fake news" intended to influence elections to cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure. These include the recent wave of ransomware attacks on healthcare systems to the pervasive impact of a compromised provider of widely-adopted network management systems. Vital processes, such as the delivery of the vaccines in the months to come, may also be at risk.'*<sup>4</sup>

Despite what now appears to be increasing geopolitical fragmentation, the key to understanding the game changers for the MENA region is that individual responses to global connectivity are far more likely to determine what happens next than predictions of the demise of globalisation and the increasing isolation of the Arab world.

As a result, security analysts and policy-driven alliances such as NATO need to think beyond the more immediate challenges that Europe's proximity to the MENA region serves to attract. More attention should be given to the 'hidden hand' of developments that, if encouraged, could ultimately structure more positive and enduring changes over the longer term. This might mean devising new and decentralised approaches to conflict resolution that are not so reliant on state and non-state actors who lack any incentive to act on their undertakings and commitments, as in Libya. It requires seeking out and engaging actors who have yet to emerge as leaders, across social and economic sectors and geographies that have yet to define themselves as being the economic and political hubs of the future. Above all, for NATO, it will require a much larger focus on identifying new 'organizing systems-in-the-making' and seeking out the individuals who are driving positive change wherever they are.

New forms of public-private security partnerships may also become more common than in just Russia, with the blending of state intelligence and criminal hackers, for instance. It was a set of criminal 'influencers' who assisted the FBI to track and arrest 800 criminals in June 2021 in a worldwide operation that covertly used a mobile communications app that was believed undecipherable by its users<sup>5</sup>. Expecting the unexpected and proactively seeking out the most unlikely of security partners is critical to grasping what the longer-term outcomes of 2011 may yet bring to MENA and beyond<sup>6</sup>.

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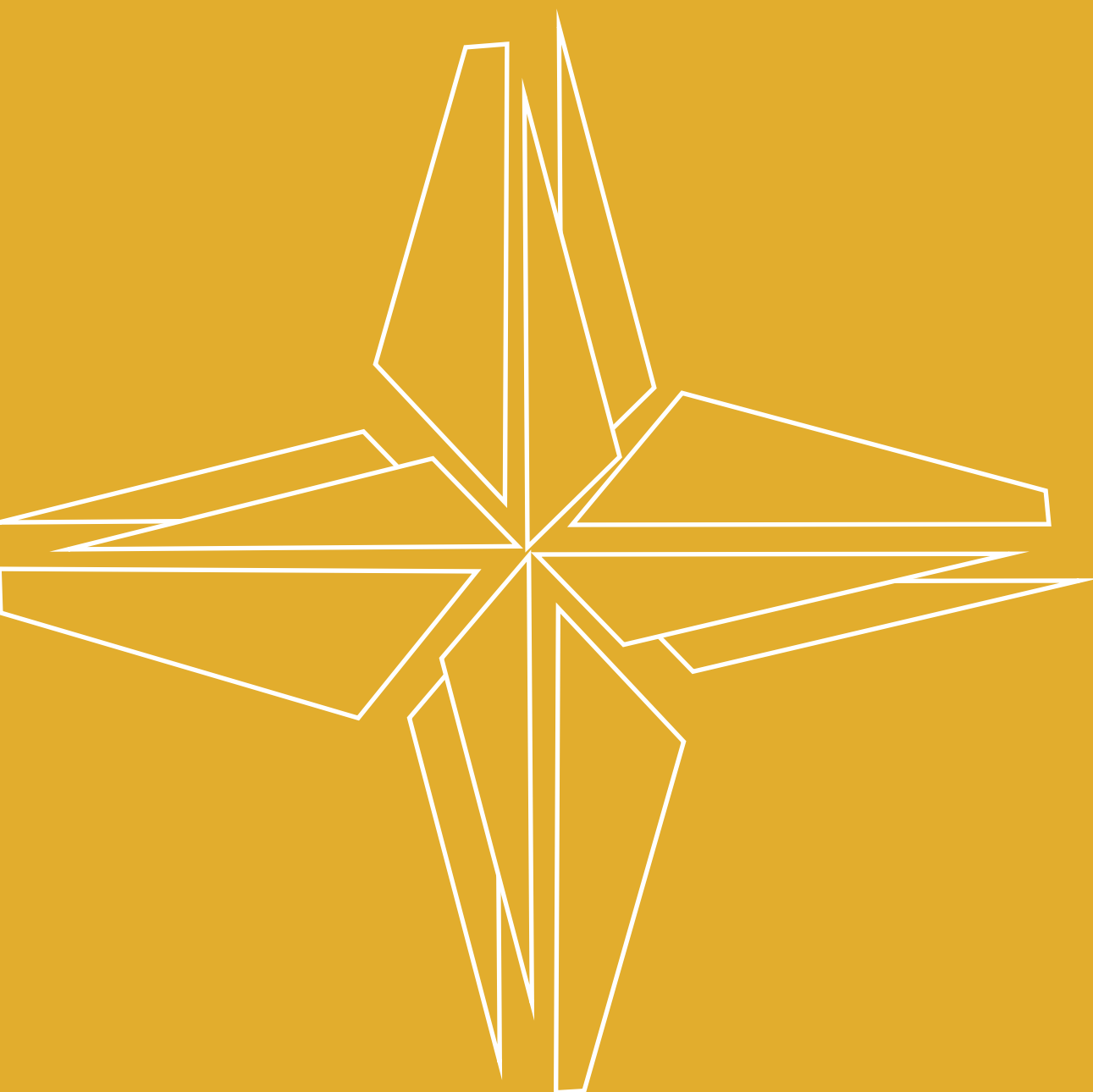
and-the-life-sciences/article/anticipating-emerging-biotechnology-threats/CCBB40DBD2BCE6CECDE9F2ACB71588CE

<sup>4</sup> World Economic Forum 2021, Davos Agenda 'These are the top cybersecurity challenges of 2021'

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/01/top-cybersecurity-challenges-of-2021/>

<sup>5</sup> BBC News 'ANOM: Hundreds arrested in massive global crime sting using messaging app' <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-57394831>

<sup>6</sup> For a fuller version of these arguments, see Claire Spencer 'Arab risings and beyond' NATO Defense College Foundation Paper, June 2021 <https://www.natofoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NDCF-Paper-Spencer-Arab-risings-and-beyond.pdf>



# The economy and the civil society



11 October 2011. Sana'a Yemen.

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# Possible roots of the risings

**ABDULAZIZ SAGER**

Chairman, Gulf Research Center, Jeddah (Saudi Arabia)

At the onset of the Arab Spring and in its aftermath over the last decade, the popular narrative regarding its causes has tended to focus primarily, if not exclusively, on a lack of growth and/or income inequality in the countries where the popular uprisings occurred. However, empirical data on growth across the region in the years leading up to 2011 suggest otherwise. In fact, many countries in the region experienced a decade or more of rapid growth before 2010 and even at the time of the uprisings (including Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, Libya and Yemen), experienced more than 5% of real growth.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the cause of the uprisings could not have been due to a simple lack of growth.

Others have suggested that the cause was more likely due to inadequate income distribution or wealth inequality playing a primary role in fostering the socio-economic conditions that led to the uprisings. Nonetheless, as economic growth was increasing in the region in the years leading to the Arab Spring, empirical data demonstrates that income

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<sup>1</sup> Ghanem, H. (2015). The Arab spring five years later, volume 1: Toward great inclusiveness (p. 39-40). Washington, D.C., DC: Brookings Institution.



**Abdulaziz Sager**

A Saudi expert on Gulf politics and strategic issues, Dr Sager is the founder and Chairman of the Gulf Research Center (GRC), a global think tank based in Jeddah with a well-established worldwide network. He frequently contributes as a commentator on major international media channels such as Al Arabiya, France 24 and BBC.

inequality was decreasing, disproving this hypothesis. According to World Bank data, the Gini coefficient, used to measure wealth inequality, fell in Egypt from 36,1% in 2000 to 30,7% in 2009,<sup>2</sup> which represents a very low figure by regional and international standards.

It would be therefore inaccurate to outline the causes of the Arab Spring simply in terms of growth or income distribution within the individual countries that experienced uprisings and/or unrest at the time. A more complete picture should take into account not only the measure of inequality at the country level but also the regional level, which is consistent with the fact that the Arab Spring was itself a regional phenomenon. At the regional level (and in comparison, with other regions globally), income inequality is extremely high at the top of the MENA as a whole. The share of total income in the region accruing to the top 10% income receivers is currently 55% (versus 48% in the US, 36% in Western Europe, and 54% in South Africa).<sup>3</sup> The top 1% share might exceed 25% (versus 20% in the US, 11% in Western Europe, and 17% in South Africa).

It is also important to consider that it was not necessarily a “growth” in inequality per se that led to the uprisings, but perhaps instead a shift towards increasing intolerance towards already existing levels of inequality and cronyism, which speaks more to the idea of values and aspirations representing a catalyst of the Arab Spring. That is to say that popular perceptions about corruption and cronyism are equally important when considering the causes of the Arab Spring uprisings, and not just the empirical levels of corruption and cronyism.

Nevertheless, data indeed indicate that corruption in the MENA had been on the rise prior to 2011 and that in some respects the MENA appears to stand out for having more corruption than other regions comprising developing countries, and much higher corruption levels than the world average in general.<sup>4</sup> With regard to cronyism in the MENA in particular, unlike other regions within Asia that have witnessed cronyism, the major negative consequences stem from a lack of competent and efficient cronies, a mechanism to weed out non-performing cronies, and the fact that countries in the region have been unsuccessful in steering the cronies’ appetite for profit in a direction that would serve their countries’ development strategies.

The World Bank shed light on this phenomenon of cronyism in the region, and in particular in the case of Tunisia<sup>5</sup> in its 2014 report, “The unfin-

<sup>2</sup> Gini index (World Bank estimate) - Egypt, Arab Rep. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?end=2017&locations=EG&start=1990&view=chart>.

<sup>3</sup> Alvaredo, Facundo & Piketty, Thomas, 2014. “Measuring Top Incomes and Inequality in the Middle East: Data Limitations and Illustration with the Case of Egypt,” CEPR Discussion Papers 10068, C.E.P.R. Discussion Papers.

<sup>4</sup> Ianchovichina, Elena. 2018. Eruptions of Popular Anger: The Economics of the Arab Spring and Its Aftermath (pages 93-107). MENA Development Report; Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28961> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

<sup>5</sup> The unfinished revolution: bringing opportunity, good jobs and greater wealth to all Tunisians (English). Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. (Chapter 3 ‘Cronyism, Economic Performance and Unequal Opportunity’) <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/658461468312323813/The-unfinished-revolution-bringing-opportuni->

ished revolution: bringing opportunity, good jobs and greater wealth to all Tunisians,” in which the World Bank emphasizes that cronyism in Tunisia existed long before Ben Ali’s rise to power, while remaining an ongoing obstacle to Tunisia’s growth as a constant characteristic of its economy. A later World Bank report elaborates on this analysis of cronyism in the region, while focusing primarily on Egypt and Yemen and the ways that political connectedness relate to economic success in those countries.<sup>6</sup> According to the report, in the case of Egypt, politically connected firms accounted for 60% of profits of medium and large firms, including privileges ranging from protection granted through non-tariff barriers, preferential access to land and credit, and privileged access to the state bureaucracy and permits.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that unemployment during the period prior to the Arab Spring was exacerbated and it was primarily the connected that benefited from employment opportunities. In this context, a stratum of middle-class professionals and small and medium entrepreneurs found themselves relatively marginalized and probably more aware of the concentration of wealth and profits in the hands of small cliques tied to political power. Therefore, it is notably this middle class that might have made the difference in igniting the chain of uprisings across the region, considering that it is indeed the middle class that possesses and is competent in the tools of modern communications technologies. These technologies, and especially social media, allowed discontented groups to connect to the wider masses in a relatively short period of time, which proved vital in organizing the uprisings and drawing support and attention to them on a local, regional and international scale.

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ty-good-jobs-and-greater-wealth-to-all-Tunisians.

<sup>6</sup> Schiffbauer, Marc, Abdoulaye Sy, Sahar Hussain, Hania Sahnoun, and Philip Keefer. 2015. *Jobs or Privileges: Unleashing the Employment Potential of the Middle East and North Africa*. Washington, DC: World Bank. doi: 10.1596/978-1-4648-0405-2. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO (Chapter 4 ‘Privileges, competition and job creation’).







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# What kind of economic prospects for the region?

## **KARIM EL AYNAOUI**

Executive President, Policy Center for the New South, Rabat

## **OUMAYMA BOURHRIBA**

Research Assistant in Economics, Policy Center for the New South, Rabat

Over the past decade, the demand for economic, social and political change in the region has been steadily growing. The COVID-19 crisis has compounded the existing challenges and unveiled the vulnerabilities from North Africa to the Middle East at different levels (UN, 2020): violence and conflict, inequality, unemployment, poverty, limited social protection, education, poor infrastructure and weak governance.

### **Karim El Aynaoui**

Executive President of the Policy Center for the New South, and Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences and Executive Vice-President of the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University. From 2005 to 2012, he worked at the Central Bank of Morocco as the Director of Economics, Statistics and International Relations. Prior to this, he served as an economist at the World Bank. He holds scientific and advisory positions in various institutions, including the Malabo-Montpellier Panel, the Moroccan Capital Market Authority, and the French Institute of International Relations. He is also advisor to the CEO and Chairman of the OCP Group and serves as a board member of the OCP Foundation and as a global member of the Trilateral Commission. He holds a PhD in Economics from the University of Bordeaux.



### **Oumayma Bourhriba**

Oumayma Bourhriba is a Research Assistant in Economics at the Policy Center for the New South. Her research areas cover macroeconomics, international trade issues and long-term economic growth. Oumayma holds a master's degree in applied economics and is currently a PhD student at Mohammed V University in Rabat. She joined the Policy Center for the New South in September 2019.



In order to prevent another lost decade, MENA countries are more than ever called upon to rebuild trust between citizens and the State by reforming the governance and enhancing participatory democracy. Moreover, recovery from COVID-19 pandemic should be considered as a real opportunity to lay the institutional milestones and implement the socio-economic reforms needed to build back resilient, sustainable and inclusive economies.

### **I - ARAB STATE REFORM: TOWARDS A PARTICIPATORY AND SOCIAL STATE IN THE POST-COVID-19 ERA**

The discontent observed in the region over the past decade was broadly triggered by a breakdown in the relationship between State and society. Restoring peace and security in the region begins with rebuilding trust between citizens and states (Aboughazi, A. et al. 2018). In this regard, countries need to ensure the application of good governance practices, promote citizens' participation in public policy design and implementation via an open social dialogue, and expand access to social services and economic opportunities for all.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the crucial role of the State in protecting and prioritizing human capital.** Indeed, the states of the region need to reform their intervention framework and assume a more effective role at different levels (Bassou, A. et al., 2020): regulators of economic and social life, providers of public services, promoters of social solidarity and national cohesion, defenders of national competitiveness, and strategic partners of other public and private actors.

