

The Arab Spring in North Africa: origins and prospects

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The insurgencies in Tunisia and Egypt – the Jasmine and the Tahrir Revolutions – seemed to offer great hope of the outbreak of democratic change in the Middle East and North Africa in what has come to be called the ‘Arab Spring’. However, the civil war in Libya and the ongoing crises in Yemen and Syria suggest that overall regional change may prove to be more difficult to achieve. In fact there are quite specific reasons why insurgencies occurred in three North African states and not in the remaining two states and why their outcomes have been so different. The causes for the insurgency are similar – they lie in the global economic crisis and in the neo-patrimonial political natures of regional states – but the outcomes differ because two of the states concerned were liberalising autocracies and the third – Libya – had resolutely rejected any political or social domestic competitors to its hegemonic political discourse and practice. Even the liberalised autocracies face very different futures for, in Tunisia a whole system has been removed whilst in Egypt, the regime rejected its figurehead in order to preserve the regime itself. Ironically enough, the authorities in Tunisia attempted a similar course of action but were unable to impose themselves on the revolution that had occurred.

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I realized only two decades later the momentous power of such a moment – how an egregious act can electrify a population until then ambivalent, and convince them that a confined dispute between political forces carried implications worthy of drawing them out of their living rooms, into the fray.¹

One of the great ironies of the art of political and economic forecasting is that forecasters virtually never anticipate the timing of major events. They may well know and even expect that certain types of paradigm shifts² are going to take place in international relations but they cannot identify the precise moment when they will occur, nor can they recognise the catalysing event that makes such a shift possible. The recent events at the start of 2011 in North Africa seem to fall within this category of unpredictability; most observers knew that change of some kind was inevitable but nobody knew when it would happen, nor were they aware of the events that would spark the process off. Most striking of all, few observers realised the vulnerability of the autocracies that existed there and the fragility they would demonstrate when challenged.

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One of the major reasons for this has recently been provided by Nassim Taleb and Mark Blyth³ when they pointed out that socio-political and financial-economic systems are ‘grounded in complexity, interdependence and unpredictability’.⁴ When such systems are artificially constrained by policy initiatives designed to ensure stability, they are ultimately rendered extremely fragile by the risks and challenges that accumulate but are not released because of this search for stability – by domestic regimes and their external supporters as well. Ultimately, such systems become ‘prone to Black Swans – that is they become extremely prone to large-scale events that lie far from the statistical norm and were largely unpredictable to a given set of observers’.⁵ In other words, the accumulated tensions and challenges that have not been resolved but, instead, artificially repressed in the search for stability erupt in unpredictable ways and with unpredicted consequences.

In the wake of such events, policy-makers often seek to attribute blame for the failure to anticipate the Black Swans that have occurred; pointlessly since, by their very nature, they are unpredictable except for the fact that the dominant purpose of policy – stability – has in itself been a primary progenitor of the crises that erupted. In addition, Taleb and Blyth point out that subsequent analysis usually identify catalysts as causes thus preparing the way for the next catastrophe.⁶ Thus, the recent crisis in North Africa has been explained away by the global food price crisis and the support given by the West to the regimes that have now been displaced by anxieties over political Islam, whereas the evidence seems to suggest that the real driver for the insurgencies in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya has been the contempt and repressiveness with which the Mubarak, Ben Ali and Qadhafi regimes treated the people over whom they ruled.

This article seeks to demonstrate that, although economic circumstances have formed an essential background to the events that took place in North Africa in the first eight months of 2011, they are not a complete explanation in themselves. Instead, it has been the discordance between the claims made by regimes as part of the process of seeking to legitimise themselves and the reality of regime repression and contempt that has been the real driver of the process. In short, their refusal to tolerate active popular political participation in the process of governance would act as the driver for the crises they faced, once the appropriate catalyst could be found. And the nature of the catalyst, of course, explains the timing of the crises that occurred. That nature, in itself, also reflects the consequence of regime repression and, ironically enough sometimes, concessions to political openness that some regimes have demonstrated in recent years.

Indeed, the evolution of the crises in each state has been a function of the actual political natures of the regimes themselves for, despite their intense political repressiveness, the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes in Egypt and Tunisia, rather like the Bouteflika regime in Algeria but quite unlike the regime in Libya, had increasingly allowed significant space in recent years for a degree of popular social and economic autonomy of expression and action. This was allied to processes of restricted political liberalisation, designed never to threaten regime control. They were, in short, ‘liberalised autocracies’, in the term invented by Daniel Brumberg⁷ or ‘illiberal democracies’, as Fareed Zakaria had termed them some years earlier.⁸ This meant, however, that, contrary to the conclusions reached by Daniel Brumberg in 2002, where permitted civil society institutions were part of the package of autocratic regime maintenance, when the final confrontation came with the authoritarian state, autonomous institutions existed to mobilise social movements that could successfully challenge the regimes in question. It was only in Libya, where a full autocracy, unprepared to make political concessions of any kind, had been in operation that radical political change could only result in civil war.

The economic background

Even if economic issues were not the proximate cause of the insurgencies and revolutions that we have witnessed, they certainly formed part of the background. This was particularly true of the global spike in food and energy costs that occurred in the second half of 2010 and which paralleled the situation in 2008. The immediate effect of this was a dramatic escalation in food and energy prices in the region, which had a direct impact on populations already living close to the poverty line, such as many in North Africa. According to the *United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation*, since July 2010, prices of many cereals and other foodstuffs have risen dramatically. Prices of maize increased 74%; wheat went up by 84%; sugar by 77% and oils and fats by 57%. It also pointed out that, in January 2011 its food price index was up 3.4% from December 2010, reaching 231 (1990 = 100) and marking the highest level since the organisation started measuring food prices in 1990.⁹ At the same time, energy costs have risen dramatically; in 2010 crude prices leapt from a low of \$75 per barrel in July to \$91 per barrel in December and to \$109 per barrel in March 2011. According to America's Energy Information Administration, prices rose by 29% between 2009 and 2010 and were expected to rise by 34% between 2010 and 2011.¹⁰

Behind this, however, looms the question as to why populations in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region should have been so vulnerable to such price rises. After all, economic development has been a key concern of policy-makers from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (IBRD) to the European Union (EU) for decades – since the 1980s for the first two bodies and at least since 1995 for the EU, as a result of the introduction of the Barcelona Process, although it has encouraged growth in the South Mediterranean since 1969.¹¹ Ever since the debt crisis emerged in the developing world in the wake of the global oil price shock of the 1970s, all three have tried to prescribe economic development policies based on neoliberal economic principles, associated with the 'Washington Consensus'¹² and designed to improve general levels of prosperity. Although macroeconomic indicators and external account balances may have improved, this has not been the case as far as microeconomic circumstances are concerned. One key factor, in this respect, has been the persistence of high rates of unemployment, averaging between 10 and 20% – with much higher rates amongst young people – alongside widespread poverty in the region. Economic development, in short, seems to have done little to minimise such vulnerability. Economic models, requiring massive reform and restructuring have been imposed upon the region for decades but have done little, in effect, to improve the microeconomic scene.

In 2005, for instance, 3.8% of the Egyptian population were classified as in extreme poverty – not being able to meet their essential needs – 19.6% were 'poor', being just on or just below the poverty line (\$2 per day), and 21% were 'near poor', being just able to meet their needs. Egypt's GINI index, which measures wealth inequalities, had been static between 1992 and 2006 at around 32, making Egypt the ninetieth most unequal state in the world where the top 10% of the population controlled around 27% of national wealth.¹³ Even in 2011, 20% of the population remained below the poverty line and unemployment in 2010 was around 13%. Similar statistics could be cited for other MENA countries. In Tunisia, for example, 7.4% of the population in 2010 was below the poverty line and unemployment ran at 14%. The GINI index there had declined from 41.7 in 1995 to 40 in 2005 and the richest 10% of the population controlled 31.5% of the wealth of the state.

Yet Tunisia has been regularly praised in Brussels as a beacon of good economic management and an economy that was the tiger of the Mediterranean! Since, over 20 years of economic

restructuring and reform along the lines of the neoliberal Washington Consensus and in accordance with the European Union's own economic prescriptions, average levels of wealth, income distribution and poverty have not changed or have even declined, it should be recognised that, as a linear projection, little is likely to improve in the future unless economic outcomes are as unpredictable as their political parallels. Of course, 'trickledown' may suddenly begin to work but there has been little evidence so far that this will be the case. In addition, perhaps investment flows may dramatically improve to levels consonant with major technology transfer – something that has so far proved to be highly unlikely, apart from a brief period at the end of the last decade when Gulf sovereign wealth funds suddenly began to invest in the region, a process that has now ceased as a result of the global financial crisis from 2008 onwards – but there is little evidence to support this (see the Appendix). And the consequence of its failure is not only continuing poverty and economic discontent that can translate in political rejection of existing regimes; it is also massive outward migration, with Europe as its primary target (Tables 1 and 4 in Appendix).

