



# Arab Spring, Global Repercussions

**Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab Spring**

By Nancy E. Brune

**The Arab Spring and China's  
Evolving Middle East Policy**

By Jing-dong Yuan

**Will Europe Shrink From the Arab Spring?**

By Omer Taspinar and Jonathan Laurence

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND THE ARAB SPRING BY NANCY E. BRUNE	3
THE ARAB SPRING AND CHINA'S EVOLVING MIDDLE EAST POLICY BY JING-DONG YUAN	8
WILL EUROPE SHRINK FROM THE ARAB SPRING? OMER TASPINAR AND JONATHAN LAURENCE	13
ABOUT WPR	18

# SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND THE ARAB SPRING

BY NANCY E. BRUNE



After a groundswell of anti-government protests enveloped many corners of North Africa a year ago, observers around the world began to wonder how far this democratic contagion would spread. In particular, many wondered whether northern Africa would inspire its neighbors in sub-Saharan Africa, which share many of the same demographic characteristics found in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), including a large percentage of unemployed young people, high food prices and years of oppression and unrealized opportunity at the hand of often-brutal dictators. At the time, political commentators in several corners of Africa seemed optimistic that the Arab Spring would indeed spread southward.

Sure enough, in a continent marred by decades of dictatorship, military coups and fraudulent elections, sub-Saharan Africa in 2011 witnessed an unprecedented number of parliamentary and presidential elections -- [in 17 countries](#) -- as well as the creation of a new state, South Sudan. On Dec. 11, Cote d'Ivoire elected a parliament for the first time in more than a decade. The elections, though easily won by President Alassane Ouattara's party after followers of former President Laurent Gbagbo decided to boycott, were nevertheless noticeable for the absence of deep violence and conflict that engulfed last year's presidential election.

Unlike what happened in Kenya in 2007 and Cote d'Ivoire in 2010, most of the countries that held elections earlier this year witnessed peaceful transfers of power. In April, Nigeria, despite logistical difficulties and the postponement of presidential elections, boasted one of the least violent, most credible elections in recent decades. Since taking office, President Goodluck Jonathan has completed a number of reforms and surrounded himself with a credible cabinet and team of advisers, including Harvard-educated Finance Minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. While the radical Islamist group Boko Haram has orchestrated several deadly bombings in the months following Nigeria's elections, one could argue that their ramped-up efforts are a direct response to the deeper democratic consolidation that is taking hold. In November, Liberia [managed to hold a successful election](#) in a relatively calm atmosphere, despite the opposition candidate's boycott of the second-round run-off election.

Nevertheless, while there is reason for optimism about the region's future, including strong economic growth, hopes for rapid democratization would be misplaced. A year after the first uprisings in North Africa, it is clear that sub-Saharan Africa is not poised on the verge of an African Spring.

## DEMAND FOR DEMOCRACY

Sub-Saharan Africa has enjoyed strong economic growth in recent years. The average growth rate in Africa [was 5 percent last year](#), and more than 12 countries have experienced annual growth of more than 6 percent for six years or more. High global prices for commodities -- including minerals, oils and agricultural goods -- have contributed to the region's fortune, although commodities

surprisingly [account only for one-third of growth](#). In addition, growth has been fueled by the efforts of several countries to implement much-needed reforms, including the elimination of trade barriers (particularly intraregional barriers), regulatory reforms (particularly in the financial sector) and privatization.

But sadly, economic liberalization in the region has not been accompanied by political liberalization. The countries in sub-Saharan Africa that enjoyed growth rates of approximately 7 percent or higher for the period 2005-2009 [had slightly lower democracy scores](#) (.pdf) (1.1 versus 2.6 for the rest of sub-Saharan Africa on Polity IV's scale of -10 to 10) and higher state fragility scores (16.0 versus 14.4 for the rest of sub-Saharan Africa on Marshall and Cole's scale of 0 to 25) than the rest of their regional counterparts during the same period. This data supports the conclusions of a recent World Politics Review feature issue, "[The New Politics of African Development](#)," which underlined the success of Rwanda, Ethiopia and Uganda in "combining political repression and economic development."

Growing evidence suggests that economic liberalization has failed to usher in a new wave of political democratization. More disturbing, perhaps, is the fact that the long-term precursors of political democratization are absent from the region. Despite several years of strong economic expansion, for instance, the size of sub-Saharan Africa's middle class cohorts remains far smaller than those of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia.

Democratic theorists have posited a link between a strong -- and sizable -- middle class and better governance and democratization. The idea is that as people move into the middle class, they are more likely to use their greater economic power to demand more-accountable governments, including an end to corrupt practices, stronger rule of law, protection of property rights, improved public services and more-robust political rights. A recent World Bank report notes that, by 2010, the middle class in Africa, including Northern Africa, had grown to 34.3 percent of the population, or roughly 313 million people. That is up from about 26.2 percent, or 111 million, in 1980; 27 percent, or 151 million, in 1990; and 27.2 percent, [or 196 million, in 2000](#) (.pdf).

But while the middle class has grown, the size of the middle class in countries in sub-Saharan Africa lags far behind those of its Arab Spring neighbors. For example, the size of the middle class in North Africa -- Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia -- comprises 33 percent of those countries' combined population. In sub-Saharan Africa, the middle class makes up only 10.5 percent of the population, and the average in the nine fastest-growing economies is 6.7 percent. Thus, if a sizeable, strong middle class [is a predictor of democratization and political liberalization](#) (.pdf), there is no indication that elite leaders in sub-Saharan Africa need to fear widespread anti-government protests anytime soon.

In discussions about the precursors of the Arab Spring, analysts have also pointed to the highly educated -- and unemployed -- youths who were frustrated with their corrupt, sclerotic governments, as well as to the high levels of interconnectedness among this disaffected youth demographic. In contrast, levels of educational attainment and connectivity in sub-Saharan Africa are significantly lower.