#### **Social Protection for All**

The COVID-19 crisis has further increased the pressing burden of the lack of social protection in the region with limited coverage of social safety nets to protect the most vulnerable. Before the COVID-19 crisis, around 42%<sup>1</sup> of MENA's population lived on incomes below US\$5.5 per day, youth unemployment hovers on average around 26%<sup>2</sup> and 64% of the region's wealth is held by the top 10 richest of the population (Alvarado, F. et al. 2018). Informal employment reaches up to 68% (Florence, B., et al 2019) on average of employment in the region which increase the vulnerability of informal workers to adverse shocks due to a lack of social cushion. The current crisis is threatening an additional 8 million people in the region to fall into extreme poverty and pushing an additional 18 million people into living on less than US\$5.5 per day. In addition, expenditure on social protection in the region remains extremely low. According to ILO's World Social Protection Report 2017-2019, Mashreq and North African countries spent on average 2,5% and 7,6% of GDP, respectively, on social protection (excluding health care).

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<sup>1</sup> Average of the period 2010-2018 - WDI

<sup>2</sup> Average of the period 2010-2019 - WDI

**Social protection reforms are needed now more than ever in the region.** Social protection measures have played a major role in mitigating the impact of the crisis in the MENA region ranging from cash transfers, unemployment protection and in-kind support to price subsidies and low-interest loans. According to IMF (REO, April 2021), inequality and poverty are nonetheless expected to rise after the crisis. Governments must therefore enhance their efforts and expand both horizontal and vertical social protection towards a universalist approach. For instance, Morocco has put the social protection of its citizens at the top of its priorities in order to lift fragile segments of the population from vulnerability. On April 14th 2021, HM King Mohammed VI launched the implementation of the social protection generalization reform to all the categories of society. This ambitious project will allow the access of 22 million additional people to mandatory health insurance by 2022, generalizing family allowances by 2024, and expanding retirement pensions and job loss benefits by 2025.

### Unleashing the potential of MENA's youth

**MENA's young population is an untapped potential representing nearly two-third of region's population.** Many of the Arab uprisings were led by educated young protesters frustrated by lack of economic opportunities, poor quality of public services and weak governance institutions (Elena, 2018). This vital segment of the population is characterized by the highest unemployment rate worldwide and 85% of youth work in the informal sector with limited or no access to social and health protection (ESCWA, 2020). The COVID-19 economic slowdown and its consequences in terms of job and income losses, is aggravating these vulnerabilities. Furthermore, the youth and youth organizations have played an overarching role in mitigating the impacts of the crisis and showed tremendous intergenerational solidarity - such as running information campaigns, supporting vulnerable population providing on-line activities and trainings (OECD, 2020).

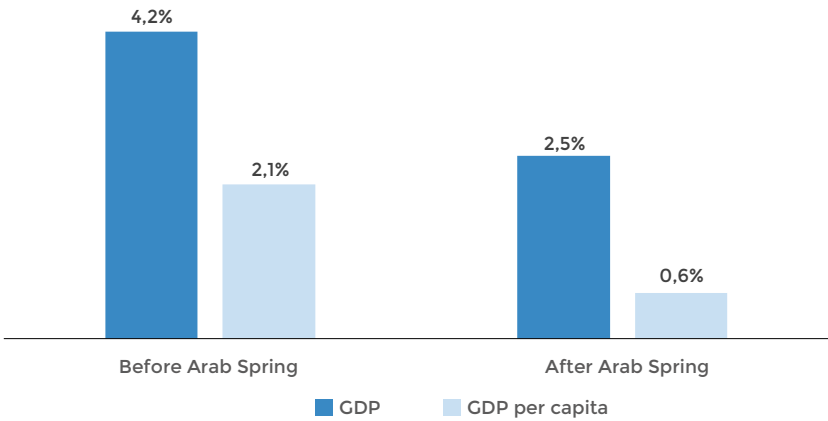
**The current crisis is an opportunity for MENA governments to restore youth's trust.** Governments need, in this respect, to urgently revise national youth strategies to ensure greater inclusion by establishing reforms ranging from better the quality of education and labor market efficiency to the promotion of a culture of entrepreneurship and improvement of financial conditions. Moreover, they should consider youth participation in addressing the structural challenges of the region in the recovery plans.

## II - DEVELOPING MORE RESILIENT, SUSTAINABLE AND INTEGRATED ECONOMIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated certain structural economic and social shortcomings of the current development models in the

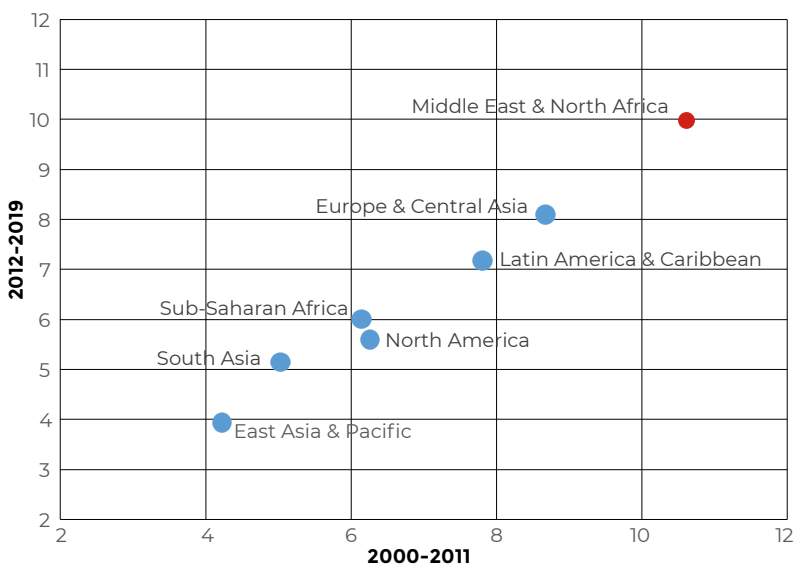
MENA region. Indeed, the overall economic performance of the region was sluggish in the aftermath of the Arab spring and unemployment rate remains the highest worldwide (figures 1&2). This non inclusive slow economic growth is the result of undiversified economies, weak governance, absence of a vibrant private sector and skill mismatches. The current crisis could be the momentum for the MENA countries to recover on a solid basis. Reforms around diversification, green transition and integration will be instrumental in ensuring resilience, sustainability and inclusiveness.

**Figure (1): GDP and GDP per capita growth rates, in %  
(Average 2000-2011 and 2011-2019)**



Source: based on World Development Indicators database (World Bank)

**Figure (2): Unemployment rate, per region, in %  
(Average 2000-2011 and 2011-2019)**

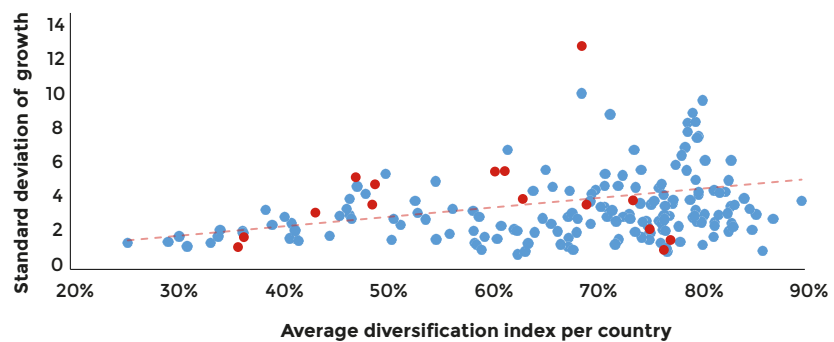


Source: based on World Development Indicators database (World Bank)

## Towards more Diversified Economies

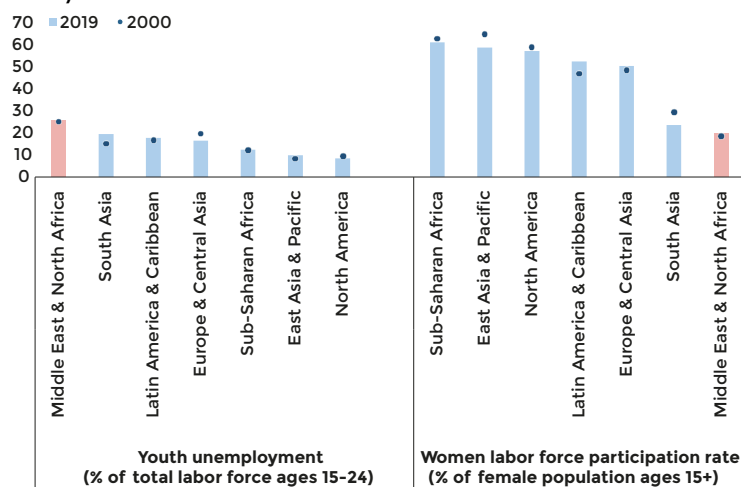
**Economic diversification is crucial for sustainable growth and job creation. Concentrated economic structure and trade tend to increase country's exposure and vulnerability to sector-specific shocks.** As figure (3) shows, diversified economies display lower growth volatility. Furthermore, diversification contributes to the emergence of new sectors and the creation of a more dynamic private sector able to absorb the high unemployment of the region. MENA labor markets are characterized by informality, the highest rates of unemployment and the lowest rates of labor participation especially among youth and women. In fact, more than 25% of the youth are unemployed and only 20% of women participate in labor market compared to Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) for example (12% and 61,3% respectively) (figure 4).

**Figure (3): Diversification and growth volatility relationship, across the world\*(1995-2018)**



"The diversification index is computed by measuring the absolute deviation of the trade structure of a country from world structure. it takes values between 0 and 1. A value closer to 1 indicates greater divergence from the world pattern and thus lower diversification"- Source: UNCTAD. Source: based on United Nations Conference on Trade and Development database

**Figure (4) : Selected Labor Market Indicators per Region (2000, 2019)\***



MENA countries are indicated by the red dots.  
Source: based on World Development Indicators database (World Bank)

### **MENA countries' reliance on natural resources exports and revenues remains a major development impediment.**

The COVID-19 outbreak emphasizes the need to scale-up diversification efforts in the MENA region in order to reduce high dependencies on oil (MENA oil exporters), remittances (e.g. Egypt) and tourism (e.g. Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco) (IMF REO, 2021). Two-thirds of the MENA region are high and upper-middle income countries, however the average performance of the region in terms of export diversification is low compared to other countries in the same income groups. UNCTAD's export diversification index amounted to an average 72% between 1995 and 2019 in the MENA region, 56% in high income countries and 68% in upper-middle income countries. However, there are some different patterns within the region: MENA resource-poor countries are more diversified than resource-rich ones with an average Diversification Index amounting to 63% in the former and 75% in the latter. United Arab Emirates is a successful exception among resource-rich countries, with an index equal to 59% on average during the period 1995-2019, which is close to Tunisia - the first diversified country in resource-poor countries. Besides the oil sector, UAE focused on developing non-oil sectors such as promoting tourism and restructuring industrial sectors (OECD, 2018).

### **International experience shows that diversification is achievable but there is no magical recipe that fosters and accelerates diversification process in a systematic way.**

Over the past few decades, countries such as Mexico, India and Malaysia, managed to successfully diversify their economies even though they encountered similar political and economic difficulties to those in the MENA region today (WEF, 2018). In this respect, MENA countries should first focus on implementing fundamental policies that have been established in any diversified economy and that: improve the quality of education; spur innovation; support private sector development; and ensure sound macroeconomic management. Furthermore, additional policies need to be tailored in order to take into account the heterogeneity of the MENA region in terms of resources and political stability. Overall, the likelihood of success of diversification depends on the specificities of each economy, the timing and sequencing of policy reforms. In other words, in order to achieve the diversification goal, each MENA country should implement specific policies that take into consideration all idiosyncratic characteristics in terms of resource endowments, economic and social structure.

### **Recovery plans should go hand in hand with the green transition**

#### **Many countries around the world have aligned their recovery packages with climate and environmental policies.**

For example, the European Union decided to make the European Green Deal the EU's recovery strategy "Next Generation EU". Complying with green norms of production will become an important criterion for access to foreign markets as

several European countries have decided to decarbonize their productions as well as imports through the implementation of the carbon tax. Therefore, MENA countries will eventually have to adapt to this transition and need to build back “greener”. For example, Morocco - ranked in top 10 of the Climate Change Performance Index since 2014 - is redesigning the contours of sectoral plans around environmental commitments such as the Green Generation 2020-2030 strategy and the new Industrial Recovery Plan 2021-2023 by capitalizing on its expertise in the renewable energy sector. In this vein, a program has been launched early this year called “Tatwir Green Growth Program” with the aim to support the decarbonization of industrial SMEs and promote the emergence of new competitive green industries.

MENA governments should set a green conditionality to their financial stimulus by prioritizing investments that foster environmental goals. For example, the European Recovery Fund, amounting to over €1 trillion for the period 2021-2027, devotes 30% of its budget to green projects.

### Strengthening decentralization is key

**The COVID-19 outbreak has emphasized the importance of effective decentralization.** In fact, in some decentralized countries such as Germany, the flexibility of their interventions and the sustained coordination between the State and the regions facilitated the management of the crisis (Bassou et al. 2020).

On the other hand, centralized government structures in the MENA region have struggled to cope with the crisis. Despite the progress recorded in decentralization since the Arab Spring, several MENA countries lack effective application of the reform because of different obstacles such as ambiguous legal framework, financial and human resources, regional disparities in funding (USAID, 2020). In this regard, MENA countries need to rethink the relations between the State and local authorities and shift towards more effective decentralization. In addition, new territorial policies aiming at reducing social and territorial fractures are necessary.

**Strong regional and international cooperation is needed to face present and future challenges.**

**Regional cooperation should support national endeavors in protecting the poor and the most vulnerable against the impact of the pandemic and any future crisis in general.** MENA countries need to coordinate their actions and set up a regional social solidarity fund in order to ensure well-targeted and rapid assistance to the poorest, especially in least developed MENA countries. This fund could also aim to support SMEs, notably those that are involved in core economic activities such as health and food. Besides its importance in resolving the structural conflict in the region and protecting human rights, constructive international and regional cooperation would help fight the COVID-19 pan-

demic and foster socioeconomic recovery through sharing expertise and surplus vaccines, as well as access to financing sources.

**Under the current global trade trends, MENA region can seize the opportunities of nearshoring or reshoring arising in GVCs.** As uncertainty has been reinforced in the current crisis, in addition to low interest rates, GVCs are becoming more local and regional, opening therefore an opportunity window for their neighbors (World Bank, 2020). In order to potentially benefit from these reconfigurations, MENA countries need to strengthen RVCs and expand trade towards GVCs, particularly in vital sectors such as food security, health systems, renewable energy and digitalization. These ambitious goals require MENA governments to: deepen and expand trade integration within the region, with Europe as well as SSA, accelerate national sectoral reforms; and invest in infrastructure in order to reduce trade costs.

**REFERENCES (SEE APPENDIX B) PAGE 98**





Jemaa el Fna Square at sunset in Marrakesh, Morocco



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# From the web to the square

## MAHBOUB E. HASHEM

Former Chair and Professor of Mass Communication, American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

The 2011 risings have marked significantly the region, not just in terms of narrative, but of concrete political, social and economic dislocation. From a strategic point of view, it is important to focus more clearly than in the past about the causes and effects of these momentous events. Five are then the main causes and six the most important effects. More detailed country analyses are available in the appendix.