This would suggest that economic models need radical revision if poverty and wealth distribution are to be significantly improved in the future. However, there is little consensus as to how this should be done, even though viable models exist in the South East Asian and Chinese experience.¹⁴ The result, therefore, is likely to be that future unpredictability in the economic sphere will compound itself on the caution of policy-makers, so that aspirations for poverty reduction will be confounded. Insofar as policy-makers tend to mistake symptoms for causes, looking for the reasons for failure inside the assumed policy failures of the states themselves, rather than in the nature of both the economic prescriptions they applied and in the implications of unregulated globalisation, the uncertainty of economic outcomes is likely to be rendered more unpredictable, with trends tending towards the negative.

Quite apart from such considerations, however, the statistics cited above make it clear that microeconomic failure had had significant social effects and, given the unprecedented rise in food costs in late 2010, had promoted unrest across the region at the end of that year.¹⁵ Quite apart from protests in Tunisia, there had been demonstrations in Algeria and Morocco as well. In Algeria, the government responded by cutting import duties and taxes on cooking oil and sugar, moves which reduced the domestic prices of these commodities by around 41%. The initiatives were effective and the riots, which had been the worst in the country for many years, subsided.¹⁶ The president also raised the state-of-emergency which had been in operation since 1991 – a key demand of the political parties for many years – and later announced constitutional reforms as well, even though, unlike the situation in Tunisia next door, there had been little effective or coherent popular demand for such political developments, an initiative for regular Saturday demonstrations in support of such demands having collapsed in February in the face of overwhelming police repression. Indeed, the constitutional proposals, when they emerged in August 2011, were dismissed as, essentially, presidential tinkering with Algeria's ongoing political crisis that did not deal with any of the fundamental problems. These revolve around the relationship between the Algerian army command, the security services and the state – issues from which public opinion is still effectively excluded – and the terrifying memory of the civil war in the 1990s (see Entelis, this volume).

Morocco experienced similar troubles, with riots in many cities over harsh economic conditions. They began on 17 January over unemployment and high utility prices – many utilities in Morocco are provided by foreign corporations and the prices they charge have long been a source of popular anger – reaching a climax in Tangier on 19 February.¹⁷ The following day major protests over political conditions, organised by a youth group now known as the February

20th Movement, took place throughout the country. The Moroccan monarchy responded to both types of protest by announcing constitutional change, although not fully in line with the protesters' demands, and subsequently in late April, economic improvements involving increases in the basic national minimum wage and in public service salaries. Once again, as in Algeria, this seemed to have eased popular discontent, although activists still clamoured for more radical change, particularly after constitutional changes were announced and approved with a suspiciously large majority vote in July 2011 (see Maghraoui, this volume). One major complaint, particularly from the February 20th Movement, about them, as in Algeria, was that they preserved the essential prerogatives of the existing power-structures intact, thus avoiding key popular demands for genuine democratic participation.

In short, in both Morocco and Algeria unrest began over economic circumstances but, although political demands became enmeshed in these economic protests, they did not escalate into full confrontation with the regimes concerned. Nor were activists able to develop meaningful social movements out of the economic unrest, to push forward a radical political agenda, different to that of government, which enjoyed mass public support. In part this was due to the rapidity with which the regimes themselves responded to popular unrest but also – at least in the case of Morocco – it clearly had to do with the legitimacy the regime still enjoys in the eyes of the population at large, despite economic and social discontent.¹⁸ In Algeria, too, the bitter memory of the civil war in the 1990s deterred many from considering radical challenge to government lest such a conflict should re-emerge, given the residual terrorism that still affects large parts of the country, especially in Kabylia.

Liberalised autocracies

Two questions therefore arise over the very different situations and consequences that developed in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. The first is why there were such differences in the responses there, compared with the situations in Morocco and Algeria. The second is how was it possible for protesters in Egypt and Tunisia to create what were effective and apparently spontaneous social movements that so rapidly captured the popular mood and thus effected the changes activists sought. Linked to this is the question of Libya, where attempts to form such movements collapsed into civil war, suggesting that local activists lacked the resources and socio-political infrastructure essential to challenging the regime in ways other than those that involved main force. This, in itself, is an issue worth investigating which clearly has something to do with the fundamental differences in the natures of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, compared with that in Libya, particularly in terms of official attitudes towards political challenge.

The answer lies, in part at least, in the way in which Western triumphalist optimism of the start of the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, was gradually replaced by a more realistic appreciation of the global scene. At the end of 1997, Fareed Zakaria noted a disturbing trend in what had been seen to be the fundamental dispensation of the post-Cold War era.¹⁹ The end of the Cold War, after all, had been greeted with enthusiasm as marking the end of ideological conflict and signalling the triumph of the democratic ideal at a global scale. As early as 1989, Francis Fukuyama had proclaimed the end of the history of contention between political ideologies, as democratic governance now occupied the political field, backed up by liberal economic organisation at both the state and the global level.²⁰ Adam Roberts in 1991, although much more pessimistic, echoed the basic premise as far as the politics of the developed world were concerned.²¹ Even Samuel Huntington's bleak vision of civilisational conflict was premised on the superiority of the liberal democratic order.²²

Fareed Zakaria, however, writing more than half a decade later – by which time it had become clear that what had been seen as the beginning of a stable new world order, based on American hegemony as the sole hyperpower, was potentially much less permanent than it appeared to be – pointed out that democracy, alone, was an insufficient prescription. Unconsciously echoing Hayek²³ but citing De Tocqueville and Madison, he pointed out that democracy also contained the potential for tyranny unless mediated by other factors because of its claim to absolute sovereignty.²⁴ Constitutional liberalism – the generalised belief in inalienable individual rights and the rule-of-law that developed in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – was, for him, the key mediating force for it had to do with the limiting of power, rather than its acquisition.²⁵ Political systems that lacked this component were essentially ‘illiberal’ and thus ultimately frustrated the aspirations of their populations, for the status of the individual could not and would not be guaranteed, as was supposed to be the case in democracies, whilst the allegedly participatory political process simply became a mechanism for enforcing an hegemonic political discourse.

By the start of the last decade, it had become clear that illiberal democracy was not just an aberration of the liberal democratic ideal, as Fareed Zakaria had supposed. Instead, it had become a device by which autocratic regimes entrenched their power. This was the phenomenon that Daniel Brumberg identified in 2002 when he remarked that, ‘In the Arab world, a set of interdependent institutional, economic, ideological, social, and geostrategic factors has created an adaptable ecology of repression, control and partial openness’.²⁶ He went on to point out that such systems also benefited from the acquiescence, even degrees of active support, from opposition groups and movements because they also benefited from the new autonomous political space that regimes now tolerated, even if their autonomy was carefully circumscribed to ensure the security of the regime itself. He added that, in such circumstances, illiberal oppositions could also be manipulated to ‘crowd out’ genuinely democratic alternatives whilst still preserving the formal democratic illusion. The reverse was also true, in that state encouragement of restricted democratic expression could also be used to confine and isolate illiberal opposition movements as well.

Daniel Brumberg went on to argue that such partial political liberalisation was not only a conscious choice by regimes to ensure survival but represented the ways in which autocratic regimes compensated for a lack of alternative resources through which full autocracy could be maintained. Thus the Gulf states, in particular Saudi Arabia, had oil wealth as a resource through which political discontent could be ‘bought off’, or symbolic or cultural capital, typically expressed by the formal mobilisation of Islam could be used to bolster regime legitimacy as was the case in Jordan or Morocco.²⁷ However, if such resources were lacking, then partial liberalisation – not as a stepping stone to liberal democracy but as a mechanism for regime acceptability – was the preferred option in the Arab world. Such regimes he considered to be ‘liberalised autocracies’. He noted that they were characterised by toleration for political dissonance and being non-hegemonic in terms of dominant political ideologies, for their ruling elites could juggle competing ideas to ensure their own continued control as arbiters of such pluralistic political scenes, which they had no intention of ceding through genuine liberalisation.²⁸

Such partial political liberalisation was also accompanied by a partially liberalised institutional space as well. Thus political parties could be tolerated, provided they did not challenge existing regimes, as could institutions devoted to activities directed towards civil society objectives, and individuals could enjoy restricted, contingent individual freedoms – contingent because they remained in the gift of the regime in question, for it was the case that all non-governmental organisations were regulated by government in these countries.²⁹ Indeed,

Daniel Brumberg pointed out that such concessions could be withdrawn as well as granted and he detected a tendency towards their restriction over the decade in question.³⁰ However, such strategies of 'state-managed political liberalisation' used by Arab governments to avoid 'the challenges of democratisation', enabled external powers, such as the United States and the European Union, to persuade themselves that genuine liberalisation would ultimately be possible.³¹ Thus real engagement to alter the political realities of the Middle East and North Africa was not necessary – a particularly important point in view of the securitisation agenda adopted by Western states after 2001.³²

It was for these reasons, no doubt, that both the United States and the European Union – the two main agents, in theory, for democratisation – actually did so little in the Middle East and North Africa to achieve such outcomes after the end of the Cold War. Rhetoric, in effect, became a substitute for meaningful action. Thus, after it introduced the Barcelona Process into the Mediterranean in 1995, the Union never sought seriously to enforce the requirement contained in all the economic agreements that it signed with South Mediterranean states for 'good governance and respect for individual rights'. The United States, in a similar fashion, introduced bilateral policies with the same states after 2004 as part of its Greater Middle East Initiative, in the form of the US-Middle East Partnership Initiative, which also emphasised good governance and respect for human rights. However, although Condoleezza Rice, the then Secretary-of-State, pointed out in Cairo in June 2005, 'For sixty years the United States pursued stability at the expense of democracy in the Middle East – and we achieved neither. Now we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people',³³ – sentiments that were to be echoed by President Obama in Cairo in June 2009 – the reality hardly changed.