For example, in 2009, the literacy rate among youth in developing countries of sub-Saharan Africa was 72 percent, compared to 90 percent in the Middle East and North Africa. In 2010, the percentage of students completing the last year of primary school, also known as the primary completion rate, was 88 percent in the Middle East and North Africa -- and 93 percent in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia -- compared to 67 percent in sub-Saharan Africa. Secondary-school enrollment rates in the Middle East and North Africa were 74.5 percent in 2009 -- and 90 percent in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia -- compared to 36 percent in sub-Saharan Africa. Tertiary-school enrollment rates were 28 percent in MENA, while they were [only 6 percent in sub-Saharan Africa](#). An uneducated and uninformed citizenry is less likely to demand greater accountability from its government leaders.

Governments that are not investing in education are probably not investing in other critical infrastructure sectors, such as communications, either. The comparative evidence [bears this out](#). In the Middle East and North Africa, there are 2.4 fixed broadband Internet subscribers per 100 people and 2.5 per 100 in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. In contrast, there are 0.2 fixed broadband Internet subscribers per 100 people in sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, the number of Internet users per 100 people throughout the Middle East and North Africa is 25 -- in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia the number is 23 -- compared to 11 in sub-Saharan Africa. On average, there are 44.7 mobile cellular subscriptions per 100 people in sub-Saharan Africa, while in the MENA region, the average is a whopping 97. Finally, on average, there are 17 telephone lines per 100 people in the Middle East and North Africa compared to only 1.4 in sub-Saharan Africa. Clearly, if the effective diffusion of democracy depends on first-class connectivity to transmit its lofty ideals over social media and to help organize and mobilize citizens, particularly those living under repressive regimes, then the lack of adequate communications infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa does not bode well for an African Spring.

## **WEAK STATES, POROUS BORDERS AND UNGOVERNED SPACES**

While democracy was absent in Arab Spring countries, the states themselves and their institutions -- particularly their militaries and security forces -- were strong and functioning. Former Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and his family maintained control of the country's political and economic institutions and resources. For decades, former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak relied heavily on his elite security forces to intimidate the opposition. In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad has so far maintained his rule with the loyal support of military and security forces.

In contrast, countries in sub-Saharan Africa are not only weakly democratic, they are simply weak, characterized by thinly functioning administrative states. Many have been scarred by recent civil wars, while corruption as well as tribal and clan politics often prevent consolidation of the state and development of much-needed administrative capacity. Highlighting the differences between the two regions, [the World Bank survey-based indicator assessing "government effectiveness"](#) found the average for the period 2005-2010 in the Middle East and North Africa to be -0.14 on a scale of -2.5 to 2.5, compared to -0.40 for North Africa and -0.80 for sub-Saharan Africa.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for example, just held its second multiparty election since the country's independence in 1960. Despite compromised ballot boxes, rebel fighters gunning down poll workers, outbursts of violence and concerns about vote fraud, it appears as though incumbent President Joseph Kabila will serve another term. His job will not be easy. The DRC's institutions are weak and corrupt. Its eastern province remains under the control of powerful local interests, and the government in the capital, Kinshasa, does not have the administrative capacity or financial resources to exert its control in those distant areas.

In another example, it was reported that Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) is "too weak, corrupt, divided and disorganized" to mount any claim to authority beyond the administrative center and capital, Mogadishu. So while the Islamist extremist group al-Shabaab is being forced out in some areas where it traditionally wielded power, the resulting power vacuum [is being filled](#) not by the TFG but by "clan warlords, Islamist militias and proxy forces armed by foreign governments." Complicating matters is the fact that Eritrea, which has previously aided and abetted al-Shabaab, could easily play the role of spoiler by once again extending support to the group to help it reverse its recent losses.

The inability of a state to secure its national borders and control rogue groups can give rise to transnational security issues or spillover violence that can further undermine the strengthening of state capacity. For example, in response to the kidnapping and killing of tourists in Kenya by Somali Islamist militants thought to be linked to al-Shabaab, Kenyan military forces recently launched its own military intervention in southern Somalia.

In addition, the absence of a consolidated state apparatus and administrative capacity means that large parts of sub-Saharan Africa remain ungoverned spaces, giving rise to unsavory elements and security threats. To address these concerns, states must divert precious resources that might otherwise fund infrastructure improvements or go toward consolidating institutions. One growing security concern in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, particularly the Sahel subregion in West Africa comprised of Mali, Mauritania and Niger, is the activity of militant groups, including al-Qaida in the Islamic Magreb (AQIM) and Nigeria's Boko Haram.

An even worse threat is the increasing trade in illicit goods, particularly drugs and small arms. The drug trade is not new to Africa, particularly Nigeria, where organized crime groups have been involved in the drug smuggling business since the 1970s. But smuggling activity is rising sharply, with Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria and South Africa having all become transit points for Latin American drugs. Last year, an estimated \$800 million worth of illicit narcotics passed through West Africa.

This development is troubling for two reasons. First, the rise of the drug trade has increased fears that weak states in West Africa [could become criminalized "narcostates"](#) (.pdf). This is particularly true in Guinea-Bissau, one of the poorest countries in the world, where a trafficking dispute was linked to the assassination of the military chief of staff, Gen. Batista Tagme Na Wai, and the murder of the country's president, Joao Bernardo Vieira, both in 2009. There are suspicions that members of the armed forces in Guinea-Bissau are working with Latin American drug trafficking organizations to smuggle cocaine to Europe through the West African country. Others have blamed drug trafficking for the increasing political instability and violence in the region, including coups in Guinea and Guinea-Bissau.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Angola, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa and Zimbabwe are all scheduled to hold elections in 2012. In Angola, there is growing unrest and increasing discontent with President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos, who has ruled for 32 years. Inspired by the success of the Arab Spring, Angolan activists have been speaking out more aggressively against government corruption, persistent inequalities and the ruling party, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). While the Angolan government faces opposition from several groups, the apparent leader behind a series of anti-government protests organized by social media sites is the Revolutionary Movement for Social Intervention (MRIS), a group of young people who have no political affiliation. Although they have attracted only a few hundred people at each event, such demonstrations are largely unheard of in Angola, where the government has historically moved quickly to repress any criticism. Dos Santos has maintained his iron rule by drawing on the security services of the internal intelligence agency, SINFO, and the Foreign Intelligence Services.

