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Geopolitics of Islam and Democracy

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Egypt and the IMF: Does history repeat itself?

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Egypt's wrecked economy makes the new leadership face an interesting question. Is the IMF the one-way road to weather the current financial crisis? The critical economic situation combined with the politically charged environment stand in the way of an agreement with the Fund, as its usually tough conditionality could spark off social unrest and political disaffection. President Morsi, descended from the Muslim Brotherhood, has to strike a balance between the society and the external actors, while wrestling with delicate issues at a time when the country is plagued by economic stagnation.

Egypt stands at a crossroads; the route towards macroeconomic stability seems rough and uncertain, while the dilemma of how she is going to reach it has been hovering over the country for months. Is Egypt willing to deal with it alone or is the International Monetary Fund going to map out the course of action? The latest developments show that there is a hesitation of the Egyptian leadership to authorize the IMF to undertake the daunting, yet familiar, task of financial reform and restructure. Indeed, the Fund's widely known conditionality is unpopular, thus a political initiative to encourage social dialogue on economic affairs seems indispensable.

Long brewing resentment over political corruption, economic malaise and lack of social justice erupted into a revolt, which caused the dethronement of President Hosni Mubarak after thirty years in power. Since February 2011 Egypt has been in a transition period, during which she has suffered mounting economic problems. The fallout from this downturn is depicted in the deterioration of the macroeconomic indicators, that is, the rise of twin deficits: the budget deficit by 1.3% to 9.4% of GDP in 2011 as compared to 2010 and the current account deficit from 2% of GDP in 2010 to 4.1% in 2011.[1] Social unrest and political uncertainty affected neuralgic sectors of the Egyptian economy such as tourism, foreign direct investment, manufacturing and the export industry. The attempts of the Central Bank of Egypt to defend its currency by spending more than $20 billion over the past two years caused a shortage of foreign exchange reserves while at the same time Egypt's budget has a financing gap of $14.5 billion until the end of fiscal year 2013/2014. In addition, persistent unemployment and the rising food and fuel prices, in combination with the subsidies' delicate question, constitute challenging tasks that the current government has to tackle in the near future.

In fact, a quarter of government spending in 2010/2011 was on consumer subsidies, especially for energy and food. The subsidies were originally introduced in Gamal Abdel Nasser's era, but they were practically established during the oil crisis in 1973. Throughout years, any attempts to end the subsidies' regime in Egypt were bringing thousands of people into the streets to protest. Today, food combined with fuel subsidies account for over 10% of GDP.[2] Given the fact that the second largest economy of the continent is a net importer of energy and food and taking into account the rising cost of tradable commodities it could be assumed that the Islamic government will be found soon in the awkward predicament to bring to the fore this thorny national issue. Interestingly, reforming subsidies had been the target of the IMF during the 1990's, when an adjustment program was introduced in order to get the Egyptian economy on track. Even under the Fund's tutelage subsidy removal has been infeasible.

Not surprisingly, in the 1980s the country was plagued by almost the same macroeconomic

imbalances. Following a period of social welfare and rapid growth in the late 1960s and 1970s thanks to the rents taking the form of aid, migrant remittances, oil, gas and Suez Canal revenues, which were in turn used to subsidies, free health and education, jobs in the public sector and entrepreneurs favourably disposed towards the state, Egypt, largely affected by the oil crises in 1970s, embarked upon an IMF supported economic reform program in 1991. In fact, Egypt is considered a success case of the IMF's ambivalent course in the international arena, as fiscal and current account deficits, as well as inflation were spectacularly reduced. The recipe was what John Williamson has described as "Washington Consensus", that is a set of policy instruments that countries should pursue in order to stabilize their economies and achieve sustained economic growth. However, much of this success has been attributed to the massive debt relief received by Egypt as a quid pro quo for supporting the United States in the First Gulf War.[3]

Today, history repeats itself by placing again the IMF on the doorstep of Egypt. But this time the country experiences a post-revolutionary period, a politically-charged environment following President Mohammed Morsi's recent decrees and the referendum on the constitution. Already the first reactions to the potential IMF's conditions on the $4.8 billion loan were not positive. The increase in tax revenues and reduction in expenditure, such as energy subsidies, engendered grievances and protests, which led the Egyptian Minister of Finance Mumtaz al-Saeed, on the 11th of December 2012, to postpone the IMF Executive Board meeting, in order to give room for more dialogue in the bosom of the Egyptian society. Similarly, in June 2011 the international community was surprised when the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) transitional government announced the rejection of the offer of $3 billion support from the Fund. All in all, the IMF Board was, currently, expected to approve the Egyptian macroeconomic measures, which would address the country's economic challenges and, consequently, the first tranche of the loan would have been made available to Egypt in order to mitigate her liquidity crisis.

Yet, the main goal of the program was fiscal and external sustainability, starting with "prior actions", meaning measures which had to be taken before the Board meeting. These included increases in sales taxes, such as soft drinks, alcohol, cigarettes, mobile phone calls and transportation, which were withdrawn less than 24 hours after the announcement, as they provoked the indignation of the Egyptian people.[4] Certainly, a socially-balanced program should have been articulated as the situation in Egypt is far more complicated.

The reasons vary behind the objections to the Fund's active role in the Egyptian economy.[5] Firstly, there is a wide scepticism by the leftist civil society activists and the military over the incentives of the international financial institutions, which represent western interests. The ques-

tion becomes more perplexed when these institutions, which have been condemning any form of corruption, had cooperated closely with the Mubarak regime, when it was apparent that corruption was the virus contaminating the country. Secondly, the IMF conditionality is to a great extent associated with policies related to the elimination of subsidies and privatisation, which constitute incendiary issues in the Egyptian society. In fact, there has been lack of awareness about the specific conditions and terms of the adjustment program, which has ignited further reluctance. Finally, there is reticence towards the IMF's loan concerning the risk of increasing debt at a time when a significant part of the civil society has been struggling for debt relief.

"Drop Egypt's Debt" is a group of civil society organizations and individuals, which aims to lobby for auditing and dropping national debt. According to this movement Egypt's debt resulted from Mubarak autocratic regime's failed policies, thus, it seeks to stop this suffering of debt burden by demanding debt cancellation. As it was mentioned above, in 1991 Egypt's debt relief took place because of her leading role in the war against Iraq. However, an IMF agreement was a prerequisite for Egypt to obtain a deal from the Paris Club, namely, "the informal group of official creditors whose role is to find sustainable solutions to the payment difficulties experienced by debtor countries".[6] It is estimated that roughly $20 billion of Egypt's sovereign debt of $48 billion was forgiven.[7] Egypt is the largest debtor country in the Middle East and North Africa as her public debt soared from 67% of GDP in FY 2009/10 to 70.6% in FY 2010/11. About two-thirds of Egypt's external debt is denominated in US dollars and euros and almost half of it, is owed to Japan, France, Germany and the United States. The American President Barack Obama has offered $1 billion in debt relief and another one in loan guarantees in May 2011, while, Egypt in February 2011 had already requested debt forgiveness from the European Union.[8] According to Williamson, a multilateral debt rescheduling via the Paris Club would be preferred to a series of individual agreements, as a potential debt restructuring would be larger and its administrative simplicity greater.