The partial liberalisation adopted by the regimes there proved to be sufficient to satisfy Western sensitivities, in short, especially as security and securitisation became the dominant theme of inter-regional relations. Indeed, on occasion, individual Western states actually reinforced the hegemonic tendencies of North African states by encouraging them to suppress incipient social movements that they believed to be threatening to European interests. Thus France, in recent years, encouraged the Ben Ali regime in its policies of political repression because of illusory French fears of the danger of moderate political Islam ushering in extremism. Britain collaborated with Algeria over the deportation of alleged extremists, this time because of its fears of domestic radicalisation, and would have done the same in Libya, had it not been hindered by the British courts. Italy, by 2010, collaborated closely with Libya over preventing migration into Europe³⁴ and the European Union externalised its migration control policies and its concerns over terrorism.³⁵

At the time, because the manifold restrictions placed on partial political liberalisation by the regimes that exploited such opportunities to improve their own stability, the possibility of such eventual democratisation processes was rendered even more remote by the success of the liberalised autocracy initiative. It came in many forms, as an examination of North African states demonstrates. In Algeria, there was 'façade democracy'³⁶ and increased freedom of expression but the real process of political decision-making remained occult and the subject of a continuous struggle between an executive presidency and the Algerian army command.³⁷ In Morocco, the monarchy defined the public space which it then sacralised against the challenge of moderate Islamist political parties and movements, reducing a democratically elected government to technocratic management of the state and marginalising parliament.³⁸ The Mubarak regime in Egypt tolerated a degree of political pluralism and media freedoms with the constant threat of repression and the state-enforced fragmentation of civil society against a background of a corrupted

private sector.³⁹ In Tunisia, the Ben Ali family plundered the economy and repressed all autonomous attempts at political expression, outside the bounds that it itself set, whilst manipulating the independent trade union movement, human rights activists and dissident journalists and lawyers (Mabrouk, this volume).⁴⁰ It was only constrained from going further by the constitutional tradition in Tunisian political life which it could only contravene at the risk of unrest. Only in Libya did such issues not arise, given the baleful perfection of the *jamahiri* system which left no space whatever for autonomous political or social action (Brahimi, this volume).⁴¹

However, in every case where a liberalised autocracy was instituted, there was a common thread. This consisted of the fact that autonomous organisations emerged, not formally controlled by the state, that could address predominantly social concerns and, on occasion, political concerns as well. Thus, although the state could retain ultimate control over this partially liberalised social space, it also allowed for autonomous action there too, thus granting the organisations populating it a degree of agency alongside the autonomous structures they were permitted to create.⁴² The state could, of course, always intervene, as the Mubarak regime actually did in Egypt in the 1990s when it altered the rules governing professional syndicates in order to prevent an Islamist takeover of them.⁴³ Indeed, the Muslim Brotherhood itself in Egypt was able to revive after the repression of the movement under the Nassirist state in a similar manner, even though it was formally banned by the Mubarak regime (Alexander, this volume). Even in Tunisia, where alternative parties to the *Rassemblement Constitutionnelle Démocratique* were only permitted after 1980 and then only within highly restricted bounds, the trade union confederation, the *Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens* (UGTT), survived numerous attempts by both the Bourguibist and Ben Ali states to curb its autonomy after 1978, as did human rights organisations and individual lawyers and journalists.

One reason, of course, for regime hegemony, whether in liberalised autocracies or not, was that the actual regimes ensured that they were able to create coalitions with elites which would thus have a vested interest in their continuation in power. Sometimes, these elites also comprised essential institutions of the state. Thus, in Algeria, the army command became the shadow state behind an arbitrary, charismatic presidency.⁴⁴ In Egypt, the army, again, was essential to the Mubarak regime's security whilst the private sector, as a result of the *infatih* reforms of the 1970s, gradually became the regime's essential economic partner, despite growing labour unrest after 2005. The regime in Tunisia, too, looked to the private sector, which eventually the president's family tried unwisely to take over, thus alienating potential supporters through its arrogant and unconcealed corruption. After breaking with the UGTT in the 1960s, it also looked to the traditional conservative allies in the rural notability and urban merchant class which formed the bulk of support for the regime's single-party state.⁴⁵ Thus such coalition partners inevitably also appeared to be guarantors against potential dissidence within the partially liberalised space that these regime now created whilst the new occupants of this partially autonomous space could also appear to be potential regime clients as well.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, these occupants, whether organisations or even individuals, effectively became the precursors of the kind of civil society that would normally mediate between the state and the private sphere within democratic polities and thus acquired the potential to transmute into social movements prepared to contest regime discourses, should pro-regime alliances ever falter.

Social movements

This was to become extremely important, for it meant that, were the appropriate conditions created for such organisations to become the vehicles of social protest, they could also

become the foci for the development of social movements that could directly challenge the autocratic regimes that sought to restrict them. The question then is how were such incipient social movements able to mobilise the kinds of mass support that would enable them to challenge regimes? It is a statement about both agency and structure and, as such, requires some understanding of how social movements function. Social movements are a reflection of contentious politics and are the base-rock upon which opportunities for major political change depend. As Tarrow has proposed:⁴⁷

Contentious politics emerge in response to changes in political opportunities and constraints, with participants responding to a variety of incentives; material and ideological, partisan and group-based, longstanding and episodic. Building on these opportunities, and using known repertoires of action, people with limited resources can act contentiously – if only sporadically. When their actions are based on dense social networks and connective structures and draw on consensual and action oriented cultural frames, they can sustain these actions in conflict with powerful opponents. In such cases – and *only* in such cases – we are in the presence of a social movement; when contention spreads across a society, as it sometimes does, we see a cycle of contention; when such a cycle is organized around opposed or multiple sovereignties, the outcome is a revolution.

Social movements are, therefore, collective challenges to authority which embody common purposes. They tend to be a product of transitional societies and are facilitated by the social phenomena that such transitions produce, such as urbanisation, industrialisation and mass education, as mediated today through new means of mass communication and opportunities for political engagement. In a similar fashion, partial liberalisation also creates circumstances in which such movements may emerge if the structures generated by such state-directed liberalisation processes acquire independent agency as well. They thus often require catalytic events to initiate them and, characteristically, often – but not always – involve charismatic leadership. In addition, insofar as they lie outside the established structures of the state, they may also reflect – or be alleged to reflect – criminalised patterns of behaviour, a reflection of the anomie that contributes to their formation as well as of official hostility towards them.

Such movements are, in effect, collective manifestations of social disequilibrium and a range of explanations has been adduced to analyse what may cause such a development. For functional social psychologists, they result from structural strain induced by a cause exogenous to the movement itself. This creates both generalised grievance and mass anomie such that individuals engage in collective action as a coping mechanism in a pathological response to established political order.⁴⁸ The exogenous causes can reflect socio-economic transition, political exclusion and authoritarianism, as well as cultural or ideological conflict. Such circumstances certainly define the background against which such movements can develop, as they explain why collective action might develop, although they do not describe how it can occur.

For this reason, explanations of this kind have long been regarded as too simplistic to capture the complexities of social movements,⁴⁹ particularly in terms of the ways in which they operate. One major objection has been that explanations of this kind do little to explain how individuals in the social atomisation implied by anomie could collectivise and mobilise their frustrations and aspirations and how they would then express them. Insofar as such movements are rational and organised, they will mobilise whatever resources are available to them. Thus they require and therefore create bureaucracies or take over existing administrative structures as part of the process of formation. It is for this reason that, in Islamic activist movements, for instance, the mosque can play a crucial role, alongside informal Islamic institutions, such as charities, schools, societies and cultural centres.⁵⁰ The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has been adept at mobilising such structures to its own advantage in the 1970s before it moved on to exploiting

more formalised structures, such as professional organisations and even political parties in the following decades.

Such patterns of resource mobilisation can easily morph into more formal structures of contention such as political parties, as has tended to be the case with Islamic social movements in recent years in countries such as Egypt, Algeria and Morocco. Indeed, social movements and political parties can co-exist as different patterns of mutually reinforcing contention, thus creating social movement communities, as has been the case in Morocco and Algeria. Here, patterns of contention are diffused between formal and informal movements with flexible leaderships and fluid boundaries between them. This was precisely the pattern which developed in Algeria during the 1980s and which contributed to the atmosphere in which countrywide riots developed in October 1988. These challenged the existing political system and initiated the changes that were eventually to lead to the civil war in the 1990s. In Morocco in that decade, it led to a formal political party and an informal social movement seeking similar political objectives of democratising the political system despite the formal competition between them.⁵¹

The drivers for such resource mobilisation are, of course, socio-political in nature and a crucial aspect of them is the way in which participants either exploit existing informal political tendencies to articulate their grievances or conceptualise their own participation in collective action and attract others to join them. In other words, the way in which the dominant discourse of contention for the social movement is framed is a key factor in its mobilisation of support and action. These 'frames of contention' are, in effect, interpretive schemata which provide a context for an ideological analysis which justifies contention and for the social movement associated with it.⁵² They provide diagnoses of social disequilibrium, solutions to it and rationales for action to achieve them that have meaning and value for participants.