Some sources have suggested that MRIS is actually a creation of the MPLA government, financed by SINFO, as a way of [exposing and managing internal political threats](#) and displaying a facade of democracy to the international community. If true, that would suggest that opposition forces might be out-resourced and outsmarted by Dos Santos and his government.

Senegal is scheduled to hold presidential elections in February 2012. One of West Africa's most stable democracies, Senegal witnessed violent riots and large-scale demonstrations this summer in response to President Abdoulaye Wade's refusal to leave office and his intent to exploit a constitutional loophole that would circumvent the country's two-term presidential limit. However, despite earlier calls for Wade's resignation, the opposition [remains divided](#), and the political mainstream appears "stagnant."

Earlier this month, too, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe called for elections in 2012, a year earlier than required. The move comes amid growing criticism by the U.S. and other countries over the increasing number of arrests of journalists and civic activists ahead of the completion of

constitutional reforms and proposed elections in the long-suffering country.

Finally, a quick review of the past year in Uganda offers an indication of the general prospects for an African Spring. Despite protests and opposition, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni won another term in February 2011, marking his 26th year of rule. Following his victory, Museveni unleashed his security forces to violently quash public protests held in April and May in response to the high cost of basic commodities and transport. He also increased government efforts to silence critical media, restrict political activities and introduce longer pretrial detention for real and perceived enemies of the state. He recently criticized the principle of separation of powers and the system of checks and balances enshrined in the 1995 constitution and removed control over local oil agreements from parliament, in response to heavy criticism from the legislative body over corruption in the oil sector.

Ironically, a recent agreement between the U.S. and Uganda to deploy 100 U.S. special operations troops to Uganda to facilitate the capture of Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord's Resistance Army, could bolster Museveni's iron rule. The mission of the U.S. troops is to enhance the Ugandan security forces' intelligence-collection capabilities, which could enable Museveni, who already controls a strong internal security apparatus, to improve internal oversight of his political opponents in parliament. In the face of greater political repression, the Ugandan middle class remains risk averse, [and the opposition is weak](#).

In conclusion, opposition movements in sub-Saharan Africa may gain momentum, particularly if international organizations and supporters provide resources that could help them mobilize. However, a review of the broader environment suggests it is highly unlikely that the countries to the south of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia are well-positioned in the near term to witness an African Spring. □

*Dr. Nancy E. Brune is a Truman National Security fellow and a member of the Pacific Council on International Policy.*

*Photo: African leaders at the African Union Summit, Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, June 29, 2011 (photo licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic license).*

# THE ARAB SPRING AND CHINA'S EVOLVING MIDDLE EAST POLICY

BY JING-DONG YUAN



The “Arab Spring” that started early in 2011 has shaken the entire Middle East. Rulers who had reigned for decades have been toppled; power has changed hands; and the few regimes that are resisting changes are still undergoing tumultuous unrest. Beijing has been forced to face the rapidly changing developments and make adjustments both to monitor the potential repercussions at home and to protect its growing commercial interests in the region.

Beijing has responded to the events in the Middle East with tentative policy adjustments aimed at securing domestic stability and minimizing economic losses resulting from the unforeseen and sudden events unfolding in the Arab world. It bears noting that there are major differences between the causes of the popular uprising in the Middle East and those driving the increasingly potent social unrest in China. Beijing also retains sufficient resources to dilute, isolate and suppress domestic dissent.

However, formulating and implementing an effective Middle East policy could be a far more daunting challenge for China, especially given its growing economic engagement with the region. Beijing has found to its dismay that the past policy of diplomatic ambivalence based on separating economics from politics in dealing with Middle Eastern countries is no longer tenable. It suddenly finds itself in the uncomfortable position of having to make explicit where it stands on issues such as good governance and human rights, and has to balance its support of the regimes in power with recognition of the aspirations of the populations in revolt against autocratic rulers in many of these countries. In short, staying aloof is rapidly becoming a luxury that China can ill afford.

## THE ARAB SPRING AND THE LESSONS FOR BEIJING

Popular uprisings in the Middle East have spread like a brush fire, scorching regimes from Tunisia to Libya and toppling autocratic leaders like Moammar Gadhafi and Hosni Mubarak. That fire is still raging in Syria, where bloody suppression by President Bashar al-Assad has yet to tamp down the unrest there. Beijing’s reaction at home, as expected, has been resolute from the beginning. To prevent a “Jasmine Revolution” from taking place in China, the government has resorted to numerous measures, including tighter Internet monitoring and censorship -- especially the use of social media -- and more-vigilant surveillance and control of public mass gatherings and protests. Search terms such as “Jasmine” or “Egypt” **have been intermittently blocked or altogether banned** on the Chinese Internet. Meanwhile, even the smallest gatherings in public places could invite a huge show of police force, a capability Beijing has strengthened in recent years. This year, for the first time in decades, the resources allocated to public security expenditures, approximately \$95 billion, **exceeded the official defense budget** of \$92 billion.