### The five causes

**Widespread Corruption:** corruption remains pervasive in the MENA region, which has been stricken by conflicts, dictatorships, and increasing attacks on freedom of expression, press autonomy, and civil society. Economic hardships cannot be tolerated when people cannot foresee a better future ahead, feel that there is adequate distribution of wealth, and are beset by painful conditions to say the least. Any kind of development that takes place in the Arab states leads to crony capitalism, nepotism, favouritism, and despotism, which benefit only a small minority of associates, relatives, and friends. Business elites cooperate with their

### Mahboub E. Hashem

Dr Mahboub E. Hashem is currently a private consultant on entrepreneurial and groundbreaking industries as well as professional communication practices based in the City of Toledo, Ohio, United States of America. Hitherto, he served as professor, founder and former head of the Mass Communication Department at the American University of Sharjah (AUS), where he also chaired the Department of English, Mass Communication, and Translation. Besides, Dr. Hashem founded the Global Media Journal- Arabian Edition (GMJ-AE), serving as Executive Editor from 2009 to 2014. Author of several thematic research, he has been a leading consultant on establishing communication programs for many educational institutions worldwide.





regimes to accumulate treasures incredible to the common people living on little to no money per day. In those countries, no business pact is closed without a kick-back to the governing entity and immediate family. Finally, although some meek attempts towards fighting corruption and increasing transparency have been made in a few Arab states, the scale of these endeavours remains abysmal.

Fundamentally, demonstrators were encouraged by an aspiration for dignity and human rights, even though spiritual tensions also played a major role. Such as was the case with Islamist parties and the Muslim Brotherhood who got power in formerly secular Tunisia and for a short-term in Egypt, when Mohammad Morsi was voted into presidential power. Similarly, profound spiritual divisions gave rise to the anti-government movement in Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen early on and is still ongoing.

**Unemployment:** youth unemployment has been a ticking bomb for many years in the MENA region. Rates of joblessness among an increasing Arab youth population has been stagnant because Arab authorities and their economic policies simply cannot keep up with the shocking increase in their populations. For instance, Lebanese educated youths migrate to work abroad, due to inability of finding decent jobs in their homeland; two-thirds of Egyptians are under the age of 30 and rates of unemployment are skyrocketing. Furthermore, the standards of living have been deteriorating and have been inspiring people to continue rebelling. Besides, Arabs have a prolonged saga of struggle for radical change, from leftist groups, Islamist, fanatics, terrorists to extremists. Nevertheless, the uprisings of 2011 and again in 2018-2021 could not have grown into an extensive confrontation, had it not been for the prevalent dissatisfaction over unemployment, poverty, and low living standards. Families struggling to provide for their kids have surpassed moral disputes in order to rebel for the purpose of changing the status quo/business as usual governance.

**Old Rulers and Transferring Power to their Children:** a considerable number of Arab leaders have been old, besides being corrupt. When Arab Springs occurred in 2011, the Egyptian leader, Hosni Mubarak, had been in power for 30 years; Tunisia's Ben Ali, 24 years; Muammar al-Qaddafi, 42 years; Ali Saleh, 22 years; and Omar Al-Bashir, 30 years. In Lebanon, the Zaeem (godfather) system has been a crooked patronage structure wherein a few political bosses manipulate elections and allocate political favours and financial rewards to those close to them. They also manage to transfer power to their heirs before they are deceased. Also, Lebanese parliamentarians usually serve the needs of local sector clientele and neglect nationwide concerns. In addition, demonstrators had not been backed by any particular groups or leaders anywhere, especially in the Lebanese uprising (17/10/2019). Instead, they had been acting primarily on the spur-of-the-moment, which made it difficult for authorities to prevent any protest movement by simply arresting a few agitators, a situation that

regime forces were entirely unprepared for. Therefore, politicians are the worst enemies of their own people and it is extremely hard to consider how to remove them soon without a miracle.

**Social Media:** mass protests were revealed on social media by anonymous activists, who managed to successfully appeal to many people in order to gather in “Tahrir” squares. Social media, back then, proved to be powerful mobilization tools that aided activists to outsmart the police forces. Besides the squares, mosques could serve as starting points for rallying or assembling, especially on Fridays, after the weekly address and prayers. Hence, activists could march down in huge rallies to squares against their dictators. Arab authorities, that could block off squares and target universities, could not close down the mosques of the country. Thus, they were unable to control huge public demonstrations.

**Authorities Reaction:** Arab dictators’ reaction to the demonstrations was definitely dreadful, going from expulsion to horror, from police force cruelty to random change that came too little too late; and efforts to quell demonstrations using force failed dramatically. All burials of regime’s viciousness victims only intensified the rage and moved more people to the streets to protest. Besides, the revolt has been contagious and has spread quickly from one Arab state to another. Riots are nevertheless ongoing, even though with less intensity due mainly to the Coronavirus pandemic. In Libya, Yemen, and Syria, those protests and efforts led to civil wars that are still continuing.

## The six effects

**Democracy:** Only Tunisia appears to have made an enduring shift to a superficial democracy, although it is still experiencing some street troubles. Egypt, after a short period of democratic elections which elected Mohammad Morsi as president, reverted back to another repressive regime of Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, who is still in power and whose regime led to detain many journalists in the region. His rule is portrayed as harder than that of Hosni Mubarak; conversely, Libya, Syria, and Yemen spiralled into prolonged civil wars which are persistent. While Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad is still in power, due to Russian and Iranian military direct intervention, Omar al-Bashir is in prison, but Libyan Kaddafi and Yemen Ali Saleh were assassinated.

**Freedom:** democracy and freedom are *sine qua non* to one another, they are like the two faces of a coin. The failure of democratization is a direct result of the ultimate power of Arab states that reject democratic transition by any means: a transition that can only be accomplished when the states’ coercive power is diminished and the leaders don’t have the will to crush their adversaries. Many states in the region have been until now very capable to quash any reform or modernization, destroying any

challenger. Therefore, there is now much less press freedom, with authorities targeting systematically journalists.

**Mass Displacement:** Another typical result of the uprisings and the civil wars which ensued in Libya, Syria, and Yemen was the mass displacement of citizenries. For instance, Syria's war alone pushed more than twelve million refugees and internally displaced citizens into surrounding countries (Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon) and beyond.

**Stifling Freedom of Internet and Social Media Usage:** These have been dynamic tools for rallying protestors and, without them, all demonstrations would have been quickly beaten. Authorities have restricted access through draconian censorship laws and imprisonment for any anti-regime posting. Only Tunisia has enhanced internet freedom, mainly by defending free expression within its 2014 constitution and by protecting whistle-blowers denouncing corrupt people with mixed results, not to speak about the rest of the region.

**Gender equality:** due to women assuming leading roles in rallies, albeit the menace of gender-based violence, some gender equality was achieved. Over the past ten years, several Arab nations have witnessed unimportant upturns in female representation in authority, but mostly the region has done little to advance the standing of women. Nevertheless, women today are voicing their opinions and speaking out more against injustices they face. Besides, some women were appointed into ministerial positions, namely in the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon, something unseen before.

**Poverty:** poverty rates have been exceptionally high in MENA. Since the year 2011, stark poverty in MENA has virtually doubled, rising from about 3% of the populace to nearly 5%; and an estimated 19 million people in the region are living on less than \$2,0 per day. MENA's poverty indicators comprise, lack of proper education, poor health, standard of living and diffused violence. Once people fall into poverty, they are increasingly likely to remain poor for a long time and with very few assets, if any, to pull themselves out of it.

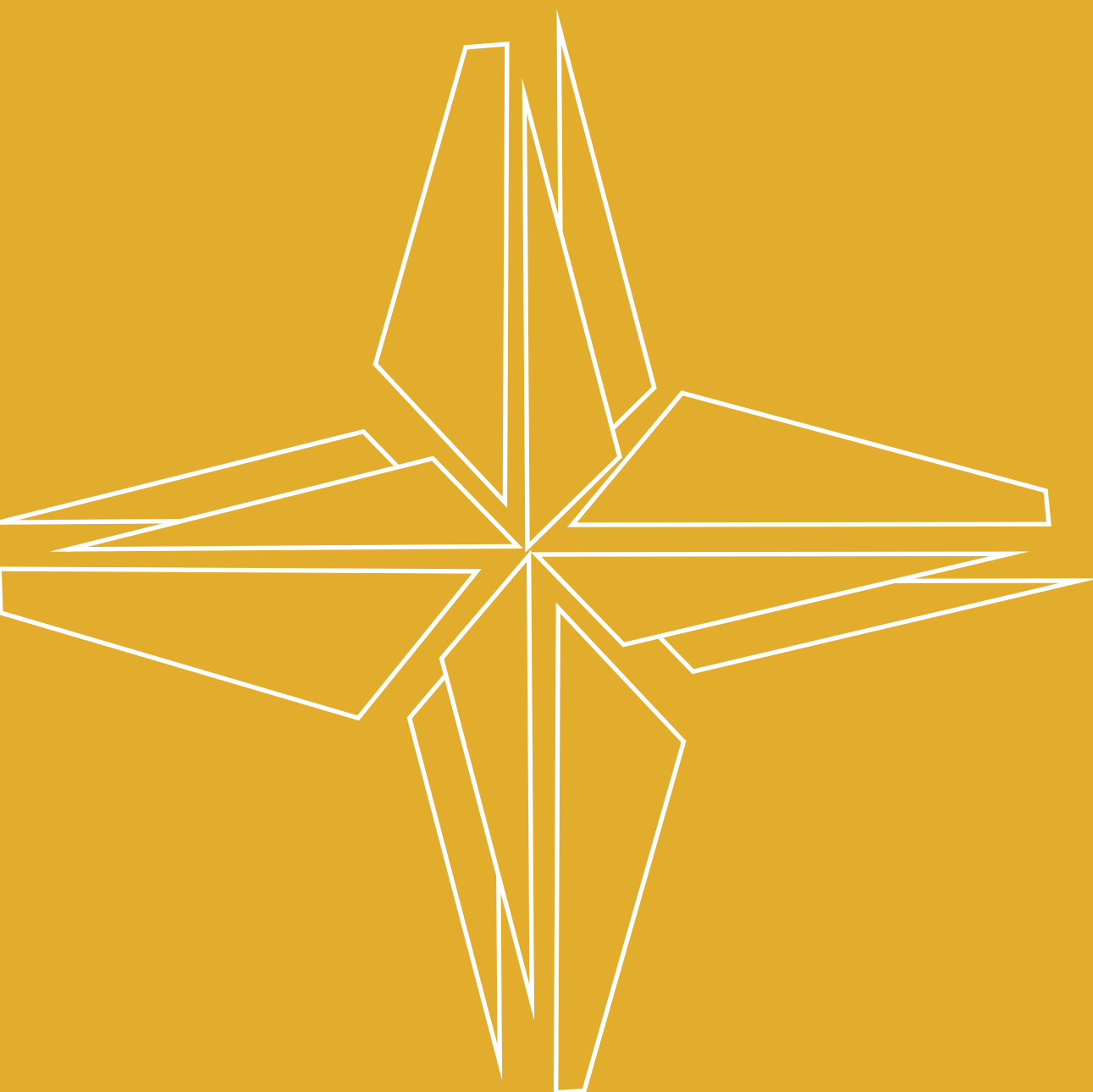
**Research findings suggest that MENA is the among the most iniquitous regions in the world.** Already region, the top 10% of the population holds 61% of the wealth, compared to 47% in the United States and 36% in Western Europe, but the worst is that poverty was increased by conflicts (especially in Syria and Yemen) and sanctions.

### A line on the bottom

Events like these, exactly like other uprisings or revolutions in the past, require a rolling judgement as time unfurls less evident consequences. Today populations pay a heavy price in too many failed states, in addi-

tion to long stonewalled reforms, while meek and spotty progress on economy, gender equality, political reforms and social development in very few cases was made. Despite horrendous repression, similarly to what happened also during the Cold War, the spirit of the revolts is far from over, as evidenced by the second wave of uprisings that caught-on in Sudan, Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon eight years later. The demands are tenaciously the same: transparency, end to corruption, democratic reforms. Authoritarian regimes have also had their learning process in the ensuing “Arab Winters”: thanks to unscrupulous Western firms and stalwart assistance from similar regime, they mastered the cyberspace to monitor, repress, disinform. For how long?

**THE ARAB RISINGS BY COUNTRY (SEE APPENDIX A) PAGE 93**





# Power and identity





Poor neighbourhood in Fes, Morocco, North Africa



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# 10 Years After the Arab Spring: Illicit Economies Evolve, Expand and Entrench

**MATT HERBERT**

Research Manager, North Africa & Sahel Observatory, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Geneva

**T**he 2011 Arab uprisings have reverberated over the last decade, continuing to influence the politics and popular expectations on the relationship between government and those governed throughout in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

However, they have also contributed to conflicts in Syria, Libya and Yemen and an increased fragility amongst many states within the region, and in peripheral areas such as the Sahel, and economic challenges for large swaths of the population in MENA states<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see:

Dina Fakoussa and Laura Lale Kabis-Kechrid, "Tunisia's Fragile Democracy: Decentralization, Institution-Building and The Development Of Marginalized Regions: Perspectives from the Region and Europe," German Council on Foreign Relations, December 2018,

## **Matt Herbert**

Dr Matt Herbert is the Research Manager for the North Africa and Sahel Observatory at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, overseeing teams conducting applied field research on the political economy of crime in the two regions. He specializes in transnational organized crime, border management and security sector reform. Dr Herbert previously consulted throughout North Africa and the Sahel on border and security force capacity building, and in East Africa on informal political economy issues. He has also worked on transborder threats on the U.S.-Mexico border, and served as a policy aide to New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson. He holds a PhD in International Relations from The Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy, Tufts University, and has authored a number of articles, reports and book chapters on crime, migration, border security, and insurgency issues.



The events of 2011 have also impacted the evolution of transnational organized crime in MENA states. Organized crime and illicit economies, such as drug trafficking and human smuggling, have long existed in the region. Lebanon and Morocco have been key cannabis production points for decades, while human smuggling across the Mediterranean from North Africa to Europe occurred in significant volumes throughout the 1990s and 2000s<sup>2</sup>.

However, over the last decade these illicit economies and others have evolved, expanded and entrenched, with interlinkages between criminal actors and formal power structures deepening, leading to organized crime groups that are more robust and capable of posing far greater challenges to regional states in 2021 than what had existed a decade before.

Specifically, the events of 2011 uprisings have shaped the evolution of organized crime in four ways. First, changes in demand and in the operating environment have allowed illicit economies in MENA to expand and entrench. The most highly visible example of this involves human smuggling, with networks operating throughout the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean expanding dramatically over the last decade, catering to a sharp increase in demand by migrants and refugees, including those displaced by the conflict in Syria, seeking access to Europe<sup>3</sup>. This expansion has further been enabled by conflict and fragility, such as in Libya, which has limited the ability of law enforcement to counter the trade<sup>4</sup>.

As well, expansion of organized crime has been driven by the imposition of embargoes on Syria and Libya. This has driven demand for accessing prohibited goods – notably weapons – and created incentives for governments to tacitly allow the operations of some types of criminal organizations.