In the context of the Muslim world, political extrapolations of Islamic doctrine have emerged as the most frequent framing ideology but have latterly been challenged by more secular discourses. In part the role played by political Islam has arisen from the cultural context but it is also a conscious reaction to other ideological failures rooted in nationalism and secularist ideologies of liberation and development. Specific aspects of the Islamic corpus have become important, particularly those governing social and political organisation such as the concept of a just society and *shar'ia* (Islamic jurisprudence), together with more atavistic and symbolic concepts, such as the recreation of the Caliphate.⁵³

Such framing ideologies can, of course, be contested both in terms of content and strategy or tactics, such that mechanisms are developed to impose a hegemonic discourse on the movement. It was this that lay behind the struggle between the GIA (*Groupes Islamiques Armés – Jama'at Islamiyya Musalaha*) and the AIS (*Armée Islamique du Salut – Jaysh Islamiyya li'l-Inqadh*) during the Algerian civil war in the 1990s. Now, of course, the popular memory of the civil war has proved to be a massive disincentive to generalised participation in social movements challenging the state, even though the regime that mobilises it lacks popular acceptance. The frame can also be challenged from outside, particularly if the movement's major opponent, the state, has created its own hegemonic framing ideology. Thus the Moroccan monarchy's claim to be a caliphate and thus to dominate the domestic Islamic agenda challenges the discourse of groups such as 'Adl wa'l-Ihsan and the PJD (*Parti de la Justice et du Développement – Hizb al-'Adala wa'l-Tanmiyya*) and is generally accepted within the population.⁵⁴

In addition, as recent events in North Africa have shown, the Islamist discourse that was expected to dominate social movements has been challenged by much simpler yet more profound frames centred around basic individual rights and freedoms. In many respects, no doubt, they reflect a basic demand for social justice typical of Muslim societies but they have

been articulated without recourse to political Islamic archetypes. Alongside such demands which often reflect economic imperatives, there have been political demands as well. There are demands that reflect an imperious insistence on participating in the political process and thus challenge regime hegemony but more importantly, they challenge the implicit assumption of autocratic regimes that their control of power renders them in some way legitimate. Indeed, this has been one of the most direct threats to existing regimes and the reason why, in Tunisia and Egypt, regimes were swept away under the pressure of the social movements that had emerged, often by the core structures on which such regimes were based, in order to preserve their hegemony of power. Elsewhere, as in Libya, regimes have not acquiesced in their own demise but cannot impose themselves by main force either, whereas in those circumstances where regimes have sustained popular perceptions of their legitimacy, as in Morocco, they have survived, at the cost only of tactical concession.

Regime collapse and regime survival

If indeed the changes that we have seen in the past six months are the consequence of social movements emerging from the semi-autonomous organisations created through the process of partial liberalisation in liberalised autocracies, then we need to establish how such organisations escaped from state control to emerge as such social movements, able to successfully challenge regimes. We need to understand the processes by which precursor movements, trapped within the liberalised autocracy consensus, were able to overturn it by breaking through the constraints it imposed to become social movements capable of contesting regime legitimacy and regime control. This is, after all, the essential stage that has enabled the destruction of the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes but which has failed in Libya, whilst it was avoided in Morocco and Algeria. The fact that Libya retained its character as an uncompromising autocracy, despite the initiatives undertaken by Colonel Qadhafi's second son, Saif al-Islam, suggests that such evolutions must be related to issues of political legitimacy and liberalisation, typical of the other regimes in the region, rather than to simply issues of economic crisis.

In other words, liberalised autocracies, ironically enough, set up the conditions for their own demise by creating space for the evolution of autonomous precursor movements – ostensibly under regime control – which, in the right conditions, could evolve into movements of political contention. They had been encouraged to do so by indirect pressure by outside powers to liberalise as a precursor to the creation of democratic regimes but had realised that partial liberalisation could also serve to guarantee regime survival. What such regimes had not realised was that, by ceding public space even under supervision, they had in effect ceded potential control as well. The simple fact of tolerating the growth of autonomous social and even political movements could be interpreted as a sign of regime weakness, as such movements began to develop frames of contention that could drive their transformation into full social movements as well. At the same time, it is important to distinguish this process from the ways in which democratic governance emerged in Latin America in the 1960s, where elites in charge of government themselves took part an evolutionary process as part of the process to protect their own positions inside the state.⁵⁵

As a result, these precursor movements only required an appropriate catalyst to expand into social movements, directly contesting the power of the regime which now faced a major dilemma in terms of its response. Full autocracies, of course, had little problem. Not only did they not face organised social movements contesting power for they had not permitted the creation of autonomous public space, but their responses would clearly involve outright force, of

which they enjoyed a formal monopoly. For liberalised autocracies, however, the dilemma was that outright repression could threaten regime credibility, an essential aspect of regime survivability, for now control of political power could be openly contested. This meant that either concessions had to be made to ‘buy off’ protest – an option that was only viable if protestors were not prepared to challenge regime continuance, as occurred in Morocco and Algeria. Or the regime itself had to be prepared to mutate in order to survive, a strategy followed unsuccessfully in Tunisia but with considerable success in Egypt.

Tunisia: a success?

Demonstrations in Tunisia began, as mentioned above, over the issue of the sudden escalation of food prices in late 2010. The situation, however, was transformed by the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazzizi on 17 December in the central Tunisian town of Sidi Bou Zid, in response to the way in which he had been treated by the local authorities after his fruit-and-vegetable stall was seized, ostensibly because he lacked the appropriate municipal licence. His personal sacrifice immediately came to symbolise the generalised popular disgust with the repressive contempt that the Ben Ali regime voiced towards its population, alongside widespread anger at the way in which the president’s family, led by his wife, Leila Trabelsi, had plundered the Tunisian economy through its corrupt control of the private sector.

Spontaneous demonstrations in sympathy with Mohammed Bouazzizi’s action were soon taken in hand by local branches of the UGTT, together with representatives of lawyers associations and journalists. They organised a series of rolling demonstrations around the country, culminating in major demonstrations in the capital Tunis, in protest against the regime’s repressive policies since 1991, when it had first turned on the country’s Islamist movement, *Annahda*. Very rapidly the demonstrations coalesced around a demand for the removal of the Ben Ali regime from power. On 14 January, the president stepped down and fled Tunisia for Saudi Arabia, thus bringing his 23-year-long regime to an end. Subsequently, a lengthy denouement eventually saw the single political party, the *Rassemblement Culturelle et Démocratique* (RCD), dismantled and a complex process for drawing up a new democratic constitution begin.

There are several aspects to this narrative that are worthy of note. First is the fact that there were clearly traditions of autonomous expression in Tunisia which had not been crushed by the Ben Ali regime. The trade union movement, the UGTT, is one for, although its central administration was repeatedly disciplined by the regime, both under President Habib Bourguiba and under the Ben Ali regime, its local branches preserved a considerable degree of autonomy of action. Alongside this were the country’s human rights organisations – the *Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l’Homme* and, later, the *Comité National des Libertés en Tunisie* which, although emasculated in the 1990s, nonetheless continued to play a semi-clandestine role. It was buttressed by lawyers, independent journalists and, later by bloggers and internet journalists.⁵⁶

Secondly, there is a very strong tradition of constitutionalism in Tunisia; all the country’s major political movements, from the start of the twentieth century onwards – the *Destour*, the *Neo-Destour*, the *Parti Socialiste Destourien* and the RCD – derive their legitimacy from the fact that they claim their origins in a movement – the *Destour* (‘Constitution’) – set up to persuade the French occupying authorities to honour both the terms of the Treaty of La Bardo which introduced the French Protectorate in 1881 and the Tunisian Constitution, promulgated in 1860 and the first constitution in the Arab world. This tradition always hindered the regime from being as repressive as it would have liked to be and made sure that it took care to allow limited political pluralism, provided that this never threatened the hegemony of the

RCD. Indeed the secular political parties that were permitted after 1980 often collaborated with the regime because of their fear of Islamism.⁵⁷ It was when the presidency breached this principle of formal constitutionality, by altering the constitution in order to allow the incumbent to stand for more than two terms and instituting a bicameral parliamentary assembly to entrench RCD control that its support-base began to fragment, as had its predecessor's over similar issues in the 1980s.⁵⁸

Thirdly, although the regime had ensured its hegemony by the social coalitions it had made and by its control of the security services, it had also traditionally marginalised the Tunisian army to ensure that it could never be a threat. Thus the army had only taken part in political affairs once in 1984 when it was brought in by President Bourguiba to restore order after severe food riots. Otherwise its officers were profoundly apolitical and were never encouraged to take part in political affairs, even within the RCD which was, effectively, Tunisia's single political party. In parallel with this, internal security duties were undertaken by the police and the security services which were increasingly used to cow the population and dissuade it from political engagement. For the Tunisian middle class, this meant that economic prosperity was offered as an alternative, whilst the impoverished working class and the peasantry was, when needed, repressed. There was, after all, the spectre of what had happened in the early 1990s to remind the population of regime power and determination. Then the country's Islamist movement, *An-Nahda*, had been brutally dismantled after it had tried to participate in the pluralistic polity that the Ben Ali regime had promised in 1989, just after it had come to power.

