

THE MIDDLE EAST RELOADED
REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES, POWER
DYNAMICS AND REGIONAL
RIVALRIES SINCE THE ARAB SPRING

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Chapter 8

The Arab Spring Movement: The Failed Revolution. Preliminary Theoretical and Empirical Deliberation

Philipp O. Amour*

Abstract

Time and again the Middle East has become the center of global attention. The long awaited and much celebrated Arab Spring uprisings promised to evince a major shift in the Arab World. Notably, some Arab states witnessed an institutional and constitutional shift that put Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen on the path of transition to liberalization and democracy. Transitions to democracy suggested that the democracy phenomenon is not limited to Europe or North America. In the meantime, however, the Arab Spring movement has had a virulent history. Arab Spring revolutionary outcomes are meek according to both qualitative and quantitative measurements. Most transitions towards democracy failed; authoritarianism is still persistent, with an even stronger nature. The chapter argues that the Arab Spring movement marked a break in the continuity of authoritarian dominance but not a turning point in the development towards democracy. The Arab Spring movement was a set of uprisings, would-be revolutions – not great revolutions. These would-be revolutions largely failed, with the exception of Tunisia. This chapter examines the factors behind the rise and failure of the Arab

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Spring uprisings and the conformity of the Arab Spring to the concept of revolution.

Keywords: *Arab Spring, failure, revolution, uprising, theory, empirical*

Introduction

The long awaited and much celebrated recent Arab uprisings seemed to evince an acute and persistent shift in the Arab World. The so-called Arab Spring started in Tunisia following Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation late 2010. The Jasmin Spring in Tunisia became the reagent for the wider Arab Spring movement against despotic regimes. Internet communication networks, social media applications and satellite TV have transformed the revolutionary drive across the wider Middle East and empowered rapid utilization and collective protest action.¹ This revolutionary funk spread to other Middle Eastern states such as Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and Palestine.² The revolutionary regional drive nurtured the growing dissatisfaction across the Middle East with regard to the dire socio-economic and volatile political environments. Protestors demanded political reforms, social justice and good governance.

In states such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen (which I label category 1), revolutionaries demanded the fall of the state leadership; they succeeded in overthrowing the government. At a later stage, the protesters managed to transfer state powers to a newly elected political elite in the context of executive and legislative elections. In other Arab states, protestors claimed rather social justice and political reforms. Such demands encouraged the state monarchs, such as those in Jordan and Morocco, to introduce political and economic reforms to appease the protestors.³ High-income Arab states in the Gulf region increased their welfare

¹ For supplementary perspectives see: Helga Tawil-Souri, "It's Still About the Power of Place," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 86-95.

² Philipp O. Amour, " Hamas-PLO/Fatah Reconciliation and Rapprochement within the Unfolding Regional Order in the Middle East since 2010: Neorealist and Neoclassical Realist Perspectives," *Journal of Social Sciences of Mus Alparslan University* 6, no. 5 (April 13, 2018): 621-631; Philipp O. Amour, "Did a Palestinian Spring Take Place? The Lost Decade in Palestine. Manuscript Submitted for Publication" (2018).

³ Katerina Dalacoura, "The 2011 Uprisings in the Arab Middle East: Political Change and Geopolitical Implications," *International Affairs* 88, no. 1 (January 2012): 63-79.

systems to soothe their population and buy politics out of uprisings.⁴ Welfare in authoritarian systems is credited with lowering revolutionary energy. In both cases (in low- and high-income countries), the monarchies became aware of the danger and employed reforms or welfare to prevent a prospective revolution from unfolding.

Thus, revolutionary waves in the Middle East were not congruent in their revolutionary demands, courses, or outcomes. Whereas Arab Spring uprisings brought about an institutional shift and a change in the state's leadership in the first category, they obtained a modest economic and political liberalization in other cases. Notably, one-party states, republics, have proven vulnerable in the wake of the Arab Spring compared to resistant monarchies.⁵ The Arab Spring turmoil has not only unleashed domestic political transitions across the region and promised to remodel society-state relations. It has also released a set of strategic dynamics that appeared to change the broader regional system and its relations with other systems.⁶

In the meantime, however, the Arab Spring movement has had a virulent history. It was unsuccessful and failed to meet the demands of the protestors to establish a democratic system, good governance or social justice. Likewise, the Arab Spring movement failed to meet the euphoria and expectations of observers as an extended third wave or the fourth wave of democratization. Since the conclusion of the Arab Spring,⁷ most Arab Spring states have either witnessed a setback into autocracy (e.g., Egypt) or devolved into disorder (e.g., Yemen, Libya). Most states in the wider Middle East continue to struggle along the uneven path to

⁴ Mark Lynch et al., eds., "So Much to Be Angry About," in *Revolution in the Arab World Tunisia, Egypt, and the Unmaking of an Era* (Washington: State Group, 2011), 4-7.