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<https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/tunisia-fragile-democracy-decentralization-institution-building-and>;

Alessia Melcangi and Giuseppe Dentice, "Challenges for Egypt's fragile stability," MENA Source, Atlantic Council, 03 July 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/challenges-for-egypt-s-fragile-stability/>;

World Bank, "Lebanon Sinking into One of the Most Severe Global Crises Episodes, amidst Deliberate Inaction," 01 June 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/05/01/lebanon-sinking-into-one-of-the-most-severe-global-crises-episodes>; John Calabrese, "Iraq's Fragile State in the Time of Covid-19," Middle East Institute, 08 December 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/iraqs-fragile-state-time-covid-19>.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see: US Drug Enforcement Agency, *Quarterly Intelligence Trends*, Spring 1975, 39; Matt Herbert and Max Gallien, "A Rising Tide: Trends in Production, Trafficking, and Consumption of Drugs in North Africa," *The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime*, June 2020; Jonathan Marshall, *The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War, and the International Drug Traffic* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Matt Herbert, "La Mal Vie': The Complexity and Politics of Irregular Migration in the Maghreb," *Institute for Security Studies* (May 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Tuesday Reitano and Mark Micallef, "Breathing space: The impact of the EU-Turkey deal on irregular migration," *Institute for Security studies & the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime*, ISS Paper 297, November 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Micallef, "The Human Conveyor Belt: Trends in human trafficking and smuggling in post-revolution Libya," *The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime*, March 2017.

Second, there has been a change in the geography of illicit economies in the region, with criminal actors operating more regularly across a far greater swath of space than in the past. Much of the shift in geography is attributable to the conflicts in Syria and Libya, which have created contested space in which organized crime has flourished. The drug trade illustrates this change. While Morocco and Lebanon remain key production points, Syria and Libya have emerged as important zones for production, storage and trafficking of drugs<sup>5</sup>. In Syria, a degradation of law enforcement capacity and limited government focus on drugs have led to its emergence as a key regional node, both for the shipment of cannabis resin and for the production and export of Captagon. The volumes of the latter drug produced in the country are extremely large, with just one shipment, intercepted by Italian authorities in 2020, valued at USD \$1,13 billion<sup>6</sup>. Rather than a production point, post-conflict fragility in Libya has allowed led to its transformation into entrepot state for trafficking, with shipments of cannabis, Captagon and other drugs arriving from Morocco, Lebanon and Syria, before being re-shipped to Europe, Egypt and further afield<sup>7</sup>.

Further, the geography of crime within MENA has also been altered by conflicts in peripheral regions. In particular, rising conflict and instability in the Sahel – in part catalysed by Libya's 2011 revolution – have become so acute led some drug trafficking networks have begun to actively avoid the region, rather rerouting shipments through areas of North Africa<sup>8</sup>. In particular, South American cocaine traffickers, often abetted by local criminal groups, have started to shift trafficking routes to states such as Morocco and Algeria, and on to Europe, an evolution raises worrisome risks of narcotics linked corruption and instability<sup>9</sup>.

Third, the last decades have witnessed a shift in who is involved in organized crime and illicit economies. In some instances, such as in Tunisia, the number of people involved in smuggling has sharply increased, driven both by economic need and increased opportunity, due to post-2011 weaknesses in border security<sup>10</sup>. Mostly, this has involved the transport of pedestrian contraband – such as food or petrol<sup>11</sup>. However,

<sup>5</sup> Matt Herbert and Max Gallien, "The Rising Tide: Trends in production, trafficking and consumption of drugs in North Africa," The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, May 2020, 6-8; Laura Adal, "Organized Crime in the Levant", The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, February 2021, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Adal, 2021, 7.

<sup>7</sup> See Adal, 2021; Herbert and Gallien, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Jihane Ben Yahia and Raouf Farrah, "Algerian cocaine bust points to alarming trends," ENACT, 10 December 2018, <https://enactafrica.org/enact-observer/algerian-cocaine-bust-points-to-alarming-trends>.

<sup>10</sup> See Querine Hanlon and Matt Herbert, "Border Security Challenges in the Grand Maghreb," U.S. Institute of Peace, May 2015; Matt Herbert, "Partisans, Profiteers, and Criminals: Syria's Illicit Economy," The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs (Vol. 38, No. 1, Winter 2014); Adal, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> See Moncef Kartas, "On the Edge? Trafficking and Insecurity at the Tunisian–Libyan Border," SANA Working Paper, Small Arms Survey, December 2013; Dalia Ghanem, "The Smuggler Wore a Veil: Women in Algeria's Illicit Border Trade," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2020, Sarah Dadouch and Nader Durgham, "Smugglers are partly behind Lebanon's energy crisis. The army is struggling to stop them," The Washington Post, 5 July 2021, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/lebanon-economic-energy-crisis/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/lebanon-economic-energy-crisis/)

in some instances such *petits commerçants* have slowly gravitated towards involvement in more illicit forms of organized crime, such as the trade in drugs or arms<sup>12</sup>.

In other instances, terrorist groups and militias have become functionally entwined in illicit markets. In Syria, for much of the mid-2010s, the Islamic State was deeply enmeshed in oil smuggling, as well, to a lesser degree in other forms of criminality, such as drug and antiquities trafficking and human smuggling, leveraging the illicit economies to self-fund its military operations<sup>13</sup>. A similar dynamic continues to prevail in Libya, with armed groups throughout the country deeply involved both in the taxation of people smuggling, petrol trafficking and drug trafficking, but also in certain cases directly involved<sup>14</sup>. Though not unprecedented – with groups such as Hezbollah linked to illicit economies for decades – like illicit economies more broadly, this entwining has occurred over a larger geographic area than in the past, and risks further challenging the ability of regional states to functionally counter the growth of organized crime.

Finally, in the wake of the 2011 the relationship between organized crime actors and authorities have been altered in many states throughout the region. In North Africa, for example, states historically viewed the challenge posed by criminal actors as limited. Rather, smugglers involved in the movement of contraband commodities, such as petrol or people, were tacitly allowed to operate, as long as they provided intelligence information to authorities and eschewed involvement in drug or arms trafficking, or the provision of assistance to terrorists<sup>15</sup>. In this relationship, states exercised clear dominance, relying on functional security forces to mete out punishment on transgressors.

Since 2011, however, law enforcement capacity has declined in a number of states within the region. This degradation, which occurred concurrently with the increase in the scope and power of organized crime groups, and their intertwining with armed groups, has up-ended the previous power balances between states and crime groups. In Libya, individuals implicated in criminal activity have functionally been absorbed

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sis/2021/07/04/b8367752-d8fe-11eb-8c87-ad6f27918c78\_story.html; Hanlon and Herbert, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Matt Herbert and Max Gallien, "Divided they fall - Frontiers, borderlands and stability in North Africa," The Institute for Security Studies, December 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Herbert, 2014; Mahmut Cegniz, "How Organized Crime and Terror are linked to Oil Smuggling along Turkey's Borders," The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2017; Husham Al-Hashimi, "ISIS on the Iraqi-Syrian Border: Thriving Smuggling Networks," New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 16 June 2020, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/isis/isis-on-the-iraqi-syrian-border-thriving-smuggling-networks/>.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Micallef, Raouf Farrah, and Alexandre Bish, "After the storm: Organized crime across the Sahel-Sahara following upheaval in Libya and Mali," The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2019; Mark Micallef, Matt Herbert, Rupert Horsley, Alex Bish, Alice Fereday, and Peter Tinti, "Conflict, Coping and Covid: Changing human smuggling and trafficking dynamics in North Africa and the Sahel in 2019 and 2020," The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, (April 2021).

<sup>15</sup> Matt Herbert, "States and Smugglers: The Ties that Bind and How they Fray," in Transnational Organized Crime and Political Actors in the Maghreb and Sahel, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, January 2019; Tuesday Reitano and Mark Shaw, "Libya The Politics of Power, Protection, Identity and Illicit Trade," United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, Crime-Conflict Nexus Series, No 3, May 2017; Herbert, 2014.

into state security apparatuses, blurring the lines between criminals and state agents, and posing stark rule of law challenges<sup>16</sup>. Instances of criminal corruption have emerged in several states, most notably Algeria, where a number of high-level officials or their relatives were linked to cocaine trafficking<sup>17</sup>. Most ominously, the engagement between crime and the Syrian state has evolved to the degree that the moniker of 'narco-state' has increasingly been applied<sup>18</sup>.

The last decade has seen the evolution, expansion and entrenchment of organized crime groups, and illicit economies more broadly, throughout MENA. There is little evidence that this trend will be altered in the coming years. If anything, the COVID-19 pandemic has further impacted the fragility of states in region, driving economic desperation, fuelling efforts to emigrate by both legal and irregular means, and limiting the financial resources available to governments. This perfect storm of conditions risks further fuelling the power and geographic reach of organized crime groups in the region, and in so doing posing an even more acute challenge to states and citizens in the Middle East and North Africa.

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<sup>16</sup> Matt Herbert, "Less than the Sum of the Parts: Europe's Fixation with Libyan Border Security," Institute for Security Studies, May 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Herbert and Gallien, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> The Economist, "Pop a pill, save a dictator: Syria has become a narco-state," 24 July 2021, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2021/07/19/syria-has-become-a-narco-state>; Adam Doyle, "Captagon, trafficking, and the long comedown of the Syrian narco-state," The New Arab, 5 August 2021, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/analysis/captagon-trafficking-and-syrias-narco-state>.





Libya flag on soldier's arm.



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# Libya: a multi-layer conflict

**UMBERTO PROFAZIO**

NDCF Maghreb Analyst, London

A decade after the Benghazi uprisings that sparked the revolution, Libya's future remains largely unwritten. The transition from the oppressive dictatorship of Muammar Gadhafi to a democratic form of government in which Libyans would enjoy and uphold principles for which they fought in 2011, such as legitimacy, representativeness and rule of law, seems suspended halfway between the dangerous brinkmanship of the latest round of fighting and the opaqueness of a political system that is attempting to reinvent itself, after coming under increasing pressure from the popular mobilisation of the Libyan Hirak.

The momentum, provided by a military stalemate that resulted from the 2019-2020 year of living dangerously and new international dynamics stemming from the change of administration in the USA, is offering Libya an unmissable chance to end the civil war and complete the transition process. The October 2020 ceasefire agreement brokered by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya certainly represented a turning point, triggering a political process resulting in the establishment of a new executive authority expected to bring the country to elections on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 2021, Libya's independence day. Nevertheless, the



**Umberto Profazio**

Associate Fellow for the Conflict, Security and Development Programme at the IISS and Maghreb Analyst for the NATO Defense College Foundation, he regularly publishes on issues such as political developments, security and terrorism in the North Africa region, focusing on the conflict in Libya, the politics and geopolitics of the Maghreb and the role of non-state actors. He holds a PhD in history of international relations from the University of Rome (Sapienza), with a thesis on Libya after independence.

persisting presence of foreign forces, mercenaries and private military contractors on both sides of the Sirte-Jufra frontline raises serious questions about the extent of Libya's real independence, while unveiling the multiple layers of the conflict at the same time.

On a domestic level, a new Government of National Unity headed by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah and a reformed Presidency Council led by Mohamed al-Menfi replaced the discredited and delegitimised political institutions in the east and the west, reverting a fragmentation process ongoing since 2011. However, a complete turnover of the political elite remains elusive and the confidence vote given by the House of Representatives to the new government epitomised a peculiar cohabitation between the emerging leadership and 'political dinosaurs' that spells trouble for Libya's incomplete transition. More in general, political heavyweights that remained excluded from the UN-sponsored political process are keeping an eye on the December 24 deadline to get back in the game. As the old and new forces pull on opposite sides, the risk of overstretching an already polarised political landscape increases, providing a wide range of marginalised actors with an opportunity to spoil the political roadmap adopted by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum.

In this context, the controversial figure of Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar remains central to understand which direction the Libyan peace process would take in the coming months. Despite his unsuccessful attempt to take control of Tripoli, Haftar is still in control of the main terminals in the oil crescent region and the main oilfields in the south. Furthermore, holding on his leadership of the Libyan National Army gives the General a substantial say on any attempt to reunify the military institutions, which remain divided between the East and the West; and fragmented, due to the proliferation of militias and armed groups throughout the country. In essence, control of the oil resources and the military leadership gives Haftar a considerable sway over the peace process, while at the same time highlighting two of the major obstacles still preventing any successful transition. Questions around the distribution of the oil revenues and the establishment of a unified Libyan military will continue to revolve, considering the priority given to the elections over the accomplishment of the constitutional process, without which the Libyan peace process will remain incomplete.

Being halfway in consolidating its institutional architecture, Libya risks being unable to resist foreign interferences, becoming prey of the great power competition in which assertive regional players are also playing a prominent role. Despite the gradual shift from the excesses of the power politics that has characterised the recent escalation to the intense international competition for the reconstruction of the conflict-thorn country, foreign meddlers still dispose of considerable clout.

In particular, Russia and Turkey have emerged as the main powerbrokers, being able to expand their diplomatic influence and establishing a military foothold often resorting to a successful hybrid playbook. In this context, negotiations and talks in UN-sponsored forum could well represent a "veil of Maya" behind which Ankara and Moscow are still jockeying

to reap the benefits of their latest interventions in the Libyan conflict. Divided by a trench and fortifications along the Sirte-Jufra frontline, Russian and Turkish forces, military contractors and mercenaries are still poised to shatter the illusion of a political solution or could simply maintain the conflict frozen while waiting for more favourable conditions to settle their old scores.



People with Egyptian Flags - Alexandria, Sidi Gaber, Egypt 30 June 2013

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# The Egyptian long pacification

## EMAN RAGAB

Senior Researcher and Head of Military and Security Research Unit,  
Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Cairo

Egypt's strength to overcome crises emerging from the transition unleashed by the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011 uprising uncovers the resilience of the state institutions and the dedication of the new ruling elite in the country, to build what the Egyptian president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi called "the new republic of Egypt". Throughout the years following 2011, Egypt has experienced internal and external political, social, economic, and security challenges that have weakened the state's resilience and slowed the journey to "the new republic".

Terrorism has been one of those challenges, and to be more precise a main challenge that was affecting the country's outlook in the world and consequently the flow of tourism and foreign direct investments that represent an important contribution to the country's economic growth. Since the uprising, terrorists in Northern Sinai and on the mainland have targeted civilians, infrastructures, police and army officers, as well as foreign embassies. Also, the continuation of the government's "ferocious war" on terrorism, as labelled by President el-Sisi,<sup>1</sup> is draining

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<sup>1</sup> Edith Lederer and John Daniszewski, "AP Interview: Egypt's Leader Says Country in 'Ferocious War'", *Business Insider*, September 27, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.businessinsider.com>



### Eman Ragab

Senior Researcher - Head of Military and Security Research Unit, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, & former MED Research Fellow at the NATO Defense College in Rome.



the limited economic resources of the country and hindering the implementation of any development projects, especially in Northern Sinai.

I argue that the Egyptian government managed to develop a unique model of counter-terrorism policies capitalizing on the interconnectedness and linkages between state institutions and society. Historically, state institutions in Egypt have not been alienated from society. For instance, there is a very well-known saying that every family in Egypt has one of its members either in the police or in the army. Also, the number of civil servants in the state bureaucracy represents 25% out of the workforce in Egypt, and 71 million are benefiting from the government-provided ration cards, which is two-third of the total population.<sup>2</sup>

What I called the unique model of policies developed by the government to counter terrorism consists of three sets of policies. The first aims at weakening the terrorists both in Northern Sinai and on the mainland through developing the counter-terrorism capacities of the law enforcement forces and strengthening cooperation with the civilians and with other countries to cut the transcending logistic network used by the terrorists.