It was, therefore, hardly surprising that, once Mohammed Bouazzizi's spectacular self-sacrifice had become the catalyst, transforming the anger over economic deprivation into political protest, that there were organisations ready and able to create a powerful social movement out of the popular disgust at regime corruption and repression and targeted at removing it. Interestingly enough, however, the initial target was the president and his family, not the massive structure of the RCD which was the real core of the regime. And, even more striking, it was because the regime had always excluded the Tunisian army from a political role that it finally collapsed, for the army refused to fire on demonstrators when ordered to do so and, in the face of the evidence of the inability of the police and security forces to control the demonstrations, it was the RCD leadership itself that decided that, to preserve its own power, the president and his family had to be sacrificed. Only then did the demonstrators turn their anger against the RCD as it tried to hang onto power. There ensued a lengthy tussle between continuing demonstrations and the party, as the latter tried to reconstruct government under its control. It was only on 6 February 2011, three weeks after the president had been deposed, that the party itself was formally dissolved by a Tunisian court and the Tunisian revolution had achieved its primary objective, the dissolution of a regime that had been effectively in power since independence in 1956.

Egypt: a partial success?

The creation of a liberalised autocracy in Egypt really goes back to the decision by President Sadat to both open the Egyptian economy to private investment in the *infatah* programme and to seek new coalition partners to ensure domestic peace as Egypt renewed its ties with the West after 1973. The result was a tacit alliance between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood by which the latter was permitted to reassert itself within Egyptian society, although not given legal status, and the growth of a private sector allied to the regime by economic interest. At the same time, the Sadat regime allowed formal political parties to enter the political scene, although

they were never able to seriously challenge the regime's own party, the National Democratic Party. In effect, therefore, the Sadat regime abandoned the total hegemony that its predecessor, the Nassir regime, had exercised over the state. In its place the Sadat regime had created a liberalised autocracy which its successor under, Hosni Mubarak, was to continue.⁵⁹

The Mubarak regime was also to engage in the wholesale privatisation of the Egyptian economy, a project involving 312 state enterprises, mainly in the Delta, which brought increased inflows of foreign investment as well as the growth of domestic investment but did not lead to rises in living standards. The regime was also loathe to risk significant political liberalisation, preferring instead to marginalise or incapacitate autonomous organisations that it perceived as threats. Thus Saad Eddin Ibrahim's Ibn Khaldun Centre in Cairo was shut down and its personnel, including the director, imprisoned for having accepted funding from the European Union, ostensibly because it had not had official permission to do so, in June 2000. Nonetheless, by the beginning of the new century, Egypt had some 30,000 organisations contesting its partially liberalised public space. The Muslim Brotherhood remained formally proscribed and periodically its leadership was arrested. Human rights activists were continually persecuted and Egyptian elections were habitually rigged amidst scenes of widespread violence.

Out of these variegated strands of frustration, however, there emerged a pattern of conscious resistance to the regime. It began in 2004 amongst the urban middle class, particularly in Cairo, as a result of President Mubarak's desire for an unprecedented fifth six-year term as president and his apparent intention to make his son, Gamal, his successor. The catalyst seems to have been a call from a highly respected jurist, Tariq al-Bishri, who called for civil disobedience in protest at the president's plans. Hosni Mubarak's presidential ambitions were challenged in the election in 2005, unsuccessfully of course, by Ayman Nour, the leader of *Ghad*, a new political party, who was subsequently imprisoned on trumped-up charges for his pains.

Middle class disgust at this abuse of official power led to the formation of a new kind of political movement, *Kefiya* ('Enough!'), drawing its strength from a group of small opposition parties and diverse movements, all united by their anger at the misuse of the electoral process. The movement also used modern information technology to communicate with its members, thus demonstrating that, even if it did not have the resources of the Muslim Brotherhood, effective widespread peaceful opposition to the regime was possible. Although the movement eventually collapsed, partly because of its middle class character and its essential opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as because of regime action against it, it was a valuable lesson in the potential of informal but structured opposition to the regime.⁶⁰

Then, in December 2006, a major strike erupted in a textile factory in Mahalla al-Kubra, a large industrial town in the Delta. Strikes which are not authorised by the state-run Egyptian trade union confederation were illegal in Egypt but this strike was organised by an unofficial body, the Independent Textile Workers' League. Yet, contrary to its usual practice, the regime did not force the workers back to work but conceded the workers' demands. The result was a growing crescendo of strikes over succeeding years until, on 6 April 2008, the regime did crack down on striking textile workers in the town, causing a major riot instead. Out of this event grew the April 6 Movement, bringing together workers and youth and spreading information about resistance throughout the country. The new movement managed to resist attempts by the regime to suppress it, largely because of its amorphous nature and its use of new means of communication, such as mobile telephones and the internet. It thus became another, more generalised strand in the growing resistance to the Mubarak regime.

Two events in 2010 completed this picture of growing resistance to the Mubarak regime; the killing of Khaled Mohamed Saeed in Alexandria in June 2010 and the advent of

Mohamed El-Barade'i on the Egyptian political scene, after his term as head of the International Atomic Energy Authority ended in November 2009. The death of Khaled Mohamed Saeed was particularly egregious since he had been dragged out of an internet café in Alexandria by two security agents and beaten to death. The incident became a public scandal when Wael Ghonim, a Google marketing executive in Dubai, created a Facebook page in his honour which received enormous public support. Some days after his death, Mohamed El-Barade'i led a massive march in Alexandria in his memory and the first protests took place in Tahrir Square in Cairo.

Thus, by the start of 2011, there were three strands of protest in operation which engaged broad swathes of the Egyptian population, alongside the growing discontent over rising food and energy prices. In this context, the events in Tunisia seem to have acted as a catalyst, especially as Zine El-Abdine Ben Ali had just been forced from power. The opportunity seems to have been seized by a small group of activists in the April 6 Movement who, drawing on their links with the Kefaya Movement, the El-Ghad political party and the Khaled Mohamed Said movement, planned a demonstration in Tahrir Square in Cairo on 25 January 2011, the day which commemorates a massacre of 50 Egyptian policemen by British occupation troops in Ismailia in 1952. Their success in resisting police attempts to crush the demonstration led to much larger demonstrations three days later, on 28 January after Friday prayers, which really set the revolutionary ball rolling in a series of continuous demonstrations focused around Tahrir Square in Cairo but involving millions outside the capital as well.

Just two weeks later, after a series of ineffectual partial concessions to public demand, Hosni Mubarak stepped down from his position as president, thereby conceding a popular victory. However, as was the case in Tunisia, he had really been sacrificed, not as a consequence of revolutionary victory but as a means of maintaining a regime which was ultimately backed by the Egyptian army. With the president's departure, the army took responsibility for remoulding the state in a more acceptable form but clearly did not intend to abandon power. Instead, it developed an informal alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood and produced a set of minimalist amendments to the constitution which were eventually approved by referendum – to the anger of the radicals who had organised the demonstrations and who had anticipated more far-reaching changes. Thus, although effective social movements had coalesced even before the demonstrations erupted, they lacked the ability to force through their agendas against the army and the social coalitions it enjoyed. As things stand, the Egyptian revolution has only been a partial success.

Libya and civil war

Given the power and universality of satellite television, people in Libya were well aware of events in Tunisia and Egypt but it is not clear that they had a 'domino effect' inside Libya itself. Nor is it clear that there were incipient precursors to social movements since Libya had never adopted the liberalised autocracy pattern typical of the other states in North Africa. This was inherent in the nature of the *jama'iri* political system that had been introduced in the country in 1973, for it tolerated no competition to its institution of 'direct popular democracy', expressed through basic people's congresses and popular committees. All Libyans were expected to participate in the congresses in which decisions were made on all matters of local, national and international policy and then passed upwards through mandated delegates to the General People's Congress, Libya's equivalent of a parliament. This body, in turn, mandated the General Popular Committee, a body that it appointed and the equivalent of a cabinet,

which passed instructions down to popular committees to provide administration. The popular committees themselves were appointed by the basic people's congresses.

In reality, of course, the population did not take up the political challenge offered to them by the Qadhafi regime. In 2000, less than 10% actually regularly attended congress meetings and over 70% of people did not believe that they could influence political decisions and it is unlikely that these statistics would have improved during the intervening years.⁶¹ The result had been that, during the 1980s, the revolutionary committee movement had been used to stimulate the moribund *jamahiri* system and to ensure that political decision-making would be in accordance with regime desires. The activities of the revolutionary committees, combined with the draconian provisions of law 71 of 1972 ensured that no political competition to this system was possible.

The same uniformity applied to the social dimension of Libyan life as well for the dead hand of the regime and the revolutionary committees applied there equally effectively – social affairs being seen effectively as an extension of the political sphere. Indeed, the latent tribal social background to the modern Libyan state played a direct political role as well. In one sense, the 1969 Libyan revolution could be interpreted as the revenge of the central Libyan tribes, traditionally subservient to the Sa'adi tribes of Cyrenaica from which the Sanussi-based monarchy created by the United Nations in 1951 drew its support, over them. As a result, it was the Qadhafi, the Maghraha and the Warfalla that dominated the political structure of the *jamahiri* state, particularly through the revolutionary committee movement and the security forces. The Qadhafi regime, aware of the potential threat of tribal resistance, had attempted unsuccessfully in the 1970s to marginalise the tribes.⁶² It had subsequently mobilised the tribes, ostensibly to its support, through the institution of the Popular Social Leadership which created the concept of collective responsibility for a tribe over the actions of its members. Apart from this, the only other social institution allowed any meaningful existence was the atavistic Union of Free Officers, the body which had instrumentalised Colonel Qadhafi's military-based coup in 1969.