⁵ For insights into resistant monarchs Daniel Bischof and Simon Fink, "Repression as a Double-Edged Sword: Resilient Monarchs, Repression and Revolution in the Arab World," *Swiss Political Science Review* 21, no. 3 (September 2015): 377-395.

⁶ Philipp O. Amour, "Israel, the Arab Spring, and the Unfolding Regional Order in the Middle East: A Strategic Assessment," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (July 3, 2017): 293-309.

⁷ Philipp O. Amour, "Editor's Note: The End of the Arab Spring?," ed. Philipp O. Amour, *The Arab Spring: Comparative Perspectives and Regional Implications* 12, no. 3, Special issue, *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* (Fall 2013): I-IV.

authoritarianism, as repressive regimes continue to restrict political liberties and control the public sphere. Tunisia, the birthplace of the Arab Spring movement, seems a sole exception. These revolutionary developments raise questions regarding the rise and failure of the Arab Spring movement. In addition, they shed light on the (non-)conformity of the Arab Spring movement to the concept of revolution; in other words, was the Arab Spring movement a set of uprisings or revolutions?

The thesis of the chapter is that the Arab Spring movement marked a break in the continuity of authoritarian dominance but not a turning point in the development to democracy. The Arab Spring movement was a set of uprisings, would-be revolutions – not great revolutions. These would-be revolutions largely failed, with the exception of Tunisia. I argue, moreover, that the Arab Spring uprisings were not unique in their course or outcome; rather, they fit universal revolution theories.

The next section lays a preliminary theoretical orientation of what makes a revolution and what does not. The subsequent section reflects on the Arab spring movement from the theoretical perspectives alluded to in the previous section. Then, the following two sections address the factors behind the start of the so-called Arab Spring movement and behind its failure. The section on the failure of the Arab Spring movement attempts to distinguish three cases of Arab Spring uprisings: the first category includes revolutionary governments or elected post-authoritarian elites (e.g., Egypt, Libya, and Yemen); the second category covers states where external interventions were witnessed as a counter-revolution (e.g., Bahrain and Syria); and a third category covers most Arab Spring cases with lower to no revolutionary events.

Preliminary theoretical deliberations: What makes a revolution and what does not?

Economists, historians, and political scientists have long debated about the causes, typology, and evolutionary configurations of revolutions; as a result, they have

delivered diverse concepts of this particular phenomenon.⁸ The purpose of this section is to sum up the concept of revolution and to distinguish a revolution from different forms of social disturbances. Social scientists argue that a revolution involves a certain level of political activism of a larger proportion of the people against their own government or regime. A driving belief interrelated with views of economic impartiality, social justice, and experiences of bad governance (individually or combined) are classically the motor of revolutionary processes that attract mass participation of the polity in revolutionary events.

Revolutions have taken place throughout human history and differ extensively in form, span, course, outcome, and driving ideology. The history of revolutions demonstrates empirical irregularities. Revolutions follow different violent or stable paths. A civil war is a form of a bloody revolutionary mobilization. A peaceful uprising or a reform movement are examples of non-violent revolutionary mobilization. Revolutions may erupt swiftly to the surprise of the political and scholastic elite, as did the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979)⁹ or the so-called Arab Revolutions in 2011. Revolutions may take place slowly over a longer period of time, as did the Chinese Communist revolution; the protagonists and antagonists of ongoing revolution may be in one way or another aware of the process taking place.¹⁰

Social scientists categorize specific types of revolutionary forms. A potential revolution may reveal features of different forms of rebellion, uprising, military insurrection, grain riot, or coup d'état.¹¹ However, all of these forms are different from a revolution. A rebellion may be exclusive (tiny elite rebellion, for

⁸ Robert MacCulloch, "What Makes a Revolution?," September 2001, accessed April 3, 2018, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1126999>.

⁹ Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*, 1. printing, Cornell paperbacks., Cornell studies in security affairs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012); Misagh Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, Studies in political economy (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹¹ Lawrence Stone, "Theories of Revolution," *World Politics* 18, no. 02 (January 1966): 159-176.

example) or mass rebellion.