The second aims at helping and supporting the victims of terrorism, both the civilian victims and those from the army and the police. This set of policies reflect Egypt's commitment to the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted in 2006 which calls countries "to consider putting in place, voluntarily, national systems of assistance that would promote the needs of victims of terrorism and their families and facilitate the normalization of their lives".

The third aims at achieving the cognitive immunity of the public, especially youth, by countering religious Islamic extreme and radical ideas leading to terrorism.

Up till 2021, this unique model has enabled the government to contain the threat of domestic terrorism and to limit the ISIS' spill over effect into the Egyptian territories. For instance, law enforcement organisations managed to prevent the terrorist groups from announcing the establishment of "Islamic principalities" in Northern Sinai, following the model of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Also, these policies have enhanced the security outlook of the country and consequently its economic outlook. According to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) of 2020, developed by the Institute for Economics and Peace, Egypt has experienced during the year 2019 a fall in the total impact of terrorism placing the country in the rank of 14. It is worth mentioning that the global rank of Egypt was 27 during the period 2002-2011 (the higher the rank the better).

Besides, these policies are defining a new role for Egypt to play in countering regional and international terrorism. Egypt is becoming a regional hub for building the capacities of security institutions in Africa. Egypt has launched a program to build the capacity of police and army officers from African countries in countering terrorism, hosting

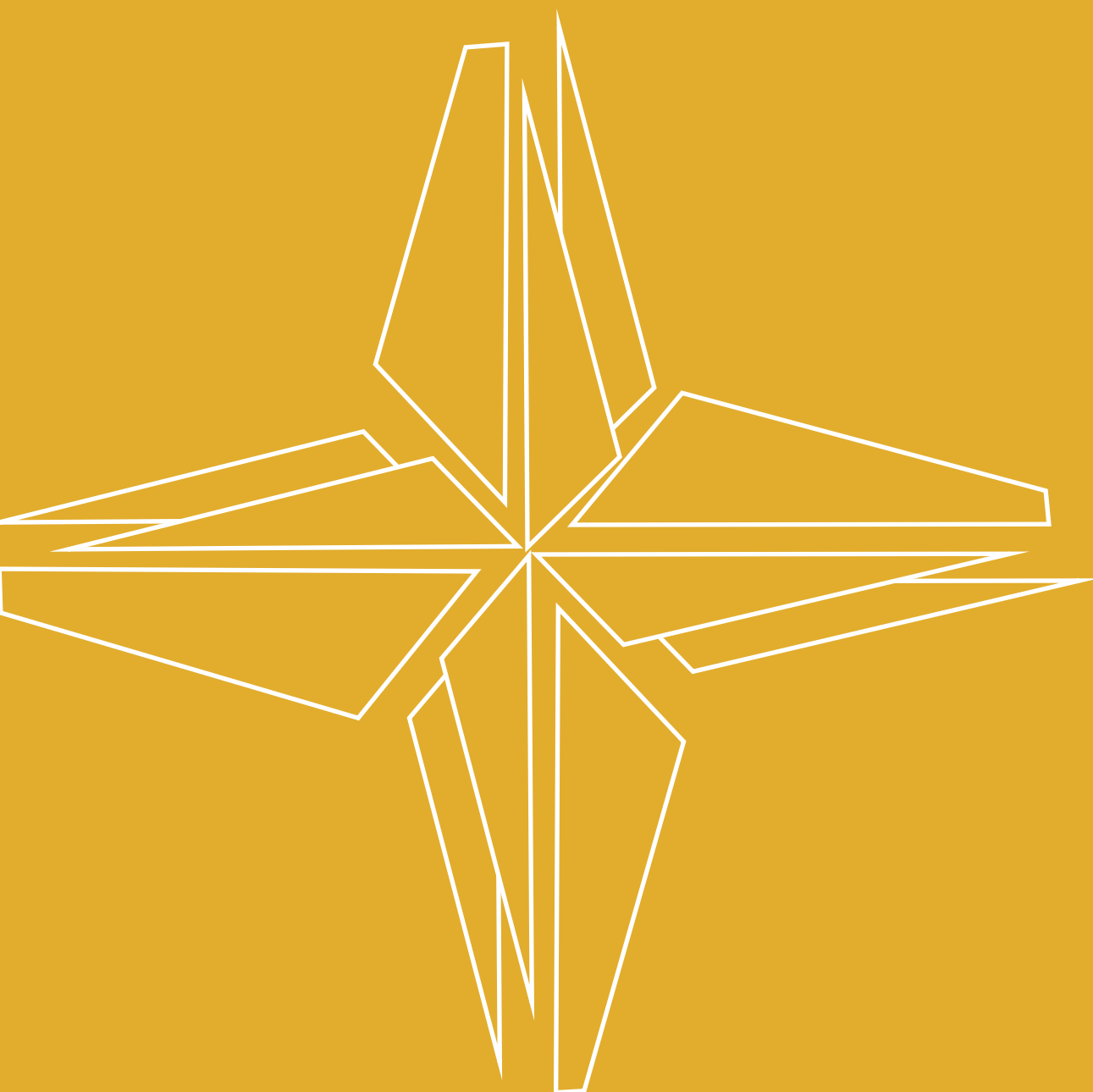
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/ap-ap-interview-egypts-leader-says-country-in-ferocious-war-2015-9.

<sup>2</sup> Eman Ragab, Egypt in Transition: Challenges of State and Societal Resilience, *IAI Working Papers*, 17 | 32 - November 2017: <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1732.pdf>.

the Sahel-Saharan Anti-Terrorism Centre, and training Muslim Imams from South East Asia on how to counter religious Islamic radical ideas leading to terrorism. In addition, the country is keen on exploring new areas of cooperation with NATO through bilateral political and military consultations.

To sum up, the second decade of the twenty-first century features how the success of Egypt in countering terrorism has contributed to strengthening its resilience and the security pillar of the new republic. However, the other ongoing internal and external challenges the country is struggling to manage are to have its impact on the country's resilience. Those challenges include the slow recovery of economic growth and living conditions of the public after COVID-19, the Nile river dispute with Ethiopia, and the continued instability of Libya.





# **A new wave of unrest: towards change?**



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# The Algerians between the “pouvoir” and the “revolution of smiles”

## **BRAHIM OUMANSOUR**

Associate Fellow, Center for Studies and Research on the Arab and Mediterranean World, Geneva; Associate Research Fellow, Institute for International and Strategic Affairs, Paris

Since February 22, 2019, Algeria has been shaken by a nation-wide protest movement termed Hirak (Arabic for movement), also called “Revolution of smiles” because of its peaceful nature. The Hirak (Movement) mobilised first against former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s bid for a fifth term, despite his age and ailing health. The movement continued demanding radical regime change and the departure of the ruling elite, as well as a transition toward democracy and the rule of law.

The protest movement surprised the international community and observers of Algerian politics, as the country had largely avoided the mass rallies held across the Middle East and North Africa during the so-called Arab Spring in 2011. Algeria today faces multifaceted challenges, as thousands of people continue to protest against the military-backed president, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, elected on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2019,



### **Brahim Oumansour**

A consultant in geopolitics and global strategy, Dr Oumansour is an Associate Research Fellow at the Center for Arab and Mediterranean Studies and Research and at the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs where he currently lectures as an expert in global strategy at the Sup' Master degrees in Defence, Security and Crisis Management, and in Geopolitics and Prospective. He also lectures in Comparing Political Systems at Université Paris-Est Créteil.

amidst an economic and social crisis that has worsened due to the fall of oil prices and the pandemic, forcing the government to cut the budget by 50%<sup>1</sup>. Algeria is at a crossroads between stability through authoritarianism or through democratization and deep political reforms.

In 2011, Algeria survived the shockwave of the Arab revolts that broke out in Tunisia then spread to the whole region, resulting in the downfall of governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. At that time, Algerians refrained from going massively into the streets for several reasons. First, Bouteflika had been credited with bringing back peace after a bloody decade of terrorism, presenting himself as the man who brought stability to the country. Then, he and his entourage succeeded in establishing a solid circle including the Front de Liberation National (FLN) and the military: two pillars of the Algerian political system. Moreover, high oil revenues allowed the regime to promote stability and co-opt certain opposition groups through cronyism and heavy social spending, accompanied by a set of political reforms such as ending the state of emergency. Bouteflika also promised huge investments and extended social programmes. Finally, his regime combined the clientelist distribution of wealth with repressive measures to thwart demonstrations of those who tried to break the curtain of fear during his four-term rule.

The Hirak is the outcome of years of growing dissatisfaction toward an outdated system that failed carry out efficient structural reforms to lead the country towards a more productive economy and inclusive political system of governance, endowed with the capacity to tackle the long-standing issues of unemployment, political and economic stagnation. Hundreds of thousands of Algerians march every Friday sharing almost the same political slogans and demands across the country. The leaderless peaceful movement emerged outside the traditional opposition parties. Political maturity among a growing middle-class and more educated youth helped the advent of this new form of protest. The Internet and social media in particular, which are now more available across Algeria, have also contributed to the spread of the protests, helping to broadcast and coordinate actions in different cities.

Despite its radical demands and the regime's repression, the protesters maintain peaceful marches. There is shared consciousness among both the population and policymakers about the risks of violent protest or violent clashes between the protesters and security forces. Many Algerians are still cognizant of the bloody experience of the 1990s or the drifts of the Arab spring in neighbouring states, like Libya and Syria.

Under pressure, decision-makers have introduced limited change by setting up the National Independent Authority for Elections, organizing a presidential election on December 12, 2019 which saw a historically low turnout of 40%<sup>2</sup>. The newly elected president Tebboune formed a new

<sup>1</sup> Ould Ahmed, Hamid, « Algeria announces a new cut in 2020 public spending », Reuters, May 4, 2020. Link: <https://www.reuters.com/article/ozabs-us-algeria-economy-idAFKB-N22G0QS-OZABS>

<sup>2</sup> APS, « Presidential election: Overall voter turnout 39,83% », December 13, 2019. Link: <https://www.aps.dz/en/algeria/32262-presidential-election-overall-voter-turnout-39-33>

government and called for a referendum on revision of the Constitution. At the same time, security forces have conducted a purge, arresting high profile, dishonest businessmen (the so-called Oligarchs) and political personalities as well as high-ranking corrupt military officers close to Bouteflika's inner circle.

However, the Hirak continues its opposition to the authoritarian regime, considering the roadmap of the decision-makers insufficient, asking instead for radical reforms and the establishment of a genuine democratic system. The offer of the government is not much different from what previous governments did. After being suspended for months at the outbreak of the Covid-19, the weekly marches have returned despite the pandemic. The unplanned fall of Bouteflika brought the military to the frontline. Repressive policy against some journalists and activists has deepened the crisis of confidence between the citizens and the ruling elite; this is illustrated in the attacks levelled against the authorities for their slow response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The standoff between the protesters and Algerian authorities continues over early parliamentary elections scheduled on June 12, largely rejected by Hirak activists and some opposition parties, amid growing economic and social predicaments that resulted from poor governance, corruption and cronyism. Financial reserves are being depleted to compensate for the drop in oil prices. In addition, the historical legitimacy of the old rulers is no longer convincing. Actually, protesters themselves use the symbols of the war for Independence as means to delegitimize the ruling elite.

The current situation could lead to two different scenarios. Either Algeria returns to an effective authoritarian regime in response to concerns over social unrest and regional tensions and instability, renewing mechanisms of allegiance while keeping a facade democracy. Or concerns over social unrest could entice authorities to agree on a negotiated democratic transition. The current situation is reminiscent of the botched democratic transition of 1989 which resulted from the collapse in oil prices in 1986 that paved the way to the 1988 riots. In fact, Algeria has already experienced an "Arab Spring" revolt in October, with the outbreak of mass protests turned into riots, resulting in an abrupt end of a one-party system rule.

Consequently, Algeria adopted a new Constitution, in 1989, including several liberalizing laws and the institutionalization of political pluralism and freedom of the press. But the process was cut short when the military abolished the second round of legislative elections with the prospect of an Islamist takeover by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which paved the way for the bloody decade and a return to authoritarianism, toughened by the establishment of a lasting state of emergency<sup>3</sup>.

In sum, Algeria is currently facing a political deadlock. Decision-makers offer only limited changes and offer no serious dialogue with the protesters. On the Hirak side, protesters keep contesting the legitimacy

<sup>3</sup> Zoubir, Yahia, «The Algerian Crisis: Origins and Prospects for a 'Second Republic'» (report), Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 2016.



of the new government and refrain from forming a leadership to prevent the regime from co-opting the movement. Besides, Algeria missed the opportunity to diversify its economy and carry out structural reforms during the prices boom to reduce its dependence on hydrocarbon exports. Today, the government should handle the political crisis to tackle economic and social issues, as it is hard to dissociate the economy from political problems. There is need for effective transition to a more democratic system and the institution of good governance. A transparent and inclusive political system is essential to renew trust, boost creativity and attract local and foreign investments, in addition to structural reforms within the financial system.



Casbah Of Algiers, Narrow streets of old city, Unesco World Heritage Site





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# Developments in Iraq and their impact on the security of the Arabian Gulf

## **ASHRAF KESHK**

Research Fellow and Director of International & Strategic Studies,  
Derasat, Awali (Bahrein)

**T**he background of Iraqi-Gulf States relations before 1990. Iraq is a direct neighbour of the Arab Gulf States. Geographically, it is part of the region, comprising Iraq, the Gulf States and Iran; that is why Iraq is influencing these countries and being influenced by them. However, geographical neighbourhood - though important - is not sufficient for establishing stable relations among the regional parties; similar governance and common interests which are to be reflected on shared foreign policies, are a must.

Within this context, the six Arab Gulf States have established the Gulf Cooperation Council States (GCCs) in 1981, as a response to the Iranian revolution (1979) and its possible export to other neighbouring countries, starting with the Arab Gulf States. At the same time the Ba'ath Party in Iraq pursued clear nationalist policies. Different politics and orientations were not an obstacle hindering the process of establishing diversified



## **Ashraf Mohamed Keshk**

Director of the Strategic and International Studies Program, Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies "Derasat".

relations between Iraq and GCCs. Before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, Iraq was a full member of several Gulf institutions, including the GCC Council of Health Ministers, the GCC Ministerial Committee for Education, the Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting (GOIC) and the Gulf International Bank. However, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait marked a radical shift in the two sides' relations as the Gulf States realized that danger may come from within, that is from the countries of the same region, not from a non-Arab nation. In addition, that invasion and the consequent US-led international coalition that was required for liberating Kuwait in 1991 made the international community more interested and concerned with Iraq till the US invasion in 2003. Operation Iraqi Freedom effectively toppled Saddam Hussein's regime and its regional ambitions (grown after the eight-year war with Iran), that were serious threat to the Arab Gulf States.

However, the weakness of Iraq after 2003 gave Iran an opportunity to consolidate its regional hegemony, a development largely predicted already in 1991 after the liberation of Kuwait when president George Herbert Bush avoided a march into Iraq that could have expanded Iranian influence. Indeed, the major challenge to Iraq was not only the Arab Spring protests that reached the country in 2015, but also the weak security capabilities. In 2014, the Iraqi security forces were put in confrontation with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a terrorist group founded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in 2004. The aim of ISIL was targeting the US forces in Iraq after the invasion, then it took over several Iraqi and Syrian cities. Though the Iraqi security forces succeeded in their fight against ISIL in 2017 with the help of an international ad-hoc coalition, other challenges remained persistent, including the inability to establish the monopoly of violence in the hands of the state. This is in addition to the difficult mission of controlling the borders where illicit activities, such as smuggling weapons and drugs, are increasing.