While Beijing has its concerns over the Arab Spring and its potentially infectious impacts on social and economic stability in China, there are strong reasons to believe that any imminent



threat to Communist Party rule **remains minimal and manageable**. First, in most Middle Eastern countries, the autocratic ruler has personally reigned for decades and has instilled a political order that is typically repressive and nonrepresentative. The lack of any meaningful political participation provides ample frustration and is one of the principal reasons behind the various uprisings. By contrast, although China remains under one-party rule, managed term limits and an institutionalized leadership succession have been put in place.

Second, there is a major difference between the Chinese economy and those of the Arab world. Chinese reforms over the past three decades have opened the country's economy to the world, lifting hundreds of millions of Chinese people out of poverty and creating a sizable middle class that is more interested in gains in personal welfare than in politics. By contrast, the stagnation in many Middle Eastern economies, despite plentiful resources and oil revenues, has infuriated ordinary citizens, especially the restless young, who find employment elusive.

However, perhaps the most critical difference is that Beijing retains total control over the military, the paramilitary and the police forces, on whose loyalty it can count. Having learned the lessons of the 1989 Tiananmen student uprising, the Chinese authorities quickly introduced and enforced censorship of social media after the initial Arab unrest and were resolute in stopping any organized protests from growing into massive social movements. These actions contrast sharply with the militaries and security forces in countries such as Egypt and Libya, which either split or abandoned the regimes they were supposed to protect, leading to the fall of Mubarak and Gadhafi.

### **THE MIDDLE EAST TRANSFORMATION TESTS CHINESE DIPLOMACY**

Further from home, the rapidly changing events in the Middle East present serious challenges to Chinese diplomacy. Beijing won kudos for its well-organized and speedy evacuation of tens of thousands of Chinese workers from the region, including 36,000 from Libya alone. For the first time, the Chinese government mobilized People's Liberation Army (PLA) navy and air force units to transport Chinese citizens out of crisis zones. At the same time, billions of dollars worth of businesses and contracted projects -- including \$18.8 billion in Libya -- **were deserted in the process**, resulting in **enormous economic losses**.

Beijing's speedy and organized evacuation efforts demonstrate a recognition of its responsibility, as a rising power, to provide care for and protection to its citizens, including consular services as well as attention to human welfare and safety, as it becomes ever more involved in global commercial and business activities. However, it is in the areas of good governance, human rights and the responsibility to protect -- all issues highlighted by the Arab uprisings -- that Beijing's long-standing principles of noninterference and the sanctity of state sovereignty are facing the most serious challenges. In other words, China increasingly finds itself under international pressure and has to balance multiple and at times competing demands. The events in the Middle East and the ways in which Beijing has reacted to them only amplify the dilemma China faces.

China's initial reactions to the unfolding events in the Arab Spring largely reflected its noninterference position. Beijing cautioned against external intervention and emphasized the importance of stability. Indeed, Chinese media pointed out the enormous economic disruption and loss resulting from the turmoil as a reason to avoid exacerbating it. However, when Gadhafi vowed to wipe out Libyan rebels as "cockroaches" and approvingly referred to the 1989 Chinese military crackdown on the Tiananmen student demonstrators, Beijing **intervened swiftly to block any domestic reporting** of his comments.

With economic interests very much its top priority, and avoiding any entanglement in the complex Middle East politics a close second, Beijing has largely stood on the sideline. China reluctantly abstained from United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 imposing the "no-fly zone" in Libya and authorizing "all necessary measures" to protect civilians from assaults by forces loyal to the Gadhafi regime. Beijing subsequently criticized NATO airstrikes, which it **considered con-**

trary to the original intent of the resolution. China's special envoy to the Middle East, meanwhile, shuttled through various countries in the region, trying to get a better sense of the various factions' positions as the forces for change continued to sweep across the Arab world. Chinese analysts and retired diplomats lamented Beijing's lack of influence and strategic thinking on the changing Middle East, and pointed out the potential pitfall should Beijing either appear ambivalent or, worse, take the wrong stand.

Beijing's handling of the prolonged civil war in Libya is indicative of its broader dilemma in the region and highlights the delicate balancing act needed to preserve its economic interests while adjusting to rapidly changing political developments likely to affect those interests. Its lackluster diplomatic performance on Libya revealed a rather passive China that was reluctant to explicitly endorse rebel forces, such as Libya's National Transitional Council, early on and only made the shift in its position after Russia had embraced the rebel cause. Meanwhile, the revelation that Chinese companies had discussed an arms deal with the Gadhafi regime even as the civil war raged may harm China-Libya relations moving forward, in particular when Beijing seeks to negotiate with the new government to claim back its assets and enter into new contracts.

Beijing now recognizes that the likely beneficiaries of commercial rewards in post-Gadhafi Libya will in large measure be those parties that provided early support to the rebel forces. Clearly countries such as France and Britain, which led the NATO effort to bolster Libyan rebel forces in their efforts to topple the Gadhafi regime, will naturally reap the biggest rewards. In contrast, Chinese companies could be discriminated against given the ambivalent positions that Beijing took. Ironically, China's concerns over its economic interests resulted in policies that favored stability, characterized by a reluctance to recognize the rebel forces. With the former rebels now in power, the new government in Tripoli has adopted a less-than-friendly attitude toward Beijing, with obvious implications for China's economic interests in the country.

## CHINA TURNS TO THE MIDDLE EAST

The upheaval in the Middle East erupted at a time when China's engagement with the region was maturing. China's ties to the Middle East date back to 1956, when China and Egypt established diplomatic relations. Over the years, ideology was the primary driver of Beijing's Middle East policy, where it sided with the Palestinian cause in the Israeli-Arab conflicts, including by lending economic and military assistance as well as political and diplomatic support to Yasser Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and other Arab countries. China became a major supplier of conventional arms to the region, including the controversial sale of 36 DF-3 ballistic missiles for \$2 billion to Saudi Arabia in 1988.