There were not, in short, any organised movements operating in what could have been construed, however restricted it may have been, as a potential space for civil society. Nor was there any formal precursor that could have developed into a social movement because of the lack of any social or political space in which it could have developed. The only example that had existed had developed in Benghazi and Darna in the latter part of the 1990s as an extremist Islamist movement opposed to the regime, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG – *Jam'at Islamiyyah al-Mutaqatilah*) but that had been disbanded and imprisoned. Even the Muslim Brotherhood had been forced into clandestinity and decimated by constant arrests. There were, however, four factors that indicated what might happen in Libya, should the regime's grip ever falter.

The first was the fact that the tribes of Eastern Libya resented what had happened in 1969 as a result of the revolution; their loss of political influence. The Qadhafi regime had responded by marginalising Cyrenaica and neglecting it which, in turn, had bred further ill blood between the east and the west of the country. Cyrenaica was not, incidentally, the only part of the country that had felt the heavy hand of regime disapproval; the Jabal Nafusa, too, as the abode of Libya's Berber population, was subject to discrimination since the regime refused to recognise any cultural heterogeneity. The Libyan army, too – outside the special internal security forces – was also sullen and hostile to the regime because of the restrictions placed upon it to avoid the danger of a military coup – Colonel Qadhafi never forgot how he had come to power – and because of regime contempt for it after the Libyan defeat in Chad in 1987. The point here is

that each of these groups represented a potential basis for anti-regime movements, if only any one of them could be persuaded that the regime could be overthrown.

The second factor was that the regime had suffered three major domestic crises, two of them in the East and the other with the all-important Warfalla tribe in central-western Libya. The latter had occurred in 1993 when a coup plot against the Libyan leader – Colonel Qadhafi, incidentally, never had any formal position within the Libyan state although he did run the revolutionary committee movement – at the town of Bani Walid was unmasked. The coup leaders included a large number of Warfalli, members of a tribe which till then had been considered to be loyal to the regime. After the coup, the regime tried to persuade the tribe's leaders to condemn the plot and sanction the execution of its leaders, without success and, later, the revolutionary committees savaged some tribal factions for their members' involvement in the original coup, thus earning for the regime their permanent enmity.

Then, in 1996, on the orders of the security chief, Abdullah al-Sanussi, prison guards at Abu Sulaim prison in Tripoli, where political prisoners were housed, suppressed a prison riot with 1300 deaths. After many years, the regime eventually admitted what had happened and promised compensation to the families of the victims, although none was ever paid. The fact that the families of the victims had eventually dared to demonstrate about their loss indicated the potential weakness of the regime because of its unpopularity and its acknowledgement of what had happened confirmed this impression. At about the same time, a scandal erupted in Benghazi over the infection of 413 children with HIV/AIDS in the main general hospital in Benghazi. Although the regime tried to blame five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor, it eventually had to agree to their release and repatriation to Bulgaria, rather than executing them as it had intended in order to appease the anger in Benghazi over the incident. This added to the generalised unpopularity of the regime as well as showing that, despite all its bombast, it was vulnerable to external pressure and, therefore, weak.

Finally, Colonel Qadhafi's second son, Saif al-Islam, unwittingly contributed to the growing sense that the grip of the regime was weakening and that its hegemony on power could be called into question. At the end of the Lockerbie sanctions regime, which was lifted in April 1999 when the regime handed over two Libyans accused of the crime for judgement at a specially convened court in Holland, he began pushing for internal reform in Libya, calling for respect of human rights, a reform of the economy to encourage the private sector and for a new political structure as well. His father seems to have been content for him to sample the political waters but reined him back whenever his enthusiasm seemed likely to overreach itself. However, his initiatives raised hope in Libya that some kind of liberalisation might be on the way, not least after he convened a committee to draft a new constitution for the state. That never saw the light of day but the very fact that such things could be discussed at all encouraged a belief that the regime's grasp was weakening as a new generation began to jockey for power.

The result was that, when the staggering transformations in the political scenes in Tunisia and Egypt took place, there were already expectations in Libya which saw these developments as presaging a new kind of future. The regime also anticipated potential trouble and warned that it would not tolerate demonstrations, whilst Colonel Qadhafi publicly decried the removals of Zine El-Abdine and Hosni Mubarak from power. It also completed the release of remaining Islamist members of the LIFG from prison, as a gesture of confidence in the strength of its own position. These moves coincided with a decision made by a courageous group of lawyers to push for more compensation for the families of the victims of the 1996 prison massacre. The regime got wind of their plans and arrested the leading lawyer, Fathi Tarbel, and a well-known writer, Idris al-Mismari on 15 February 2011. That move, in turn, in a remarkable

statement about perceptions of regime weakness, particularly as regime strongmen – Abdullah Sanussi and Sa’adi al-Qadhafi, the Libyan leader’s third son – had moved to Benghazi to suppress any demonstrations, led to a public demonstration in the city two days later. Security troops fired on the crowds and then, in what is still today a mysterious development, a detachment of the Libyan army in Benghazi deserted the regime, openly supporting the demonstrators instead.

This in turn led to a collapse in regime morale in the city; Abdullah Sanussi and Sa’adi al-Qadhafi fled and the justice minister, Mustapha Abdeljalil, and the interior minister, Abdulfattah al-Obidi, both of whom come from Cyrenaica, cobbled together – apparently with tribal support – a temporary administrative body, the Interim National Transitional Council. From 27 February onwards, this body, a mixture of urban intellectuals, former Islamist guerrillas, secular professionals and tribal leaders, continued to guide the breakaway proto-state that has emerged in Cyrenaica. With NATO help, after a United Nations Security Council decision to protect the civilian population of Libya, this body and the citizen’s army it led was able to keep Colonel Qadhafi’s professional forces at bay, as other revolts broke out in Misurata and the Jabal Nafusa to contest power with the rump of the *jamahiriyyah*, by then centred on Sirt, in the heart of Qadhadhfa territory, and Tripoli. On 20 August 2011, after a preliminary attack on Zawiya, Tripoli itself fell under the combined effects of a city-wide uprising against the Qadhafi regime and a military onslaught from Misurata and the Jabal Nafusa. By then, the National Transitional Council had been widely recognised as the new and legitimate government of Libya and the Qadhafi regime had been effectively dismantled.

What was striking about the Libyan experience was the fact that that the regime lost control of half its territory so rapidly. In reality, however, power in Libya is predominantly a matter of geography. Libya’s population is overwhelmingly concentrated around two towns, Tripoli and Benghazi, which are separated by hundreds of miles of desert. Thus, to lose control of either is to lose effective control of half the country. It is that feature, alongside the fact that the Libyan regime was so heavily personalised around the figure of its leader and had made no concessions at all to the concept of liberalised autocracy that explained the speed of its loss of control. To that must be added the way in which, over the past decade, the regime had also made tactical retreats which had revealed its weaknesses such that it could fragment once real challenges arose. The great difference between the Tunisian and Egyptian experiences on the one hand, and Libya on the other, is that, in the latter case there was no shadow state to be preserved, for the regime was also its public face, whereas, in Tunisia, the single party abandoned the president in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to preserve its power and, in Egypt, the army abandoned its president in a successful attempt to preserve its interests.

A summation

Given the fact that, apart from Algeria and Morocco where major political transitions have been avoided, the transitions in the remaining North African countries are far from complete, it seems inappropriate to consider ending this discussion with a conclusion. We cannot yet know the final outcomes of the experiences of the last nine months there, except to recognise that paradigmatic changes have taken place. It seems likely that Tunisia will achieve some kind of democratic outcome, whereas in Egypt a more liberal version of a liberalised autocracy might be the best that can be expected. And, in Libya, where so much will depend on the attitudes of the outside world, the outcome is quite uncertain – democracy (but of what kind?) or a reversion to autocracy are both possibilities.

There are two codas to the analysis made so far that do require attention, however. The first is the role played and to be played by political Islam in what is happening and the second is the significance of youth and the new 'social media' in the events that have taken place. The second issue is, in some ways, easier to answer than the first for the facility of communications – and thus of organisation – afforded by mobile telephones and the internet has been undeniable. However, contrary to what has been suggested by some observers, it has not been determinant. That is, neither mobile telephone technology nor the internet – whether as Twitter or Facebook – were essential to the success of the demonstrations in Tunisia or Egypt. Indeed, in both countries, both facilities were closed down by the authorities for part, at least, of the period of the demonstrations without hindering the growth of the demonstrations at all.

