The Nature of 2011 Arab Uprisings: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

The fall of the Tunisian and Egyptian rulers as a result of the popular uprisings in the Arab World was the harbinger of vast, surprising developments, which rapidly restored self-confidence to the Arab Street, attracting the attention of international actors and observers to the revived power of a new player affecting developments in the Middle East. Although in contemporary history, Arab public opinion has been tense at most times and always been present in the margins or core of developments, it failed to be involved in developments as extensively as it recently did. In addition, in contemporary Arab history, this is the first time that rulers have been dismissed as a result of popular pressure and street protests. This article examines the developments and uprisings in the Arab world in 2011 in light of the change in behavior and increased capability of Arab public opinion. In particular, this article assesses the reasons for the lack of democracy among the Arabs, and differences between the recent uprisings, and protests and movements in the past decade. The main argument of this paper is that the change in political behavior of the Arab youth and new political elites is a result of change in their political outlook and redefinition of the self and the other in their relationship with domestic rulers and foreign powers. The article tries, using an epistemological approach, to portray the character of the new Arab uprisings; arguing that they are different from other uprisings in contemporary history in terms of form, content and people's demands. In this picture, Arab nationalism and Salafist Islamism, which promote transnational ideals, are declining on the horizon of new uprisings. Instead, a new Arab political identity with an anti-despotic, pluralist and democracy-seeking approach is expanding.

Keywords: Arab Revolutions, Arab Nationalism, Islamic Radicalism, Arab Youth, Good Governance.

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Introduction

This article aims to examine the character of the recent Arab revolutions, including their origins, causes and consequences in light of new conditions in the Arab World and change in people's behavior as the main player in these developments. Since January 14, 2011, when Zine El Abidine Ben Ali left Tunisia, a large number of articles and analyses have been produced on the uprisings in the Arab World, which are still at the top of important international developments. Focusing on the new behavior of the Arab publics, particularly the new generation, in their protests against their governments could help us better understand part of the nature of their uprisings. Deep belief in the effectiveness of peaceful struggle, avoiding resorting to violence, non-ideological demands, search for democracy, absence of a charismatic revolutionary leadership, the traditional opposition following the youth, and use of novel two-way media are new characteristics that have emerged in the political behavior of the Arab masses.

In all countries where this wave has occurred including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Algeria and Jordan, in spite of local nuances, all the aforementioned characteristics can be identified. In this article, attention is focused on discerning the political mentality and behavior of Arabs and their intentions behind the wave of anti-despotic uprisings. Furthermore, this article will examine the thoughts governing the contemporary Arab movements; including Arab nationalism and Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist Islamism and their relation with the popular revolutionary movements. Factors

contributing to the rise of current authoritarian rulers and the causes of the failure of Arab societies to establish democratic systems will also be analyzed.

People in the Arab world have been alien to democracy since independence and the creation of existing nation-states.[1] Completely free and fair elections were not held in any of the 22 Arab countries before 2003 (except in Lebanon, where the political system is based on confessionalism), and the Arab republics have lacked true mechanisms for transfer of power by the people. Since 2003, when former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein was removed from power, the Iraqi people and elites have started experiencing a new form of government and power circulation. The Iraqi people cast their votes twice for the parliamentary elections in 2005 and 2010 and twice for the provincial councils. They also voted in a constitutional referendum in 2005. The developments in Iraq were a new experience in the Arab World; nonetheless this was not the result of a popular revolution. Western occupation forces and Iraqi elites opposing Saddam played a role bigger than that of the people in the creation of the system replacing Saddam's dictatorship. Democracy in Iraq's divided society is faced with serious challenges.[2] The overthrow of Saddam's regime by a foreign force prevented the Iraqi people from agreeing on shared goals and demands in the process of a comprehensive struggle against dictatorship, which would have deepened their shared national identity. The Iraqis celebrated the fall of Saddam, but they have utilized democratic mechanisms simply in order to claim their religious and ethnic shares within the past eight years, unable to establish political parties with a nationalist agenda.