But, what could Egypt give in return to the IMF so as to avoid submitting to strong conditionality? In the 1990s Egypt was a staunch ally of the Western powers and maintained good relations with Israel thus, the conditions on the Fund's loan were very soft on her. In appearance, political conditions do not constitute a prerequisite for an IMF loan, however, as economics is closely interrelated with politics there must have been a discussion over the role of Egypt as interlocutor in the Middle East and in Gaza.[9] As the IMF's senior representative in Egypt in the late 1990s, Arvind Subramanian, puts it "these things do not take place in a political vacuum". So, is the IMF's intervention going to have an impact on Egypt's stance towards the Middle East

and Gaza?

All in all, the prominent economist, Gala Amin, stated that "to be able to predict the future, we have to recall the past" adding that "every time Egypt had relied on foreign aid and loans to resolve a crisis there had been a price to pay".[10] Indeed, it would be really interesting to see if President Morsi will deploy the maximum of his bargaining power in order to draw the best possible gains for the benefit of the beleaguered Egyptian people.■

NOTES

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Jordan on board

Zakia Aqra

Jordan has been neglected in the regional analysis of the Syrian crisis, while in fact Amman is in the eye of the storm. With the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, Jordan's stance was rather 'timid'. Meanwhile, the Kingdom is in the midst of accessions' negotiations in the GCC, which have high-stake interests in Syria. Trapped between the GCC and Syria, once again Jordan is caught up in a regional crisis, in which it has limited impact.

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As the Syrian crisis prolongs, the Jordanian society is rather divided regarding the stance of Jordan toward the Syrian crisis. A large number of Jordanians are strongly opposed to Jordan's meddling in Syrian affairs. They fear possible repercussions, not only to the economy, but also – as many Jordanians believe- of a possible spillover of the battle in Syria into Jordan. On the other hand, others, including the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood (Islamic Action Front -IAF), have accused King Abdullah II of not taking a clear and definite stance against Assad's regime. They find themselves in solidarity with the Sunnis in Syria.

Abdullah's response reflects the divisions and ambivalence of the Jordanian society. Early on in the Syrian crisis, he encouraged the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to resign, but almost immediately Jordanian officials claimed that his statement was misinterpreted. The two countries are exposed to each other in various ways, thus limiting the King in taking radical measures against Syria. This reluctant behavior is not only a matter of internal legitimization, but also of national interests that include the economic and security fields.

The economic ties between the two have been shaken tremendously, even though they have not been interrupted yet. The perseverance of the economic relations is in the interest of both countries, and especially for Jordan. For instance,

although initially Jordan was in favour of the Arab League's economic sanctions against Syria, after weighing the economic consequences of such a decision, Jordan had to reconsider and refrain. Some estimate the trade between the two countries up to $700 million a year. Currently, however, the trade between the two has dropped by 50%. Moreover, more than half of Jordanian trade goes through Syria.[1] Specifically, Syria was a route for more than 90% of Jordan's trade to and from Turkey and Europe. Presently, it is forced to use the costly sea route.[2] This is a result of two main factors: first, the devaluation and instability of the Syrian currency that forced Syrian businessmen to limit their exports and second, the inability of exporters to guarantee a secure passage of their commodities through Syria. It is thus apparent that the kingdom cannot make drastic moves until its interests are assured.

Regarding the security issues, there is a real fear in Jordan of possible Syrian retaliation in case Assad's regime survives. As a result, Jordan is constantly trying to reassure its audience at home and abroad that it is not actually being active against Syria. For instance, Jordanian officials constantly claim that they are strictly opposing weapon smuggling via Jordan. This issue is not clear, though, since many rebels have reported that small arms have indeed been crossing the border.[3] If the regime falls, Jordan fears a spillover; this means that in case it is the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood that will dominate the post-Assad political scene, this outcome will reinforce the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood. In addition, the Syrian political feuds may be carried on among the Syrian refugees in the camps in Jordan. The Syrian refugees in Jordan are a matter of concern both on a domestic and on a bilateral level. Hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees still flow into the Kingdom, while the Jordanian authorities are trying to stabilize the situation by refusing to accept any political activity by the Syrian refugees against Assad's regime within Jordanian territory. Nevertheless, over time the situation is translating into a security issue for Jordan. On a bilateral level, Syria accuses Jordan of giving shelter to traitors and 'American' spies. The camps have been targeted by the Syrian regime, as there have been, for example, attempts to poison the water supply in the camps. At the same time, the number of refugees has increased in Jordan and the activities within the camps cannot be easily controlled; gang-style groups are forming within the camps, attacking the police. Jordan has already been 'overloaded' with Palestinians after the 1967 war and Iraqis during both American invasions, in 1991 and in 2003, and Syrian refugees are burdening the already vulnerable social fabric of the Kingdom. Currently, the Syrian refugees –some estimate that the total number exceeds the 200.000 mark- are being hosted in a country that, considering its limited resources, can barely sustain its current population.

In order to help Jordan cope with the looming refugee crisis, the Gulf kingdoms have increased their aid to Jordan, funneling more money to Amman. In the end of 2012, the GCC and Jordan finalized a plan of financial cooperation until 2017.[4] The GCC's cooperation with Jordan, however, extends beyond the economic sphere to the geostrategic field. The 16 year-old Jordanian GCC bid to join the council has been under serious consideration since September 2011. The approach

of the GCC was not coincidental.[5] The GCC and particularly Saudi Arabia and Qatar are using this 'card' to persuade Jordan to align accordingly its policies regarding Syria. However, the benefits that the GCC members will attain in case Jordan does join the union are not clear. While Jordan is going to gain new job opportunities, markets and direct investment, the Gulf countries do not seem to be gaining as much, at least in economic terms. However, other analysts underline that the benefits of the GCC from such a union have a geostrategic nature. Due to the borders shared between Jordan and Saudi Arabia, the Saudis can secure stability in the neighboring country by avoiding a potential spillover of the Arab spring.[6] In other words, the GCC can use Jordan as a buffer zone. This tactic may be just a temporary method to delay any spread of Arab uprisings by changing the focus of the socioeconomic demands; instead of providing economic reforms within the Jordanian society, they provide economic opportunities for the Jordanians within the GCC. Until recently, Jordan was hesitatingly following Saudi steps in the Syrian crisis, that together with the other GCC members have their own agenda in Syria. Even though Jordan desires to join the GCC family and benefit from their financial support, Amman has also a lot in stake regarding Syria.

The Syrian uprising was ultimately a great opportunity for Saudi Arabia and the rest of the GCC members to counteract Iran by creating a Sunni alliance under the veil of protecting the innocent Syrian civilians, and to influence the events and the future of Syria. Even though Jordan does not share a common agenda with the GCC, nor does it consider the Shia'a threat as a major priority -at least under the given circumstances, its foreign policy is compatible with the GCC goals. It is important to note that Jordan did not endure an Arab Spring, but it does suffer from the same underlying problems with the countries that did and, at the same time, Amman is affected and burdened by the negative implications the Arab Spring has on Jordan, especially on an economic and security level. Thus, not only does Jordan need to be supported economically by the GCC, but at the same time it cannot afford opening a front with the GCC by being neutral and risking economic sanctions from them.