In any case, old technologies may well have been more important, especially satellite television which is universally accessible and much more difficult to shut down, as regimes have discovered to their cost. Table 6 shows the levels of internet penetration and usage in 2008 but mobile penetration is generally significantly greater – 76% in Tunisia and 40% in Egypt, for example – although it is not clear whether these figures reflect internet connectivity as well. Normally the majority of users take prepaid contacts and do not use connective mobile telephones. Beyond this, as Johnny Ryan has shown, the internet is both fecund, in that it can generate much greater connectivity between users but also suffers from a phenomenon known as the 'perpetual beta' – namely that the ability of internet users to modify information they receive renders the information it purveys potentially unreliable.⁶³ In addition, regimes can both interrupt internet access and increasingly challenge the information that it provides by exploiting its flexibility and fecundity.

The role of youth in the revolutionary processes stimulated by the new media and in the mass demonstrations has been undeniable. Indeed, in many respects, it has been the enthusiasm, dynamism and organisational abilities of young people that have driven the revolutionary processes forward. In one sense, this has hardly been surprising since youth – young people under the age of 30 years – has long been the dominant element within Middle Eastern and North African populations, often at more than 50% of the total, with 30% being under 15 years of age (Table 3). It has also been youth that has played the greatest role in exploiting the new media as they have emerged, despite the poverty that can make access to them much more difficult. But, most strikingly, despite conventional beliefs that political and religious radicalisation, spurred on by poverty and repression, has characterised youth in the region in recent years, the recent revolutionary changes there have been driven by peaceful protest, spearheaded by youth with agendas committed to political pluralism rather than political Islam.

Indeed, the Islamist issue is much more ambiguous than convention would admit for, up to the recent events, there was a general assumption, amongst Western states at least, that the most likely alternative to the regimes in place would be political Islam. Islamic movements were believed to be the best organised and had an agenda of taking over governance, should the regimes themselves fail. In addition, there was a generalised belief that moderate Islamic regimes would act as the conduits by which extremists would penetrate the states concerned. Regional autocracies, of course, had an interest in encouraging such views and were very successful in doing so, thus guaranteeing Western support, particularly after the events of 11 September 2001.⁶⁴ In the event, these concerns turned out to be baseless; Islamist moderates took little part in the revolutions anywhere inside the North African region as formal movements. Individual Islamists were certainly involved alongside the April 6 Movement in planning events in Egypt but the Muslim Brotherhood itself was not. Nor did *an-Nahda* take a revolutionary position in Tunisia, despite the years of repression it had suffered. In Morocco, Islamists

played no great role in the February 20th Movement and, perhaps, only in Jordan, did the Islamist movement play a significant role in persuading King Abdullah into reluctant concessions.

It is also the case that the argument, much beloved in the European Union, that moderates merely usher in extremists has little basis, for extremists generally consider their moderate counterparts to have betrayed the Islamic ideal, as the Algerian civil war in the 1990s made abundantly clear. In addition, the demonstrations themselves revealed little evidence of demands for Islamic governance; the main demands of the demonstrators related to regime removal, an end to corruption, political participation and respect for individual rights and freedoms. Islam, of course, formed the social background to what happened and conditioned much of the discourse but its specifically political manifestation was not an explicit component of the demonstrators' demands.

Nonetheless, political Islam cannot be excluded from what will develop as the aftermath of the demonstrations. Firstly, Islamist political movements are the best organised political formations in the countries concerned and resonate with the general cultural and social environment. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is expected to garner one third of the votes cast in any election and *An-Nahda* in Tunisia has rapidly reconstituted itself and is expected to enjoy a similar level of support. They therefore must inevitably form part of any democratic system that will emerge. Secondly, the Islamist movements in both countries have made it clear that they do not seek a dominant role in any political system that will emerge and are prepared to respect pluralism as a fundamental political principle. Thirdly, in Egypt, at least, the Muslim Brotherhood has created an informal alliance with the army which now dominates the interim administration, preparing the ground for new presidential and legislative elections.

Of course, electoral outcomes are notoriously difficult to predict with certainty but there seem to be good grounds to trust to the insistence of the demonstrators on a democratic future and on the commitments of the actors involved on their willingness to abide by such outcomes. One of the ironies of recent months has been that the system designed to preserve autocratic regimes has become the mechanism by which they were eventually overthrown, despite widespread scepticism that this could occur. Another is that radical, democratising change in the Middle East and North Africa was wrought without interference from external powers. NATO, it is true, played a crucial role in defence of civilian populations and in equilibrating the military balance in Libya but it has played no part in determining what the future political outcomes there will be. Quite what the future may be is still unclear and, in any case, insofar as the outside world accepts democratic principle, it, together with the populations of North Africa, will have to accept the electoral decisions made there, whatever they may be and however, palatable or unpalatable they appear. That, in itself, may become the defining characteristic of future relations between North Africa and its wider diplomatic environment – for the first time, perhaps, since the end of the colonial era half a century ago!

Notes

1. Ebadi, S. (2006, p. 33), Shirin Ebadi was recalling the effect of the Abadan cinema fire in 1978, in which 400 people died and which acted as the political spark for the mass protests which eventually led to the Shah's downfall in early 1979.
2. The term originates with Tomas Kuhn (1962, 1969, p. 150) who argued that, in science, progress occurs through radical shifts in structures of interpretation. Furthermore such shifts are incommensurate – the new structure of meaning cannot be interpreted in terms of its predecessor. His concept has since been applied to the political and social sciences, although the requirement of incommensurability does not apply as different structures of meaning can and do coexist and can be interpreted, the new by the old.

3. Taleb, N. and Blyth, M. (2011), 'The Black Swan of Cairo; how suppressing volatility makes the world less predictable and more dangerous,' *Foreign Affairs*, 90, 3 (May–June 2011); 33–39.
4. Taleb and Blyth, *op.cit*; p. 34. The concept of complexity versus linearity has been widely theorised in International Relations in terms of chaos theory and catastrophe theory (Bosquet and Curtis 2011, pp. 43–63) and modelled as fitness landscapes (Geyer and Pickering 2011, pp. 5–27) or as complex adaptive crisis systems (Lehmann 2011, pp. 27–43)
5. Taleb and Blyth *op.cit*; p. 33.
6. Taleb and Blyth *op.cit*; p. 38.
7. Brumberg argues that, from the 1980s to the 2000s, there was a transition away from authoritarianism and then back again, based on tactical political openings designed to sustain, rather than transform autocracies there. This was mistaken by opposition actors in the region and external powers as an inherently unstable equilibrium giving way to competitive democracy, whereas the liberalised autocracies that were created, unlike full autocracies that made no concession to political sensitivities, were far more durable than imagined. In fact, the combination of guided pluralism, controlled elections and selective repression was not 'just a survival strategy by authoritarian regimes but a type of political system whose institutions, rule and logic defy any linear model of democratization'. (Brumberg 2002, 'The trap of liberalized autocracy', *Journal of Democracy*, 13, 4 (October 2002); 56).
8. Zakaria, F. (1997), 'The rise of illiberal democracy', *Foreign Affairs*, 76, 6 (Nov/Dec 1997); 22–43.
9. FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) (2011) <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/50519/icode/> (Accessed 29 April 2011).
10. USEIA (2011), <http://www.eia.doe.gov/steo/> (Accessed 29 April 2011).
11. The Barcelona Process – more correctly known as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership – is a holistic policy linking South Mediterranean countries with the European Union, designed to create 'peace, prosperity and stability' in the Mediterranean region through a combination of shared economic, social, political and security measures. In economic terms, it envisages the creation of bilateral free trade areas in industrial goods between Europe and the countries concerned in order to drive development and, eventually, market integration through competition between the European private sector and the private sectors of southern countries. The Barcelona Process followed on from the bilateral economic stimulus packages the Union has promoted with these countries ever since 1969. Although the Barcelona Process has now been superseded by – or rather integrated into – two more recent policy initiatives – European Neighbourhood Policy (2002) and the Union for the Mediterranean (2009) – the underlying neoliberal economic principles are common to all the policies concerned. (See Joffe 2011)
12. A process of economic reform and restructuring, promoted by the IMF and the World Bank from the 1980s onwards, which sought to reduce the role of the state in the economic process by promoting private sector-driven export-led growth through liberalisation of currency and trade regimes in order to ensure economic efficiency through exposure to global asset and commodity pricing systems.
13. CIA (2000–11), *The World Factbook, Egypt*, Washington, DC <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook> (Accessed 27 April 2011).
14. See Chang, J.-H. (2003), *Kicking away the ladder: development strategies in historical perspective*, Anthem Press (London).
15. One important aspect of these global effects was that they had occurred before in North Africa and elsewhere in the Middle East, in 2008, but they had not provoked threats to the political stabilities of the regimes concerned. In 2008, the food price crisis had been provoked by rises in oil costs – agriculture is highly energy-intensive – commodity speculation, drought in Russia and Australia, increased import demand from China and India, and the sudden expansion in biofuel production, particularly in the United States (Joffé 2009a). The 2010 price crisis, however, seems to have been, in addition to the causes cited in 2008, the first indication of depressed cereal yields as a result of climate change (Guardian 05.05.2011).
16. Reuters, (8 Jan 2011); <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/08/us-algeria-riots-idUSTRE7053EL20110108> (Accessed 2 May 2011).
17. Reuters, (19 Feb 2011) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/19/morocco-riots-idUSLEDE71108K20110219> (Accessed 2 May 2011).
18. Joffé, E.G.H. (2009), 'Morocco's reform process: wider implications', *Mediterranean Politics*, 14, 2 (July 2009); 151–165.
19. Zakaria, *op. cit*; p. 24.
20. Fukuyama, F. 'The end of history?', *The National Interest*, 16 (Summer 1989).
21. He argued that the developed world was now a 'Grotian one, observing norms of cooperation, and perhaps even [with] its Kantian element: a civil society of civil societies'. However, outside this normatively ideal focus,