The term rebellion suggests violent actions. An uprising refers to weaponless or roughly armed popular rebellion. A militarized insurrection suggests a higher involvement of paramilitary means in planned actions. Mobilizations in the form of uprisings or rebellions may occur in rural areas and remain isolated; they may start in cities and spread elsewhere. Less isolated social movements that manage to attract the attention and support of the wider masses beyond their narrow circle have more chances to bring out the first stage of revolution: a shift in state leadership and institutional change. These forms of political mobilization may bring out revolutionary outcomes and result in successful revolutions; they may not unfold into successful revolutions and may remain mere political disorder. History demonstrates that grain riots and social movements do not stand up to destroying the regime; instead, they direct themselves towards the regime (i.e., compromise) or try to work within the institutional framework to induce changes. Both mobilization forms may turn revolutionary if the ruling authority fails to anticipate the urgency for meaningful reforms or if it blocks all peaceful means.¹²

What distinguishes a revolution from other political phenomena/social disturbances is a collective driving ideology of national strength capable of attracting the hearts and minds of the masses. Carriers of a prospective revolution are capable of overthrowing the state leadership, electing novel political elite and creating new state institutions. An evident change of the political elite and institutional shifts are revolutionary outcomes of a promising ongoing/would-be revolution.¹³

A successful revolution usually involves two stages. In the first stage, a revolutionary transaction takes place in a slow or sudden fashion, causing a shift in the state leadership. Such a shift must be accompanied with institutional developments in the short or long term. These developments are essential for the first stage of the prospective revolution. This first stage, the transition period, of

¹² Goldstone, *Revolutions*, 1-9.

¹³ Stone, "Theories of Revolution."

would-be revolution is a prelude to the reenacting of the state, government and society. A replacement of the old political elite by a new one is on its own no successful revolution. In the second stage, the revolutionary leadership attempts a transition period to consolidate the democratization process and to generate socio-economic reforms and social developments.¹⁴ Sweeping transition of the social order may take several generations to accomplish.

A transition period is frequently crucial to continue on the revolutionary course due to differences in driving ideologies, transformative expectations, and prospective course between and among soft-liners and hard-liners, reformers and principlists.¹⁵ A transition period is more likely to be successful if professional and public groups prioritize national interests and the stabilization of the transitioning state administration/newly elected leadership instead of personal and party particularities. A pronounced revolution that has established a new political system and generated a novel social order is an effective one that has successfully completed both these stages. Examples of historic revolutions are the Glorious Revolution (1688) or the French Revolution of 1789.¹⁶ Research demonstrates, however, that most of the would-be revolutions did not complete the second stage due to different complications. Unsuccessful revolutions are thus more common than (successful) revolutions. The abovementioned forms of revolutionary actions are bottom-up. Other prospective revolutionary actions are top-down, such as a coup d'état.¹⁷ A revolutionary outcome of this form is not certain, however.

What make revolution more likely to arise?

¹⁴ Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, N.J: Published for the Center of International Studies, Princeton University [by] Princeton University Press, 1970); Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1978); Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash, eds., *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-Violent Action from Gandhi to the Present* (Oxford [England]; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁵ Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965).

¹⁶ Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492-1992*, Pbk. ed., *The Making of Europe* (Oxford, UK Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1995).

¹⁷ Charles Tilly has different typology of revolution including coup, top-down seizure of power, a revolt and a Great Revolution. *Ibid.*

So far, the chapter has dealt with the concept of revolution. The question remains valid as to what makes revolution more likely to occur. In answering this question, social scientists tend to deliver explanations grounded in their disciplines, such as economy, sociology, political science and history. In their analyses, most social scientists mark a distinction between long-term causes as underlying factors for the rise of the prospective revolution and short-term, immediate causes invoked by a triggering incident.¹⁸ What are the classical long-term underlying causes of a revolution?

First, socio-economic causes. Increasing poverty among the polity marked by imbalance between rapid growth of population, level of employment, production and distribution could have major implications for the state's leadership. Rational economic motivations are significant. The presence/absence of net income and the level of inequality incentives seem to have a specific impact on the occurrence of revolution.¹⁹ Economic hardships may result in an increase in taxes and inflation. These may increase the level of disaffection among wider fragments of the nation. Research reveals that poverty-led mobilization did not bring out a revolution, contrary to cases in middle-income states. Scholars argue that poverty may start a revolution. A high level of poverty, however, results most likely in submission and hopelessness. Mobilization in low-income countries may cause a revolution if a major portion of the professionals, in particular the army, refrain from interference against the ongoing revolution or decide to step onto the side of the revolutionaries.

When do professionals refrain from backing up the ruling authority or even join the side of the ongoing revolution? Mutiny becomes an option for professionals who consider the ruler an antagonist for reforms and fundamental change. Such groups of professionals start to increasingly desert the ruler and welcome a possible shift. If the ruler can no longer hold allowance to his/her clientele, then material support is no longer a guarantee for the persistence of the ruling authority. Such

¹⁸ See e.g., Jack A. Goldstone, "Theories of Revolution: The Third Generation," *World Politics* 32, no. 03 (April 1980): 425-453.