Beginning in the late-1970s, however, since China embarked on economic reforms and adopted its open policy, Beijing has become more pragmatic in its Middle East policy. In 1992, for instance, China and Israel established formal ties. That process accelerated as China, after becoming an oil importer in 1993, began to turn to the region for its much-needed energy resources. Between 1990 and 2002, annual Chinese oil imports from the Middle East grew from 8.4 million barrels to 258 million barrels. By 2010, its daily oil imports from the Middle East had reached 1.94 million barrels. With 60 percent of the world's proven oil reserves and 35 percent of traded oil in the global market, the Middle East has been and will likely remain a region of critical importance to China as its appetite for oil continues to grow.

China's rapid economic growth over the past three decades has put significant pressure on its energy production and consumption. Due to the lack of newfound domestic oil fields and the depletion of existing ones, oil imports represent a steadily growing proportion of total consumption. In 2008, China became the second-largest oil importer, after the United States, with daily imports close to 5 million barrels per day, representing more than 50 percent of its daily consumption. An August 2010 report by the Paris-based International Energy Agency stated that China had overtaken the United States to become the world's No. 1 energy consumer. Its "World Energy Outlook

2011” (.pdf) factsheet states that China alone will account for more than 30 percent of total growth in global energy demands over the next 25 years. Within the greater Middle East region, Saudi Arabia and Iran stand out as China’s top suppliers, with the region as a whole [providing up to 55 percent of all oil imports](#) to China.

Saudi Arabia. Since 1990, when Riyadh and Beijing established diplomatic ties, bilateral relations have developed rapidly. Two-way trade has grown to \$40 billion in 2010, and their “strategic oil partnership” has resulted in growing investments in Saudi oil and gas fields from Chinese national oil companies as well as Saudi equity in Chinese refinery facilities. In 2009, for the first time, Saudi Arabia exported more oil to China than it did to the United States. Regular high-level visits between leaders of the two countries and growing business ties have further strengthened the bilateral relationship. During Chinese President Hu Jintao’s state visit to Riyadh in February 2009, major trade deals were signed, [including the \\$1.8 billion high-speed monorail](#) linking Mecca and Medina that will be built by the China Railway Construction Corporation by 2013. Notably, the Chinese press praised the Saudi royal family for its handling of unrest in the kingdom.

Iran. China’s economic ties with Iran have been controversial, in that Beijing [is perceived as less keen on supporting international sanctions](#) to force Teheran to give up its nuclear weapons than on protecting its commercial interests (.pdf). Sino-Iranian bilateral trade reached \$30 billion in 2010, [making China Iran’s largest trading partner](#). China imports 11 percent of its oil from Iran, making the country one of China’s top three suppliers -- the others being Saudi Arabia and Angola. Beijing has endorsed a number of United Nations Security Council resolutions that impose various sanctions on Tehran for its covert nuclear activities. However, it continues to allow Chinese companies to do business in the country, including energy-related investments, such as the development of the Yadavaran oil field by Sinopec, and infrastructure projects, such as the construction of subway lines in Tehran. There are reportedly more than 100 Chinese companies operating in Iran, with total signed contracts [estimated at \\$100 billion to \\$120 billion](#).

Over the past decade, Beijing has also encouraged state-owned enterprises to adopt the so-called going-out strategy to acquire equity stakes in overseas energy projects. The Middle East remains a critical target of this strategy. Sinopec, one of the major Chinese national oil companies, reportedly has more than 120 projects in the region, including partial ownership of foreign oil assets. In addition, building China’s strategic petroleum reserve, diversifying its energy sourcing and developing land-based supply lines constitute what Beijing sees as increasingly necessary components to ensure its energy security needs. All [remain continuing subjects](#) of debate regarding the country’s [future energy strategy](#).

China’s growing energy ties with the Middle East have also expanded to other sectors of economic relations, with two-way trade [reaching \\$190 billion in 2010](#). Beijing is encouraging further expansion of commerce and investments, with a target of \$200 billion in two-way trade set for 2015 at a recent China-Arab States Trade and Investment Forum in Ningxia. Meanwhile, on the diplomatic front, Beijing has also sought to become more active in the region’s affairs, appointing its first Middle East envoy in September 2002. However, Chinese diplomats have by and large confined their activities to reiterating known positions, without offering any concrete proposals to address specific problems. In the end, securing and advancing its energy interests has more or less become the focus of China’s Middle East diplomacy.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Beijing’s rather ambivalent response to the rapid changes in the Middle East reflects to some extent an evolving policy toward a region of increasing salience to China’s national interests, especially with regard to China’s growing energy needs. It is also in part a reflection of the complexity of the region’s ethnic, religious and geopolitical conflicts that have defied any solution so far. While Beijing clearly recognizes the need to raise its diplomatic profile in the region to influence events, it is also highly conscious of the potential risks of entrapment in Middle Eastern politics.

On the other hand, the Chinese government has responded quite resolutely to any attempt to bring a Jasmine Revolution-type uprising to China.

But the Arab Spring and its consequences pose serious challenges for Beijing. At stake are not only important commercial interests but also China's credentials as a responsible rising power. At the same time, the potential threat this democratic -- and chaotic -- wave poses to communist rule and social stability in China highlights the pitfalls of a domestic policy that continues to prioritize economic growth without the simultaneous development of social safety nets and political reform.