The Iraqi democracy is at best another version of Lebanese confessional democracy where religious and ethnic strife and rivalry are inherent. Will we witness the formation of more successful democracies in other Arab countries where new political systems will come into being? Although we have to wait for the evolution of events to be able to pass judgment, this paper intends to assess the

impact of the 2011 movements on the new outlook of Arabs in regards to good governance. Moreover, for the theoretical framework of the developments in the Arab political identity, the opinions of a modernist Arab thinker, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, will be mentioned. He is among the contemporary Arab thinkers who have devoted their academic lives to the study and critique of Arab reasoning and the parameters of the Arab political, moral and historical identity. He has allocated one of his 4-volume works on the critique of Arab reasoning to the critique of Arab political reasoning.[3]

I. The Current Uprising in a Comparative Perspective

In early 2011, after a long period of time, the Arab World witnessed the extensive return of the people to the scene of political developments. In Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Yemen, Syria, Libya, Bahrain and Jordan people openly called for change. "Only once in contemporary history has such a wave shaken the Arab World" (Doran, 2011). Half a century ago, during the Suez crisis, people also took to the streets throughout the Arab World. Charismatic Egyptian leader and the champion of Pan-Arabism Gamal Abdul Nasser challenged Israel militarily, standing up to French and British colonialism. He forged an alliance with the Soviet Union, and in July 1956 he nationalized the Suez Canal. The European powers and Israel attacked Egypt in order to overthrow him, but they failed. The defeat of Europe and Israel in 1956 vis-à-vis Nasser, just as the 2011 Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia, was inspiring for the Arab masses. Nasser's resistance against the joint European and Israeli invasion proved that imperialism was not invincible to the Arabs. The Arab regimes, which were allied to the West faced threats on part of the public opinion provoked by the Egyptian nationalists. The Cairo Radio then played a role similar to the one played by the Arabic language news channel Al-Jazeera in the 2011 developments, leading Arab public opinion. However, what are the differences between the 2011 Arab uprisings and the Arab resistance movement in the 1950s?

A- Anti-Despotic Orientation and Collective Leadership: The first difference refers to the orientation of these two uprisings and the form of their leadership. In the 1950s, the Arabs were mobilized behind their nationalist champion vis-à-vis the colonialist powers and Israel, while in 2011 the people rose up against domestic rulers and dictators, blaming them for their problems. Moreover, there is no visible charismatic leader such as Nasser seen in the current developments. The leadership in the contemporary uprisings is pluralist, led by the new generation of Arab protesters who have access to post-modern means of communication. The Tunisian Revolution and the its success in overthrowing a dictator was a new experience in contemporary Arab history. Such a popular overthrow of a regime had not been witnessed since the First World War. Indeed, during a period when vast disappointment with living conditions prevailed in Arab societies, with the possibility of undertaking fundamental changes and replacing dictators dependent on the West seemingly impossible, suddenly an Arab ruler dependent on the West was removed from power. After the fall of Ben Ali, people in Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan, Algeria and Syria took to the streets with the same slogans, aspirations and struggle techniques. On February 11, 2011, a second dictator – the leader of the most important and influential Arab country - was forced to resign. After former Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak's resignation, Arab hopes for the recurrence of the Tunisian and Egyptian experiences in other countries increased in such a way that the start of the year 2011 has to be considered as the beginning of the fall of Arab rulers' legitimacy.

B- Peaceful Struggle: Another difference between the current Arab uprisings and the events of the 1950s as well as Arab struggles against European colonialists and the Ottoman Turks, is the new belief in the efficiency of peaceful struggle. Hence, even in a poor country like Yemen where people have been traditionally armed and Ali Abdullah Saleh has threatened since the first days of the start of anti-government protests that continued demonstrations will lead to

civil war, we see patience and peaceful behavior on the side of the protesters. The slogan of Silmiyah, literally meaning peaceful, which was first heard in Tunisia and Egypt, has been repeated in the Yemeni people's protests so frequently that the word has entered the Western political terminology and can be considered as one of the symbols of the Yemeni revolution. Even though popular protests were initially peaceful in Libya, Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi imposed a civil war on the people, excessively resorting to violence and the use of the military and African mercenaries. He transformed the peaceful protests into a war in order to perhaps prevent his fate from becoming like those of Mubarak and Ben Ali. Using this tactic, Gaddafi presently calls for a compromise with the end result being him staying in power.

In Bahrain, when the ruling Al Khalifah regime was about to surrender to popular protests after a month of resistance, concerned about the rapid domino of Arab uprisings and spill-over to the southern shores of the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia which sees the member states of the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council as being within its sphere of national security, turned Bahrain's domestic crisis into a regional crisis. Riyadh invoked supposed Iran involvement in the Bahraini revolution and provoked sectarian strife by dispatching its military forces to Bahrain to crush dissent within the framework of the Peninsula Shield agreement.[4] Placing Iran on the one side of the conflict provides the Al Khalifah regime and Saudi Arabia with the opportunity to escape the wave of uprisings. At least in the short term, it causes the international community to keep silent in this respect, failing to support Bahraini people's demands in this conflict, since the international community is in conflict with Iran over several issues.[5] The Bahraini opposition parties, including al-Wefaq, which is the most notable opposition political group, continue to protest peacefully, rejecting violence.[6]