### **Iraqi security developments: the impact Arab Gulf security**

This can be resumed in three main points:

**1. A deepening the gap in the regional balance of powers:** The existence of Iraq as a regional power before 1990 was balancing Iran, as there was some sort of a cold war after the open conflict between two regional powers (Iraq and Iran). However, as Iraq started to get weak after 2003, the imbalance of power between the Gulf States and Iran worsened. Iraq has transformed from a "buffer state", that is the eastern wall of the Arab and Gulf national security, into an "arena state", witnessing conflicts of regional powers through "proxy wars".

**2. The impact of Iraq's current conditions on regional sectarian conflicts:** in spite of building Iraq's institutions as well as drafting a new constitution through the years following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, Iraq has experienced sectarian and ethnic divisions.



Moreover, Iran's influence in Iraq became clearly visible in light of a three-dimension strategy that Tehran has adopted towards Iraq. First, supporting elections as a mechanism or a means for creating an Iraqi elite consistent with Tehran's interests. During the parliamentary elections in 2018, the largest Shiite blocs won the majority of votes. The Sairoon (Moving forward) alliance, led by Muqtada al-Sadr, won 54 seats, Al-Fatah (the Conquest) alliance led by Hadi Al-Amiri won 47 seats, including the "Popular Mobilization" factions, or "Al Hashd Al Shaaby" which is known for its affiliation with Iran. The "Victory" or "Al Nasr" coalition, headed by Nuri al-Maliki, the then prime minister, won 42 seats. This means that the three major Shiite blocs have won 143 out of 329 seats. Second, making up 'constructive chaos'; for instance, 'the Group of God' or "Jamaat Allah", an armed pro-Iran militia, made a parade in Baghdad, on last March 25, to display its force with all types of weapons. This militia is part of Iran-backed "Hezbollah" militia. Third, promoting common interests with Iraq through, for instance, renewing a contract under which Iran will provide Iraq with electricity for two years from 2020 to 2022.

**3. Border disputes between Iraq and Kuwait:** Though the UN Security Council resolution 833 (1993) has demarcated borders between Iraq and Kuwait, there are still disagreements over the maritime borders' demarcation, especially regarding territorial waters. Iraq, in a letter to the Security Council in 2019, has expressed its concerns over this issue as it could be a source of future conflicts between the two countries, especially in light of the fact that the dispute over borders was one of the main reasons for the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (1990). That is because Iraq is an almost landlocked country. On the map, it takes the shape of a triangle the base of which is in the northern Kurdish region, while its head is on the narrowest point of the Arabian Gulf, which is the most important point for Iraq because it has the single port of Umm-Qasr, that can be easily blocked from the Al Faw island.

### How the Gulf States support Iraq?

The Gulf States are aware that it is crucial to have a stable Iraq for the sake of the "balance of power" concept. Before 1979, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia allied with Iran because it was, at that time, a military force allied to the USA, possessing more powerful capabilities than Iraq which was very weak in terms of the military capabilities, and, thus, Iran could easily threaten Iraq. Actually, that alliance was against the guidelines of the 'balance of power' theory. Afterwards, Saudi Arabia withdrew from its alliance with Iran and re-allied with Iraq after the latter became militarily stronger, whereas Iran became weak due to the Iranian revolution and the collapse of the Shah's army in 1979. However, though Iran became weak militarily, it was never so ideologically. The post-2003 developments that allowed a renewed Iranian regional expansion not only in Iraq but also in Yemen, Syria and Lebanon, have propelled the Arab Gulf

States to try to contain Iran again, through a three-dimension strategy.

- **First**, at collective level, the GCC provides support for Iraq; this support is a fixed item in the final statements of the council's annual summits. Nayef Al-Hajraf, the Secretary-General of the GCC, has visited Iraq in February 2021 where he publicly asserted that "the security, stability and prosperity of Iraq is important and crucial to the security of the Gulf States and the region as a whole." He added, "The GCC supports Iraq in its fight against terrorism". In addition to that, during the visit, Al-Hajraf, discussed four areas of cooperation with Iraq, namely, security, investment, economic and energy. The power linkage project between Iraq and the Arab Gulf States was also discussed as the visit was part of an agreed joint work plan between the GCC and Iraq (2019-2024).
- **Second**, at the bilateral level, since 2017 until now the Gulf States tried to contain Iran through procedures such as establishing the Saudi-Iraqi Coordination Council, and the re-operation of Baghdad-Jeddah airlines after a 27-year hiatus. This is in addition to exchanging official visits; the Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa Al-Kazemi's visit to Saudi Arabia, last March, witnessed the signing of five agreements in various areas, while the Kingdom announced the establishment of an Iraqi-Saudi fund with a starting capital of \$3 billion. In the same month, Al-Kazemi visited the UAE which announced, following his visit, a \$3-billion investment in Iraq.
- **Third**, supporting Iraq's accession to regional frameworks in an attempt to keep it away from Iranian hegemony. This has been accomplished through the tripartite framework, "New Mashreq", which encompasses Iraq, Egypt and Jordan, and includes a mechanism for periodic meetings between the three countries' leaders to establish constant cooperative relations in many areas. It is worth noting that the total number of naval vessels owned by the three countries is about 413, and the defence expenditure of their armies is about \$950 million \$ for this year (2021).

### THE ENDURING OBSTACLES TO COOPERATION

This does not mean that this cooperation is working at its best because there are still at least three considerable hurdles.

- **First**, There is no unified Gulf vision adopted by the six Gulf States concerning what is required for rebuilding a new acceptable Iraq. They, on the one hand, need an Iraq which does not threaten their security as it did in the past. At the same time, they do not want a weak Iraq that might be employed in the current regional and international conflicts, but rather a balanced Iraq. On the other hand, the Arab Gulf States assume different views regarding the threats endanger-

ing them. Bahrain, for example, views sectarian impacts, as illustrated by the frequent official statements by religious parties in Iraq, as the main threat. Manama views these impacts as an interference in Bahrain's internal affairs. The issue for Saudi Arabia has to do with sharing regional influence with Iran, whereas other Gulf States' visions, concerning the threats, are based on a variety of either economic factors or neutral policies.

- **Second**, Iraq and the Gulf States adopt different positions towards some regional issues. While Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE announced joining the International Military Alliance for the Safety and Protection of Maritime Navigation in the Gulf, Ahmed Al-Sahaj, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry spokesman, announced in September 2019 that Iraq refused to join that alliance. He said: "forming any military force to protect waterways in the Arabian Gulf will further complicate the region". He added, "Securing the Arabian Gulf security is the responsibility of the states bordering it; an escalation between the United States and Iran has multiple paths, and Iraq would remain neutral in that fight".
- **Third**, the increasing Iranian influence in Iraq, as compared to the role played by the Arab countries and Gulf States, a fact which is reflected in the frequent visits between Iranian and Iraqi officials.

The strategic conclusion here is that the security of Iraq is one of the crucial pillars for achieving and serving the Arab Gulf States' regional security. Excluding Iraq from the regional security system is jeopardising regional security issue itself. There are many mechanisms for developing relations between the Arab Gulf States and Iraq, such as launching a strategic dialogue encompassing the GCC and Iraq. On the other hand, since Iraq can affect the strategic interests of many major countries, then providing Iraq an international support is a strategic necessity. This is why the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) decided to increase its mission from 500 to 4.000 personnel. Stabilising Iraq will not only contribute to achieving regional and international security, it will also be a prerequisite for aborting the regional hegemonic and expansionist project of Iran.



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# Future perspectives in the Gulf

## JEAN-LOUP SAMAAN

Senior Research Fellow, Middle East Institute, National University, Singapore;  
Associate Research Fellow, French Institute of International Relations, Paris

Ten years after the revolutions that shook the Arab world, the monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation (GCC) face a series of tremendous security and economic challenges. These may not put into question the nature of their political systems, but they definitely test the ability of local leaders to address them.

First, Gulf states face the fallouts of the Covid-19 crisis. They generally fared better than Western countries vis-a-vis the pandemic (on daily cases or deaths per capita) but they have not been immune to the economic consequences.

The health situation exacerbated the fall of oil prices that started with the 2014 market crisis. The sudden halt of global demand and the Saudi-Russian battle in Spring 2020 over production levels inflicted a major blow to the market. This situation directly impacted Gulf rentier states that generally need a 70\$ barrel to break even with their public expenditures. Consequently, sovereign debt in the region has been on the rise. In Bahrain and Oman, it is forcing local governments to rely more and more on foreign aid. But the economic fallout of the pandemic is also painful for those that had already diversified their source of revenues: Dubai whose wealth relies primarily less on energy than on being a re-

### Jean-Loup Samaan

Dr Samaan is a research affiliate with the Middle East Institute at the National University of Singapore. He worked in various positions for the French Ministry of Defense, NATO and the RAND Corporation. His research focuses on Israel-Hezbollah conflict, and the evolving Gulf security system. He authored 4 books and several peer-reviewed articles. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Paris, La Sorbonne as well as an accreditation to supervise research from Sciences Po, Paris.





gional hub for finance, tourism, maritime and air traffic was badly hit as well.

The long-term effects of the pandemic also have ramifications on the social fabric in the GCC countries. In Kuwait, it exacerbated xenophobic sentiments used by parliamentarians seeing the foreign labour force as a convenient scapegoat for the virus proliferation. In other states, like Oman and Bahrain, the economic crisis complicates the ability of local rulers to implement the much-needed socio-economic reforms to assuage potential discontent that existed prior to 2020.

Meanwhile, the war in Yemen, now in its sixth year, remains a major threat to regional stability. Sadly, there is no end in sight: the coalition assembled by Riyadh has been unable to succeed militarily against the Houthi rebels and the prolonged fighting created one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. Well aware of the reputational cost the conflict has inflicted on Saudi Arabia, its leadership displayed a willingness to negotiate a diplomatic settlement in early 2021 but the Houthis dismissed the initiative as they seemingly believe to be on the winning side of the war.

Beyond the war in Yemen, regional stability is still defined by the evolving competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The regional strategy of the latter maintains a high level of assertiveness, be it through its variable support of proxy militias in the region or its campaign of naval harassment in the strait of Hormuz. Furthermore, Iran's nuclear programme remains a major issue for Gulf states. Back in 2018, the US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) provided Tehran with a convenient pretext to progressively reduce its own commitments with the initial deal, in particular regarding the level of uranium enrichment.

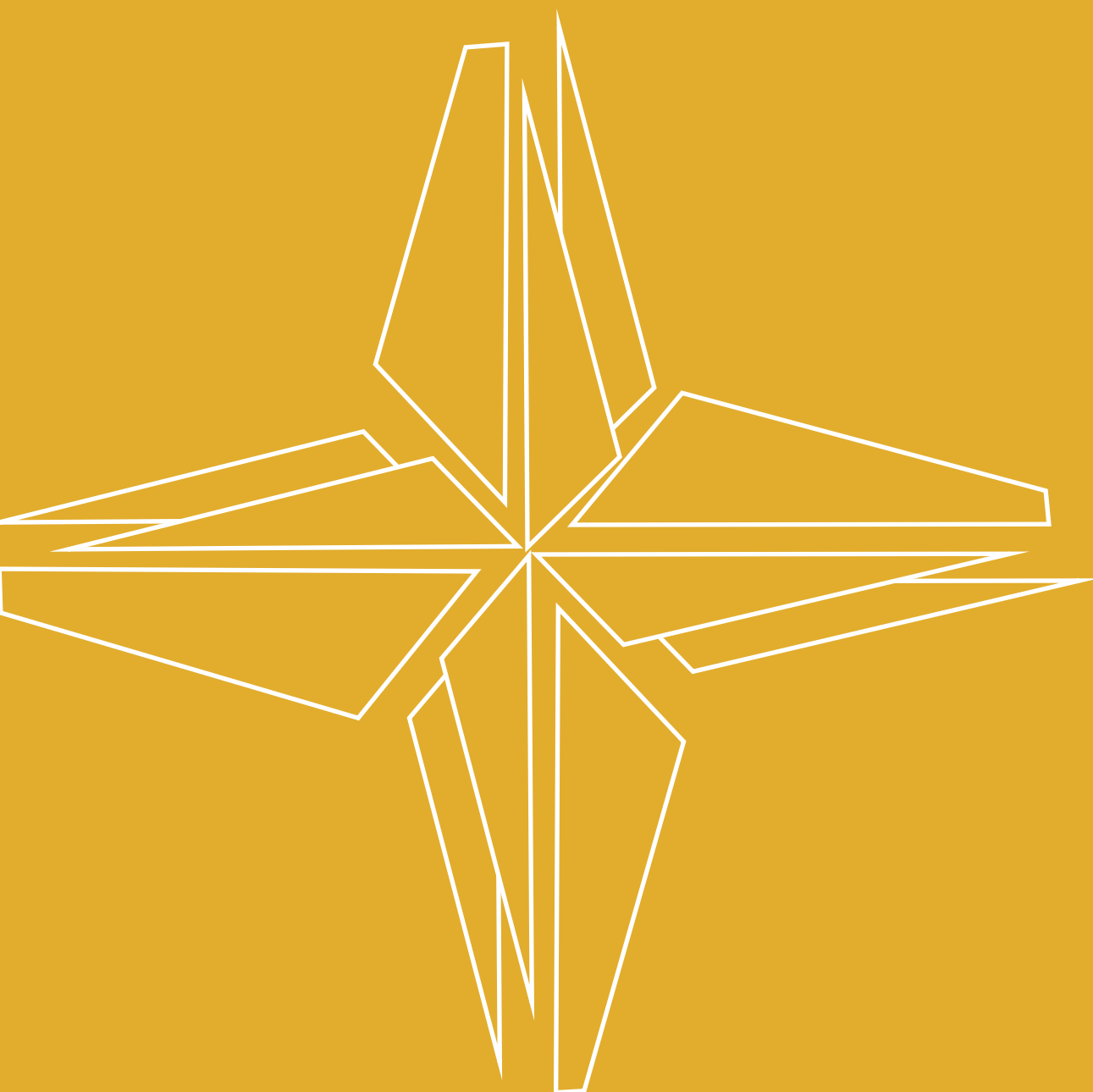
The fate of the Iranian nuclear issue will also test the relationship between GCC states and the new US administration led by President Joe Biden. As many members of the current national security team in Washington already worked under the Obama presidency, rulers in Saudi Arabia and the UAE have not hidden their concerns. Back in 2015, Gulf states had only reluctantly endorsed the JCPOA, feeling that they had not been consulted and that their national security interests were undermined by the deal. The fact that the Biden administration declared its intention to resume talks with Iran while removing the Houthis from the list of terrorist organizations and at the same time, suspending its arms sales to both Saudi Arabia and the UAE obviously sent a negative message in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. However, this is unlikely to compromise the presence of US armed forces in the Arabian Peninsula, which still makes the US the most decisive military player in the Gulf.