The Arab Spring and its aftermath present Beijing with both challenges and opportunities. China's traditional positions regarding noninterference and state sovereignty have been brought under growing pressure by the international community's emphasis on good governance and respect for human rights in responding to developments there. With its growing power and influence come greater expectations that Beijing will comply with international norms and practices, including making the ultimate choice between protecting its commercial and energy interests and preserving its image and reputation as a responsible rising power. Above all, Beijing must develop strategies and have effective means at its disposal not only to safeguard its growing interests in the Middle East and beyond, but to shape events that will impact them. How Beijing balances those two -- at times conflicting -- priorities will determine whether China's current economic influence in the region is matched by a corresponding political influence in the years ahead. □

*Dr. Jingdong Yuan is an associate professor and acting director of the Center for International Security Studies at the University of Sydney.*

*Photo: Chinese President Hu Jintao and Saudi Arabian King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz in Saudi Arabia, April 24, 2006 (photo by the Chinese Embassy in Saudi Arabia).*

*A footnoted version of this article is available upon request.*

# WILL EUROPE SHRINK FROM THE ARAB SPRING?

OMER TASPINAR AND JONATHAN LAURENCE



Will the Arab Spring finally end the European Union’s lethargic approach to the southern Mediterranean and lead to more serious support for democratization? Don’t hold your breath. There are three key reasons why “business as usual” with only cosmetic changes is likely to remain the norm.

First and foremost is the fact that Europe [is in deep economic and financial crisis](#). With growing discord between France, Britain and Germany, not only the future of the euro but the very foundations of the European Union are at stake. Consumed by its own existential crisis, a serious rethinking of foreign policy is obviously not a top priority for the EU at the moment.

The second reason why we should not expect Europe to seriously change its policy toward the southern Mediterranean is the success of Islamist parties in post-Arab Spring elections. For decades, Europe’s primary concern in the southern Mediterranean has been security and economic development. Anti-terrorism cooperation, border controls against immigration and economic assistance to corrupt but friendly authoritarian regimes were the hallmarks of a series of EU projects, ranging from the Barcelona Process (which became the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008) to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). This “security and development first” mindset came at the expense of genuine support for democratization in countries like Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.

The logic behind such European programs -- and similar American policies -- can be best summarized as the fear of the alternative. Autocrats like Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak became masters at exploiting such Western fears by presenting radical Islam as the only alternative to their repressive regimes. Now that Islamist parties are coming out ahead in parliamentary elections in Egypt and Tunisia, some serious second thoughts about democracy in the Arab world are likely to emerge.

Finally, the third reason to believe that Europe is unlikely to change its foreign policy toward the southern Mediterranean is Europe’s [continuing reluctance to embrace Turkey](#), whose own success as a prospering secular democracy owes so much to its European vocation. To be sure, the EU cannot offer membership prospects to its southern neighbors in North Africa. But it could rethink its approach to and support for democratization there. Yet, the fact that the EU sidelines even a country like Turkey shows the limits of Europe’s current geostrategic vision toward the Muslim world.

Despite all these shortcomings, the European Commission is trying to reorient its approach to the southern Mediterranean with proposals such as a “Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity” and new task forces for the region. Conceived in March 2011 as the EU’s response to the uprisings in the Arab southern Mediterranean, the partnership puts an emphasis on democratic transformation and institution-building, civil society contacts and economic development underpinned by an improvement in educational and health systems. [Further areas of engagement](#)

are targeted toward fundamental freedoms, constitutional reform, reform of the judiciary and the fight against corruption.

What is missing, however, is an effective application of conditionality and a clear sense of priority attached to democratization. This repeats the mistakes of past European efforts, which also emphasized the importance of rule of law, democratization and human rights, while failing to prioritize these issues with clear metrics and conditionality for further economic assistance. Instead, the European Union's traditional approach has been inspired by modernization theory, based on the notion that economic development will lead to incremental democratization.

The expectation that higher economic growth would trigger political reforms stood in sharp contrast with the realities on the ground, where entrenched authoritarianism coexisted with economic stagnation -- with economic growth reserved for the few and well-connected. After Sept. 11, European policymakers had additional incentive to prioritize security cooperation with authoritarian regimes in areas such as counterterrorism and intelligence cooperation.

Similar dynamics were at play on the other side of the Atlantic. But the grueling years of state-building in Iraq and Afghanistan lessened the Bush administration's sure-footedness in the region. The push for democratization that characterized Washington's earlier approach between 2002 and 2005 underwent further re-evaluation after significant electoral gains by Islamists in Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine. Although the U.S. continued funding for its Middle East Partnership Initiative, that program represented a small fraction of the billions devoted to foreign military funding. Despite its aggressive rhetoric, the Bush administration did not follow through with policy action. The U.S. did not punish Egypt for the trials of Saad Eddine Ibrahim and Ayman Nour, for instance, nor did then-President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali pay a price for his violations of press freedoms in Tunisia.

Ironically, the Arab Spring came just as both Washington and Brussels were growing more comfortable with the old paradigm of sustaining what they knew to be an unsustainable order. Even [President Barack Obama's famed Cairo speech](#) soft-pedaled democracy promotion in the hope that the old regimes might hold the key to an enduring Israeli-Palestinian settlement.

After registering an initial sense of relief that the uprisings themselves were not led by Islamists, Europe has begun to feel alarm over the current turn of events. If the revolts were in themselves surprising, however, the sweep of moderate Islamist parties in elections in Tunisia (41 percent), Morocco (27 percent) and Egypt (36 percent plus another 24 percent [for the hard-line Salafist Al Nour party](#)) did not come out of nowhere. The Tunisian Ennahda party received 14.5 percent of the vote back in 1989, and the Moroccan Justice and Development Party won almost 13 percent of parliamentary seats in 2002. Most recently, in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafist Al Nour party together captured nearly two-thirds of the seats in the country's three-stage parliamentary elections. Although the Muslim Brotherhood was widely predicted to emerge as the top party, almost no one expected the more radical Salafists to score as high as they did. The Libyan National Transitional Council's pronouncement in October that Sharia would be that country's main source of law -- later partially disavowed -- had already raised eyebrows. Should the Egyptian Brotherhood choose to form an Islamist government in coalition with the Salafist group, it will certainly curb the EU's enthusiasm for elections and democracy in the Arab world.