- '...parts of the world beyond are still Hobbesian, with force still a very active final arbiter within and between countries, and sovereignty loudly proclaimed'. (Roberts, A. 'A new age in International Relations?', *International Affairs*, 67, 3 (July 1991); 519).
22. Huntington, S. (1993), 'The clash of civilisations', *Foreign Affairs*, 72, 3 (Summer 1993); 22–50.
 23. Hayek, F. (1978), *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas*. London: Routledge & Keegan-Paul, p. 152.
 24. Zakaria, *op. cit.*; p. 30.
 25. Zakaria, *op. cit.*; p. 26.
 26. Brumberg 2002, *op.cit.*; 56–57.
 27. Brumberg 2002, *op.cit.*; p. 59.
 28. Brumberg 2002, *op.cit.*; p. 61.
 29. Hence the phenomenon of the 'gngo' – the government-approved non-governmental organisation, whereby ngos have to be registered with the state!
 30. Brumberg 2002, *op.cit.*; p. 63.
 31. Brumberg 2005, *op.cit.*; p. 1.
 32. Joffé, E.G.H. (2008), 'The European Union, democracy and counter-terrorism in the Maghrib', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 46, 1 (January 2008); 147–171.
 33. As reported by the BBC. news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4109902.htm (Accessed 13 May 2011).
 34. Gazzini, C. (2009), 'Assessing Italy's *Grande Gesto* to Libya', *Middle East Research and Information Project Online*, www.merip.org (Accessed 10 September 2010).
 35. Joffé, E.G.H. (2008), *op.cit.*
 36. This was the term used in Algeria to describe the creation of formal institutions purported to enable democratic governance whilst the actual practice of governance took place alongside them, thus rendering them irrelevant as a vehicle for meaningful popular participation in the political process.
 37. Roberts, H. (2003), 'The state and the challenge of democracy', in H. Roberts (2003), *The battlefield: Algeria 1988–2002. Studies in a broken polity*, Verso (London), p. 113.
 38. Waterbury, J. (1970), *The Commander of the Faithful: the Moroccan political elite*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson (London); Spiegel, A. (2009), 'Islamist pluralism: youth, activism and the state in Morocco', unpublished PhD, University of Oxford (Oxford).
 39. Hassan, H.A. (2011), 'Civil Society in Egypt under the Mubarak Regime', *Afro-Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, 2, 2.2 (Quarter II, 2011) <http://onlineresearchjournals.com/aaajoss/art/61.pdf> (Accessed 11 May 2011).
 40. Alexander, C. (2010), *Tunisia: stability and reform in the modern Maghreb*, Routledge (London); pp. 64–66.
 41. St. John, R.B. (2008), *Libya: from colony to independence*, Oneworld (Oxford), pp. 258–260.
 42. See Pierre Bourdieu (1977 and 1990) over the relationship between agency and structure.
 43. Brownlee, J. (2002), 'The Decline of Pluralism in Mubarak's Egypt', *Journal of Democracy*, 13, 4 (October 2002); 7.
 44. Roberts, H. (1998), 'The struggle for constitutional rule in Algeria', *Journal of Algerian Studies*, 3, (1998); 22–23.
 45. Alexander, *op.cit.*; p. 40.
 46. Yom, S. (2011), 'Authoritarian state-building in the Middle East: from durability to revolution', *CDDRL Working Paper No. 121* (February 2011), Stanford University (Stanford, CA); 7–15. The one state – Libya – that did not create such space in North Africa formally excluded any autonomous political or social organisation under Law 71 of 1972. As a result, the only organisations that approximated to autonomous entities in the Libyan stateless state were the tribes and atavistic remnants of the 1969 Libyan revolution such as the Union of Free Officers which were marginalised and powerless in what was a full autocracy – in effect, the perfect patrimonial state (Bill, J. and Springborg, R. (1990), *Politics in the Middle East*, Little Brown (Glenview, IL)).
 47. Tarrow, S. (1998), *Power in movement; social movements and contentious politics*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge); p. 10.
 48. Schmidt, C., Davar, E. and Joffé, E.G.H. (2005), 'The psychology of political extremism', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 18, 1 (April 2005).
 49. Wiktorowicz, *op. cit.*; p. 8.
 50. Wiktorowicz, *op. cit.*; p. 10.
 51. Spiegel, *op.cit.*
 52. Hafez, M.A. (2004), 'From marginalisation to massacres: a political process explanation for GIA violence in Algeria', in Wiktorowicz, Q. (ed.) (2004), *Islamic activism: a social movement theory approach*, Indiana University Press (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN).

53. Wiktorowicz, *op. cit.*; p. 16. This would also include the catchphrase, 'Islam is the solution', as a mechanism for rejecting ideological alternatives whether seen as secularist or as foreign cultural or political imports.
54. Joffé, E.G.H. (2006), 'Politics in the Muslim world: Morocco, Iran and Indonesia', in Graham L.E. (ed.) (2006), *The politics of governing: a comparative introduction*, CQ Press (Washington, DC).
55. See, for example, Avritzer, L. (2002), *Democracy and the public space in Latin America*, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ).
56. Alexander, *op.cit.*; pp. 64–65.
57. Alexander, *op.cit.*; p. 66.
58. Alexander, *op.cit.*; p. 98.
59. Shehata, D. (2011), 'The fall of the Pharaoh: how Hosni Mubarak's reign came to an end', *Foreign Affairs*, 90, 3 (May/June 2011); 26–32; 29.
60. Owiedat, O., *et al.* (2008), *The Kefaya movement: a case study of a grassroots reform initiative*, Rand National Defense Research Institute (Arlington, VA); pp. vii–ix. www.rand.org/pubs/monograph/2008/RAND_MG778.pdf [Accessed 12 May 2011].
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63. Ryan, J. (2010), *A history of the Internet and the digital future*, Reaktion Books (London); pp. 137–150.
64. Joffé, E.G.H. (2009), 'Morocco's reform process: wider implications', *Mediterranean Politics*, 14, 2 (July 2009); 151–165.

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Appendix: Migration and investment flows

This appendix provides details of migration and investment flows in the North African region, as measures of the economic crisis that exists there and as an indication of what economic collapse could imply for Europe. The statistics are all drawn from a publication of the World Bank, published in 2010 by the MENA Region division of the organisation. The publication claims that, in 2005, the average level of unemployment throughout the region was 17%.

1. Migration (2005) and unemployment (2000).

Country	Migration stock (mn)	Annual migration rate (%)	Unemployment (%)	
			1990	2000
Algeria	1.8	5	20	29
Egypt	2.4	3	8	8
Morocco	2.7	9	16	21
Tunisia	0.6	6	15	16

Source: IBRD 2010; 2, 3.

2. Net remittances 2007–09.

(\$ bn)	2007	2008	2009	08/09 (%)	%GDP (2007)	\$/capita (2007)
Algeria	2.1	2.2	2.2	– 0.4	1.6	63
Egypt	7.7	8.7	7.8	– 10.3	5.9	101
Morocco	6.7	6.9	5.7	– 17.0	9.0	218
Tunisia	1.7	1.9	1.9	– 0.5	4.9	168
North Africa	18.2	–	–	–	4.8	121

Source: IBRD 2010; 4 Morocco, and the North African region overall, have the highest inflows of per capita remittances in the world.

3. North Africa: population projections 2010 and 2040.

(%)	Under 15	15-65	Over 65	Total (mn)
2010	29.6	65.5	4.9	163
2040	21.1	67.7	11.2	223

Source: IBRD 2010; 6.

4. Emigration from North Africa 2000.

Total outward migration			Main destination			Location in EU
Country	Stock (nos)	Annual rate (%)	Country	Stock (nos)	National share (%)	(EU27) (%)
North Africa	7,441,150	5.5				
Algeria	2,070,840	6.8	France	1,333,587	64.4	79.1
Egypt	2,173,711	3.2	Saudi Arabia	1,015,124	46.7	8.9
Morocco	2,589,108	9.3	France	759,011	29.3	71.9
Tunisia	607,491	6.4	France	364,498	60.0	75.1

Source: IBRD 2010; 11.

5. Capital inflows 2007.

Country	Inward (\$m) remittances	Per cap (\$) remittances	% GDP (2006)	ODA \$m (2006)	FDI \$m
Algeria	2,906	85.9	2.2	209	1,664
Egypt	5,865	77.7	8.0	873	7,620
Morocco	5,700	185.0	9.5	1,046	3,800
Tunisia	1,669	163.6	5.0	432	1,620

Source: IBRD 2010; 13.

6. Internet usage 2008.

	Usage (% population)	Penetration (% population)
Algeria	13.5	10.3
Egypt	24.3	15.4
Libya	5.5	4.7
Morocco	41.3	32.0
Tunisia	34.1	na

Source: opennet.net/research/regions/mena.