C- Shared Civil Demands: The third characteristic of the new Arab uprisings refers to the type of popular demands. The various

Arab uprising have their own local characteristics and might lead to more or less different outcomes as it led to a civil war in Libya, while in Bahrain, the military forces of a neighboring country interfered in the conflict between the people and the establishment of the country. Nonetheless, people's demands are almost identical as categorized below:

-terminating life-time personal authoritarian governments, -emphasis on democracy as the most appropriate solution for forming alternative political systems, -ending corruption, discrimination, and political and economic prerogatives of the ruling elites, -enjoyment of equal rights, ending sectarian and religious disputes and emphasis on the rights that every human being should inherently enjoy including freedom, equality, justice and welfare.

D- Role of the Youth and Virtual Social Networks: The precedence of the youth and groupings based on virtual social networks over traditional opposition parties at the onset of the protests is the fourth characteristic of the new Arab uprisings. The self-immolation of a poor Tunisian youngster named Mohamed Bouazizi who was insulted by the local police on December 17, 2010 ignited the flames of protests in the small town of Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia.[7] By the end of that month, protests swept across all Tunisian cities. The organizers of the protests and demonstrations included labor unions, professional guilds, young political bloggers and journalists. Virtual social networks, especially Facebook and Twitter, were extensively used by protesters to expand and plan demonstrations (Ottaway and Hamzawi, 2011). Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was forced to leave the country on January 14, 2011. Since the rule of his predecessor Habib Bourguiba, the government had blocked the presence of legal opposition in the country since the early 1980s. Hence, in recent years, particularly before the uprising known as the Jasmine Revolution, opposition parties were not actively involved in political developments. The first vestiges of the public presence of opposition parties came to fore in developments in Tunisia after Ben

Ali's departure.

In Egypt, January 25, 2011 was the beginning of the vast protests which ultimately led to Hosni Mubarak's resignation on February 11. The Egyptian opposition parties enjoyed a better position than their Tunisian counterparts, and had been active in political developments within the past decades and even participated in elections. However, in spite of the inspiring role of the Tunisian Revolution for them, it was not these opposition parties that instigated the demonstrations that began on January 25th. Rather, it was a small Facebook group called the April 6th Youth Movement which had organized a labor protest on April 6, 2008 in the industrial city of Al-Mahallah al-Kubra. It also set up another Facebook page entitled "We are all Khaled Saeed", calling for the first gathering in Cairo's iconic Tahrir Square. [8] This call was widely welcomed by Egyptian youngsters and people. For days after January 25 opposition parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood, still refrained from joining the protesters. The Brotherhood formally joined the protests on January 28 and Egyptian opposition parties took part in the protests since then through February 11, contributing to the organization of demonstrations. Nobody, however, doubts that they did not initiate the protests.[9]

In Yemen and Bahrain, opposition parties also joined the protest with caution and delay. The Al-Wefaq movement, which is the main Shia opposition group in Bahrain, declared its exit from the lower house of parliament and that it would join protesters on February 18, 2011 - four days after the first popular gathering in Manama's Pearl Square in Manama and a day after the Bahraini army started forcefully suppressing protests. Seven Bahraini opposition groupings formed a coalition in March for the coordination of rallies.[10] The failure of al-Wefaq and other opposition groups in containing the youth and protesters' demands finally led to the impossibility of a compromise between the opposition and the government. Thus, taking advantage of the situation, Saudi Arabia

sent military forces to Bahrain in March 2011.

In Yemen, opposition parties and the parties competing with the ruling party forged a coalition entitled Joint Meeting Parties for the coordination of events, joining Ali Abdullah Saleh's opponents in the streets with delay and caution. Efforts made by the Joint Meeting Parties to reach a compromise with Saleh and an acceptance of mediation proposals by the GCC have been faced with the objection of revolutionary youth and have failed to yield any results. Vast demonstrations have taken place in Yemen's major cities including Sana'a, Taez and Aden after February 11 (the day Mubarak resigned). When the armed followers of Ali Abdullah Saleh erected tents in Sana'a's Tahrir Square in order to prevent a repeat of events in Cairo's Tahrir Square, Yemeni youngsters started holding marches from Sana'a University. On March 18, the Yemeni security forces used unprecedented force against demonstrators. This day constituted a turning point in the Yemeni revolution, because since that day, the defection of formal parties and authorities started. Yemeni youngsters and people displayed an interesting phenomenon during the months in the country's streets. A society which has been torn apart due to its tribal composition, separatism in the south and the Zaidi Shia in the north, as well as Ali Abdullah Saleh's divide and rule policy, has become united around one single demand; the removal of Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime. People's refusal to resort to violence, in spite of their possession of arms and Saleh's warning that the peaceful popular protests will lead to an armed civil war, clearly demonstrates people's civic behavior in a country which lacks civil society mechanisms. In other words, what Ali Abdullah Saleh has failed to create during his 32-year authoritarian rule over Yemeni society – forging a single Yemeni identity - has appeared during the protests. Nevertheless, we have to wait and see if this solidarity and unity will be preserved after Ali Abdullah Saleh is removed from power. There are certain concerns about it.