¹⁹ MacCulloch, "What Makes a Revolution?"

development may increase the disaffection among the political elite; more loyalists come to terms with the uncomfortable possibility that sooner or later the ruling authority will collapse. If the misfortune of the whole clientele appears to be on the rise, then members of the clientele regard the ruler as a burden for their survival. Under these circumstance, resentment may grow among professionals; the ruler becomes disposable. To gain control of the unfolding situation, the unstable elite may seek to induce reforms and initiate radical changes or to tackle the government's/state's leadership. If the ruler loses the support of the professionals, then the ruler will scramble to survive.²⁰

Second, a common discontent with the socio-political situation towards an oppressive system and bad governance. An interplay of socio-economic and socio-political causes increases the gap between polity, on the one hand, and the ruling authority, on the other hand. If this gap widens, then the revolutionary context becomes more effective for carriers of a potential revolution and dangerous for the repressive ruling authority. Within this process of moving from equilibrium to disequilibrium,²¹ a shared narrative of opposition can transform popular resentment towards authority into mass revolutionary actions.²²

Third, the presence of revolutionary brokers and public groups to bond and rally mass groups for widespread mass mobilization. Technological changes through history have been an integral part of revolutionary expansion. Currently, the Internet revolution and social media applications are supportive for the ability of public groups and revolutionary brokers to include further segments of the people in the ongoing revolution and turn it from an isolated into a mass movement. Fourth, a successful revolution requires a positive international context; hence, foreign states are aware that the revolutionary outcomes of constitutional and institutional shifts alter a state's foreign policy and regional rationale, thus affecting

²⁰ Goldstone, *Revolutions*, 16-17.

²¹ Goldstone, "Theories of Revolution."

²² Johnson call this aspect dysfunction: Chalmers Johnson, *Revolution and the Social System* (Stanford: Hoover institution studies, 1964).

their own national rationale.²³ Fifth, a triggering incident will most likely open a revolution if the element of surprise is in favor of such an opening.

When all these factors come into play together, the self-regulating dynamics, cohesion and self-confidence of the ruling authority suffer, to the advantage of the carriers of a prospective revolution. Then, a would-be revolution is more likely to occur. However, the interaction of all the above mentioned factors is exceptional. None of the factors is conclusive in and by itself. This explains the rarity of successful revolutions.

Reflections on the Arab Spring movement

Since the setup of the inter-state system in the Middle East, Arabs and other ethnicities have suffered the political oppression of their political leadership and socio-economic hardship caused by authoritarian rulers and bad governance. At different times, Arabs have reacted with hope for a better future, with submission, or with frustration; almost every decade, Arabs oppose their dire conditions in the form of violent and non-violent actions. However, most of these mobilizations have remained exclusive or were terminated by the authoritarian leadership. Notably, Arabs had and still have grounds to revolt. What about the Arab Spring movement?

At the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, thousands of people in different states in the Middle East started a potential revolution against long-settled autocracies. A minor triggering incident occurred in Tunisia, suddenly. This stimulus mushroomed in size, yielded widespread collective actions throughout the country and transcended national boundaries. In terms of expansion, the conflict spread first from Tunisia, then to Egypt and other states and finally to Syria, culminating in the termination of certain states' leadership. In several ways, the timing of the potential revolutions was surprising to many contemporaries. Arabs set out to demand change of the regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya,

²³ Goldstone, *Revolutions*, 10-25; Maridi Nahas, "State-Systems and Revolutionary Challenge: Nasser, Khomeini, and the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17, no. 04 (November 1985): 507, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800029457>.

and Syria. Thus, the second decade of the 21st century was captious for several former dictators and quasi-dictators: the Tunisian president Bin Ali became the first head of state to be toppled by the 'people powers'. The deposed president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, was arrested, along with others of the old guard, and put on trial after mass demonstrations before he was released by the current ruling authority. The self-alleged king of the African kings, , fought against revolutionary groups and a Western alliance to avoid his removal before he was caught and murdered. The Yemini President Ali Saleh was forced to resign and was killed years later.²⁴ In other states in the Middle East, as in Jordan, Palestine,²⁵ and elsewhere, crowds went spontaneously into the streets; they used the social media for mobilization, demanding economic and political reforms. The social movements in these states did not demand the overthrow of the state as did those in the former category.

Motivated by a heroic vision of revolution and chasing revolutionary glory, protestors called their uprisings a revolution. Observers regarded the Arab uprisings as a revolutionary wave of regional scope as part of an extended third wave or a fourth wave of democracy.²⁶ Two elements of thought deliver some degree of clarification for this perspective. First, the revolutionary happenings were extensive in specific Arab countries and quite far-reaching in the Middle East. They came as unexpected to most people who followed their progress in part live on television. Second, the events promised to have both an extended and emancipatory impact on the long-seated states' system. Contemporaries assumed that a domino effect would take place in the Arab Middle East and turn the region into a garden of democracy.

Undeniably, the Arab Spring movement began with fruitful revolutionary

²⁴ John Isbister, *Promises Not Kept: Poverty and the Betrayal of Third World Development* (Bloomfield, CT; Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Kumarian Press ; Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

²⁵ Ghada Ageel, "A Palestinian Uprising: Is It Possible or Is It Too Late?," *Sociology of Islam* 2, no. 3-4 (June 10, 2014): 283-309 and Philipp O. Amour (2018): "Did a Palestinian Spring take place? The lost decade in Palestine."

²⁶ Ellen Lust, "Missing the Third Wave: Islam, Institutions, and Democracy in the Middle East," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 46, no. 2 (June 2011): 163-190; Jack A. Goldstone, "Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4, no. 1 (June 2001): 139-187.

perspectives. The uprising in Tunisia set in motion dynamics that would lead to further social movements in other Arab states. Small-scale revolutionary events in the first category managed to unfold as large-scale actions. Mass demonstrations and public groups pressured the authoritarian executive (and legislative) administrations in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen to resign from power. Later, elections were held, and newly elected politicians ran the second stage of the prospective revolution, the transition stage, to lead sweeping political and socio-economic changes. These developments can be seen as positive outcomes of the revolutionary interactions taking place in the Middle East since 2010.

However, apart from Tunisia, no Arab Spring state has managed to reach the second stage of revolution. A coup d'état took place in Egypt that put an end to the transition stage of the celebrated Egyptian revolution and returned the state of state-society relations and human and citizen rights to that of pre-revolutionary times.²⁷ Libya and Yemen, two states that completed the first stage of the revolution, dissolved into civil wars and hotspots for proxy wars between and among regional powers. Libya and Yemen (as well as Syria) initially began as non-violent uprisings; they unfolded into cases of civil war, notably as insurrections from within and without, and hence, external forces became involved in the alleged revolutionary happenings for self-serving grounds of regional hegemony. Against this background, the potential revolutions in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen failed. Civil wars and proxy wars in the mentioned states have caused much domestic disorder and dire human conditions.

By 2012, most states in the Middle East had become aware of the potential for a revolution at home and were able to prevent a domestic overthrow of the state leadership/old regime through economic reforms or repression. Large-scale revolutionary events in other Arab states (e.g., Morocco, Jordan, Algeria, and Palestine) did not take place.

²⁷ Amour, "Editor's Note: The End of the Arab Spring?"

Grounds for a revolution in Arab States

The different Arab Spring uprisings had different triggering incidents, yet the broad parameters were similar: a political, economic and social plight. A mix of these underlying factors increased public dissension towards the political elite and constituted a common ground for revolutionary actions at different levels.

In the second half of the 20th century, Arab states came out of an era of colonialism into the status of independence that brought a spirit of many expectations for Arab polities. Revolutionary leaders, i.e., heads of state such as Gamal Abdel Nasser and Muammar Gaddafi, set their own domestic and foreign policies, which had essential implications on their own polities. Initially, revolutionary leaders and succeeding head of states made promises to their polities regarding social justice, good governance, and welfare. However, the rulers did not keep their promises regarding political and socio-economic changes. Instead, rulers often applied tyranny, wasted national resources on self-serving affairs, suppressed their own people and rewarded their high-ranking supporters, the exploiters of their own people.²⁸ Political grievances stand behind the Arab Spring movement.

Moreover, the structural challenges besetting the Arab states during the 20th century came into play in the Arab Spring movement.²⁹ Arab states have been going through rapid and chaotic social change. Populations have been growing and becoming more urbanized. The birth rates continued to rise in Arab states with major socio-economic implications. At the same time, the production of goods and services did not grow along with the population. As a result, not enough local food was available; prices increased; and the majority of the people could not afford the increasing prices of basic goods.³⁰ Due to the global 2008 financial crisis, most Arab states faced economic crisis and could no longer sustain the subvention of

²⁸ Isbister, *Promises Not Kept*, 2-25.

²⁹ See e.g., Marcus Noland and Howard Pack, *The Arab Economies in a Changing World* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2007); Melani Claire Cammett et al., *A Political Economy of the Middle East*, Fourth edition. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 2015).

³⁰ Isbister, *Promises Not Kept*, 2-25.

prices as they used to.³¹ Uprisings and grain riots in previous decades in the Middle East are examples of peoples' opposition against their own conditions/bad governance. The absence of incomes or low incomes, in addition to high levels of inequalities, were implications of such structural problems.

Lower-income states in the Middle East became increasingly dependent on international funds (e.g., International Monetary Fund) that conditioned their financing on neo-liberal reforms. The rise of the neoliberal economy in many Arab states was promising in the beginning. However, at a later stage, economic liberalization resulted in an increase in the pre-existing social inequality, increased poverty and political conflict. Failed economic reforms increased the already widespread frustration and disappointment among the younger generations and encouraged demands for political reforms.³² An exclusive circle of politicians and businesspeople controlled national resources and maximized their benefits to the disadvantages of the majority of the polity. Corruption was endemic. Such a policy of economic liberalization created rivalries among the political elite and businesspeople, who became potential supporters for a prospective revolution.³³ One further aspect is important. Due to the dependence of lower-income states on their international patron/funder, they frequently followed a foreign policy that was not in harmony with national objectives or transnational issues. Such a foreign policy course estranged rulers from their citizens, which decreased public support. These socio-economic insufficiencies were indissolubly linked with and empowered revolutionary attitudes and actions in the wake of the Arab Spring movement.

Apart from socio-economic and political grievances, one further aspect must be mentioned. Globalization has spread information and communication

³¹ For Egypt see: International Labor Organization, accessed March 24, 2014, http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/afpro/cairo/downloads/trade_book.pdf.

³² Yasmine Mather, "The Arab Spring and Its Unexpected Consequences," *Critique* 42, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 73.

³³ John Rapley, *Understanding Development: Theory and Practice in the Third World*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007), 155.

technologies, Hollywood and Bollywood movies, and liberal values around the Middle East and in the Arab states. Modern technologies have shown old and young Arabs novel perspectives, alternative life styles and political realities; they have demonstrated how people elsewhere are living in welfare and democracy. The younger generation is growing up with expectations of social equality, the right to job opportunities and a better future, and basic respect and decency – similarly to generations elsewhere.

These factors explain to a certain degree why people went to the street in different states in the Middle East and demanded socio-economic and political changes. Over the decades, public discontent toward the authoritarian leadership style of rulers has been increasing. Citizens in opposition wanted to put an end to the decades of political suppression and economic hardship. The Arab Spring movement delivered such a context. In contrast to previous turmoil, the protagonists of the Arab Spring movement are not only the young but also the educated.³⁴

The unifying beliefs for many protesters were social justice, good governance and job opportunities. The vision was a better future. In the initial phase, the Arab Spring uprisings were leaderless and did not sweep out of oppositional political parties. Carriers of prospective revolutions encountered a severe disequilibrium against domestic socio-economic and political conditions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. This level of opposition seems to distinguish the quality and nature of these specific uprisings and their outcomes from those of other cases. Revolutionary brokers and public groups, such as pre-existing NGOs and political opposition groups, contributed to the expansion of revolutionary actions into large-scale cases. Internet networks and social media applications delivered carriers of revolutionary actions with tools to coordinate their revolutionary energy. The role of the Aljazeera channel and social network applications seems to have been important in spreading the revolutionary funk across borders and mobilizing people for collective actions.

³⁴ Jeffrey Haynes, *Politics in the Developing World: A Concise Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 16-17.

Large-scale activities lasted long because the military refrained, in the cases of Tunisia and Egypt, from taking sides. With time, more political and public figures alienated themselves from the authoritarian ruler. In Yemen and Libya, too, large-scale revolutionary activities took place. However, Saleh and Gadhafi had time to prepare themselves for potential revolution; their security services stood on their side, which stalled the progress of revolutionary actions. In both cases, however, regional contexts were favorable for a shift leading to an end of Gadhafi's (NATO intervention) and Saleh's eras (regional mediation).

The cases of Syria and Bahrain reveal a further pattern of revolutionary processes by which the army took the side of the regime, along with regional (Iran and Hezbollah in the case of Syria and the GCC in the case of Bahrain) and international allies (Russia in the case of Syria). The matrix of Syria's political relations to Iran and Russia go back to the Cold War, in addition to its delicate geopolitical position that makes regional and international indifference unlikely. Thus, the Syrian regime proved less dispensable than others in the region.

This analysis presents the empirical regularities of the factors behind the occurrence of the abovementioned Arab Spring uprisings. Such factors may explain why particular would-be revolutions occurred; however, they do not illuminate why would-be revolutions did not arise in other states in comparable contexts or even in Arab states with more far-reaching socio-economic and political hardships than those in the cases involved.

Why did the Arab Spring movement fail?

As the transformation theory demonstrates, the revolutions with a high level of success potentiality are those based on the elimination of the causes of uprisings including social injustice, unemployment, and poverty. Thus, the post-authoritarian elites in the Arab Spring states had to lead the state into social justice and good governance and create job opportunities and improve the economy within a shorter period of time to gain public support and leverage over the established old guard.

In retrospect, this has proven a hard task bearing in mind the inherited challenges and the performance of the newly elected political parties.