Still, US-Gulf relations will increasingly be tested by the implications of the rapprochement between GCC states and China. Over the past five years, this cooperation with Beijing diversified and increased. Initially driven by China's consumption of Gulf oil, these partnerships now include Chinese investments into Gulf ports infrastructures (in Abu

Dhabi's Khalifa Port, Oman's Duqm Port as well as the Hamad Port in Qatar), Huawei's management of the 5G networks in the Peninsula (for instance in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE) and limited but significant arms sales (such as drones and short-range ballistic missiles).

But as the US-China competition escalates, it becomes one (rare) topic of bipartisan consensus in Washington where politicians see the rivalry turning into a zero-sum game and forcing allies of the US to make one single choice. As a result, American officials are likely to increase their pressure on Gulf states to carefully reconsider their rapprochement with China if they want to keep benefiting from the US security umbrella.

All in all, Gulf states may have been able to cope with the regional turmoil that ensued from the 2011 revolutions, but they do face a wide array of critical challenges that will definitely test their resilience for the next decade.



# The way ahead





The streets of Masdar City, the city projected to be first city totally sustainable in the world. Abu Dhabi, UAE.



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# A look to the future

## AHMAD MASA'DEH

Former Secretary General, Union for the Mediterranean, Amman

Ten years after the Arab Spring, its serious consequences are far from being resolved in the Arab Region. Social change movements and uprisings are ongoing and will continue to transform and evolve until people attain dignity, equal opportunity, human rights and self-ruling.

In the first round of the Arab uprisings, people suffered great losses. While in some countries state regimes augmented their power and returned to executing business as usual, civil war tore others apart. However, the uprisings underscored that people will no longer opt to stay silent. With a nation that is comprised of youth seeking job opportunities and a better life, one would expect more waves of uprisings to follow in the future.

In order to avoid future hard rifts and further fragmentation in Arab countries, national conciliation is a must. This exercise will differ from one country to another depending on the severity of the events and implications of the first round of uprisings. However, to serve the best interest of Arabs, the stability of official institutions should be maintained, time and effort wasting should be avoided, and any conciliation process must be guided by the following principles:



### Ahmad Masa'deh

Dr Masa'deh served as Minister, Ambassador and chief of an international organisation. Today, he practices law and is the Managing Partner of Khalaf Masa'deh & Partners Ltd. He was also the Jordanian Coordinator at the Union for the Mediterranean and Jordan's Representative to NATO.

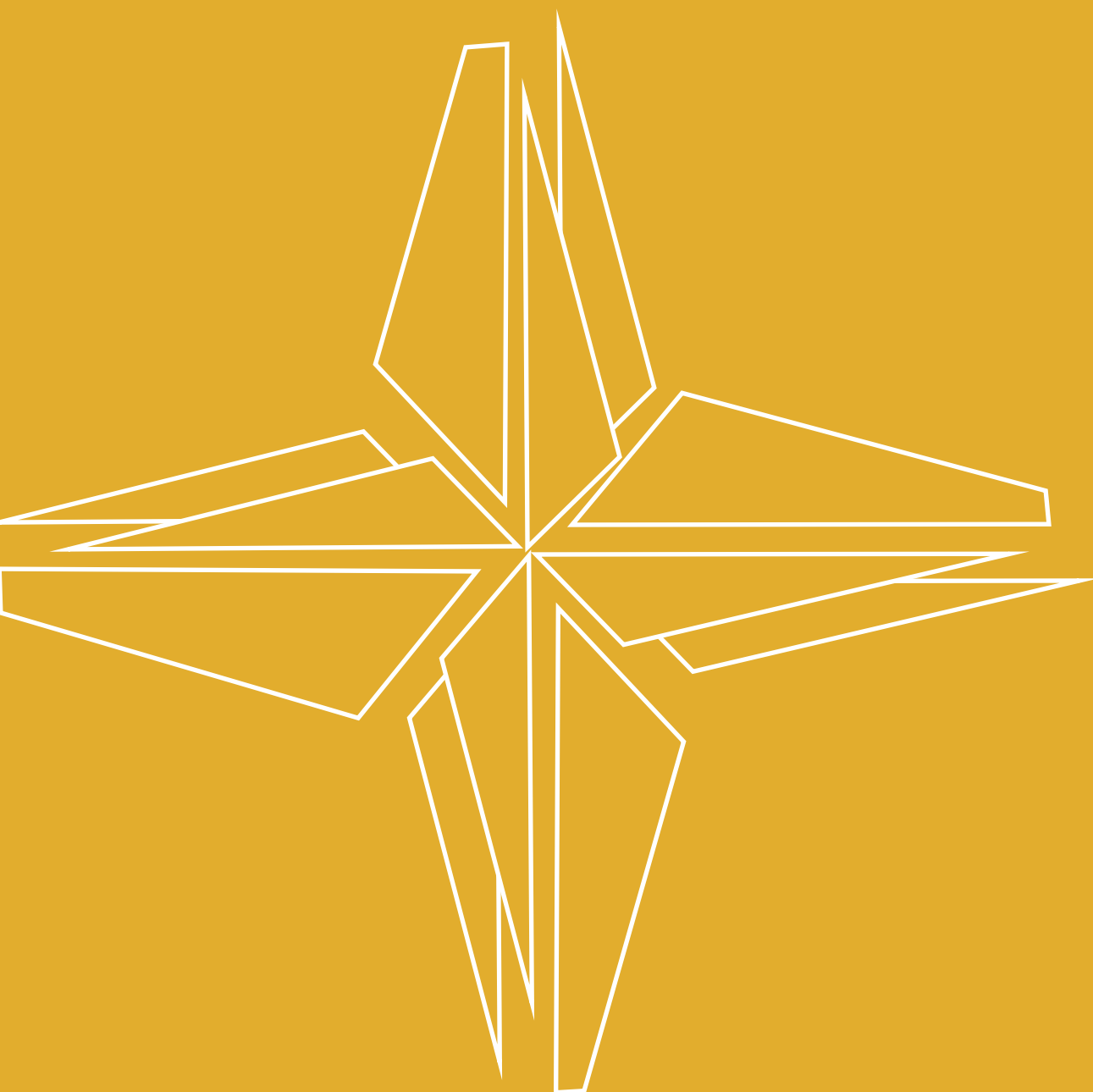
**a. Democracy is the ultimate objective:** It is futile to continue carrying on political reform exercises in Arab countries in the same manner they were done in the past ten years, i.e. giving lip service with no real substance. To be effective, consensus should be reached among society and political circles. The end game of political reform should arrive at a multiparty, plural and democratic system, a system that emphasizes that power rests with the people. In addition, the reinvigoration of rule of law, structurally and statutory, is a requisite for success and a safety net.

**b. Human rights are at the core of social systems:** Coupled with establishing proper democratic structures, human rights and personal dignity should become central in the discussion and eventually the core of social systems. This is a notion that needs to be re-defined culturally, ranging from parental attitudes to social, economic or religious freedom. This should not be understood, however, to mean the overtaking of inherited deep-rooted customs and traditions indigenous to Arab societies.

**c. Jobs, industry, science & innovation:** With a population of 337 million people, out of which over 100 million are within the age of 10 to 24 years old, the Arab human bomb is ticking. Consumer-oriented structures that Arab regimes adopted after their independence from 19<sup>th</sup> century colonialism meant that citizens, especially the youth, were put at a disadvantage when it comes to utilizing and benefiting from industrial and technological leaps. In turn, this created scarcity in innovative job opportunities in the digital world for Arab economies. Empowering Arab societies with modern scientific and educational tools should be at the forefront of economic reform programs, with a quest to achieve more viable job opportunities and prosperous societies. Not only will this reduce legal and illegal immigration to other countries, but it will also assist in undermining other threats such as terrorism and extremist thinking.



The Al-Husseini Mosque on Friday morning, Amman, Jordan



# The Alliance looks South





Meeting of the North Atlantic Council with the ICI Countries and the participation of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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# The evolving security context and NATO's continuous adaptation

## GIOVANNI ROMANI

Head, Middle East and North Africa Section, Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, NATO HQ, Brussels

For over 70 years, NATO has provided unprecedented peace and security for the Euro-Atlantic area. As a fundamental pillar of the international order, it continues to contribute to global stability, including through missions and operations beyond its borders. Today the Alliance represents 30 nations, one billion people, and half of the world's economic and military might. It is the most successful Alliance in history, because of its unity, values and ability to adapt as the world around changes.

NATO is and will remain a regional alliance for Europe and North America. However, the challenges are global and require a more global approach. The international rules-based order is facing unprecedented pressure from increasing geopolitical competition and mounting authoritarianism, led by countries which do not share NATO values. The Alliance also faces sophisticated cyberattacks, more brutal forms of ter-



### Giovanni Romani

Mr Romani is a former Italian Navy officer. He served as a combat operations electronic warfare and intelligence officer on several Italian and US ships. Mr Romani is currently Head of NATO Middle East and North Africa Section.

rorism, disruptive technologies, nuclear proliferation, and the security impacts of climate change. NATO is not only a military Alliance, but also a political Alliance. Beyond purely military responses, political dialogue and security cooperation are important tools to address global challenges. They are greater than any country or continent can tackle alone and as part of its ongoing adaptation, NATO wants to work closely with like-minded countries to protect the rules-based international order and defend shared interests and values.

The NATO 2030 initiative, recently launched by Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, is a testimony of NATO's permanent effort to evolve and adapt its policies and capabilities to an increasingly complex and volatile security environment. Under the banner of NATO 2030, the Alliance has an ambitious and forward-looking agenda to prepare itself for the future. NATO 2030 addresses a wide range of issues: from strengthening deterrence and defence, including by increasing the use of NATO common budgets, to resilience, from maintaining our technological edge to enhancing partnerships with like-minded nations. NATO 2030 will also aim at reaffirming NATO as the essential transatlantic forum on security policy, strengthening NATO as a training alliance; updating the 2010 Strategic Concept; and addressing the security impact of global warming or climate change.

### **NATO's partners in the South. Common challenges**

NATO and its partners in the MENA region share geographical proximity and face similar security challenges. These include conflict spill over from fragile or failing states, instability and terrorism, transnational terrorist groups, cybercrimes, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, illegal migration, trafficking in small arms and light weapons, the security implications of climate change, etc.

NATO engages with its southern partners primarily through two cooperation frameworks: the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, launched respectively in 1994 and 2004. They aim to contribute to long-term global and regional security through political dialogue and practical cooperation and have proven to be resilient and invaluable fora to discuss, assess and jointly address common challenges. Therefore, the notion that transatlantic, Mediterranean and Gulf security are closely linked, is more obvious today than at any point in the history of the Alliance.

### **Cooperation**

In the last decades the Alliance has been primarily engaging with its southern partners as part of the NATO's core task *Cooperative Security*, which is one of the three core tasks engraved in the NATO Strategic Concept. *Crisis Management* activities were focused on crisis prevention, supporting partners' capacity building and resilience.

This practical cooperation has included: training and education; de-

fence capacity building; counter-terrorism and -hybrid threats; cyber defence; maritime security; mine detection and clearance; defence against CBRN agents; enhancing crisis management systems (egg, in Jordan and Mauritania); advanced technologies; energy and environmental security; cyber defence; medical emergency response; border security; defence planning and management; science cooperation; Women, Peace and Security.

Also, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, NATO has established a Pandemic Response Trust Fund and a stockpile of medical equipment and supplies to provide immediate relief to Allies or partners in need. Assistance packages were delivered to nine countries, including Iraq and Tunisia. Moreover, NATO supported the development of the Jordanian National Centre for Security and Crisis Management which eventually was a key asset to effectively handling the Covid national crisis.

### **Enhancing synergies with other International Organizations**

Military instruments alone cannot sustainably deal with complex crises. The Alliance has been reaching out to other international organisations to be more proactive in its contingencies. In addition, actions were taken to adapt crisis management instruments and mechanisms to better cooperate with other multilateral actors ahead of operational planning, in a broader framework of a comprehensive approach.

In MENA other international organisations, such as the United Nations, the European Union and the African Union have large and comprehensive toolboxes across the security, economy and development sectors. NATO has a broad security and defence experience and expertise and has been seeking synergies with these organisations. With 30 Allies in North America and Europe and a well-developed network of partnerships, the Alliance is the essential transatlantic platform for political consultation and information sharing. In return, closer ties with the international community's main actors will contribute to mutual trust building, and facilitate the Alliance's contribution to international crisis response.

### **NATO's increasing engagement in MENA**

All over the world, but particularly in MENA, effective partnerships are favoured by trustworthy, reliable personal relations, which can be cemented with a more active engagement and a more stable presence in the region.

With this in mind, in 2017 NATO created the NATO Strategic Direction South Hub to increase the Alliance's situational awareness of the region, improve its information collection and management, and support the coordination with southern partners.

Also in 2017, the establishment in Kuwait of the NATO-ICI Regional Centre consolidated the strong relationship between the Alliance and the State of Kuwait and greatly enhanced NATO's efforts to reach out to the GCC countries. The Alliance is currently looking into other options

for additional engagement in the region, including the possible creation of thematic centres. This effort should focus on cooperative security programs properly designed and resourced.

### Public diplomacy

Since the inception of both partnership frameworks, NATO has put significant efforts and resources in public diplomacy activities. NATO engages, builds and maintains over time cooperative relationships with key actors shaping public perceptions in MD and ICI countries to promote better mutual understanding and trust. Our political dialogue and practical cooperation with partners in the region can only be bolstered if decision-makers - as well as the general public - have an understanding of NATO's mandate and its approach to partnership. In addition, the complex environment in the MENA region remains dynamic and highly challenging. The Alliance continues to face strategic competition from different directions both from state and non-state actors, including in the engagement and communication sphere. Ensuring that NATO's message is heard in MD and ICI countries will help position the Alliance as a credible and valued partner.

### Future outlook

Looking at the future, the June 2021 Brussels Summit, besides offering an opportunity to reinforce NATO as the enduring embodiment of the bond between Europe and North America, will address the forward-looking NATO 2030 agenda. This includes Russia's aggressive actions, the threat of terrorism, cyber defence, emerging and disruptive technologies, the security impact of climate change, and the rise of China, all of which will be key to shape the direction of NATO's policies towards the South.

In the MENA region NATO has supporters and detractors, but it is generally viewed as a strong, credible, capable force. NATO could build on this to improve the image of an Alliance that respects regional ownership, is more engaging in crisis prevention/management and support its partners with specific expertise.