II. Changing Arab Identity

The Moroccan thinker, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, is one of the few scholars who have devoted their academic lives to the epistemological critique of the elements constituting Arab mindsets and identity. He passed away in 2010, just months before the beginning of the Arab Spring and did not have the chance to witness the formation of Arab revolutions in accordance with the change in Arab mindsets which he had theorized. He considered the Arab identity as problematic, and located between the definition of the self and the other. The Arab self is rooted in the past, while the current condition of the Arab depends on the other i.e. colonialism and foreign powers. The identity of the Arab is thus stuck between the past he wants to pass and the present to which he does not belong (al-Jabri, 2005: 9). According to al-Jabri, the challenge to the Arab movements during the past 100 years involves a clash with the foreign elements, power of capitalism and Western colonialism. At this stage, the role played by the domestic elements and most notably socioeconomic factors are just secondary. Al-Jabri's views refer to the movements before the 2011 spring, which were largely affected by Arab nationalism.

The main slogan of Arab nationalism included the realization of Arab unity vis-à-vis foreign forces; thus, nationalism has persistently needed a foreign and non-Arab enemy. Opposition to the Ottoman Turks, colonialism, imperialism and Israel has provided the driving force behind Arab nationalism in contemporary history. Abdurrahman Kavakebi (1855-1902) and the other reformist Arab nationalists who proposed the slogan of Arab unity, called for secession and independence from the Ottoman Empire. In the Arab Maghreb which was not controlled by the Ottoman Sultan, the slogan of Arab unity emerged initially at the end of the 19th century as a result of contact with the Turks and Ottoman Empire to escape from French colonialism. With the end of the First World War and the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the Arab World came under

the influence of the colonialist governments: Italy, France and Great Britain. In this period, the foreign element constituting Arab identity was colonialism. Even in the discourse propagated by figures such as Jamaleddin Assadabadi and Mohammed Abdu, where religion is also proposed as one of the indicators of Arab-Islamic identity, unity means Arab and Muslim resistance, in a single front, against the colonialist West (Al-Jabri, 2005, 80-91).

The Arab nationalist theorist, Sati' al-Husri (1880-1969), also regarded the ultimate goal of the ideology of Arab nationalism as the political unity of Arabic-speaking peoples. To him, happiness of the Arab peoples' is only realized when national borders are removed. He saw Arab countries as fabricated, created by imperialism, regarding the Arab defeat in the 1948 war against Israel as arising from Arab disintegration in eight countries. In order to prevent another defeat, he saw the solution as the formation of a single Arab country (Dawisha, 2005: 2-3).

The leader of the Ba'ath nationalist party, Michel Aflaq, shared this viewpoint concerning the destiny and happiness of the Arabs. This idea, however, was faced with a number of limitations from the very beginning. Expansion of separate and independent Arab sovereignties was one of these obstacles to which Nasser pointed both as an opportunity and a constraint. With the further deepening of national sovereignty in the following decades and the rule of the Ba'ath parties in Iraq and Syria, the idea of Arab unity as the pivotal idea in Arab nationalism became incrementally unattainable. Particularly with the formation of new Arab countries after the Second World War and their access to oil resources and economic growth in the 1960s-1970s, national interests preceded ideological nationalism and the idea of Arab unity. The Arab countries did not display solidarity. Instead, they began rivalries and occasionally experienced conflicts over national interests.

Today, the new Arab generation sees its happiness in the attainment of freedom and escape from authoritarian governments

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rather than in Arab unity. For them, the champions of nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s and their successors have turned into the ruthless, incompetent rulers they are fighting.

In the recent events in the Arab world, the Arabs no longer seem to define their identity vis-à-vis the other which does not belong to them in a leap in the definition of Arab identity. What today's Arabs negate in this stage of their uprisings is not colonialism and the foreign element, but they reject part of themselves which is rooted in their own political thinking i.e., their ruling governments. Arab rulers have largely largely blocked the possibility of any kind of domestic political development and circulation of power with the justification of a struggle against a foreign enemy. What the Arab peoples' demand today is rooted in the self. The new Arab generation wants justice, freedom and welfare and views the replacement of authoritarian governments with accountable democratic systems as the way to achieve those goals.