Despite this new opportunity for Jordan on the horizon, the relationship between Jordan and the GCC can be hardly described as an alliance. The GCC monarchies cannot protect Jordan from the developments in Syria. Until recently, Jordan has not officially chosen sides, nor it is in a position to do so; which explains the 'timid' stance and -more importantly- the lack of eagerness to get involved in Syria. Jordan is facing three scenarios: Assad or his regime to remain in power, the continuation of the crisis, or a regime change in Syria. In either case, the only preparation Jordan can do is to keep in check its repercussion on the internal affairs, in order to prevent or at least limit the impact on its domestic front. Namely, Jordan needs to proceed with economic reforms and provide aid for the Syrian refugees either through UNHCR or the Gulf countries. Otherwise, Amman could close its borders, although Jordan usually refrains from taking such measures. If the security situation deteriorates, however, its only options could be an imposition of a no-fly zone, which Jordan cannot enforce on its own, a military intervention from abroad or the creation of a humanitarian security zone. Up to this point, King

Abdullah II does not seem inclined to follow either security options. Thus, the King can only micro-manage the impact on the internal balance since Jordan has limited impact in the unfolding events in Syria. However, despite the increased challenges and negative implications that Amman faces due to the situation in Syria, Jordan might actually have to choose sides in the regional bras-de-fer between the Gulf kingdoms and Iran.■

NOTES

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Gulf: Islam or Democracy?

Thanassis Papamargaris

What this article argues is that up until the Arab Spring uprisings of the Gulf, one would describe the Gulf geopolitics as dependent on Islam and oil and that from this point onwards democratic aspirations have been added to the equation. Considering energy as of great value, but nonetheless as a variable that would not further the analysis at this point, this essay essentially proposes that geopolitics of Islam and democracy is a reality when it comes to the Gulf.

One of Iran's traditional goals has been for quite a long time to extend its influence across the Persian Gulf and this goal has not changed. The GCC countries, however, stand in the way, enjoying the support of the US, and even though Iran is supported by Russia and China, this help is not at all comparable to the American one towards S. Arabia, neither in quantity nor in quality. Facing therefore the American dominant presence in the region, Iran has not been quite in position to further its goal and is consequently restrained into using a Shia'a-based (or anti-Sunni) dogma towards increasing its influence. Constituting one of its main tactics, this effort has not been crowned with major success.[1]

But then there came the Arab Spring in the Gulf, the turbulence of which was not a result of Iran's efforts and instead seems to have been caused by the Gulf ruling establishment's authoritarian and discriminative nature. The people that got out to the streets appear not to owe the outburst to any sectarian influence, at least not primarily. As a matter of fact, Iran seemed to be caught quite out of the blue, this being proved by the fact that Hassan Mushaima (a cleric on whom Iran has a great deal of influence) flew from London to Bahrain only after the protests had already erupted, as well as that most Shia'a did not shout in favour of an Islamic Shari'a-based state, but in favour of a democratically structured one. And in this sense, the Arab Spring's main characteristics in the Gulf were not sectarian. Despite this, it brought mainly Shia'a people to the streets and had them confront their Sunni power establishments. And even

though the protesters vehemently asked for democratic reforms, the very nature of the situation favoured the development of a light, and yet distinct, sectarianism. In no time the protests were portrayed by many as a Shia'a vs. Sunni sectarian clash and even though this was only partly true, the Saudi-led GCC intervention in Bahrain did nothing but to "sectarianise" the protests. Even if most people did not originally think of the uprising in such terms,[2] the intervention was largely seen as an external Sunni anti- Shia'a move aimed to help a Sunni establishment continue its authoritarian and unjust rule over a largely unprivileged Shia'a population.

Iran could expect nothing better given the previous status quo in the region, even in nearby Bahrain. Even if the Bahraini power establishment had been toppled, Iran would most probably not be in a position to take over in Bahrain, and this is due to its relatively small level of influence in the country's society, as well as (if not mainly) due to the American presence. On the contrary, because of the GCC move, Iran appeared as the protector of the unprivileged and oppressed Shia'a in the Gulf. In other words, the "game" across the Gulf was being played on the socio-political level and with that move the GCC countries transferred it to the sectarian one, where Iran had the advantage. What the Saudis essentially accomplished was to weaken the pro-democratic and non-radical elements (the socio-political centre of the uprising) and consequently strengthen the radical ones. And by doing so, they may have facilitated Iran in patronising Shia'a in the Gulf: in the eastern provinces of S. Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and southern Iraq too. This is of course not to suggest that Iran currently controls all of the Shia'a, just that the Iranian influence has been increased in relation to the recent past.

The just mentioned sectarian level of the on-going "game" in the Gulf, constitutes the geopolitics of Islam, while the socio-political one is the geopolitics of democracy, the very existence of which neither the GCC-USA "block" nor Iran seem to have in mind. Even though the US is the major bearer of the democracy narrative on an international level, it seems to continuously choose stability (or, better-said stagnation) over democratisation due to the fear of "Iranisation". Nevertheless, Iran does not in any way affiliate itself with any democratic movement, but instead tends to support relatively radical elements (like the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain in the past and the al-Wefaq party at the moment).

Nonetheless, democracy is there, albeit not promoted by hierarchically organised power establishments. Instead, as the Arab Spring showed, there is another actor that has been heavily undermined for decades and that is at the moment the major bearer of the geopolitics of democracy. And this actor is the people, the horizontally structured power of whom allowed, in the first place, the very initiation of the Arab Spring. It is somehow unusual to attempt a correlation between the people and geopolitics since it is usually the governments that are related to

geopolitics. But this is not true, at least not entirely. In certain cases the internal and external politics and social processes tend to be entangled in a mutually interactive relationship. With the on-going cold war between Iran and S. Arabia, the Shia'a awakening and the USA presence in the region, the Gulf at the moment certainly constitutes such a case. And since any change in the internal socio-political status quo of Bahrain, Kuwait and more so S. Arabia will also affect the geopolitics of the region, one might argue that this is a quite rare case in which people can actually affect geopolitics.

And it is this type of geopolitics that can significantly alter the position of the three actors. If there is one more round of protests in Bahrain, the government will most likely not be in the position to resist them without another GCC intervention. If such an intervention occurs, sectarianism may take over. Nevertheless, without such an intervention, a different story will be on the making: a democratisation process launched without the US, GCC countries' and Iran's consent is one that could eventually result into a government not as friendly towards these countries as the last one. Even though it will (most probably) not succeed, such an attempt will render politics much more difficult for Saudi Arabia and Iran. One of the two might eventually bring the democratised region back under their influence, but precious time and resources will have been lost, not to mention the regional tension. The same applies for the US, especially if someone considers the political trend towards international interference, as well as the quite tender balance between Iran and Israel.

But whoever takes advantage of the democratisation trend and adopts it will enjoy a great level of sympathy inside these pro-democratic societies. Nevertheless, all three of them do not seem eager to understand this quite simple assumption: Iran and GCC countries highly relate their foreign policy to their domestic socio-political structure, while, despite their democracy-based narrative, the USA tends to support the existing GCC policies. It comes naturally that there should be a different mentality from whoever decides to proceed (if anyone does).

They need to realise that taking the part of the people and gaining their trust is to create an internal majority in the potentially pro-democratic block's favour; and this is by far more secure than influencing a government. But, as said before, from all three of them none seems eager to accept the existence of the geopolitics of democracy. nstead they keep thinking in sectarian

terms, and in this sense, they will not be able to achieve a stable status quo.

By favouring the tactic of strengthening sectarianism and by ignoring the new trend, all three actually harm their strategies, those being related to different levels of dominance in the region. And even if this may seemingly be successful, this success will only be temporary.■

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See Gengler, 2011.

The End of the Political Islam project in Turkey- State, Islam and AKP

Ahmet Gencturk

Historically speaking, early transition to the multi-party democracy and center right governments consolidated Kemalist regime in Turkey. Erdogan, accused of having a secret Islamist agenda, restored the legitimacy of the political regime, which significantly eroded 90's and reconciliated conservative masses with the system.

Ever since modern Turkey was established in 1923, by secular and nationalist elites led by Mustafa Kemal, discussions on political Islam have always been one of the hot topics in Turkish politics. The founding elites of the Turkish Republic inherited a Modernist tradition, from Ittihat ve Terakki Firkasi (Committee Progress Union - CUP), of which, most of them were members.

The Modernist tradition, generally, saw religion as an obstacle in front of the construction of a nation-state, set as its ultimate goal. In the case of Turkey, the relationship between the modernization project and Islam has its own particular dynamics and historical background. Firstly, witnessing Arab revolts against the Ottoman Empire, during WWI, made the Turkish elites lose their hopes that Islam can be used for keeping Islamic ethnicities together in an already shrunk Empire. Secondly, the nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal were accused of fighting against the "Caliphate", and hence Islam, by the Istanbul government and the Allied Powers, who used Islam to undermine the Turkish Independence War. Lastly, the strongest reaction against Kemalist top-to-bottom modernization efforts mostly came from religious circles along with Kurds.

The Kemalist establishment, from the very beginning, became aware that Islam should be kept under control, if not totally excluded. While Islam's effects and visibility was significantly erased from the public sphere, Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi (Religious Affairs Directorate) was established in 1924 in order to control Islam and the spreading Kemalist ideology to the private sphere as well. This should be understood as a policy that is strongly in line with the Ottoman state's tradition, which always kept religion under state control.

Having decided that the essentials of Kemalism were consolidated, and single party regime became unsustainable due to internal and external pressures, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (People's Republican Party – PRP) consented to a transition to a multi-party democracy. After winning a landslide victory in 1950 against RPP, the Democrat Party (Democratic Party – DP) allayed the rigid pressure concerning religion,

without compromising with the establishment of secularism, which was recognized as one of the countries' founding principles.

Being ideological successors of the DP, the other center right parties of Turkey, Adalet Partisi (Justice Party – JP), Anavatan Partisi , (Motherland Party – ANAP) and Dogru Yol Partisi (Right Path Party- RPP) pursued similar policies, which allowed conservative masses to get involved in politics and enjoy religious liberties freely. Although they were accused of being counter-revolutionary to the Kemalist establishment, which consisted of the main fractions of the Turkish left, bureaucracy, university students and intellectuals, as a result of their stance on the role of Islam, the Turkish center right consolidated the legitimacy of the political regime. They convinced large masses in Anatolia that secularism is even useful as far as protecting Islam is concerned. They also made conservative Anatolian people to embrace Mustafa Kemal as a savior of Islam and of the nation and as a founding father of the Republic.[1]

Nevertheless, a small portion of the Turkish right electorate remained outside of the center parties' efforts to reconcile Islam with the Kemalist state. Discontented sections of the right came together under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan, a brilliant engineering professor, and formed the National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi – MNP). Labeling all the other political parties of being the "agents of the materialistic Western ideologies", the party embraced an openly Islamic agenda named Milli Gorus (National View). Although MNP was closed down by the Turkish Constitutional Court, under the accusation of "acting against the secular characteristic of the Kemalist ideology", the party, with its new name, Milli Selamet Partisi, (National Salvation Party) succeeded to become a minor partner in the coalition governments in the volatile Turkish political arena of the 70's.

After the 1980 military coup, the National Salvation Party, like all political parties in Turkey, was closed once more and its leader, Necmettin Erbakan was put under house arrest. While a new offspring party, Refah Partisi - Welfare Party, was founded by Erbakan's followers, it remained a marginal party with a 6-7 percent vote rate.

Nonetheless, Erbakan's Welfare Party started to gain momentum in the late 80's as a result of the widespread corruption allegations, the economic stagnation and the escalation of social disturbance. The party exceeded the 10 percent electoral threshold and became the third biggest party in 1991. When the deteriorated financial situation of the country led to a financial crisis in 1994, an electoral victory of the Islamists became even more expectable. After Erbakan's victory in 1995 and the formation of a coalition government with the participation of Islamists and Tansu Ciller, who led the center right party DYP, the Kemalist establishment constructed an odd coalition in which big conglomerates, leftist trade unions, nationalists, intellectuals, and even some extreme leftist small parties enthusiastically became involved. After this coalition succeeded to discredit and, eventually, topple the Islamist Erbakan's government in 1998, a new election was held in 1999.

However, the new grand coalition, generated by the elections of 1999, could not produce a solution for Turkey's already congested political and economic structure. The financial crises of November 2000 and February 2001 brought the country to the brink of total collapse and revealed the incompetency of the centrist parties and the Kemalist establishment as far as ruling Turkey is concerned. Hence, the road to power was cleared for the ex-Islamists, who were now called new conservatives, under the leadership of a great orator and former Istanbul mayor, Tayyip Erdogan.

Although it contained some important figures from the centrist parties, the AK Party had as its founding figure, Erdogan himself, the current president Abdullah Gul and the present deputy prime minister Bulent Arinc, who were among Erbakan's closest

and most ardent followers. This made the Kemalist establishment suspicious of AKP and although Erdogan stated countless times that AKP is not an Islamic party but a socially conservative and economically liberal movement, whatever remained from the Kemalist establishment has remained ambivalent on AKP.

Erdogan, however, managed to convince the Turks that he had left his Islamist ideas aside, adopting a center-right agenda in 2002 and winning an easy victory. Given the fact that the system's parties lost their legitimacy and became irrelevant due to the above mentioned reasons, it was obvious that the anti–systemic parties would make some gains in the Turkish politics. Yet, what led to the Erdogan's new movement to victory was his new centrist stance.[2]

Having ruled Turkey more than 10 years, a record in Turkey's history, AKP's course does not allow us to label it as "Islamist". On the contrary, to the Islamists' strong anti-capitalist rhetoric, AKP's economic policy is liberal with some strong corporatist aspects. Looking at his own viewpoint on the institution of the family, the role of the religion in the private sphere, the issue of abortion, the discouraging statements on cigarette and alcohol consumption, it can be argued that he is more conservative than what he claims to be. AKP, however, has marched into some other major developments which might turn it into the most liberal party in Turkey; such as positive and constructive approach toward the religious and ethnic minorities in Turkey, placing the Turkish Armed Forces under civilian control for the first time since 1923 and introducing policies of positive discrimination in gender issues.

In the same vein, AKP's foreign policy does not give us valid arguments to call it "Islamist". Turkey's efforts to strike a balance between the West and East do not mean it pursues a neo-Islamist policy. Rather, it should be seen in the context of an attempt to find new markets for Turkey's flourishing industries and cover the increasing demand for raw materials and energy resources due to the economic growth. The gridlocked membership negotiations with the European Union along with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the resulting appearance of an autonomous Kurdistan in Iraq and 'Shia'a Belt' have also played a role in the developments.

As a conclusion, the rise of the AKP has confirmed the end of the political Islam project in Turkey. Having inherited the policy of "state first" from the Ottoman state tradition, and the modernist world view from the early elites of the late Ottoman period, Turkey has never been a futile ground for the political Islam. With the help of its pragmatist conservative political culture, the Turkish state managed to overcome the legitimacy crises it experienced by allowing the conservative masses to feel themselves as part of the mainstream political system.■

NOTES

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The FJP and Democracy: A Turbulent Relation

Evangelos Diamantopoulos

The Egyptian Revolution of 2011 was first triggered by the local people's aspiration to live under a democratic system. The pressing need for open and fair elections after Mubarak's fall brought up a heated debate over the Muslim Brotherhood's character since it was the only well-organized and established political party in Egypt. The opposition accused the Brotherhood for aspiring to islamize the state but at the same time failed to unite under a common body. The FJP's rule has not realized its opponents' worst dreams until now but at the same time cannot be labeled as a purely democratic one.

The wave of popular unrest ignited mainly by secular Egyptians was overwhelmed by the Brotherhood's late participation at the Revolution. At first, Egyptian Islamists were hesitant in joining the massive protests against the regime and they did not become part of the movement until Hosni Mubarak started making concessions towards it.[1] However, the Islamists' numbers and organization gave a significant boost to the Revolution, which resulted in Mubarak's fall. The Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) had promised not to participate in the

presidential elections in order to calm multiple voices, coming from both Egypt and abroad, expressingfear against the possibility of it islamizing the country. Having changed their position, the Muslim Brothers, nowadays, dominate the ruling posts after their electoral wins in both the parliamentary and presidential elections. The FJP refuted some of its critics' extreme predictions that it would turn Egypt into a new Iran or Saudi Arabia although its rule lacks certain basic democratic rules and appears increasingly greedy for power.

As time passes, a problematic relation between the freedom of the Press and the Morsi administration seems to unfold. The attempt to control the media and make them uncritical and supportive towards the new regime leads many people to make comparisons between the current situation and the Mubarak-era practices.[2] The controversial Ministry of Information was not abolished even though its reinstatement by the SCAF had been received with anger due to its former use as a tool of propaganda under Mubarak. The Ministry was rather empowered by the appointment of the FJP member Salah Abdel-Maqsoud at its head, who appeared very keen in attacking voices of opposition on several occasions. Broadcaster Tawfik Okasha was convicted to imprisonment for defaming the President at his talk-show 'Egypt Today' and his television channel, al-Faraeen, was suspended. Furthermore, al-Dostor copies were confiscated and its editor, Islam Affifi, faced a trial for insulting the President, while, security forces raided the newspaper's al-Gomhouriya printing house.

Charges for "insulting the President" and "spreading false rumors" are commonly used to limit the freedom of speech, with great vigor, under Morsi.[3] The list of journalists, who faced similar legal problems is long and includes, among others, al-Masry al-Youm's Yousry al-Badry, Magdi Algallad, editor of al-Watan and Abdel Halim Qandil, editor of Sawt al-Umma. TV presenters, such as CBC's Bassem Youssef and Khairy Ramadan as well as al-Nahar's Mahmoud Saad have also felt the Brotherhood's unique understanding of the freedom of expression.[4] Meanwhile, Khaled Salah, editor-in-chief of the Youm7 independent newspaper, was attacked by a mob of Islamists, who were protesting against "media corruption." The most tragic event was the murder of al-Fagr's reporter El-Hosseiny Abou-Deif, who was shot dead by pro-Morsi protesters near the presidential palace and his camera was seized.

Moreover, the Shura Council, led by another FJP member, Ahmed Fahmi, controls fifty state-run newspapers and appoints their editors who, not surprisingly, happen to be friendly to the Islamists.[5] The Shura Council also appointed a new Supreme Council of the Press filled with Islamists as well. The Supreme Council of the Press is a key player concerning the Egyptian media since, apart from deciding the prices for all publications, it has large authorities ranging from the approval of licenses for both state-run and private publications to the formulation of Press laws as well as the Egyptian Journalism Code of Ethics.

A clear example of the Shura Council's latest appointments is the new chief editor of Akhbar al-Youm, Suleiman Qinawy, who used to write articles for the FJP's official newspaper and was the editor of the Sout al-Azhar newspaper and the Grand Imam's website. In addition, al-Akhbar newspaper's newly appointed editor, Mohamed Hassan al-Banna, faces accusations of censorship by his colleagues from

his first week in office.[6] The first move of al-Ahram's new editor, Abdel Nasser Salama, a fierce opponent of revolutionaries and Copts, was to cease the newspaper's series, which debated the President's first 100 days in office. The current editor of al-Gomhoreya, Gamal Abdel Rehim, is not a fan of the freedom of belief since he had rallied successfully against a conference concerning the Bahai minority at the Journalists' Syndicate and used to support, through his columns, attacks against them in Upper Egypt. Following these developments, the Journalists' Syndicate has escalated its protests against the Ministry of Information and its attempt to continue its infamous undemocratic practices.[7] Journalists from privately owned newspapers such as al-Tahrir, al-Masry al-Youm, al-Shorouk and al-Watan left their columns blank, while, private TV channels stopped broadcasting to protest against the state's latest actions to manipulate the media.

The FJP's campaign to amass step by step all the available powers of the state and consolidate its grip was also proven by its abrupt move to challenge the judiciary authority. After the Brotherhood's electoral victories in both parliamentary and presidential elections as well as the sudden removal of the military and intelligence services' heads there were few institutions left to control the FJP's rule. The constitutional amendments made by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) were cancelled overnight and the road for Morsi and his government to achieve extreme power was open. Morsi issued a decree which gave him extra powers that could not be challenged by the court, sparking massive protests against what was described as a political and constitutional coup. According to the second article of the decree, presidential decisions might neither be cancelled nor suspended. In addition, the government rushed the creation of a new constitution draft by the Islamist-dominated Constituent Assembly in order that it is put to a referendum. In Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, Suez and other regions, anti-Morsi campaigns and Islamists' counter-rallies clashed for several days over the President's new Pharaoh-like powers. Eventually, the President was forced to backtrack from his contentious decree in order to calm the situation, even though, he insisted on the constitutional referendum.[8] The new constitution gained the majority votes amidst voices of concern by the opposition (of the opposition's concern) that the Revolution was betrayed.

The FJP's success concerning the constitution came after a direct confrontation with an important branch of the government that was not under the Brotherhood's influence, the judicial. The Supreme Constitutional Court was put under siege by Islamists, who prevented it from considering the legality of the Constituent Assembly in an ongoing battle between the Brotherhood and the judges.[9] Actually, the new constitution ignored various human rights, such as the freedom of expression, women's rights and an independent judiciary.[10] Furthermore, Morsi managed to remove Abdel Meguid Mahmood, Egypt's Prosecutor General, from his post after an earlier attempt combined with threats had failed to do so. However, the Egyptian law does not provide executive authorities with any power against judicial bodies. Abdel Meguid had lost the war against the Brotherhood but went on to give an interesting speech at the Cairo Judges Club in which he accused the highest ranks of them for collaborating with the former regime and being involved in cases of corruption. The new Prosecutor General, Talaat Abdullah, appointed by

Morsi himself, refuses to resign, even though, he had promised to leave his office on December 18 after massive protests against him were held by the other prosecutors.

Mohamed Morsi and the FJP were elected through the most democratic procedures in Egypt so far, but that does not make them democrats. Indeed, free and fair electoral victories offered them increased legitimacy towards the Egyptian people and the world. However, the new regime's continuous attempts to manipulate or intimidate its opponents reveal its dark side. The Press and the judiciary were two of the few last authorities, which stood in the Brotherhood's way to ultimate power since the FJP had already conquered most of the executive and legislature through democratic means. The government finds it difficult to play by a democratic set of rules and has targeted the remaining voices of opposition in the context of an ongoing war. The most optimistic fact is that the Egyptian people appear fed up with authoritarianism and protest actively every time they feel that the Revolution comes under threat. Time will show whether Morsi and the Brotherhood have understood the will of the masses, whether they will abide by the rules of democracy or whether they will keep walking down an undemocratic path. ■

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Arab spring among the cedars

Paschalis Anastasiou

While the Arab Spring raged through the Middle East and North Africa, for many the question was not if, but when, the Spring would erupt in Lebanon. It did not, however, despite the fact that the country hosts a large youth movement which could have protested before 2011.

Although the Arab Spring, which some even claim that its origins lay in Lebanon's 2005 "Independence Uprising" or "Cedar Revolution", was greeted with enthusiasm, support and optimism in Lebanon,[1] there was no such thing as a Lebanese Spring. Naturally, the question arising is why. If one looks at the situation in Lebanon, and by comparison to other Arab countries, there could be four main causes (among others) that prevented the Arab Spring from spreading into Lebanon.

First, Lebanon's level of democracy and freedom is much higher compared to its autocratic neighbors. It is usually described as a democratic state –at least in theory- because of the freedom of press and expression and the absence of a strong, repressive and autocratic government. Lebanon's past corroborates this statement as its citizens had the right to vote ever since the founding of the Lebanese state.

Second, Lebanon's GDP is rather high compared to other Arab, non oil-driven economies, and has known decades of economic growth.[2] Lebanon's largest economic challenge is not its unemployment

rate (although it is high, especially amidst youths), as was that case for the other countries partaking in the Arab Spring. However, as a middle-income economy, the challenge is to become a highly competitive economy, by increasing exports and improving the product sophistication, in order to be able to compete globally.[3] But from 2011 onwards there has been a loss in economic output and growth has decreased from 8-9% (January-March 2010) to 2-3% for the first quarter of 2011.[4]

Third, Lebanon has a long history of civil war (1975-1990) and sectarian divides, which continue to influence the domestic situation. Whereas there are many young Lebanese unsatisfied with the contemporary system and demand change, they are not able to unite because of the sectarian divide.[5]

Considering the above, one would think that Lebanon is immune to the Arab Spring and that the

developments in the region have left the country unscarred. After taking a closer look into Lebanese society, however, one cannot confirm this notion. The Arab Spring has had an ideological impact within Lebanon regarding the regional debate of "the new Middle East", in the sense of more democratic, non sectarian, open societies with complete freedom of press and respect for human rights.[6] More significantly, due to its relationship and proximity to Syria, the intense conflict between the Assad regime and the political opposition forces continues to impact Lebanon's internal political stability.[7]

The Arab Spring has also brought economic consequences; the imposed sanctions on the Assad regime have seriously affected Lebanon, since one third of all trade was either conducted with Syria or transported through it.[8]

Even though the Lebanese government has tried to remain neutral on the neighboring Syrian conflict, the assassination of top-security official Wissam Hassan, a Sunni anti-Syrian, has made this more difficult. The assassination triggered a reemergence of the countries' internal differences, in the form of violent clashes between Shia'a and Sunni, upsetting their delicate political balance and threatening to introduce a new era of sectarian bloodshed.[9] Moreover, Prime Minister Najib Mikati's policy of self-distancing from the situation in Syria in order to avoid any spillover from the neighboring crisis[10] goes against Hezbollah who is a crucial partner in government but has a pro-Assad approach.

Hezbollah, which can hardly contemplate a future with a profoundly different Syrian regime, has tied its fate ever more tightly to its ally's, and will not keep its hands tied should Assad be in real jeopardy. The Shia'a of Hezbollah fear that if the Assad regime falls (which, along with Iran, is their main ally) they would become more and more regionally isolated and forced to face Sunni retaliation. On the other hand, the Sunni-dominated "Future Movement" and its allies see no alternative to the regime's demise.

In conclusion, even though the Arab Spring has not swept, as it has elsewhere, Lebanon -a country with a long history of religious tensions, sectarianism, civil war and probably the most likely one to be influenced by a spillover of violence in neighboring Syria- it has left its mark. Despite the fact that a full blown civil war is unlikely, exactly how much it will be affected by Syria's conflict is unknown, but a short and certain answer would be, a lot.■

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Tunisia still in turmoil

Charitini Petrodaskalaki

Two years may have passed since the Tunisian Spring, the subsequent overthrow of the previous regime and the 'establishment of democracy', but Tunisians still have not attained the long-anticipated stability. Multiple protests have taken place across Tunisia due to dissatisfaction concerning, among others, the economic situation, government policies, women's rights, the role of Islam and political repression. Meanwhile, the increasing pressure of Salafi groups, who emerged in the political scenery after the revolution, poses an additional substantial threat.

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Most of the recent protests and political tensions in Tunisia circle around issues, such as the drafting of the constitution, the division around the role of Islam and the critical economic situation. Government policies, as well as the suppression of demonstrations, have also been a cause for concern with several voices demanding the fall of the government. In some cases, even violence was directed towards political representatives. For example, during the celebrations for the anniversary of the uprising, protesters threw stones at the President Moncef Marzouki and a parliamentary speaker shouting "Get out! Get out" - the same chant that was used to overthrow the previous regime.[1] If any other evidence was needed, the assassination of prominent opposition leader, Chokri Belaid, demonstrated the gravity of the situation.

All these mobilizations highlight the waning economic situation in the country. The European Union's economic crisis has affected Tunisia and primarily the manufacturing sector, due to the limited demand for Tunisia's goods. As a consequence of the social unrest and violence that is prevailing since the revolution, foreign investment and tourism have also recorded a decline.[2] Furthermore, a significant budget deficit prevents the authorities from boosting crucial sectors of the economy with investments. As a result, the unemployment rate is higher than it was before the revolution, reaching 19% of the population, with youth unemployment reaching almost 40%.[3] Thus, it is justifiable that Tunisians give such an emphasis on the economic situation and demand the formation of a sustainable solution plan.

What is more, the problem of political corruption, the tackling of which has been one of the top demands since the revolution, has not been resolved, with the government's transitional justice minister declaring he is not to blame for it. Although a commission was established and over 400 cases of corruption have been brought to justice, proving the existence of a vast system used for personal gain, only a few among Ben Ali's associates, who masterminded the majority of the operations, have been tried. Moreover, the government appears reluctant to facilitate the work of the commission and many insufficiencies have been recorded, ranging from lack of office equipment to mishandling in witnesses protection's programmes.[4] The persistence of such a system is raising suspicions that the current political authorities may take advantage of it as well. Reduced earnings in local authorities along with the slow pace of delivering justice exacerbate the existing problem as civil employees are more vulnerable to bribes in order to improve their income.[5]

In addition to all these issues, it seems like, to a certain degree, the repression of the past has re-emerged. Many protests have taken place against the imposition of restrictions in public life, and at the same time several arrests of people expressing freely their objection to the latter have been carried out, frequently in the guise of guarding public morality. Such was the case of Sofiene Chourabi, a journalist and activist, who was arrested for drinking alcohol a day after he announced a protest against the restriction of free speech. Numerous trials have been carried out across the country against dissidents, unionists, journalists, artists and comedians. In just one of many examples, Ayoub Messaoudi, a former member of the government, was charged for defamation after blaming some officials for treason.[6] Worldwide concerns have been raised that these political trials may be part of a wider effort to repress, and Amnesty International has stated that since June 2011, freedom of speech has not been respected in many cases.[7]

Meanwhile, besides the ambiguous government policies, the announcement about the impending formation of a national unity cabinet added to the uncertainty already weighing on the interior. The fragile coalition between Ennahdha, Ettakatol and the Republican Congress, which was formed after the country's first free elections in order to form a transitional government, does not exist in reality, for Ennahda seems to hold all the power. It is notable that most of the protests are turning against Ennahdha, and not so much against the other parties. Moreover, some members of the government are characterized by a lack of sense of partisanship coupled with limited attention to their assignments,

inducing political dysfunction. A common practice between members of the Constituent Assembly is absence from meetings, particularly by the members of the opposition, and, according to some observers, this is either because they want Ennahda to fail or because they do not consider their job that significant.[8] The absence of transparency is also an issue. In general, the actions of the Constituent Assembly remain in the dark, as neither the duration of the meetings have been published, nor have the voting records and attendances been revealed.

In fact, the draft laws that have been published appeal to social values, such as the role of women and the presence of religion in everyday life. The blasphemy law, i.e. article 3, which criminalizes religious offences, has been introduced by Ennahda in order to maintain public order and heighten people's religious sentiment, as well as deter insults against other religious doctrines, namely Christianity and Judaism. Yet, there is no clear definition of what is considered a blasphemy, and this law is likely to restrain free speech to some degree.[9] The status of women in the new constitution, stated in Article 28, has raised many concerns as well. Women have some clear gains in regard to their previous position; yet the principle of equality is not recognised. Instead, it has been replaced with the principle of "complementarity" within the family, without any reference to women that don't have one.[10] However, with this tactic, Ennahda is trying to draw attention to social issues, steering away Tunisia from its real priorities, such as the economic situation and corruption.

On the other hand, there is another rising problem. Apart from the general political and economic instability, extremist groups put pressure on the government to introduce Islamic law in the constitution, and they demand this not only by protesting but also by using violence. Since the revolution, numerous acts of violence have been attributed to Salafist groups, including attacks on bars and art galleries - in the name of morality and religion - and more recently against the US embassy in Tunis. More alarming among such incidents were the attacks on other religious groups, like the assaults on Sufi sacred sites or the threats against Tunisian Jews. Whereas these groups are still a minority, the events indicate that social tolerance in Tunisia is at stake, and secularists are accusing Ennahda of not dealing with Salafists drastically.

To conclude, the course that Tunisia is taking should not be underestimated. The country is still in a difficult and transitional stage. Despite the revolution and the conduct of free elections, domestic issues that ignited the uprising remain unsolved. High unemployment, corruption and political repression motivate people to protest against the government. In this political context one may assume that the government, and especially Ennadha, have failed to deal with the improvement of the everyday life of Tunisians. Moreover, some politicians seem to adopt policies that go against the efforts the country is making towards democracy. Meanwhile, the violent involvement of radical Islamist groups is becoming a threat to the lives and practices of many social groups, primarily the ones with different religious beliefs. ■

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The Obama Cairo address revisited

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The Cairo speech seems part of the distant past, as the United States has to confront a new situation in the region. The rapid changes in the Arab world pose new foreign policy dilemmas, reminiscent, however, of the type of issues that Washington had to deal with before.

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It seems like ages since President Obama made his well-publicized Cairo speech in 2009. Back then, the choice of al-Azhar, a renowned University and the center of Islamic jurisprudence in the Muslim world, and Egypt were meant to mark the reorientation of the American foreign policy from changing the Middle East to learning to live with it. Moderation was the main argument running through Obama's speech.

Even though only three years have passed, the regional landscape of the Middle East has been significantly altered. One cannot hear anymore the familiar voice of Hosni Mubarak, whom many senior US officials trusted to intervene when a difficult situation arose. Now, the situation in Egypt is much more fluid; an affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood has assumed the Presidency of the country and political Islam seems to set the tone inside Egypt. Revolt, and not moderation, is the word of the day. Uncertainty abounds, not only for how the United States could deal with the rising tide of desperation in the Arab world, but also for the few remaining choices of keeping non-friendly groups outside of power.

Things have not gone the US way in another "success story" of western intervention: in nearby Libya, where one more autarchic regime was overthrown by the uprising of the population and where the US-led alliance implemented UN decisions to prevent massacres of innocent people. The transition process from the Qaddafi-led regime to a more representative type of government involves a lot of questions that are difficult to answer. The killings of four Americans, including the US ambassador to Libya, has illustrated that the new Libyan government cannot even deter attacks against foreign nationals, let alone play a wider stabilizing role in the area. Nonetheless, Washington has remained engaged with Tripoli, not freezing the current financial aid programme and trying to find ways of assisting its ally to impose central control over a wider region beyond the Libyan urban centers.

The continuing conflict in Syria adds to the current uncertainty. As the main patrons of the Syrian opposition also happen to be allies of the US, calls have multiplied for a more active US role, such as the imposition of a Libya-like non flight zone. However, the minimal American influence on the warlords that lead the war against Damascus and the potential, political and financial repercussions of such an intervention prevent Washington, for the time being, from becoming embroiled in the Syrian quagmire.

The reluctance of the United States about the situation in Syria could also be explained by its constant attention to the Gulf, and mainly the monitoring of the Iranian nuclear aspirations. Washington seems anxious about the military potential of the Iranian nuclear program, as Tehran has tripled its monthly production of higher-grade enriched uranium in 2012.[1] But for now, United States' reliance on the Gulf states as counterbalance to its strenuous relationship with Iran has actually made Washington incapable of restraining its own allies,[2] while appearing to apply a double standard in dealing with the uprisings in the region. While severely criticizing the Syrian regime and seriously considering arming the opposition, Washington responded mildly to the harsh treatment of the opposition in Bahrain since Iran's shadow covers most of the Gulf, including the little island and what is happening in Manama.

In addition to the turbulence in the Arab world, another challenge looms on the far horizon. The ongoing struggle for regional supremacy between Iran and Israel could rise to another level, as Israel threatens to destroy Iranian facilities, using the nuclear program of Iran as a pretext to settle its scores with Tehran.[3] This scenario troubles Washington, as the flow of energy resources from the Gulf to the West could be disrupted and the rising tension in the region could inflame other areas as well.

Hoping to handle all these uncertainties the United States leans as usual towards the one true constant of its Middle Eastern policy. Israel, since the 1960s, has been able to make itself a basic ingredient of the US foreign policy choices, taking advantage of any American involvement in the region. Cooperation in almost all fields between the two countries has continued unabated, especially in the military and intelligence sectors. Only recently, Washington provided a requested fund to support the Israeli anti-missile system "Iron Dome"[4] and, in addition to this, sanctioned the purchase of the F-35 jet fighter by Israel, the only clearly 5th generation of its kind.[5] Apart from enhancing the already strong Israeli arms industry, Washington is also providing its most advanced weaponry as a clear sign of American support for Israel in its showdown with Iran, aiming to prevent any unilateral Israeli moves and convince Israel about its reliability.

Many things have changed since Obama reached out to the Muslim world in 2009, proposing "a new way forward" and indicating that the Israeli-Palestinian peace process could be central in an American breakthrough in the Middle East. However, before making headway and engage Israelis and Palestinians in serious discussions about their future, the Arab Spring came along, changing the scenery and destroying any sense of planning. The focus of the American foreign policy changed and the US chose again sides, by indiscriminately supporting Israel and attempting to stop the Palestinian Authority from achieving indirect recognition as a state in the UN.[6]

Nevertheless, the dilemmas of USA policymakers remain unchangeable. Do authoritarian sovereigns offer short term stability to the region or is the emergence of democratic governments preferable in the long term?[7] Should the US remain aloof and hope for the gradual improvement of the situation on the ground or should there be an active intervention in the region, in consultation with the other regional powers? The next challenge ahead for the American foreign policy lies, however, beyond the handling of the crisis in Syria and it is not focused on checking the Iranian menace, as many US allies would hope. Far more important than every other priority is a related question to the above-mentioned dilemmas. The spread of religious radicalism, Jewish, Muslim or even Christian, in the Middle East, is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed. In this context, sometime in the near future, a choice will have to be made by the US between engaging or containing the democratically elected Muslim Brotherhood offshoots and affiliates that have learned to play the game of democracy in several Middle Eastern countries. And if the right path was to be followed, much more than words and good will would be needed.■

NOTES

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3 About the struggle between Iran and Israel see Parsi, Trita, Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007, passim.

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The Theoretical Framework of Post-Islamism and the Political Transformation in the Arab World

Andreas Evaggelatos

The rise of Political Islam following the Arab Spring has been a source of concern within the International Relations discipline. Many IR scholars have stressed that this is the end of political Islam, but on the contrary Islamists became more powerful after having seized power in Egypt and Tunisia. This article examines the theoretical framework of Post-Islamism and its critics. It concludes that religion is the most vital element in the process of political transformation in the Arab world.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution marked a transformation in the Middle East. Yet, there followed a period which saw another transformation, that of the Post-Islamist period. Bayat first used the term “Post-Islamism” in 1996, in his article “The Coming of a Post-Islamic Society”, in an attempt to comment on Iran’s Post-Islamist turn during the 1990s. He defined it as “...the metamorphosis of Islamism (in ideas, approaches and practices) from within and without”.[1] Another definition of Post-Islamism comes from the journalist Ali Eteraz, who stresses that “[it] is the recognition that politics rather than religion provides for welfare of life”.[2] Eteraz underlines that Post-Islamists have taken Germany’s Christian Democratic Union as a model and seek for the implementation of liberal values (both in politics and economy) within Muslim society.

Since the Islamic Revolution, two major events have exposed the need for political transition; the 2009 Green Movement in Iran, which failed to support liberal values in Iranian society and, to a much larger extent, the Arab Spring. Nonetheless, the prevalence of Post-Islamism as an analytical tool now faces the challenge of having to confront the political unrest in the Arab World.

The latest sociopolitical transformations in the region have triggered a debate concerning the future of the political situation. According to Olivier Roy, the Arab Spring was an expression of a new Arab individualism. This individualism led Arabs to vote for religious-oriented political entities because, in their minds, secularism is associated with previous dictatorships.[3] To this end, Roy indicates that in "the process, these Islamist parties will abandon the Islamic goal of pure religious society governed only by the Koran."[4] Thus, following Turkey's AKP example, political entities like the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda will, in the future, be considered as "conservatives analogous to the religious right in the United States."[5]

"Post-Islamism" scholars seem to be convinced that demographic changes (e.g. the rise of literacy), economic development and the use of the Internet have played a crucial role in making religion a badge of identity, not a way of life. Thus, in Muslim countries such a development could be the starting point for the search of a democratic system. These scholars go one step further to attest that the current state of violence is a vital step in the process of political transformation.[6]

Demographers Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd in their analysis on the transformation of Muslim societies stress that:

"The Muslim world is becoming modern the same way France did, with wild swings of revolution and reaction. Westerners would like to forget that their own demographic transitions were also strewn with many disturbances and a good deal of violence."[7]

For scholars like Roy, Courbage and Todd, the current state of violence in the Arab world reflects that a political transformation is in the works; thus, violence should be considered a natural consequence. Furthermore, it shows that even if non-secular parties like the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda have seized power, the idea of "Post-Islamism" is still alive and strong. If this is the case, then it could be assumed that Post-Islamism scholars see the seizure of power by Islamists as a temporary situation, preceding the creation of a secular state based on democratic values. The latter can become a reality if the existing Islamist governments adopt a more secular approach or if the Arab people replace them with liberal ones.

Scholars like Jamal and Tessler challenge Post-Islamists' optimistic view by focusing on protesters'/voters' behaviour in an attempt to understand the kind of political transformation that the Arabs want. Contrary to Post-Islamism scholars, Jamal and Tessler do not interpret the victories of Islamist parties through the lenses of Arab individualism and certainly don't treat it as a temporary situation. Jamal and Tessler use the Egyptian Referendum of 2011 in an attempt to show that the Egyptian people did not seek "true" democracy but were merely seeking for stabil-

ity and a strong leadership. Thus, they indicate that there was no true desire for democracy; instead democracy is seen purely in instrumental terms.[8] They conclude that in the Muslim/Arab world (in this particular occasion, Egypt) there is high support for democracy but this support seems to be at odds with the values in which democracy is grounded (e.g. gender equality, among others).

Jamal and Tessler have presented a theory which is merely based on a quantitative rather than qualitative approach. They have founded their conclusions on the fact that only 41% of eligible voters voted for the 2011 constitutional referendum in Egypt, but this is not enough to extract the assumption that Arab people do not desire a true Democracy. Furthermore, their view is associated with a Clash of Civilizations-oriented approach, by indicating that Arabs (contrary to Westerners) seek a Democracy that is Partial or Illiberal. Such theoretical frameworks have effectively deconstructed by scholars (P. Berman, E. Said, N. Chomsky and others) and politicians like M. Khatami (Dialogue among Civilizations).

On the other hand Post-Islamism scholars, in their attempt to provide for a solid theoretical framework, fail to link the victories of parties like the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda with the religiousness of Arabs. In short, Arab people did not vote for the Brotherhood or Ennahda only because they link secularism with Mubarak and Ben Ali; they did it because those entities better represent their culture and their linkage with religion.

The current prevalence of Political Islam reflects the tight bonds between politics and religion. The fact that religious-related parties, like the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda, are the dominant powers in their countries is an indication that possibly the Arabs have a different understanding of the secular state concept. Thus, it is not certain whether the Arabs asked for democracy or for a political change with respect to their link with religion. In contrast with the "Post-Islamism" scholars' view, the political situation in Egypt and Tunisia indicates that it is too early to say that the rise of political Islam is a temporary situation.■

NOTES

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4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Youssef, Courbage and Todd, Emmanuel, A Convergence of Civilizations: The Transformation of Muslim Societies Around the World, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011

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