The legacy of authoritarianism during the second stage of would-be revolution proved too great; deep-rooted socio-economic structural problems challenged post-authoritarian elites. In such transition states, dysfunctional state institutions were incapable of withstanding endemic socio-economic challenges within a short period of time; weak – if not absent – NGOs could not aid the success of the prospective revolution.

Nota bene, election and a resultant shift in state leadership set Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen on a democratic path; however, such developments are not a guarantee for a successful revolution (or a transition period). Such a process (if it proceeds without breaks) requires generations. It is now clear that the transition periods of the potential revolutions in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen could not easily or quickly overcome the obstructive structural legacies of the states' authoritarian systems, including the role and dominance of the army and old guard, in addition to regional and international dependency.³⁵ The Arab Spring movements in these states have dismantled the state leadership; they have disrupted and weakened the old regimes to different degree. However, they did not put an end to them. In these states, the military did not step back from the economy and from politics. The old guard, including high-ranking officers in the army, remained to enjoy social privileges and economic profits. Evident cases in these states demonstrate that the novel leadership elite had to withstand the traditional and conventional elite including the old guard and their conspiracy/cooperation with regional partners for self-serving rationale. Yemen and Libya are two examples.

The old guard including officers from the army did not attempt to stabilize the transition period by backing up the newly elected political elite. At the same time, the inexperienced novel political elite could not win the support of the people and establish a weight against the old guard due to their lack of know-know of

³⁵ Mather, "The Arab Spring and Its Unexpected Consequences," 73.

socio-economic transition and good governance, among other reasons. Comparative research suggests that very few transition periods have proven effective to induce a radical change within a short period of time that can stabilize the subsequent post-authoritarian era. Social fragmentation and weak states are also part of the authoritarian heritage in Libya and Yemen that challenged a smooth transition period. The authoritarian legacy in Tunisia regarding structural problems (socio-economic grievances) was, in comparison to other transition cases, less persistent in the transition period. Among other factors, this enhanced the success potential of the would-be Jasmine revolution.

In harmony with these theoretical deliberations, the post-authoritarian elite did not gain the support of regional hegemonic powers that considered them a risk to their own domestic security and the regional balance of power, as evident in the case of Egypt. As a result, different hegemonic powers in the Middle East supported different streams of post-authoritarian elite as evident in the cases of Yemen and Libya. This explains why some states in the Middle East supported the coup in Egypt or contributed to the failed transitions in Yemen and Libya. This causality is even more evident in the following category.

The second category of Arab Spring cases includes state leadership that managed to maintain the support of security services, above all the army, in addition to major portions of the professionals and the polity. In addition, they managed to obtain strategic external intervention for their survival. In Bahrain, the uprising was harshly inhibited by the external intervention of the forces of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), whose member states were afraid that a constitutional change in Bahrain would lead to a domino effect across their borders. In Syria, the military insurrectionists were about to besiege the regime when the external powers of Iran, Hezbollah and at later stage Russia intervened for the sake of Syrian regime. The bloody confrontation is still ongoing. In both cases, foreign intervention was counterrevolutionary from the perspective of the Arab Spring movement.

The third category including the rest of the Arab states reveals less revolutionary turbulence. Demonstrations were relatively minor and isolated and

rarely unfolded at a large-scale level. In specific cases, as in Jordan or Morocco, carriers of demonstrations did not seek per se a profound revolution, a change of the authority ruler. In addition, in these cases, carriers of revolutionary actions failed to change their revolutionary actions from an isolated phenomenon into a large-scale operation; to break the support of key security agencies, most importantly the army; and to break the solidarity of the intellectuals and political elite. In other words, the national discontent in these states was likely not deep-rooted enough to emerge in large-scale actions. As a result, the revolutionary chronology was of short duration, and groundbreaking energy was at a low level. The revolutionary events thawed over time. These factors did not put enough pressure on the ruling elite to uphold to their political and economic reforms. Major reforms were absent, and some reforms were frozen or not implemented. Remarkably, the weak revolutionary gravity in this category did not increase the impetus among professionals to join or coordinate revolutionary actions; it did not decrease the apathy of the ruling elite towards power separation and power sharing. In the states of this category, a first stage of would-be revolution did not take place.

One other factor accounts for the failure of the Arab Spring movement in the second and third categories: the lack of support of professionals, above all from leftist and pan-Arabist streams. Members of these streams put into question the emancipatory character of the Arab Spring; they found these revolutionary events objectionable, perceived the Arab Spring movement not as a developmental shift towards democratization but rather as imperialist and/or regional aspirants. Critics regarded the Arab Spring movement as a grand master plan to crack down on the resistance movement in the Middle East (i.e., the conservative-resistance bloc) and take over the region held by the conservative-moderate bloc known for its good intentions towards or submission to the USA and Israel.³⁶ However, these views fail too to appreciate that notably Tunisia has achieved early benchmarks towards democratization and that the factors behind regional disorder are domestic and

³⁶ For alliances in the Middle East see: Amour, "A Strategic Assessment."

regional rather than American or Israeli.