III. Islamism and 2011 Uprisings

The current Arab uprisings are occurring in societies where Islam constitutes a large part of their cultural identity. In the contemporary era, other political tendencies have appeared along with Arab nationalism, which see the way to overcome Arab political backwardness in the return to religion or at least consider religion as more efficient in mobilizing people against the foreign enemy; namely, imperialism and Israel.

Two Sunni Islamist currents active in developments in the Arab world during the past decades have been the Ikhwaan (Muslim Brotherhood) and the Salafists. The Ikhwaanis' thinking is based on Hassan al-Banna's teachings (1906-1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966). The movement has been active in the developments occurring in the Muslim and Arab Worlds during the past eight decades.

Hassan al-Banna developed his teachings over two decades, the

most notable component being the universality of an Islamic call for the acceptance of Islam as the religion and state. In the Brotherhood's fifth conference proceedings, al-Banna observes: "We believe that Islamic rulings and teachings suffice for handling people's affairs in this world and the other world. Islam represents the doctrine and worship, homeland and nationality, religion and state, spirituality and action, the book and sword" (Shagir, 2002).

Hassan al-Banna's method to achieve his goals differed from that of Sayyid Qutb. Al-Banna stressed the necessity of orderly organization and rectification, giving priority to those concepts. Meanwhile, Qutb emphasized political thinking and ideology and discerning paganism and faith in the relationship between the ruled and the ruler. He divided human societies into the Islamic society and the ignorant society. Qutb argued that the Islamic society is a society where Islamic rulings are implemented, while the ignorant society is one in which Islamic rulings are not implemented. His thinking is close to the Salafist currents in this respect. The two also divide societies into the abode of Islam and the abode of paganism. The Muslim Brotherhood has seen numerous ideational contentions based on al-Banna's emphasis on inviting followers to his movement and rectification on the one hand, and Qutb's Salafist Jihadist tendencies on the other. The Muslim Brotherhood's political behavior during the past decade, particularly in the course of the recent Arab revolutions, is largely influenced by al-Banna's line rather than that of Qutb. Most importantly, al-Banna's argument that "we do not want the government for ourselves and if someone assumes responsibility from among the Muslim community, governing according to the Islamic method, we will be his soldiers and followers," has had resonance on the Brotherhood's political conduct during the Egyptian revolution. The organization declared in the first days after the revolution that it would not nominate anybody for the presidency. By establishing the Freedom and Justice Party, it has also pronounced that the door of the party is open to all Egyptians with any political and religious

character. Furthermore, the Brotherhood has said that it will not seek to acquire a majority in parliament (Eizzat, 2011). The formation of the Freedom and Justice Party, which will not be bound to all of the Ikhwaanis' doctrinal requirements, as well as its acceptance of participation in the government and not claiming it for itself, indicate a turn in the Brotherhood's political thinking. The latter displays an understanding of the new conditions in Egypt, i.e. people's pluralist demands, as well as the international situation. At the same time, some still doubt the Brotherhoood's new attitudes, maintaining that within a some-year process, it will depart from its current moderate slogans and will try to acquire government, ultimately implementing Sharia law. Even though this perception of the Brotherhood's strategy is correct, the process of events and transformation in the Arabs' political thinking and identity will pose problems for this strategy.

The second Islamist political current in Sunni Arab societies is Salafism. Apart from the categorization of the Salafist tendencies in terms of doctrine and political conduct, there are scant differences between the Radical Salafists, better known as Jihadists and Takfiris, and doctrinal Salafist leaders who negate terrorism because of their formal relationship with states. The Salafists who formally established by al-Qaeda were fighters dispatched to Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation of the country, motivated by the idea of jihad against paganism. The Western and occasionally some Arab intelligence services supported these fighters financially and logistically during the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. With the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Arab fighters came back home. However, they were no longer ordinary citizens, and having been exposed to radical thoughts and struggle methods, confronted the governments in their home countries, which were largely U.S. allies.

The occupation of Kuwait in 1990 and dispatching of Western troops to the Arab Peninsula in order to attack Iraq was a turning point in the history of Radical Salafist movements in the past two decades. Salafist leaders considered the presence of Western troops in

Islamic territories as contrary to Islamic teachings, condemning getting help from non-Muslims in order to wage war against a Muslim country. From this stage, we saw the divorce between Salafist fighters and Arab governments. Enjoying close relations with Arab intelligence services in the 1990s, Osama bin Laden began objecting to the presence of Western military forces in Muslim countries, causing issues with the Saudi government and the United States. The overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan after September 11, 2001 failed to remove the bases of Radical Salafists in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The September 11th attacks, the assumption of responsibility by bin Laden, and the involvement of 15 Saudi nationals in the operations, showed that Radical Salafists had proceeded to establish terrorist organizations to a larger extent than what the United States and its allied Arab states perceived.

Before the Arab Spring, the United States and its Arab allies considered al-Qaeda as the biggest force threatening peace and security in Arab countries, giving rise to close cooperation between Arab states and the United States within the framework of a "War on Terror". Within the framework of such collaboration, rulers including Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen received the green light from the United States to continue their lengthy rule. In the 1990s, radical Salafists propagated anti-imperialist and anti-Israeli slogans, avoiding challenging Arab governments. The September 11th events caused the Americans to exert pressure on the Arab states, and Saudi Arabia in particular, to battle radical Salafist thought and their financial and logistical resources. Due to this common U.S. and Arab battle against al-Qaeda, since the 2000s, the terrorist group added attacks against Arab rulers allied to the West to its agenda. Two countries where al-Qaeda has been highly active in the past decade have been Iraq and Yemen. Iraq's unstable conditions after 2003 and Yemen's armed and insecure society have provided fertile grounds for al-Qaeda activities.

With the beginning of the Arab revolutions in 2011, al-Qaeda and radical Salafists have been entangled in a doctrinal and

operational crisis. Al-Qaeda has kept silent concerning these movements, which are targeted against rulers dependent on the West for support. It seems that the contradiction between the democratic and pluralist slogans of the popular movements and the closed and ideological thoughts of the Salafists has prevented al-Qaeda from looking at developments in a completely positive light. If the corrupt Arab regimes dependent on the West are eliminated and democratic systems rise to power in their place, al-Qaeda will be in trouble in several respects. Al-Qaeda's recruitment among angry Arab youths will be halted. A rival mode of thought has widely moved young people in the Arab World, able to more efficiently respond to the demands of the youth and their feelings than the closed and radical thoughts offered by the Salafists. While authoritarian Arab governments have struggled against al-Qaeda, they have seen the terrorist group as a good excuse to receive U.S. aid and support on another. Their policies towards al-Qaeda have been hypocritical and opportunistic, thus creating safe havens for the terrorist group in Arab countries. With respect to the method of struggle, the success of the peaceful, popular toppling of Arab rulers has questioned the Salafists' insistence on violent struggle. Part of Salafist thinking, which is connected to the Al Saud regime, is influenced by official Saudi policies; for example, Riyadh's ban on demonstrations against rulers as religiously unacceptable. In response to the popular demonstrations against Mubarak in Egypt, Saudi Mufti Sheikh Abdul-Azeez ash-Shaikh condemned the demonstrations, saying that they are not in accordance with Islam (Nasser, 2011).

In the meantime, the Egyptian Salafists adopted varied positions. They held a meeting in Alexandria on February 8, 2011, before the overthrow of Mubarak, and called for the revival of Article 2 of the Egyptian Constitution which stresses the country's Islamic identity and bases law-making on the Sharia. In parallel, they joined the protesters in the streets.

Jordanian Salafist leaders have also described the Arab

revolutions as sedition and rising against just rulers (Najjar, 2011). Sheikh Hassan al-Badid, one of the most prominent Salafist leaders in Jordan, reiterated the general Salafist belief in the inadmissibility of rising against a just ruler and called for consultation with rulers and advising such an approach as a solution to disputes between rulers and the people. He accused those who demand change and human rights of not knowing that their demands contradicted Islam. Salafist circles also describe prominent Egyptian scholar, Yusuf Qaradawi's support for the Egyptian revolution as misguided. Even though a few Arab Salafists have supported the Arab revolutions, the majority of Salafists and other radical currents seem to be shocked by and unable to get along with the Arab revolutions, whose organizers are youngsters pursuing civil demands. Nonetheless, al-Qaeda leaders are ready to take advantage of the gaps that might unfold in the stability and security of the Arab countries to organize themselves. Yemeni-origin American citizen, Anwar al-Awlaqi, who is the commander of al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula, has said that the Arab revolutions will provide our brothers with breathing space after thirty years of strangling. In an unprecedented comment, he said: "The outcome should not necessarily lead to an Islamic government so that we can say that a step on the right track has been taken." In saying so, al-Awlaqi admits that people do not demand the creation of religious governments in Arab countries.

There are certain concerns about the role of radical Salafists in future developments in Yemen, Libya and Syria. Salafists will certainly take advantage of the free political space in the Arab World for propagating their thoughts. However, if the process of democratization starts in countries which have experienced revolutions and in the Arab World in general, radical Salafists and al-Qaeda will face serious problems in defining their own status in Arab-Islamic societies and adapting their ideological beliefs to people's new demands. Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was killed by American commandos in Pakistan amid the recent Arab uprisings. His death has

had scant repercussions among people in Arab countries that are experiencing revolutions. If the Americans did not face any limitation in choosing the right time to eliminate bin Laden, it should be admitted that they chose the right time to end the dilemma about him as in ordinary circumstances, they would have to expect violent reactions. The death of bin Laden, and the lack of widespread repercussions, manifests the decline of Salafist thinking in the course of the recent Arab revolutions.

IV. Arab Revolutions and Nation-Building in the Arab World

Nation-building posed one of the fundamental challenges to Arab governments and their Western allies during the post-First World War period. The sparse identities of the people in the countries arising after the First World War have proved an obstacle to successful nation-building: "The world during the past decades particularly after the Cold War has been replete with identity questions" (Fuller, 1999: 9). The Arab Middle East has not been an exception to the rule. In an opinion poll among 200 Iraqi and Arab elites conducted by Graham Fuller and his assistant Rend Rahim before the fall of Saddam concerning the parameters of Iraqi identity, it was revealed that along with the national identity, the respondents acknowledged other identities such as Shia, Sunni, Arab, and Kurd. After the occupation of Iraq, the sparse nature of Iraqi identity has been exacerbated. The Iraqi elites that have come to power after 2003 have failed, in their political rivalries in accordance with the divided identities of Iraqi society, to forge non-ethnic, non-religious truly national parties. Hence, the meaning of majority and minority is still non-political and based on religious divisions. One of the biggest challenges to democracy in Iraq is this identity division, which prevents the formation of national political parties and the circulation of the majority and minority in line with political and party agendas. The difference between the overthrow of the dictator in Baghdad in 2003 and the 2011 Arab revolutions is that in Iraq, a foreign power

overthrew a dictator, brining Iraqi opposition elites into power. The Iraqi people's demands have been channeled through opposition political parties and elites. Hence, the people themselves have not found the chance to articulate their own demands in the course of a struggle against domestic despotism, reinforcing their single shared national identity through shared demands. In fact, in Iraq, opposition parties and foreign forces were pioneers and the people followed them, whereas in the 2011 revolutions, the people have been the pioneers followed by opposition elites and foreign powers. This popular precedence in the struggle against despotism and taking the initiative of street protests led to the formation of a single national identity among the people in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen; something which has prevailed over sparse ethnic, religious and tribal identities. This is best exemplified in Yemen where the southern-northern, Zaidi-Sunni, leftist-Islamic identities have paled as protesters have rallied around a united call for the regime's overthrow.

The continuity of national consciousness in the Arab revolutions in the formative stage of new systems will provide the ground for the further reinforcement of the concept of nation among the Arabs. The consolidation of democracies based on political party agendas rather than tribal ones like in Lebanon and Iraq can contribute to this process. Nonetheless, if sectarianism is not contained, democracy can unravel ethnic and religious sentiments, unleashing conflicts posing challenges to nation-building. In Egypt, during the past months, violent religious skirmishes have occurred between extremist Muslims and Coptic Christians. Although these conflicts might be provoked by foreign and domestic elements influential in the new political process, the roots of such conflicts cannot be denied within Middle Eastern societies. The recent Arab popular movements provide an opportunity for the people and elites to compete over political agendas by forging democratic systems and non-sectarian parties instead of religious and ethnic rivalries. Hence,

we have to wait and see to what degree groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, which has pioneered the aforementioned with the creation of the Freedom and Justice Party, can distance themselves from their entirely religious agenda in political contests.

Conclusion

Unlike the other Arab uprisings in the contemporary era, the 2011 Arab revolutions are of a domestic nature and motivation. After becoming entangled in conflict against outsiders over their independence and territorial integrity in the post-First World War decades, people in the Arab World viewed struggle as resistance against the 'others' (Ottoman Turks, European colonialists and Israel). But currently, with the prolongation of Arab authoritarian rule, they are experiencing a new sense of struggle. The ideologies and thoughts governing the Arab struggles during the past decades, i.e. Arab nationalism and Brotherhood-like Islamism and Salafist Islamism, do not play an encouraging and guiding role in the recent popular uprisings. In other words, Arab nationalism and Salafist radicalism have failed to find a role in the Arab revolutions and the Muslim Brotherhood is seeking to get along with developments by changing its sociopolitical outlook. The existing Egyptian Brotherhood leaders do not emphasize their slogan of "Islam is the only solution." Rather, they seem to have accepted a type of political pluralism. The Freedom and Justice Party, with its political rather than religious agenda, has been created to pursue this goal. Arab youngsters were the pioneers and organizers of demonstrations, involved in political events as a reformist political force with non-ideological civic demands. The traditional opposition parties and domestic and foreign actors have accepted their role, consulting them on various occasions.