Understandably, there are now voices in the Western media expressing serious concerns, even panic, that democracy's march is leading to a radical Islamic turn in Egypt and across North Africa. Western analysts should avoid pulling the emergency brakes just yet and try to understand the nature of this complex phenomenon generically called "political Islam" in the Arab world.

The place to start is to analyze the role of Islam in societies under the thumb of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world. Across the Arab world, from North Africa to Saudi Arabia and Yemen, the absence of good governance, democratic politics and free elections has been the most funda-

mental feature of entrenched political systems. Islam, in this repressive context, emerged as the only meaningful avenue for dissent. In the absence of political parties, grassroots-oriented NGOs, freedom of association and freedom of expression, the mosques became the only place where disenfranchised masses could gather and engage in collective action. While politics was the realm of the wealthy and corrupt elite, religion was the realm of the silent majority.

Since the mosques were the only available political and social outlet in these otherwise very repressive regimes, what emerged was a phenomenon that can be best summarized as the Islamization of dissent. Since Islam was often “the only game in town,” the Islamization of dissent also created a parallel process leading to the “politicization of Islam” as the conversations in mosques turned more and more political. The fact that Islam puts tremendous emphasis on the concept of justice also helped. The equality and unity of all believers and the absence of hierarchical structures controlling the relationship between God and believer are very important features of Islam. The call for justice against tyranny is also an inherent aspect of the faith.

Concepts such as freedom, human rights and democracy have alien, Western connotations in the Islamic world. But “justice” is part of the Islamic lexicon in an authentic way. And the concept of justice naturally resonates with humiliated, repressed and frustrated masses. It is not a coincidence that from Turkey to Morocco and Egypt, political parties that wish to emphasize their conservative, religious and populist credentials against entrenched power elites all refer to “justice.” It is also important to note that in most Arab countries, Islamic movements have become very effective at providing social and economic assistance to the impoverished masses. The weakness and corruption of the state stood in sharp contrast to the organizational capacity and willingness to help [demonstrated by Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood](#). In short, what we call “political Islam” filled an important vacuum in the social and economic sphere as well.

All together, these dynamics should help understand why Islamic movements have a tremendous head start in post-authoritarian Arab societies. There is nothing surprising in their electoral victories, and the West [should not panic about their rise](#). Instead, what we are witnessing is also a political opportunity. By sharing in the responsibility of government, Islamic movements will soon realize that their long-cherished slogan that “Islam is the solution” will not work. Given the complexity of the problems they will face, Islamists will have to adapt to the new environment by becoming more pragmatic and competent. If they insist on ideological rigidity and doctrine, their failure will provide an opportunity as well. Simply put, this failure will “demystify” political Islam as the magic solution. In either case, it will be a win-win for both the West and Arab societies. Instead of panicking, the European Union should see what is unfolding in Egypt as an opportunity for either the moderation of political Islam once in power or the demystification of a powerful force.

Given its geographic proximity to the Arab world, it is only normal that Europe has more at stake in the outcome of the revolutions in the southern Mediterranean. In addition to geographic proximity, another important reason Europe feels deeply involved is the presence on the continent of a sizable Muslim population, including 16 million to 18 million Muslims within the borders of Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy and the U.K.

When revolution came to North Africa in 2011, many observers wondered what role European Muslims would play in the events: Would they be cadres for the revolution, a cheering section or a supplemental electorate abroad? How would European minorities react to the chaotic forces unleashed by international politics? Would the revolutionary spirit of Arab awakening jump the sea into “Eurabia”? Would European Muslims stage their own days of rage to protest the policies of governments in London, Paris and Rome?

The dynamic events of the past year provided an opportunity to gauge European Muslims’ political cohesiveness as well as the vehemence of their objections to Western foreign policy in North Africa. Yet, for all the shock value of the year’s events, 2011 confirmed trends long underway

across the Muslim-majority world: Osama bin Laden's moon was waning while Islamist parties' stars rose. That was good news for counterterrorism efforts, but its effect on political contestation within the oft-conjured European Umma has been subtler.

For decades, European countries have served as a bullpen for the most ardent advocates of regime change in North Africa. If waves of Islamist activists arrived in Europe between the early 1960s and the late-1990s, it was because substantive opposition parties were banned in their countries of origin. Since both Tunisia and Egypt are historical sources of Islamic organizational leadership in Europe, the legalization in those countries of Ennahda and the Ikhwan could lead to participation by European Muslims in the ensuing political competition or, at least, active support from the diaspora.

The notion that these conflicts might spread via contagion to Western Europe -- home to sizeable Muslim minorities -- was also on the minds of many in Europe and the Middle East. "The waves of Islamic awakening in the Middle East will spread to Europe very soon," Iran's U.N. ambassador said in early June. For the Dutch-Moroccan politician Ahmed Marcouch, the Arab Spring [demonstrated that](#) "Muslims need to reach out to the others and say that freedom is our common value, and we must all fight for it and defend it." For the far-right French politician Jean-Marie Le Pen, the crowds in North African capitals called a different image to mind: "The day when you have a [Muslim] mob like that marching down the Champs-Élysées -- and it would be nothing for them to have 300,000 or so -- who will stop them? They won't be there to play around," he said, suggesting French Muslims might even target the presidential Elysée palace. Over the summer, an editor at *Le Monde* saw in the Indignados movement in Spain the signs of Europe's own "light version" of the Arab Spring: "The revolt has crossed the straits of Gibraltar." The Indignados' movement over the summer and [the London riots in August](#) contributed to a sense that the Jasmine Revolution would have repercussions well beyond the borders of North Africa.

However, while the Arab Spring has affected European politics and political culture, and although increased political participation by European Muslims could eventually influence policies toward the Arab world, the Arab awakening did not have immediate political resonance for European Muslims. The demonstrations and anti-regime slogans in Tunis and Cairo have added to the repertoire of collective action in Western democracies, but not to that of European Muslims in particular, who received little spark or new urgency for their own political participation.