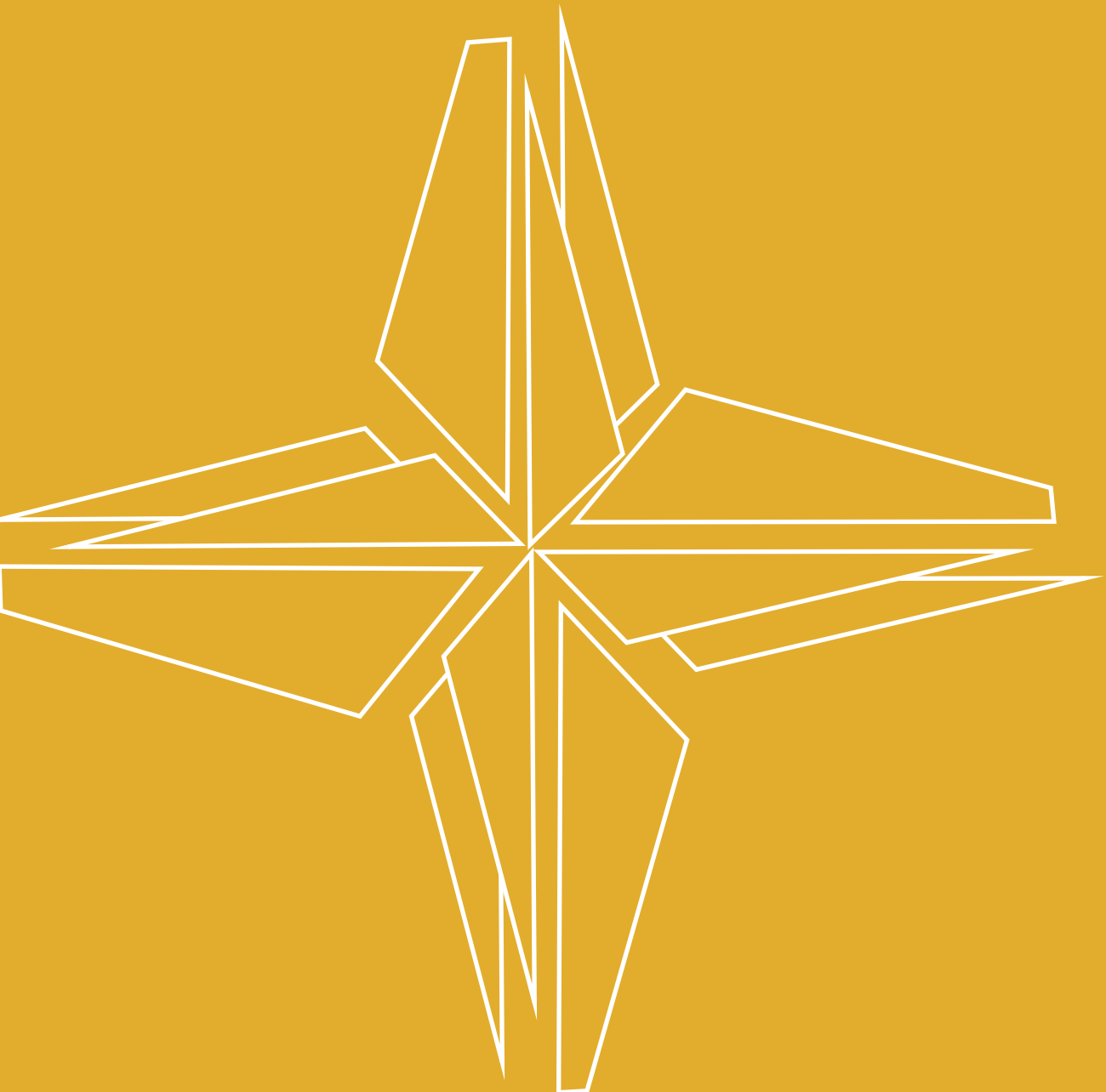
Some MENA partners see in NATO a model for regional military cooperation and advanced interoperability among different forces. The GCC, for example, could benefit from NATO's best practices and advice to further develop its security dimension, for example on interoperability, training and command structure. NATO could also explore ways to support the G5 Sahel, building on its long-term partnership with Mauritania.

With a multitude of ongoing and latent crisis at its periphery, could NATO play a more relevant role? Is there an appetite among Allies and in the MENA countries for a NATO's more proactive engagement? Iraq will be a significant testing ground, especially in view of the withdrawal from Afghanistan. NATO's focus will remain non combat-oriented tasks, such as advising and training the Iraqi security forces. NMI will deliver pro-



grams incrementally, building on previous gains and always reassessing priorities with the Iraqis as the Mission matures. This scheme could also be applied to other post-crisis scenarios in the MENA region, should the political condition be favourable for a NATO involvement.

# Appendix



# Appendix A

## The Arab risings by country

### From the web to the square

**Mahboub E. Hashem**

#### Tunisia

The 2011 uprising is considered somewhat successful, compared to other Arab states. Dispute and bloodletting were contained, policymakers and citizens alike stayed typically clear of tactics that could divide the country. El-Nahdah, the leading Islamist party, made a fairly smooth shift to cooperation politics. Contrasted with the breakdown of Egypt and the tragedy of Syria, Tunisia appears as a tremendous case in the larger, regional drama and tragedy. While Tunisia visibly did better than other states, the full picture of events and the benefits of the uprising are still not tangible. Though Ben Ali is gone and the nation has held together, nonetheless the economic conditions have not improved a great deal. So, there are no jobs available to youths and violence is still occurring periodically in the country.

#### Egypt

The 2011 Arab Spring protests were successful for a short period of time, since they led to the downfall of President Hosni Mubarak and brought Mohammad Morsi to power in a democratic election. However; that short-lived democratic evolution was soon brought to an end when Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the then appointed Defence minister by the popularly elected President Morsi, overthrew him in a July 2013 coup, ordered his arrest, proceeded to crack down on his supporters and restored military rule in Egypt. Later, El-Sisi's regime witnessed the mass killing of 1,000 demonstrators at the Raba Square and, since that time, all forms of protest were banned, tens of thousands of activists were imprisoned and all independent media were shut down. El-Sisi was appointed president in 2014, following an election that was held under debatable conditions, and later re-elected for a second term after a vote in which the incumbent's sole opponent had endorsed the ruler. The constitutional amendments have consolidated military rule over civil society and were intended to ensure an el-Sisi presidency for decades to come. Consequently, economic deprivation, insecurity and basic social degradation against which millions of Egyptians were mobilized in 2011 have become more acute. Social media are tightly controlled, including free internet service and for the first time in the nation's history, you can overhear young adults longing to leave the motherland.

### Morocco

Protests constituted a sequence of demonstrations across the state which occurred from the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 2011 to autumn 2012. They were inspired by Arab Spring uprisings in the MENA region and targeted political change, police reform, electoral manipulations, political censorship and high unemployment. Thousands of Moroccans took to the streets of Rabat, Casablanca, Tangier and Marrakech in peaceful demonstrations demanding a new constitution, a change in government and an end to corruption. However, protests were sedated by superficial reforms and some trials.

### Algeria

Hirak Movements did not catch on till February 16 of the year 2019, six days after the President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, declared his candidacy for a fifth presidential term. These protests, without precedent since the Algerian civil war, were peaceful and led the military to insist on Bouteflika's immediate resignation, which took place on April 2, 2019. The increasing strains within the Algerian regime can be traced back to the beginning of Bouteflika's rule, that had been characterised by the state's domination on natural resources to finance patronage and ensure its stability. The major demonstrations took place in the prevalent urban centres of Algeria from February to December 2019. Due to their significant scale, the results of those protests led to the election of Abdelmadjid Tebboune as president on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2019. Even if things appear quiet and normal at the present time, youths are unsatisfied with the status quo and are eager to rally in force for their freedom and better social services.

### Sudan

Major marches started in the Second Arab Springs of 2018-2021, which consisted of considerable anti-government protests in major cities and witnessed deadly incidents. Those revolts caused the overthrow of President Omar al-Bashir in a military coup on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2019, following a Khartoum massacre of protestors, and the transfer of power from a military regime to a combined military-civilian Sovereignty Council that is legally devoted to a 39-month transition to democracy. That second wave of Arab Springs was also initiated by civil activists on social media, spreading over several Arab countries protesting fraud, unemployment, nepotism, favouritism, inefficient public services, etc. Even though protestors faced government repression, police brutality and arrests they satisfying results.

### Libya

The uprising against the four-decade rule of Muammar al-Qaddafi led to civil war and international military intervention. On February 15, 2011, anti-government rallies started in Benghazi wherein protesters called for Qaddafi to step down and for the release of political prisoners. Libyan security forces used water cannons and rubber bullets against the masses, resulting in a number of injuries, that exacerbated the problem and led to more rallies

taking control of Benghazi and unrest spreading to other cities including Tripoli. Then, the Libyan government began using lethal force against activists. The regime also restricted communications, blocking the Internet and interrupting telephone service throughout the country. Due to the regime viciousness, the country has turned into an unruly battlefield for militias and their foreign sponsors in which democratic aspirations have been buried deep up till now. Hence, Libya's onetime rebels split into countless militias that fragmented the country and the fighting is still ongoing despite a new national unity government.

## Bahrain

Its strategic location between Saudi Arabia and Iran, hosting the US Navy Fifth Fleet and a UK naval base, is important for any regional actor. Truly, Bahrain was the only Gulf monarchy to experience massive demonstrations, due to a majority of Shia population and a minority government of Sunni. When protestors took to the streets in 2011, they knew what to expect and that they were not just up against the regime, but also the six GCC countries of Sunni majorities, and their allies (UK and the USA). Thus, the uprising was crushed with the help of Saudi Arabia, preventing any radical proclivities on its own land.

Ten years after Bahrain's popular insurgency, systemic injustice has increased and political oppression has essentially barred any freedom of expression. Besides, the government has also stripped many citizens of their nationality. Demonstrations have not ended completely in that tiny state, activists still prove they are waiting for more opportunities and are not happy with the current status quo.

## Yemen

The "Revolution of Dignity" followed the initial platforms of the Tunisian revolt and occurred simultaneously with other Arab revolutions in the region. In its early stage, Yemeni demonstrations were initially against unemployment, economic conditions, corruption, and amendment of the country's constitution. Then, hostilities deteriorated and calls for the resignation of Yemeni President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, ensued. Subsequently, military defections truly reduced the government's control and permitted protestors to defy its clout.

A major demonstration took place later in Sana'a, Yemen's capital, which induced Saleh to announce that he would not run for re-election in 2013 and that he would not pass power over to his son. More protests and pro-government rallies were held in different parts of the country, where anti-regime protestors were fired upon, causing a considerable number of deaths and ultimately culminating in mass defections and resignations. Finally, many more clashes overwhelmed the state and made it slide into a religious civil fight. Currently, poverty is skyrocketing, the economy is in shambles, children are starving to death, fighting is still ongoing, and the future of Yemen is unpredictable.



### Iraq

Here protests of 2011 came in the wake of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolts. They resulted in at least 45 deaths. In an effort to prevent probable fighting, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki proclaimed that he will not run for a third term in 2014 and called for a constitutional term limit. Nevertheless, many protesters gathered in several major Iraqi cities, particularly Baghdad and Karbala, demanding a more efficiency in national security, a fight against corruption and fair access to public services. The regime was so slow in acting and the rallies escalated with thousands protesting in Baghdad's Tahrir Square and elsewhere, drawing hundreds of thousands of Iraqi citizens, which led to calling for the overthrow of the sectarian regime and redrafting the constitution. The fighting continued to escalate until Nouri al-Maliki was forced to step down.

The Iraqi demonstrations of 2019–2021 constituted a series of escalating rallies, marches, sit-ins, and civil disobedience. They began to complain against corruption, unemployment and futile public services. Anti-government activists attempted to enter the Green Zone, where the US and other foreign embassies are located, but were violently repressed and held back by security forces. Later on, groups of Popular Mobilization Forces (al-Hashd al-Sha'ab) were able to enter the Green Zone and advance in direction of the US Embassy without being blocked by security forces. At that time, Iran was accused by the then US president of organizing the attack on the embassy and held them responsible for that deed. Afterwards, Major General Qassem Soleimani of Iran and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis of Iraq were killed by a US drone, escalating the situation further with attacks and counter attacks between US forces and Iranian backed militias. The current situation in Iraq is still untenable.

### Syria

In this land uprisings followed the increase of Arab revolts that started in Tunisia and Egypt on January 26, 2011. Inspired by the downfall of Ben Ali and Mubarak, students of the southern town of Dara'a had spray-painted anti-regime drawings with writings on walls for the Syrian President specifying: "Your turn, doctor" has come. The teens, responsible of such writings, were swiftly arrested and tortured, provoking a wave of furious demonstrations for their release. This triggered a nationwide uprising, wherein activists demanded the removal of President Bashar al-Assad and requested reforms permitting electoral changes, equal rights and civil freedoms. First the authorities made several minor concessions; then, security forces quelled any rally. Additionally, Syria's ethnic divisions exacerbated the problem further. Assad and much of the nation's elite, mainly its military, belong to the Alawite cult, which is a small minority within a majority of a Sunni country. Hence, Syrian dissidents, comprising reps from different groups officially founded the Syrian National Council, that decided to fight the autocratic system of Al-Assad. Death tolls turned out to be very high, millions were displaced and many more had been arrested, due to relentless fighting and insurgences around the nation. So far, el-Assad has been able to wither the storm, becoming the only Arab leader that did not fall; however, fighting is still ongoing.

ing in several parts of the country, which needs and anticipates a huge uplift from major donors to rebuild it.

## Lebanon

Endured many years of internal partisan conflict, which have led to the creation of partisan elites who govern and act to serve their own interests, rather than the citizens' welfare. Despite many promises of reform, Lebanon has failed to live up to its various pledges because of huge corruption and pathetic governance, coupled with a severe economy structure that rendered the country into a disarray before the Coronavirus pandemic hit and the explosion of Beirut Harbour.

The arrival of almost 1.500.000 displaced Syrians on top of nearly 500.000 Palestinian refugees has exacerbated the Lebanese social worries and intensified struggle for low-skill jobs and public services. Hence, Lebanon remains a hub for various delinquencies, lasting structural difficulties, weak organization, poor services, longstanding corruption, rigid regulation, and lingering financial debts that have added to Lebanon's liability and misery by world standards. These elements combined have led to the 2019-2021 protests (known as the 17 October Revolution, in 2019). Those protests were triggered by a proposal to raise taxes on gasoline, tobacco, and basic calls on applications such as WhatsApp, which rapidly spread into a nation-wide blame of partisan rule, stagnant economy, unemployment, prevalent corruption, wicked legislation, and failure of government to provide the essential necessities of electricity, water and sanitation.

Disorders started in Beirut, but quickly stretched to Tripoli, Sidon, Sour (Tire), and Beqaa Valley areas. The push for the uprising was evident well before in Lebanon's various songs by the artist Ragheb Alama's "Tar Al Balad" in December 2018, and by the rock singer-songwriter Imad Jack Karam's song "Chedd Halak" in June 2019. The Lebanese revolution has not finished, even though it has been mitigated by the Coronavirus pandemic at this time. The situation is deteriorating by the day, due to a very corrupt political entity that managed to steal the country's assets and resources beyond any imagination and plunged the people into an unprecedented level of poverty (more than 50% of the population is currently living under the poverty line).

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### What kind of economic prospects for the region?

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الشهيد

Bureau de Poste  
Sidi Bouzid 9100

مكتب بريد  
سیدی بوزید 9100



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## NDCF Special Project on MENA and Gulf Relations online





Since its very beginning in 2011, the Middle East and Deep Maghreb have been a fundamental priority for the Foundation.

As this year marks the 10th anniversary of the Arab uprisings, our Dossier wants to provide a meaningful understanding of the future dynamics of an area that, despite several positive attempts, is still affected by major instability.

Gathering the perspectives of a pool of distinguished regional and international analysts, this publication dives into the socio-economic and political conditions that showed the aspirations of a civil society, often stifled by old problems and emerging challenges. Despite the very different outcomes of the uprisings, new ways ahead are possible.

“ There is a wealth of humanity that deserves our best wishes and is not easy to forget: the people who live among the ancient mosques in Cairo, the Roman cities of Jordan, the pearl islands of the Arabian Gulf, and the deserts of Mauritania.

We face a great world in flux, which requires us to take a long view, out towards a new horizon in our history. ”

Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo

