

# Cyclone

Journal for Policy and Strategic Affairs

**Marking a decade to the Arab Spring:  
The turmoil that changed the Middle East**

**Editor: Michael Milshtein**

Vol. 1, 2021

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## Journal for Policy and Strategic Affairs

### Marking a decade to the Arab Spring: The turmoil that changed the Middle East

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The papers contained in this publication present an in-depth analysis of the past decade in the Middle East. They examine the roots of the regional turmoil, the changes it caused in various hubs in the Arab world, and its strategic implications for Israel. Alongside these, a cautious attempt will be made to analyze the future trends toward which the Middle East is heading, as well as their repercussions for Israel.

This collection of articles is brought to you as the first issue of a new journal called *Cyclone* published by the Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) at the IDC, Herzliya. This journal will be dedicated to an in-depth discussion of processes and issues directly affiliated with Israel's national security domestically and globally.

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# Marking a Decade to the Arab Spring: The Middle East at a Crossroads

**Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilead**

*A decade ago, the Arab world was in the midst of a historical shockwave between two dramatic events: The incident during which Tunisian street vendor Mohamad Boua`zizi set himself on fire (December 17, 2010), marking the beginning of the Arab Spring; and the start of the Tahrir Square events in Cairo (January 25, 2011), leading to the collapse of Mubarak's regime, and marking the culmination of that spring while also indicating the beginning of its decline.*

The Middle East has changed immensely over the past ten years: long-lasting regimes that seemed to have tremendous power collapsed under the unprecedented pressure exerted by the public in the Arab world; political entities were shaken to the core, some of which continue to wallow in blood-soaked civil wars to this day; the "dormant demons" of hostility between ethnicities, religions, and political groups emerged in all their glory; the Arab world weakened, with non-Arab forces in the region becoming more influential at its expense; and extremists made their presence known across the region, posing a challenge to the political order that had existed there for the past century.

**What began as an "Arab Spring" and accompanied by optimism with the prospects of democratization and social reform in the Middle East soon transformed into continued turbulence filled with suffering and violence for most countries in the region.**

What began as an "Arab Spring" and accompanied by optimism with the prospects of democratization and social reform in the Middle East soon transformed into continued turbulence filled with suffering and violence for most countries in the region, and it remains unclear whether it is nearing

its end, peak or has perhaps only just begun. After a decade of upheaval, the Middle East in general and Arab world in particular is wounded, weak and weary from bloody struggles, most of which are still ongoing.

Moreover, the lion's share of fundamental issues that led to the eruption of the Arab Spring not only have not been resolved, but have even exacerbated. In some of the Arab Spring centers, such as Egypt, that served as a hub for all regional turmoil, the economic state is graver now than it was in 2010, as are political oppression and human rights. Because these severe points of distress remain, future outbreaks are possible, both in areas where turmoil has already left its deep and painful mark, and in those it has skipped to date, such as the Arab monarchies and Palestinian system.

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The Middle East is currently more polarized than ever before. Four key compelling ideas emerge from it, each of which is hostile toward and opposes the others in terms of their objectives and visions. The two main camps battling one another are: the opposition camp headed by Iran, primarily affiliated with Shia, which grew over the past decade and has set roots in many geographical locations (especially Syria, Iraq and Yemen); and the moderate Sunni camp that strives to keep the status quo that existed in the region a decade ago, which is strongly affiliated with the United States, and, nowadays, Israel too. Among the prominent leaders of the Sunni Arab camp are the Gulf states, the increasing weight of which reflects the power shift in the Arab world away from the long-standing centers such as Cairo, Baghdad and Damascus. New powers are on the rise that replace reliance on military might and revolutionary ideas with financial force and clout in areas such as diplomacy and media.

The two regional powers that have more limited weight, yet have enjoyed "temporary clout" over the last decade (which has since waned) is the Muslim Brotherhood camp, which Erdoğan is attempting to head by entrenching himself as its leader, and the Islamic State's (ISIS) radical Islam, eliminated as a governmental entity but still existing as an idea, attempting to bolster its stronghold in the hearts and minds of many members of the younger generation across the Middle East.

From a strategic Israeli point of view, the last decade has provided opportunities alongside threats. The turbulence lessened the conventional military threat as the Arab states focused on addressing their domestic issues and, in some cases, because their powerful armies had been eroded. Another opportunity that evolved due to the turmoil was the promotion of normalization with the Arab world. However, Israel must continue to beware of the chronic instability characteristic of this region, and remain alert to possible additional shockwaves, that may also be accompanied by changes in the status of Israel's strategically important allies.

**The strategic debate on Middle Eastern turmoil requires profound methodological discourse. These dramatic developments have proven that the current state of affairs cannot be properly analyzed without prior familiarity with the culture, language, and history of research subjects.**

The strategic debate on Middle Eastern turmoil requires profound methodological discourse. These dramatic developments have proven that the current state of affairs cannot be properly analyzed without prior familiarity with the culture, language, and history of research subjects, and that these are also required when diagnosing its undercurrents, which seethe below the surface and, at times, erupt. While such tools do not guarantee the ability to predict the future, they are essential to the precise and sharp analysis of events and processes as they take place, as well as to understanding their implications and possible developments.

Moreover, the changes that swept over the region have demonstrated to research institutions that they would find it difficult to continue with their traditional focus on governing elites, military forces and political actions, perceiving them as key shapers of reality. For while they all still carry considerable weight in the Middle East, they are no longer exclusive, and research capabilities must also be developed in the public sphere that, after many years of being a relatively marginal factor in the Arab world, has now become equally influential.



# A Portrait of the Turmoil that Changed the Middle East

Michael Milshtein

We are now marking a decade to the eruption of the Arab Spring. A ten year perspective allows for an interim summary of the process that changed the Middle East, and continues to send shockwaves through it to date. It is difficult to discern the exact stage this process is currently in; however, it is advisable to avoid definitive conclusions that could imply that this historical drama is nearing its end or effectively over.

Ten years down the line, several stages of evolution can be identified in this Middle Eastern turbulence:

1. **2010-2011:** The first days of upheaval were laced with euphoria. Many felt that the Middle East was changing for the better, and heading for a brighter future. And indeed, after decades of powerful authoritarian order, and publics whose participation in the political game and national decision-making processes was limited, the Arab world saw some genuine revolutions. The public came together, protested on the streets, and successfully toppled local regimes. The most prominent development in this context were the dramatic events in Egypt that ended Mubarak's rule, and inspired the entire Arab world.
2. **2011-2014:** The initial wave of optimism was quickly replaced by a cascade of expectations and concerns over the new threats that developed against the backdrop of the shattered old order. Two main phenomena were at the center of this period. As part of the first, some countries in the region were caught up in severe domestic conflicts between religious, ethnic and sectarian forces. This was



particularly true in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. The second was the growing power of the Muslim Brotherhood in key hubs of turmoil. However, this movement's success was short-lived, and ended after their Egyptian regime was toppled in the summer of 2013.

3. **2014-2018:** Half a decade after the Arab Spring began, the "dormant demons" that the authoritarian regimes managed to restrain for many a decade erupted in full force. The most blatant manifestation of this trend was ISIS – a terror organization that successfully established an "Islamic State" in the areas where the sovereignty of nation states collapsed. The ISIS extensions set up more concentrated territorial strongholds in the Sinai Peninsula and Libya, were active in western Europe, and recruited numerous volunteers across the Muslim world, who were drawn to the struggle in the name of the "Islamic State's" compelling vision. These were the most lethal years of regional turmoil, and they ended once ISIS was militarily defeated in Iraq and Syria, its state destroyed during the second half of 2017 (although some of its proxies still exist in various places, and its ideology continues to lure many youngsters).
4. **2018-2021:** Just when many in the Arab world were certain that the regional turmoil had passed, a model that seemed to duplicate the events of 2010-2011 broke out in the summer of 2019. Despite obvious similarity in form – primarily mass protests led by the younger generation, and calls to topple governments – two striking differences emerged between the first and second waves of the Arab Spring. The first is the geographic center of the protest. The second wave swept over the areas left untouched by the first wave: Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, and Sudan. A decade ago, these same countries were still wounded and scarred by bitter civil wars, and their citizens were therefore wary of undermining existing order. The second difference was embodied by the slogans used in the protests. The demands for democratization and political reforms that characterized the first wave were replaced by calls for everyday improvements: economic recovery, addressing issues relevant to the younger generation, and ending government corruption. The second wave was "artificially" disrupted by the breakout of the COVID-19 crisis; however, the roots of this protest continue to seethe, illustrating that the potential explosiveness in the region remains intact.



After a decade, **the current Middle East differs greatly from that of 2010.** It has been over a century since the Sykes–Picot Agreement of 1916 was signed, and yet this turbulence has demonstrated **just how fragile the state entities in the Middle East are.** The shockwaves endured by most have been detrimental to their functioning, illustrating most residents' loose affinity with the identity various regimes had attempted to nurture and instill for dozens of years. However, despite the harsh blows they sustained, **no Arab state has vanished from the world map.** Moreover, most of the internal forces that caused these countries to crumble – with the prominent exception of ISIS in Syria and Iraq – were active within their territories, and strove to rise to power in them, as was seen in Libya and Yemen.

In contrast, **the primordial forces have strengthened** considerably during the Arab Spring. The undermining of political frameworks has led to the eruption of ancient hostility between religious, tribal, sectarian, and ethnic powers formerly restrained by Arab rulers, some of whom had represented minorities that ruled by force (particularly in Syria and Iraq). As part of these struggles, the deep rift between Sunnis and Shiites was underscored, as exemplified by Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. The rise of primordial forces – together with the growing strength of extreme religious factors – was accompanied by appalling persecution of minorities in the Arab world, who were heavily threatened before the Arab Spring had even begun.

Another prominent fundamental trend is **the weakening of the Arab world alongside the rise of non-Arab forces.** Bitter internal struggles and the undermining of regimes across the Arab world have contributed to the strengthening of regional non-Arab actors, led by Iran and Turkey, as well as Israel. The weakening of the Arab collective was evident prior to the Arab Spring, but has clearly been accelerated by it. Most non-Arab forces are increasing their impact in the Arab space, establishing both a military and economic stronghold in many of its centers.

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Regional turmoil was accompanied by a **power center shift in the Arab world**. The long-standing power hubs that formerly led the Arab world had nosedived into severe domestic crises, primarily Cairo, Baghdad, and Damascus, and new powers have risen in their stead. Prominent among them are the Gulf states, which have been relatively less impacted by regional turmoil, led by Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The new dominant pole in the Arab world differs from the power centers that were hegemonic in the past. The Gulf states are displaying a softer political approach, expressed in their willingness to promote relations with Israel – which is essential to their interests, particularly security-related ones – even in the absence of an arrangement on the Palestinian issue.

**The effect of the turbulence is apparent beyond the boundaries of the Arab world too.** The shaken reality in the heart of the Middle East, and especially the crumbling of some of the state entities, has created far-reaching shockwaves that have broadened the traditional definition of regional boundaries to a great extent. The collapse of the state entities and harsh civil wars (particularly in Syria and Iraq) have led to two phenomena that have deeply projected onto the West: the first – waves of immigration consisting of millions of refugees have swept over Europe; the second – young Muslims in western countries have joined the ranks of the "Islamic State" en masse, in part with the aim of carrying out terror attacks in the very same countries in which they had been born and raised.

**A decade down the line, it seems that the collection of reasons that led to the eruption of the Arab Spring remains intact, and some have even been reinforced.**

In the social context – the role played by **the younger generation in spearheading the Arab Spring** stands out, particularly in its early stages. The young people's protests emanated from several reasons: the inability to realize their full potential, especially in terms of material gain and having families; growing familiarity with the goings-on around the world by using the internet, increasing the gap between their desires and the reality in which they were living; and the profound sense of alienation in light of the political and social order around them.

The collective despair following this difficult decade led many in the Arab realm **to steer clear of the slogans and ideologies** that previously motivated the Middle East. Desperate and tired of every sort of vision – be it socialist, pan-Arab or Islamic – Arab

crowds are now pursuing a far more modest goal – **Bidna Na'ish** ("We Want to Live"). In the absence of a promising, compelling idea, and with leaders and political forces in the region whose image is often unimpressive or even contemptible, a large part of the Arab public – particularly the younger members of the population – is expressing little interest in the political sphere.

A decade down the line, it seems that **the collection of reasons that led to the eruption of the Arab Spring remains intact, and some have even been reinforced.** The socio-economic reality in most turbulence hubs is still harsh, even exacerbated; political order has only partially changed; the future seems vaguer than ever for the younger generation; governing order and citizens' security in many Arab states has deteriorated since 2010.

**Another factor expected to impact life in the Arab world is the foreign policy adopted by the new administration in Washington.** Much of the Sunni world, especially the Gulf states and Egypt, is very anxious about the possibility that the Biden Administration will promote a dialogue and reach an arrangement with Iran, as such a development would raise Tehran's self-esteem and make it bolder, prioritizing democratization over economic ties with the Arab states.

The ongoing disquiet may manifest itself in **a third Arab Spring wave** that will once again sweep over areas that have been rocked by it before, such as Egypt, the economic state of which is sensitive and constantly hanging by a thread, or Lebanon, which is currently a "volcano" ready to erupt at any moment. It could also wash over areas that almost have not been touched by it, primarily Jordan, where the socio-economic state and growing public criticism of the monarchy may lead to acute domestic protests, or the Palestinian system, where both the government in Ramallah and that in Gaza struggle to provide solutions for the younger population's basic issues.

**Turbulence throughout most of the Arab world poses severe challenges to Israel, and it must advance some key efforts to address them** by: trying to contribute to the establishment of good relations between the Sunni Arab world and the new administration in Washington; continuing to limit Iran's force buildup both in the regional space and in nuclear contexts; maintaining close coordination with Russia, especially with regard to the northern arena and Iran; attempting to promote normalization with the Arab world while developing communication channels with its various audiences; and, in the Palestinian context – preserve economic stability and, in the longer term, examine the possibility of renewing the peace process.



# The Great Power Competition in the Middle East following the Arab Spring – What has and has not Changed?

**Udi Evental**

The decade that passed since the Arab Spring erupted enables sufficient perspective by which to examine the change in the role played by the great powers in the Middle East following the shifts in the region. The present paper analyzes several key questions: How have the superpowers, who have always "meddled" in the Arab sphere and shaped it, responded to the regional turbulence and transformations? Did the great powers, particularly the United States – the most dominant actor in the region – view the Arab Spring as an opportunity or risk? Has the power balance shifted between the great powers, with Russia, pushed out of the region in the mid-1970s, having renewed its involvement and presence in it? Has the Arab Spring altered the directions taken by the great powers' foreign policies? And finally, how is the new U.S. administration expected to conduct itself in the region, having learned the lessons of its predecessors' grapple with the challenges posed by the Middle Eastern turmoil?

## **"On its way out": The Obama Administration and the Arab Spring**

The revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011 caught the Obama Administration off guard as it prepared to reduce American presence in the Middle East, forcing it to address the question of democracy in the Arab world.

In May 2011, President Obama delivered a programmatic speech on the turmoil sweeping over the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> He underscored that the transition to democracy has

become a top priority, and that the United States would pursue this goal by insisting on democratic values, helping collapsing economies, and generating a dialogue with local audiences.

In practice, the U.S. foreign policy reflected a gap between what was said and what was done. The United States employed a hesitant approach to regional revolutions, and continued to gradually reduce its involvement: in December 2011 the American forces completed their withdrawal from Iraq, a step that, in retrospect, paved the way for the "Islamic State" (ISIS) to spread throughout it; following the attack against the U.S. consulate in Benghazi in 2012, the United States also reduced its presence in Libya; and in 2013, President Obama chose not to take action against the Assad regime when it used chemical weapons against its own citizens.

President Obama believed that the United States had been involved in the Middle East for too long, and, contrary to the idealist views held by President Bush, had adopted a more pragmatic and realistic approach. He preferred to avoid investing significant resources in building civil state and society in the region – an effort he believed the chances of which were low. Moreover, President Obama feared that such steps would place U.S. interests at risk, primarily Washington's relations with Arab leaders, the stability of local regimes, and advancing the campaign against terror. Obama therefore chose to focus on the nuclear deal with the Iranian regime, and to turn his attention to Asia, where China's growing power was posing a substantial threat.

The Trump Administration continued to reduce American involvement in the Middle East, focusing on interests at the expense of values. In 2018 his administration published the national defense strategy<sup>2</sup>, stating that the great power competition with China and Russia, and not the war on terror, is the United States' greatest challenge.

In line with this same view, President Trump had instructed the withdrawal of additional U.S. forces from Iraq and Afghanistan, leaving the Syrian arena, to a large extent, to Russia and Turkey. The pressure he exerted on Iran was based on economic levers, and, as a rule, President Trump avoided all military friction with the Iranian regime for fear that he would run into trouble there.

## Russia "slips into the crack"

Whereas the actions of the Obama Administration were based on a realistic approach, and its members hesitated to support the forces of change in the Middle East, Russia, and to a lesser extent China, had identified them as a threat. China was predominantly concerned that the shockwaves would disrupt the flow of oil into its territory, while Russia's considerations were more complex. Moscow feared that the collapse of Middle Eastern regimes would lead to the rise of fundamentalist Sunni movements and denominations in a manner that could inspire extremists in its Muslim districts.

Themselves "living in glass houses", China and Russia do not believe in intervening in other countries' internal affairs, and object to external involvement in an effort to replace regimes and dictators who have lost their legitimacy.

True to this principle, Russia came to Assad's aid in September 2015. Its involvement in the Syrian Civil War allowed Moscow to regain a position of influence in the Middle East, to project the image of a superpower once more, and establish a long-term maritime hold in the Mediterranean. Over the past year, Russia has taken advantage of the exacerbating crisis in Libya, as well as the United States' absence from the scene, to deepen its military involvement there once more, and even reached an agreement with the Khartoum government, allowing it to build the first Russian military seaport in the Red Sea at Port Sudan.

**Against the backdrop of Russia's entrenchment in the Middle East, the United States is no longer the only player on the field. Moreover, its tendency to reduce its involvement in it has harmed its credibility as well as the image of its deterrence**

## Has the great power balance in the Middle East shifted?

Against the backdrop of Russia's entrenchment in the Middle East, the United States is no longer the only player on the field. Moreover, its tendency to reduce its involvement in it has harmed its credibility as well as the image of its deterrence. Nevertheless, contrary to its pretensions, Moscow is unable to outline a new order in the Middle East, the vision required to shape it, or the economic resources required to implement it. De facto, the Russian strategy is based on opportunity seizing, not long-term, organized planning.



China, however, has the economic strength required to become an influential actor in the region, but is not interested in shaping the events and strategic processes in it. In the foreseeable future, Beijing prefers to avoid entering an unstable space that is deteriorating economically, where, in its view, investments are associated with more risk than opportunity.<sup>3</sup>

Under such circumstances, the United States remains the most dominant political, economic, and military force in the Middle East. Washington has a strong alliance with Israel, as well as strategic relations with key states in the Arab world to the security of which it vouches, particularly in face of the Iranian threat. The United States ensures free passage through the Gulf and the flow of oil from it to international markets, particularly in Asia; it has huge bases and extensive military presence in the region; and is the main arms supplier to Israel and the Arab states.

### **What is next? The Biden Administration and the Middle East**

President Biden and his foreign policy team are projecting continuity with regard to intentions to scale down the United States' presence and involvement in the Middle East in favor of freeing attention and resources to the great power competition. However, unlike Presidents Obama and Trump, President Biden has entered office with a global approach of restoring liberal-democratic order and bolstering democracies worldwide, including in the Middle East.

The Biden Administration may therefore find itself entangled in deep tensions in the Middle East. On the one hand it could get "dragged" into the region against its will in order to address the challenges posed by Iran and Afghanistan, or the great power competition that will inevitably take place in the Middle East as well. On the other hand, from a value-based perspective, President Biden may ultimately prefer, much like his predecessors, to adopt a realistic approach over an idealistic one. Over the years, Biden has been directly exposed to the "unintended consequences" of American attempts at "transformations" in the region, from which he has had his reservations back when he was vice president. It is likely that he has learned a similar lesson from the Arab Spring, which led to instability, civil wars, the spread of terror forces, and finally, in a "historical closure" of sorts, the return to power of authoritarian rulers in most countries in the region.



## Summary: What has and has not changed in the great power balance in the Middle East?

The extreme shifts caused by the Arab Spring in the Middle East have not driven a similar change overseas – in the great powers' policies with respect to the region. In the early 2000s, the United States tried to force the Middle East to democratize by toppling regimes and making an effort to build states in Iraq and Afghanistan. These steps have probably sown some of the seeds of the Arab Spring. And yet, despite the opportunity for deep change in the region indicated by the Arab Spring in its initial stages, as democracy seemed to take hold, the United States remained unconvinced, often making grand declarations about freedom and equality, but never intervening to ensure that the process was moving forward in the desirable direction.

It seems that the combination of increased destabilization as the events of the Arab Spring progressed and China's rise as a power threatening American supremacy and values has pushed Washington to continue, and even accelerate, reducing its involvement and presence in the region. In parallel to this process, Russia returned to the Middle East, impacting several arenas significantly, primarily Syria. However, the Russian steps have yet to indicate a shift in the great power balance in the region. Russia has not gained the trust of most Arab states, and lacks both vision and resources necessary to shape or outline a new regional order. Under such circumstances, the United States remains the dominant superpower in the Middle East, and is expected to stay in the lead in the foreseeable future.

### Notes

1. Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa | [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/22/20120522-middle-east) ([archives.gov](https://www.archives.gov)).
2. Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy ([dod.defense.gov](https://www.dod.defense.gov)).
3. China's Middle East Policy: Between Continuity and Change., INSS, Strategic Survey for Israel 20160-2017 (December 2016).



# A Decade to the "January Revolution": The Return of Military Hegemony and the Stability Paradox in Egypt

Moshe Albo

The events of January 25, 2011 in Egypt had come as a surprise both in magnitude and dramatic outcome, for they ran contrary to the assessment shared by most academic and intelligence research bodies whereby Mubarak's authoritarian regime was stable. The "genie" was out of the bottle in Cairo, and soon spread to other Middle Eastern countries. The Arab public overcame the fear barrier, flooded the streets in unprecedented numbers, and demanded to have economic and political rights while advocating for a profound change in the relationship between state and citizens.

A decade later, the so-called "January Revolution" has failed to realize the liberal-democratic vision at the heart of the Arab Spring (at least in its initial stages), and has not been able to translate the "revolutionary moment" into a fundamental change in the political system, national priorities, and reassignment of power in Egypt.

**A decade later, the so-called "January Revolution" has failed to realize the liberal-democratic vision at the heart of the Arab Spring (at least in its initial stages), and was unable to translate the "revolutionary moment" into a fundamental change in the political system.**

The military coup performed in July 2013 was led by the defense-institutional establishment that sought to regain control of Egypt, and had, in effect, marked the end of the "January Revolution". The old-new regime countered all manifestations of

opposition – whether Islamic or liberal – and instilled deep in the collective Egyptian mind a narrative whereby national stability precedes individual liberties, as well as the realization that anarchy, not democracy, was the alternative to the current regime.

### **A rude awakening: A popular revolution (2011) and military coup (2013)**

The "January Revolution" embodied a unique historical moment during which the Egyptian public came together to alter the national set of priorities to promote the establishment of a political system founded on democratic principles. The "domino effect" that began with the Tunisian revolution (December 2010) served as an outlet for the deep rage that seethed for many years among numerous factors in Egyptian society.

The widespread public protest was inspired by several phenomena that exacerbated in Egypt throughout recent decades, primarily: the regime's arbitrary infringement upon human rights; the overt and profound corruption in the political and economic systems; the growing class and economic gaps; the ongoing unemployment and financial hardship, especially among the younger generation; and public concern over Mubarak's son inheriting the presidency, leading to the creation of a non-monarchial ruling dynasty.

The government's collapse granted dominance in the public sphere to the Muslim Brotherhood. The movement seized the opportunity, leveraging its organizational power to winning the elections. When the political vacuum was created upon Mubarak's resignation, the Muslim Brotherhood remained the most organized power in Egypt politically, and the one with the most profound public hold. And, indeed, its candidate, Mohamad Morsi, won the June 2012 elections, defeating the security-political establishment's candidate, General Ahmed Shafik.


Morsi's term in office consisted of incessant conflicts with the "Deep State" bodies,

particularly the defense, legal, and religious establishments. This harsh reality demonstrated the price of electing the Muslim Brotherhood to the Egyptian public, as well as the movement's inability to take control effectively. The fear that the Muslim Brotherhood will take over the state establishments and entrench themselves in it while seeking to change its nature prompted the army to take action. On July 3, 2013, the defense forces took over the state with the support of widespread popular protests against the Muslim Brotherhood's regime, and ousted Morsi. During the transition to new elections, Minister of Defense Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who had been appointed by Morsi, established himself in the defense, political and public systems, and was officially appointed as president after winning 96% of votes in the May 2014 elections.

The old-new regime was determined to prevent another popular revolution. Shortly after his appointment, al-Sisi diligently overpowered the Muslim Brotherhood in particular and Egyptian civil society organizations in general. This development began in August 2013, when the security and armed forces stormed public protest centers promoting Muslim Brotherhood activity in Cairo, first and foremost the **al-Rabia`a al-A`dawiya** Square, which became a traumatic symbol for all movement activists in the Middle East. 817 protestors were killed in this action, and thousands arrested, among them senior Muslim Brotherhood officials. In September of the same year, the movement was outlawed and its assets confiscated, and in December 2013 it was named a terror organization, forcing its activists to hide underground.

The political overpowering promoted by al-Sisi was directed at other civil society organizations too. "The Protest Law" passed by the Egyptian government in November 2013 prevented the public from promoting a protest against the regime in an expression of the government's turning its back on the "January Revolution" vision, and the "State of Emergency Law" abolished following the "January Revolution" was renewed, thereby enabling the regime to use arbitrary force against civilians perceived as a threat.

## **The financial distress as a strategic challenge**



al-Sisi emphasized the need to advance far-reaching reforms to the Egyptian public in an attempt to prevent the state from going bankrupt. The plan he presented when first entering office included raising taxes and cutting back on subsidies in the energy field, while promoting mega-projects designed to lower unemployment and ensuring steady income. al-Sisi sought to stabilize the Egyptian economy by encouraging the private sector and international investors, expressing willingness to minimize bureaucratic barriers and provide grants.

The reforms succeeded in stabilizing the macro figures of the Egyptian economy, renewing its growth, encouraging investors to become active in Egypt again, and shrinking unemployment. Until the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in March 2020, success was noted in almost every set parameter: the annual budgetary deficit dropped significantly after the president's first term in office (from 10.9% to 5.6%); growth in GDP was rising consistently; the scope of unemployment was down to 7.5%; and the foreign currency reserves tripled.

However, Egypt's fundamental problems had not been resolved while the reforms were being implemented, and to a great extent, were even exacerbated. Among them: an uncontrolled demographic growth rate (at this time there are some 104 million people living in Egypt); water and energy issues; dilapidated infrastructures; a high rate of illiteracy due to gaps in the education system's activity, and large numbers of children and teens entering the work force; government services of a poor quality (particularly health, education, and welfare); profound corruption; and cumbersome bureaucracy.

The pandemic forced al-Sisi to face a health crisis of historic proportions, and what is worse, it threatened to exacerbate Egypt's economic state in such a manner as to jeopardize the regime's stability. The world recession expected due to the pandemic, and its implications on the Egyptian economy, honed the realization that the financial threat is the Egyptian government's largest existential challenge. To date, Egypt has managed to contain the health and financial crisis, and avoid a sharp recession, but it is estimated that it will suffer a slowdown in economic activity in 2021 that will manifest

itself in less growth, export and personal consumption, and an increase in budgetary expenditures. According to the International Monetary Fund, unemployment is expected to soar to 11.6%, and 32.5% of the Egyptian public is expected to find itself below the poverty line.

## Conclusion

Looking back a decade, there is an almost unbridgeable gap between the vision that accompanied the "January Revolution" and the current state of affairs. The worsening portrait of the Arab Spring has gradually illustrated the cost of instability to the Egyptian public both domestically and regionally, paradoxically strengthening the defense establishment's ability to concretize a ruling hegemony while employing comprehensive, systematic oppression.

Ten years after the 2011 events, Egypt is still clearly suffering from the same fundamental issues that accompanied it when the Arab Spring erupted, some of which have even been exacerbated. Yet both the exhausted Egyptian public and the old-new ruling system are currently being driven by the traumatic memory etched into their minds.

This memory is channeling all powers in Egypt toward the shared understanding that, at this stage, the current hardship is still the lesser of all evils, for the alternative could lead to chaos and destruction.

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# Why have the Arab Monarchies in the Gulf Remained Unaffected by the Arab Spring?

Yoel Guzansky

A decade after the eruption of the Middle Eastern turmoil, the monarchies in the Gulf emerge as the most stable set of countries in the Arab sphere, and as entities with tremendous impact on the regional agenda. While key non-monarchial Arab regimes have collapsed, the Gulf monarchies, and even those outside the Gulf, such as Jordan and Morocco, have remained intact, even though some of them have been facing tremendous socio-economic pressures greatly enhanced by the COVID-19 crisis.

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As the long-standing power hubs in the Arab world – namely Cairo, Baghdad and Damascus that are grappling with ongoing violent struggles and severe economic hardship – lose their strength, the status of the Gulf states as the new engine of the Arab world is on the rise. These countries have become more influential than ever, and are actively involved – on military, economic, and political levels – in various centers of struggle in the region, among them Yemen, Libya, and Syria.

However, the rising powers in the Middle East have distinctly different basic characteristics than the actors that have led this region in the past: the monarchies sanctify the status quo, and do not support any kind of revolutionary or radical idea; their strength is based on their economic standing, diplomacy, and, in recent years,



military strength too; their approach is clearly pro-Western; they perceive the U.S. administration as a key strategic source of support; and they display a relatively softer approach toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as demonstrated in recent months by the promotion of normalization between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain.

The Gulf monarchies' relative stability may be traced back to three main reasons:

1. **Economic** – oil gains have ensured the Gulf regimes' survival, primarily by maintaining calm in the public sphere, and garnering external support. When turbulence first began, huge sums were designated to prevent public protest, mainly directed at the younger generation that spearheaded the Arab Spring. When the turmoil was in its initial stages, the Gulf monarchies spent some 150 billion Dollars on reforms: from cash grants and raises in salaries to development, housing, and job-creating projects. These efforts were particularly noticeable in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. To finance these reforms, and in light of the drop in oil prices, Gulf regimes turned to cutting back on subsidies provided to citizens for water, gas, and electricity. For the first time in their histories, they imposed various taxes, including Value Added Tax.
2. **Social** – among the monarchies' oldest survival techniques is the division of key roles among the ruling family members. This helped maintain the monarchies' cohesiveness tremendously over the past decade, when some of the ruling elites in the Arab world were grappling with challenging internal rifts that undermined their status or even eliminated them altogether. Monarchial regimes' traditional nature, and the fact that many of them are socially "intertwined" (family ties) with large parts of the population also contribute to such countries' relative stability. Against this backdrop, such regimes are more (if not absolutely) legitimized domestically, and viewed as more acceptable by local societies.
3. **Political** – the regimes in the Gulf are undeterred by oppressive steps to counter political protest and advance stringent oversight of public discourse for fear that it be directed against them. Although all regimes in the region attempt to uphold an image of liberal, political change, the traditional political method in most has mostly remained as it was before the regional turmoil, and at present, has not faced broad collective demand for change. Enforcement and oversight efforts are focused on social media activity, viewed as a key "platform" serving as basis for the evolvment of the Arab Spring.

The Gulf states' strategic balance sheet following the past decade is leaning significantly toward the negative. This decade has raised grave concerns among many monarchies, who now cast a doubtful, worrisome look toward the future. For while they have improved their status and impact in the Arab world, and are much more involved in its geostrategic shaping than they once were, viewed as powerful forces by international entities, they also face old challenges that have now been exacerbated, as well as new ones that have subsequently emerged. The most prominent threat is the one posed by the Shiite camp headed by Iran, which threatens the Gulf states, and especially Saudi Arabia, from new arenas, primarily Yemen.

Looking toward the future, several key challenges to Gulf monarchies can be anticipated:

1. **Lessening oil dependency:** The economic crisis exacerbated by the pandemic demonstrates the Gulf states' deep dependence on the global oil market. The Gulf states can utilize the current crisis to improve their economies' performances by introducing more citizens into the labor market at the expense of reducing the number of foreign workers, strengthening the private sector, stepping away from large-scale projects, and prioritizing productive projects that do not depend on the oil market. However, the pursuit of income sources that do not depend on oil will require many resources that compete with the resources currently needed to mitigate the decline in citizens' standard of living. It seems that, at present, these regimes will have no choice but to infringe upon their citizens' living conditions.
2. **Portrait of future leaderships:** The rise of the young generation of leaders in the Gulf, who are relatively freed from past restraints, may impact the nature of states in the region. There is no imperative that the young leaders will open up the political system to citizens' involvement, for an attempt at democracy is still identified to a large extent with the bloodshed and destruction associated with the Arab Spring. Nevertheless, the expectations of political involvement may increase social tension, forcing rulers to initiate reforms, albeit symbolic and limited, by way of making it subside. This challenge is particularly prominent in Saudi Arabia. Under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, socio-cultural openness has grown, and reforms may lead to high expectations among the younger generation while causing unrest among the traditional and religious circles that are still quite dominant in the kingdom.

3. **The rise of the younger generation:** As in the rest of the Arab world, the Gulf states are also dealing with a young, educated generation that has financial expectations and, in future, perhaps some political ones as well. Many young adults born when the economy was thriving, are expecting to secure jobs in the public sector. To maintain their stability the Gulf states will have to meet these young people's expectations. As mentioned, the younger generation is yearning for rapid changes across the board in life in the kingdom, a trend that could evolve into a cascade of expectations should it discover that there are many difficulties on the road to realizing this longed-for change.
4. **The relations with the U.S. administration:** The Gulf states are concerned about the policy that President Biden may promote in the Middle East. The Arab rulers are worried that the dialogue with Iran will recommence, particularly on the nuclear agreement, thus filling Iran with renewed confidence that will make it bolder and more influential in the Middle East. They are also troubled by heavy American pressure on human rights issues, and the possibility that Washington will attempt to form a channel of communication with the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East. Like the Saudis, the rest of the Gulf states are likely to focus in the near future on forging ties with the new administration, and setting up lobbies in U.S. power hubs. They are also expected to improve the state of individual liberties in the kingdom, at least on the surface, and continue expanding their security-related acquisition from the United States. They may even go as far as to show greater involvement in the peace negotiations in the Palestinian context.
- As economic pressure in the Gulf will mount, and the social contract in them shatter, the monarchies will find it more difficult to rely on the religious legitimization – particularly relevant to the Saudi monarchy – or tribal loyalty that contribute to maintaining stability in the Gulf states.**

Looking ahead, the Gulf monarchies will have to maneuver between the need to implement profound internal reforms and maintaining current political order. As economic pressure in the Gulf will mount, and the social contract in them shatter, the monarchies will find it more difficult to rely on the religious legitimization – particularly relevant to the Saudi monarchy – or tribal loyalty that contribute to maintaining stability in the Gulf states.



# Arab Spring or Islamic Awakening? Iran's Strategic Balance Sheet in face of the Turmoil

**Michael Segall**

The Arab Spring found the Iranian regime some 18 months after what it believed to have been a successful containment of the strong Green Wave of Iran (2009) referred to also by western media as the Persian Spring – one of the most difficult challenges it has had to face over the past two decades. It was therefore natural that the Islamic regime initially believed that the wave of protests sweeping over the Arab world would reignite domestic public unrest.

**Tehran had rebranded the Arab Spring as an "Islamic Awakening" – a development that provided the Islamic regime with the golden opportunity to advance its hegemonic ideological vision in the region, at the center of which is exporting the Islamic revolution.**

Yet, what was initially perceived as an imminent threat transformed in time into a strategic opportunity. The weakening of the Arab world as a political factor and the disintegration of regimes, some of which had been Iran's bitter enemies, created governing vacuums in which Tehran was quick to entrench itself, striving to instate the Shiite Crescent vision of territorial contiguity from the Gulf to the Mediterranean. As a result, Tehran had rebranded the Arab Spring as an "Islamic Awakening" – a development that provided the Islamic regime with the golden opportunity to advance its hegemonic ideological vision in the region, at the center of which is exporting the Islamic revolution.


Iran's growing involvement and clout in Syria are perceived as some of Tehran's greatest strategic achievements this past decade. Syria is known in Iran as "the golden link in the resistance camp (against Israel) chain", and plays a vital role in Iran's national

security strategy, alongside Tehran's ongoing influence and stronghold in Lebanon. Iran has deepened its military presence in Syria to ensure Assad's survival as ruler, adding Hizballah into the campaign mix in 2013. In addition, Iran attributes great importance to the establishment of political order in Syria on the morning after the civil war will end, viewing it as a central landmark in what it calls "reshaping the landscape of the Middle East".

In addition to Syria, Iran's strategic accomplishments in Yemen also stand out. Thanks to its support of the (Shiite) Houthi rebels prior to the Arab Spring, the latter have managed to take control over large areas in Yemen, including its capital, Sanaa. Its influence in Yemen allows Iran to use "proxies" against Saudi Arabia, and cause damage in strategic infrastructure targets in the kingdom (particularly airports and oil industry facilities). Large Saudi and Arab military forces are engaged in this ongoing conflict in Yemen as part of a model similar to the one employed against Israel via Hizballah's activity. Tehran's impact in Yemen also enables it to have presence in strategic areas of the Red Sea and Horn of Africa. On the military level, these areas have become Iran's main experimentation field, used to test weapons (drones, missiles, explosives boats) it intends to use in other conflict zones too, including against Israel.

Iraq is yet another arena in which the Iranians have had some strategic successes in the past decade, among them: deepening the dependence of the current government in Baghdad on the Iranian regime; developing ties between the key religious and political powers in Iraq (especially Shiites) and the Islamic regime in Tehran; tightening the economic relations between the two states; and utilizing Iraq's territory for Iran's defense needs, including the attempt to deploy missiles directed at Israel or activating armed Shiite militias against American presence. However, the Iranian impact in Iraq is periodically accompanied by locals' violent protests, among them Shiite Arabs. One particularly strong wave of violent protest took place at the end of 2019 against the Baghdad government, and included vehement criticism of Iranian military religious and economic involvement in Iraq.

Iran's growing impact in the various theaters has been posing greater threat to Israel. The war in Syria has enabled Iran to establish military infrastructure that poses a threat to Israel, at the heart of which is missile deployment or the development of missile production lines including precision guided weapons. Iran also funds Hizballah and other Shiite militia groups active in Syria over the past ten years. Tehran has focused special



efforts on the development of military and intelligence infrastructures in the Golan Heights, and was supported in its endeavors by Hamas' and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's force buildup in the Gaza Strip, as well as the attempt to establish infrastructures that would enable it to launch missiles from Iraqi and Yemenite territory.

At the same time, Iran continues to advance its nuclear program, especially since Washington's withdrawal from the JCPOA signed in 2015. Consequently, direct and unprecedented friction has intensified between Iran and Israel, led by the Israeli strikes against Iranian infrastructure and forces in Syria, which, at times, has led to military retaliation against Israel by Tehran's proxies in Syria. More recently the shadow war at sea between Iran and Israel gained momentum.

Alongside its strategic achievements, Iran has also been facing an exacerbation of long-standing threats or the development of new ones. The strengthening in its regional status and defiant moves against its neighbors as well as the United States have led to a variety of harsh blows, such as the assassination of Soleimani and more stringent economic sanctions against the Iranian regime (particularly since the U.S. administration withdrew from the nuclear deal in 2018), as a result of which Iran's economic distress has taken a turn for the worse.

Moreover, Tehran has not been able to undermine the local regimes posing a challenge to it, primarily the Saudi one, so threatened by Iran that it has been forced to form an anti-Iranian front, tightening its relations with Israel in the process, and further aggravating Iran, which now fears Israeli security presence on its doorstep.

Thus, over the past decade, the long-standing rift between Sunnis and Shiites in the Middle East has deepened, and has, in fact, become more tangible and profound than the traditional division between the Arab and Muslim world and Israel. The current Middle Eastern camp map shows Iran and its allies on one side, and all actors fighting Tehran on the other – a camp comprised of key states in the Sunni Arab world and Israel that were formerly hostile toward one another and are now enjoying a fruitful collaboration.



Another strategic challenge faced by Iran that has developed due to regional turbulence is the rise of the "Islamic State" (ISIS). Tehran has been hit by this organization both during the campaigns in Syria and Iraq, and in terror attacks carried out on Iranian soil. It has managed to maneuver both battle and diplomatic fields well, weakening the organization and toppling its regime.

On the military level it has promoted a determined campaign against ISIS both via its own forces and the various Shiite militia groups it controls.

**Looking ahead, it seems that Biden becoming president boosts Tehran's confidence, making it bolder, and leading it to advance defiant steps in the Middle East and its nuclear program in an attempt to broaden its impact on shaping the future order in key arenas in the region.**

Iran thus holds a mixed achievement balance sheet at the end of this decade. On the one hand, it has managed to preserve Assad's rule in Syria as well as its assets in Lebanon, fortified its status in Iraq and Yemen, and successfully integrated itself into international efforts to defeat "the Islamic State". On the other hand, it is receiving a number of harsh military and morale-related blows at the hands of Israel and the United States, grappling with ongoing economic distress, struggling to contain domestic disquiet, and failing to destabilize key states in the Arab world. Looking ahead, it seems that Biden becoming president boosts Tehran's confidence, making it bolder, and leading it to advance defiant steps in the Middle East and its nuclear program in an attempt to broaden its impact on shaping the future order in key arenas in the region, primarily Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.





# A Decade to the Syrian Tragedy

**Nir Boms & Stephane Cohen**

In March 2011, Moawiya and Samer Sayasina, two 15-year-olds from Dara`a in Southern Syria, were arrested after getting caught spraying graffiti on the walls of local houses that read: "Your turn, Doctor", and effectively demanding that Bashar Assad renounce his presidency. The young boys disappeared, leading locals to protest in Dara`a, and the regime to respond with violence. These events marked the beginning of the "Syrian Spring" – a short-lived popular riot at the center of which was the call for political change in which Muslims and Christians, Kurds and members of other minorities alike had participated.

That short spring soon turned into a stormy and bloody "Islamic winter", followed by a civil war during which the regime ruthlessly fought its citizens. Foreign actors and militias soon deployed across Syria, while the Syrians themselves were playing the roles of both victims and refugees in a campaign that soon transformed into one of the worst tragedies the modern Middle East has seen.

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This war has claimed the lives of over half a million people, turning every other Syrian into a refugee or displaced person. The campaign also crossed over the Syrian borders, its shockwaves spilling into the region and still felt today, particularly in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq, but also internationally, mostly in Europe, where millions of Syrian refugees sought asylum.

A decade down the line, eight key changes that have resulted from the regional turmoil can be traced in Syria:

1. **The disappearance of the nation state?:** Since the Ba'ath Party took control of Syria in 1963, the regime in Damascus has sought to project an image whereby a modern Arab nation-state was being established in which the national foundation is stronger than the other super-national or sub-national identities. Reality in Syria today contradicts the vision that its rulers attempted to nurture for four decades. The war, which soon became sectorial, revealed the Syrian system's weakness, as well as the fact that its religious, sectarian, and ethnic identity roots have not only refused to vanish, but have in fact been preserved all the while deep in locals' minds, erupting with a vengeance as soon as the state structure was shaken.
2. **A demographic decline:** After a decade of bloody fighting, more than 6.6 million Syrians – the majority of them Sunni – out of 21 million who were living in Syria up to that point, have become refugees. Most of them are in neighboring countries (namely Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan), and 6.7 million displaced persons are within Syrian borders. Moreover, the Shiite and Alawi have strengthened their overall weight in the population, a trend that has grown stronger due to the Sunnis' mass immigration from Syria, and the Shiites' entrenchment in areas previously populated by Sunnis and Christians.
3. **The collapse of the economy and no recovery in sight:** The war had crushed the Syrian economy, which shrank substantially by more than 70% between 2010 and 2017. In early 2011, the Syrian Lira was typically stable at about 50 Lira per U.S. Dollar; however, when war broke out, the local currency collapsed, reaching an unprecedented low – about 2,000 Lira per U.S. Dollar in May 2020. These days, the cost of rehabilitating Syria is estimated to be anywhere between 250 billion and one trillion U.S. Dollars.
4. **The fragility of the central regime:** Ten years after the civil war began, the Syrian regime is incapable of regaining control over large parts of the country, particularly in the north west and north east. Parts of northern Syria are now occupied by Turkey or its proxies, and others – especially east of the Euphrates – are under Kurdish control with American support. ISIS cells remain active in eastern Syria, while other militia groups are operating unhindered across the

country, enjoying both Iranian and Syrian support. The Syrian rebels, with Turkey's support, continue to have a stronghold on large areas of Idlib. As for the fabric of life, the fighting has led to the suspension of commercial flights for long periods of time, as well as to the closing off of roads and border crossings. Social issues have also been exacerbated, such as crime, drug trafficking, and a soaring suicide rate.

5. **The Syrian Arab Army – less Syrian and less Arab:** Before the civil war broke out, the SAA was estimated to amount to some 300,000 troops, comprised primarily of conscript soldiers. In October 2015, estimates had dropped to 80,000-100,000 soldiers due to high casualty rates and waves of defectors. The army that had trained to cope with both internal and external threats found itself focusing on a civil war in which chemical warfare was used and barrel bombs dropped on densely populated areas. Moreover, the army ranks were filled with Shiite "ringers" – most of them under Iranian auspices – and bolstered by Russian command consultants, Iranians, and Hizballah operatives.
6. **The establishment of the Assad Family as a ruling dynasty:** The Assad Dynasty has celebrated 50 years to its establishment, rendering it the longest-ruling non-monarchical family in the modern Arab world. All family members play key roles in the Syrian government, as they have done for the past half a century, and are supported by the Alawi sect, who believes their dominant status guarantees its dominance and, indeed, its survival in Syria. The Assad Dynasty now faces opposition that is no more than an amorphous body comprised of several groups with different and even contrasting ideologies. Many of its leaders have been exiled or disposed of, and, at least at present, it is hard to view the opposition as a force capable of serving as an alternative to the Assad Dynasty.
7. **Iran – here to stay:** While Tehran was Syria's strategic ally before the civil war began, its deep involvement in it has certainly brought the two regimes much closer. In fact, it has led to the Assad regime's dependency on Iran, transforming the latter into the most significant external force at play in Syria. The Iranians' participation in the war – through the supply of weapons, military consultation, and sending of Shiite militia groups – has replaced the weakened Syrian Army. At the heart of the Iranian effort is Hizballah, which focused on the Lebanese arena since its inception, and has found itself fighting in the Syrian one relatively quickly as Iran's proxy.

8. **Russia – the return of "The Godfather of Damascus"**: Russia's intervention in Syria resulted from concern over extreme Islamic forces' growing strength and possible spilling into Russian territory (namely the Caucasus) as well as a desire to protect military assets such as the Russian

naval base in Tartus Port. Russia also strives to generate levers against the West, and protect the Orthodox Christian assets in Syria. It therefore expanded its involvement in the fighting since September 2015 using air strikes, and managed to tip the scales in the regime's favor that, up until that point, had lost about 70% of Syrian territory.

**After a decade of fighting, Syria has become extremely weak, and it is unclear whether an international actor will be found that will know how to or be interested in investing in its restoration.**

No resolution of the conflict by political means seems plausible at this time. The "Syrian cauldron" will probably continue to boil in 2021. The military campaign is expected to be joined by acute humanitarian distress. After a decade of fighting, Syria has become extremely weak, and it is unclear whether an international actor will be found that will know how to or be interested in investing in its restoration. Moreover, it seems that some of the key players active in the Syrian arena, namely Turkey and the Kurds, have no desire in rehabilitating the central regime. A glimmer of hope may be found in the steps taken by Russia, the United States, Gulf states, Jordan and Israel, who are striving to distance the extremists to help Syria regain its stability, and under the auspices of which a new order may finally be established there.



# Can the Democratic Vision be Realized in the Arab World?

**Ksenia Svetlova**

It has been an entire decade since Tunisian street vendor Mohamad Boua`zizi set himself on fire, leading to a huge chain reaction that, in its first phase, toppled many regimes and ousted several rulers in the Arab world. These days, young Arabs, who were children or teens when the Arab Spring began, no longer share the same dreams that the young men and women of 2010-2011 did. They have utterly despaired of the possibility of establishing a new political order, of democratization, a social reform, or economic success. Instead, they yearn to leave their homelands behind and immigrate to the Gulf, where absolute monarchies have paradoxically become the ideal model of an Arab state in the eyes of many.

Although some form of opposition existed in many of the countries where public protests broke out in 2011 (such as Egypt, Yemen, and Bahrain), very few were able to clearly and poignantly formulate their demands or outline the regime they desire. Moreover, for the most part, the protests were disorganized, and the opposition groups claiming to head them were divided among themselves, having no shared objectives.

The signs held at Tahrir Square in Cairo in January and February 2011 exemplified the many facets of Arab Spring revolutions: some called for the establishment of a democratic regime; others demanded social justice; and many featured extreme Islamic slogans. Thus, all who attempted to paint the protest in the colors of a public movement aiming to realize a democratic-liberal vision were forced to face a harsh reality.

The absence of leadership made matters easier for the revolutionists, as the regime struggled to identify and neutralize the leading forces. However, once the main goal set by the protesters had been achieved, i.e., ousting their ruler, many were unsure how to define their next step, and played no part in the decision-making process. The chaotic

state of affairs that followed the revolutions meant that only the strongest and most organized – led by the Islamic organizations – survived and became dominant.

One factor was shared by all – from liberal students in the American University in Cairo to the most extreme of Salafi in Tunisia – opposing their ruler who became a symbol of anachronistic, thoroughly rotten order. In Egypt the masses demanded the execution of Mubarak, in Syria Bashar Assad was depicted in a coffin, and rumors of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's family fleeing with suitcases full of jewelry and Dollars spread throughout Tunisia (and turned out to be true).

To some extent, the masses were right. For decades those rulers had left empty shells of their governmental institutions, causing detriment to their courts, parliaments, and media outlets. Some had relied on military support, others turned to mercenaries who were loyal to them personally, or to networks of tribes and groups to which they belonged. Most Arab regimes did not allow political parties to exist, leaving their countries devoid of a political culture that enables gradual establishment of institutions and processes, or evolving political parties and movements.

All these processes led to most Arab states having no functioning state institutions when the Arab Spring began. The Egyptian police force hid in houses for fear of civilians' retaliation efforts, or sent hordes of thugs to deal with protesters. The Syrian government provided no state services in areas controlled by the rebels. Schools and universities stopped teaching in large parts of the Arab world, the work of the courts was disrupted, and food supply ran low.

**In most Arab countries, the revolutionists could not control the chaos that followed the collapse of government systems or the intentional actions of the Deep State – the state lurking beneath the surface, often called "the state within the state".**

In most Arab countries, the revolutionists could not control the chaos that followed the collapse of government systems or the intentional actions of the Deep State – the state lurking beneath the surface, often called "the state within the state". Even when rulers were ousted and national councils and governments disbanded, the strong, fixed pillars of these countries – primarily their various defense establishments – held onto power. They were supported by Arab countries that were less impacted by the Arab Spring, aiming to stop turmoil from reaching their region, and impede the spread of revolution into their territory.



As mentioned, the only ones who could cope well with the undermining of existing order, and even use it to their advantage, were members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Being well-organized, having a clear ideology and a strong hold on the public sphere enabled them to survive, and even preserve their power despite dozens of years of oppression by Arab rulers. When the latter were gone, they seized the opportunity to realize their own vision. Supporters of democracy in the Arab world remained fundamentally weak once again, left to choose between the lesser of two evils: an authoritarian regime like the one they had struggled against, or the dominance of Islamic forces.

The current circumstances of those who sought to be depicted as the rising forces of democracy, and strove to lead the Arab world in a new direction, are very bleak: many activists in such organizations have been imprisoned, the lives of others ended tragically, while others still who were more fortunate fled, leaving their beloved homelands behind for fear of their safety, having despaired of all hope to bring about a more profound change in the Arab world.

The causes of the Arab Spring – poverty, unemployment, corruption and police brutality – still exist, as does the desire

**The causes of the Arab Spring – poverty, unemployment, corruption and police brutality – still exist, as does the desire among various groups in society to promote democratization.**

among various groups in society to promote democratization. If we look ahead, the only chance of stabilizing the region lies in the establishment of efficient and honest government institutions as part of a determined, ongoing fight against government corruption, as well as the formation of new, democratic systems. Only then will the return to violence brought on by autocracies be avoided. But it is imperative that we acknowledge that this process will be long and hard, so we may refrain from promoting drastic and rapid changes, particularly those that are encouraged by external forces, as such steps have already proven that the damage they cause far exceeds the benefit they offer.



## Appendix A

# The Chronicles of Turmoil in the Middle East

Year	Key Developments
2010	<p>December: the Boua`zizi incident</p> <p>December: The ousting of Zine al-'Abadin Ben Ali in Tunisia</p>
2011	<p>January: Tahrir Square events in Cairo</p> <p>February: Mubarak's resignation</p> <p>February: Public protests begin in Libya</p> <p>January-February: Public protests in the Gulf states, Jordan, Algeria, and Morocco</p> <p>April: The Civil War breaks out in Syria</p> <p>May: The Civil War breaks out in Yemen</p> <p>October: Parliamentary elections in Tunisia</p> <p>October: Execution of Muammar Qadhafi</p> <p>November-December: Egyptian parliamentary elections</p>
2012	<p>February: Ali Abdullah Saleh is ousted as president of Yemen</p> <p>June: The Muslim Brotherhood wins the Egyptian presidential elections</p>
2013	<p>June-July: Morsi is ousted in Egypt and al-Sisi rises to power</p> <p>August: The Ghouta Chemical Attack by Assad's regime</p>
2014	<p>January: Raqqa and Fallujah are captured by ISIS</p> <p>April: Parliamentary elections in Tunisia</p> <p>May: The Second Civil War erupts in Libya</p> <p>June: ISIS seizes control of Mosul and establishes the Islamic State</p> <p>July-August: Operation "Protective Edge" in the Gaza Strip</p> <p>August: The international campaign against ISIS begins</p>
2015	<p>January: The Houthis take control of Sana'a</p> <p>March-April: Operations Decisive Storm and Restoring Hope in Yemen</p> <p>November: ISIS carries out a series of lethal terror attacks in France</p>
2016	<p>February: A ceasefire between the Assad regime and rebel groups is reached</p> <p>July: ISIS activist carries out mass truck-ramming attack in Nice</p>
2017	<p>June: Arab states sever diplomatic relations with Qatar</p> <p>May-June: ISIS carries out a series of lethal terror attacks in the UK</p> <p>June-October: al-Raqqa and Mosul are liberated from the Islamic State</p> <p>December: Houthis in Yemen kill Ali Abdullah Saleh</p>