In the meantime, the opposition towards the Arab Spring movement has increased even among people who do not have leftist or pan-Arabist ideological orientation. These voices argue that the Arab Spring movement was the flux of the century that caused desolation to many Arabs and brought little to no changes in social, political and economic affairs. They mark, for instance, regional polar rivalries and regional chaos. Such widespread voices, in the meantime, prefer authoritarian continuity to the witnessed disorders across the Middle East and in particular in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria.

Conclusion

Contemporaries have postulated the Arab Spring period as a turning point in regional history and as such described revolts as revolutions, drawing similarity to the French revolution. Such voices took the success of the Arab Spring movements for granted. They assumed that the regimes/leadership of many Arab states, if not all of them, were about to witness a radical shift. Contemporaries have justified their prism of a new era in the Middle East with the prospective domino effect of the regional uprisings and with a prospective transition into a long-awaited extended third wave of democratization or even a fourth wave of democratization.³⁷ During times of excessive optimism, some contemporaries have emphasized that the Arab Spring model is neither European nor preceded by similar instances but is rather the outcome of the Arab world's distinct characteristics.

In retrospect, it becomes apparent that such insights represented an approach of hope rather than sound empiricism. Critics have exposed the label Arab Spring and noted that it is confusing and has some illusionary characteristics. Literally, the uprisings started in winter and not in the spring. Thus, calling it a spring suggests a promising development of the events in the Arab states along the lines of the revolutions of 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe that resulted in a

³⁷ Lust, "Missing the Third Wave."

radical shift of political systems.³⁸ The term implies a self-assurance and a certainty of success for an alleged new era.

Taking into consideration a total of 22 members in the League of Arab States reveals that the claimed shift was rather exaggerated.³⁹ Four potential revolutions (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen) entered the first stage of would-be revolution and witnessed a change in state leadership. The coincidence of the above discussed factors afforded for political change may explain why in these specific cases the revolutionaries managed to tackle the state leadership.

However, with the exception of Tunisia,⁴⁰ all cases failed the transition period. Egypt witnessed a military coup. Libya, Yemen and Syria are undergoing civil wars and at the same time proxy wars of regional/international powers. All three cases have since been witnessing a reversal in political liberties to a level worse than that of pre-revolutionary times. In other words, the so-called Arab Spring is per se not a region-wide Arab Awakening/Revolution either in course or in scope.⁴¹ The Arab Spring movement could be compared in many aspects with the revolutionary wave of 1848, but not with that of 1989.⁴²

The label Arab Spring suggests a homogenous Arab entity regarding median age, literacy, poverty, corruption, or youths out of work, in addition to the level of resentment against bad governance – such factors seen as underlying factors for revolution. The research concludes, however, that Arab states are different from each other in the mentioned domains. The Arab polities share a perceived common historical memory and face similar transnational issues. The impact of the Jasmine revolution in Tunisia on other Arab states confirms the internal ties Arabs enjoy and the role of North Africa, long regarded as a periphery

³⁸ Dalacoura, “The 2011 Uprisings in the Arab Middle East,” 63.

³⁹ “League of Arab States,” accessed February 21, 2018, <http://www.lasportal.org/en/Pages/default.aspx>.

⁴⁰ See Safwan M. Masri, *Tunisia: An Arab Anomaly* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

⁴¹ Dalacoura, “The 2011 Uprisings in the Arab Middle East,” 63.

⁴² Kurt Weyland, “The Arab Spring: Why the Surprising Similarities with the Revolutionary Wave of 1848?,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 04 (December 2012): 917-934.

of the Middle East. However, the prism that what applies to Tunisia would apply elsewhere was naive, as the pre-conditions of would-be revolution are different across Arab states.

Against this background, I argue that regional dynamics have marked a break in the continuity of authoritarian persistence but not a turning point in the progress to democracy. In other words, while the Arab Spring obtained revolutionary potential, it did not reach the level of a revolution, where the region-wide after-era marks a distinguished break from the region-wide before-Arab Spring era.

Moreover, I argue that the dramatic events in the region may be different from previous revolutionary forms in Arab States or elsewhere. However, they are not unique. Despite the Arab nations' distinctive historical and socio-cultural experience(s), the Arab Spring uprisings apply to the universal revolution theories. The Arab Spring for is now dead. The would-be revolutions have miscarried. For that, authoritarian regimes will dominate regional politics in the long future to come.

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