Obviously, in the current phase and even in the years ahead when the Arabs will be busy forging their new political systems, there will not be any room for propagating transnational Arab ideals as the Arab nationalist leaders were seeking, i.e. the single Arab nation. The common Arab identity based on a common language, culture, history

and religion, however, will continue to exist and will not perish. Indeed this shared identity has led the Arabs to influence each other and to the chain occurrence of Arab revolutions. But this shared identity has been clarified in the course of struggle against despotism at the age of information explosion and global sociopolitical communications, moving towards rationality and freedom from dogmatic beliefs in political thinking and a new definition of the self and the other. The sultan-like narrative of leadership is paling in Arab political thinking. The Arab utopia is no longer a Platonic utopia where good governance is defined according to the good prince's characteristics. The princes' of the age of Arab nationalism turned into incompetent ruthless dictators due to the absence of a just system of governance. Arabs are undergoing a historical transition in their political thinking, seeking the characteristics of a good government in their definition of utopia rather focusing upon the characteristics of a good ruler.

Developments in the Arab World have shown that the Arab Street has transformed into an active and influential player, far from its role as a passive and actor. People are now proposing demands which entail mainly civil and citizenship demands rather than transnational ideals. For the first time in the history of the Arab World, democratic systems are being established and experienced.

Although Iraq was the first Arab country, except Lebanon, which has experienced a transfer of government through elections during the past ten years, the change that occurred in Iraq was not the outcome of a popular revolution. In fact, no popular struggle took shape that encouraged the formation of a national spirit among the country's population. The main prerogative of the future democracies of the Arab World, as compared to Iraq, is that people in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and the other Arab countries took to the streets and gave shape to their shared demands in the course of a struggle, deepening their uniform national identity within the framework of legitimate, common demands.

Notes

[1]. See Diamond Larry (2010), "Why are there no Arab democracies?" *Journal of Democracy, January* 2010, Vol., No. 1. A survey done in 2003 and 2004 by Arab Barometer found:

-40 to 45 percent of each public supports secular democracy.

-40 to 45 percent supports an Islamic form of democracy.

-5 to 10 percent supports secular authoritarianism.

-5 to 10 percent supports Islamic authoritarianism (Diamond, 2010: 96).

[2]. See Byman Daniel (2003), "Constructing a Democratic Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities," *International Security*, Volume 28, Number 1, Summer.

[3]. Mohammed Abed al-Jabri (2010), *The Formation of Arab Reason: Text, Tradition and the Construction of Modernity in the Arab World*, Edition: J. B. Tauris &Company.

[4]. In 1984 *Persian Gulf Cooperation Council* (GCC) decided to create a joint military force of 10,000 soldiers divided into two brigades, called the *Peninsula Shield Force*, based in Saudi Arabia near the Kuwaiti and Iraqi borders.

[5]. See: International Crisis Group, Middle East/North Africa Report N°105 – 6 April 2011, p. 1.

[6]. See: Statements of Al-Wefaq association on: http://www.alwefaq.org/

[7]. See: pipe, Daniel, (2011) "Mohammad Bouazizi, Historical figure" *National Review Online*, April 20, 2011

[8]. Khaled Mohammad Saeed was a young Egyptian man who died under disputed circumstances in the Sidi Gaber area of Alexandria on June 6, 2010 after being arrested by Egyptian police. A prominent Facebook group "we are all Khaled Saeed" moderated by Wael Ghanim brought attention to his death and continued discontent in the weeks leading up to the Egyptian revolution of 2011. See Fanatical Times February 9, 2011.

[9]. See Egypt revolution and parties Phobia, http://www.middle-east-studies.net/?p=8789 [Arabic]

10. See International Crisis Group, Middle East/North Africa Report No. 105 – 6 April 2011, p. 14: The seven most important licensed opposition groups formed a loose coalition after the first two weeks of protests in February 2011 and began to urge their followers to take to the streets. This coalition, comprising al-Wefaq, al-Wa'ad, al-Minbar al-Taqaddumi, al-Amal, al-Tajamua al-Qawmi, al-Tajamua al-Watani and al-Ikhaa, first participated in the protests on March 1.

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