Year	Key Developments
2018	<p><b>April:</b> The Douma Chemical Attack by Assad's regime, followed by the West's military strikes against the Syrian government</p> <p><b>May:</b> The U.S. Embassy is moved to Jerusalem</p>
2019	<p><b>June:</b> The Manama Conference</p> <p><b>September:</b> Iran attacks Saudi oil installations</p> <p><b>October:</b> The second wave of the Arab Spring begins in Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, and Algeria</p> <p><b>October:</b> Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is killed</p> <p><b>October:</b> The U.S. withdraws from North Syria and Turkey invades it</p> <p><b>October:</b> Presidential elections in Tunisia</p> <p><b>December:</b> Presidential elections in Algeria</p>
2020	<p><b>January:</b> U.S. air strike kills Qasem Soleimani</p> <p><b>January:</b> The Trump Peace Plan ("Deal of the Century") is announced</p> <p><b>January:</b> Turkish intervention in the war in Libya is deepened</p> <p><b>September:</b> Israel, the U.A.E and Bahrain normalize their relations (the signing of the Abraham Accords)</p> <p><b>October:</b> Israel and Sudan also normalize their relations</p> <p><b>November:</b> Biden is elected U.S. President</p> <p><b>December:</b> Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, head of the Iranian military nuclear program, is assassinated</p> <p><b>December:</b> The Israel-Morocco normalization agreement is announced</p>

### List of Contributing Researchers

#### Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilead

General Amos Gilead is the executive director of the Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) at the IDC, Herzliya, and chairman of the IDC's Annual Herzliya Conference Series. He is also a faculty member at the IDC Herzliya's Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy & Strategy. Among his many senior positions in the defense establishment, General Gilead was Director of Policy and Political-Military Affairs at the Ministry of Defense, Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), Chief of the Israel Defense Intelligence Research and Analysis Division, IDF Spokesperson, and the Military Secretary (Aide de Camp) to the late Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Yitzhak Rabin. Over the years, he has played a key role in developing Israel's defense relations with the Arab world, and forming Israel's strategic alliances with senior elements in the international theater. General Gilead has been taking part in a series of negotiations with the Palestinians since the early 1990s, heading the Israeli team of the military affairs working group in the negotiations following the Annapolis Peace Conference with the Palestinian Authority in 2008. He was decorated with the U.S. Legion of Merit, and awarded the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency's (DIA) Director's Award. *Warning Lights: Secret Talks with Amos Gilead* is a biography by Shimon Shiffer published in 2019.

#### Dr. Michael Milshtein

Dr. Michael Milshtein is an Expert on the Palestinian issue. He heads the Palestinian Studies Forum at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, and is a senior analyst at the Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) at IDC Herzliya. He is a Colonel (res.). Dr. Milshtein is a former advisor on Palestinian affairs to the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), and headed the Department for Palestinians Affairs in the Israel Defense Intelligence. He has published three books and dozens of articles on the Palestinian issue as well as Israeli Arab society, strategic developments in the Middle East, Israel's defense challenges, and modern intelligence. Two more books Dr. Milshtein has authored will be published in 2021: a study on the younger generation in the Palestinian system, and a lexicon of key senior Palestinian officials. He is currently involved in several public projects centering on Israeli Arab society, and is heading legislative endeavors on teaching Arabic in Israel.

#### Ksenia Svetlova

Ksenia Svetlova is a senior researcher at the Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) at IDC Herzliya. She was a Knesset member between 2015 and 2019 with the Zionist Union, serving as a member of the Foreign affairs and Defense committee, as well as the Aliya and Integration committee. Ms. Svetlova initiated and led several parliamentary lobbies, among them the Israel-Kurdish alliance. Prior to being elected to the Knesset, she served as senior analyst and reporter on Arab affairs on Channel 9 (Israel), interviewing many key position holders in the Middle East, and covering historical developments in the region. Ms. Svetlova has an MA in the history of the Middle East from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and is currently completing her PhD on Israel in the Egyptian media. Her book, *Through the Middle East on High Heels* was published in 2020.

## Udi Evental

Col (res.) Udi Evental is a senior researcher at the Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) at IDC Herzliya. While in uniform Colonel Evental formerly headed the Strategic Planning Unit at the Israeli Ministry of Defense, was a former assistant to the military secretary of the prime minister, and an intelligence attaché in Washington. He headed the U.S. and International desk in the IDF Planning Directorate, as well as the strategic arena at the Israel Defense Intelligence Research and Analysis Division. Colonel Evental is an expert on policy planning – an area he has been teaching at the IDC, Herzliya – as well as on strategy and military diplomacy. He holds an M.A. in the history of the Middle East and Islamic culture from the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO), Paris.

## Dr. Moshe Albo

Dr. Moshe Albo is an expert on modern Middle-Eastern history, particularly Egypt's. He is a senior researcher at the Dado Center for Interdisciplinary Military Studies, and a Lieutenant General (res.). Dr. Albo headed a unit at the Israel Defense Intelligence Research and Analysis Division, and was the chief liaison officer to Egypt in the IDF Planning Division. He has published several papers on matters of religion, society, and politics in modern-day Egypt.

## Dr. Yoel Guzansky

Dr. Yoel Guzansky is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) at Tel Aviv University. He served on Israel's National Security Council in the Prime Minister's Office, coordinating the work on Iran and the Gulf, and was also a former consultant in the Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Ministry of Intelligence Affairs. His research focuses on the security, politics, and economics of the Gulf states, strategic trends in the Middle East, and nuclear proliferation. Dr. Guzansky was a Visiting Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, an Israel Institute Postdoctoral Fellow, and a Fulbright Scholar. He cowrote and coedited 11 books and monographs, as well as some one hundred academic articles and chapters in edited volumes. His most recent book, *Fraternal Enemies: Israel and the Gulf Monarchies*, co-authored with Prof. Clive Jones, was published by Oxford University Press in 2020.

## Michael Segall

Michael Segall is an expert on Iran. He is a senior analyst at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, and a research fellow at the International Institute for Counter Terrorism (ICT) at the IDC, Herzliya. Segall is Chief Information Officer (CIO) at Acumen Risk, and a Lieutenant Colonel (res.). Mr. Segall headed a unit at the Israel Defense Intelligence Research and Analysis Division. He has authored dozens of papers on strategic trends in the Middle East in general and Iran in particular.

### Dr. Nir Boms

Dr. Nir Boms is the Chairman of the Syria Research Forum at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, and the coordinator of the TAU International Workshop on Israel and the Middle East. He is a member of the board of the Israeli Council on Foreign Relations, and a research fellow at the International Institute for Counter Terrorism (ICT) at the IDC, Herzliya. Dr. Boms served as the Vice President of the Washington based Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD), and as the Academic Affairs Liaison at Israel's Embassy in Washington, DC. His 2016 book, *Expat-ing Democracy* focuses on the influence of Expat communities on democracy discourse in the Middle East. His recent book, *The Syrian War: Between Justice and Political Reality* is an edited volume on the war that has been raging in Syria for the past decade.

### Stephane Cohen

Mr. Stephane Cohen is an expert on national security, specializing in Israel's northern borders. He explores his interest in this area both as a military liaison officer in reserves and an academic researcher. His fields of interest include Middle East ancient history, archaeology, philosophy, and national security.

# About the Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS)

The Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) at IDC Herzliya, the convener of the Annual Herzliya Conference Series, aspires to contribute to Israel's national security and resilience. To that end, the Institute conducts integrative and comprehensive policy analysis on national challenges, produces strategic insights and policy recommendations for decision-makers, and informs the public and policy discourse. The Institute's policy agenda consists of two main pillars – Israel's national security and societal resilience.

The Institute's policy analysis and deliberations on Israel's national security assess key processes shaping the Middle East and global arena, and identifies strategic opportunities to mitigate and offset critical threats and risks. The Institute's policy work on societal resilience stems from the understanding that internal weakness could harm Israel's overall ability to tackle strategic challenges, thus making societal resilience a key building-block of Israel's national security. Connecting both pillars, the Institute also addresses the growing gap between Israel and Jewish communities around the world, particularly with respect to American Jewry.