The reason is that none of the countries most affected by the Arab awakening are major sending states of migrants to Europe. Tunisia comes closest with roughly 600,000 residents in France and another 250,000 in Italy and Germany. This is small compared to Turkey, Morocco, Algeria and Pakistan, the main ancestral homelands of Europe's Muslims. Instability in those countries might have had a more immediate impact. Beyond the excitement of living through a historic moment and welcoming democratization, the Muslim diaspora populations who settled in Europe for economic reasons have not gone out of their way to shape outcomes in their ancestral homelands, although they have welcomed the advent of political change there.

Tunisians in France are just "couch-potato revolutionaries," [according to a commenter](#) on French news website Rue89 in mid-March. But will they be armchair voters in Tunisia's post-revolutionary democracy or actively get involved? Two-thirds of the 600,000 Tunisians in France are thought to have dual nationality. Reports have suggested there is "no particular passion for the elections, as if the euphoria of the revolution had subsided." Another French-Tunisian observer [wrote that](#) "many seem disconnected from the political issues in their country of origin, as if they had abandoned the idea of investing in it because of the ramifications of Ben Ali's repressive regime, or . . . because of a simple lack of interest."

So far, it is not clear from electoral turnout just how interested the diasporas remain in elections in their countries of origin: Voting for residents abroad can present serious logistical challenges, and it appears that just 10-20 percent of Tunisians and Moroccans abroad availed themselves of



their right to vote during the first post-Arab spring elections of 2011: the Moroccan constitutional referendum in summer 2011, in which 266,000 votes were cast by Moroccans residing abroad, or less than 10 percent of eligible adults; and the vote for a Tunisian constituent assembly in the early fall, in which roughly 120,000 Tunisians residing in France, or around 20 percent of eligible adults, cast votes at polling stations. Many millions more have simply looked on as eyewitnesses and observers. The Moroccan government did not provide polling stations for citizens residing abroad in November's parliamentary election. Of Moroccans who voted in the referendum, however, more than 96 percent approved of King Mohamed VI's proposed reforms (compared to 98 percent in Morocco itself). Just 30 percent of Tunisians in Europe voted for the Islamist Ennahda party, [which received 41 percent in Tunisia proper](#).

The electoral rise of political Islam does not discredit earlier theses of its apparent demise. In important ways, this is not your grandfather's Islamism. Europe has played host to the democratic experience of former exiles, inevitably impacting the trajectory of figures such as the leader of Tunisia's Ennahda party, Rachid Ghanouchi, and the country's new president, Moncef Marzouki. In similar fashion, they, too, might now reassure Europeans so that European capitals can shape their southern Mediterranean policies to reflect a new confidence in the region's democratic potential. Salafism is yet another challenge, but the best arm against its pernicious rise may be to ensure room for maneuver by the democratic Islamist parties, and not a return to military rule. This risks moving further away from the status quo ante, including European countries' foreign policy commitments. But the epochal shift from patronage to partnership has revealed opportunities as well as dangers. New democratic pressures will force Egypt, Tunisia and other countries impacted by the Arab awakening to evaluate their alliances and treaties with Western democracies. Europe should seize the opportunity to influence the outcome through intensive engagement, rather than responding by giving in to fear. □

*Omer Taspinar is a professor at the National War College and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.*

*Jonathan Laurence is an associate professor of political science at Boston College and a nonresident senior fellow at the Center on the U.S. and Europe of the Brookings Institution. He is author of "The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims" (2012).*

*Photo: Woman after voting in the constitutional referendum, Cairo, Egypt, March 19, 2011 (photo by Flickr user monasosh, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license).*

*A footnoted version of this article is available upon request.*

*Cover: Egypt's Tahrir Square, Nov. 18, 2011 (photo by Flickr user Lilian Wagdy, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic agreement).*

# WORLD POLITICS REVIEW

<http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com>

**WORLD POLITICS REVIEW** helps its users: 1) closely follow the events, issues and trends that constitute international affairs; and 2) better understand those events, issues and trends.

Sign up now for a free trial at [www.worldpoliticsreview.com/freetrial](http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/freetrial)

## The WPR Service

To help our subscribers closely follow international affairs, WPR provides:

- Our daily Media Roundup linking to the stories that you must follow to stay informed. Online and in your inbox.
- Our daily Leading Indicators service highlighting emerging stories before they become mainstream news. Online and in your inbox.

To help our subscribers better understand international affairs, World Politics Review publishes a variety of analytical content, including:

- Daily Briefings and Columns (more than 50 each month), written by our global network of expert contributors and columnists.
- Our in-depth, full-length reports, providing comprehensive examinations of single subjects. These include our Features (24 times a year), Special Reports (12 times a year), and Strategic Posture Reviews (six times a year).
- Daily “Trend Lines” items, providing quick-hitting expert viewpoints on important issues of the moment, including our “Global Insider” interviews.

WPR also provides a variety of tools to support subscribers’ need to conduct research and gather background information:

- WPR’s Media Roundup search allows subscribers to search for individual topics across dozens of international news sources.
- Our Documents Center aggregates important reports and studies by third-party organizations.
- Our extensive archive contains more than 4,000 (and growing) pieces of original analysis.

With all these tools at your disposal, you’ll not only know what is happening, you’ll understand why.

## Questions?

Contact us at [subscriptions@worldpoliticsreview.com](mailto:subscriptions@worldpoliticsreview.com) or +1.202.596.9771.

Corporations, schools, non-profit organizations, government agencies and other institutions can get site-wide access. Get more information about our institutional subscriptions at [about.worldpoliticsreview.com/wpr-ebSCO](http://about.worldpoliticsreview.com/wpr-ebSCO)