

Introduction

In our time civil society has growing relevance in the global polity and in international relations. At the same time, it is undergoing profound and rapid change in almost every corner of the planet. People today increasingly communicate, interrelate, and enter into conflicts outside the representation and intermediation of their respective national governments. Nonstate actors such as ethnic and religious groups, corporations and smaller businesses, nongovernmental organizations and impromptu street demonstrators, and radical or terrorist networks have become more prominent in a time of relatively little warfare, high economic interdependence among nations, partial attempts at global governance, and an unprecedented degree of interpersonal communication.

Outbursts of interstate conflict and wars of independence have become increasingly rare. Even civil or interethnic conflicts, though still frequent (witness Syria or South Sudan), appear to be trending downward both in number and lethality, particularly since the end of the cold war. Yet the world continues to be seen as a dangerous place. Words such as instability, anxiety, threat—even apocalypse—enjoy widespread use. One explanation is that today's conflicts are watched worldwide, in detail and in real time, wherever they occur. Houses in flames and corpses on the pavement—not to speak of the collapsing Twin Towers—are brought by the media into people's living or dining rooms almost daily. The changing typology of violence, reflected in increased impersonal and cowardly killings of many innocent civilians by politically or religiously inspired fanatics, may also bolster this perception.

Regarding the world economy, per capita income has shown unprecedented growth over the long run, despite the constant increase in global population. In particular, the outlook for what used to be called the third world a few decades ago has changed drastically, especially in recent years. From 2005 to 2010, half a million individuals escaped absolute poverty (defined as an income of \$1.25 a day or less). Three quarters of these people are from China or India, but the poverty rate of sub-Saharan Africa has also fallen below 50 percent. The main engines of development have been trade expansion in both goods and services and investment liberalization, with the consequence of dramatically enhancing interdependence among nations. Yet the prevailing perception is either of economic uncertainty, particularly after the 2008 financial crisis and economic downturn, or of an unacceptably unfair distribution of wealth, or both. Again the mass media bear some responsibility for this unbalanced perspective in that they apparently prefer to spread bad news while, at the same time, broadcasting fictions that are mostly about the more affluent.

Governance both within and between countries is undergoing transition. The totalitarian states that made the twentieth century so tragic have almost disappeared from the face of the earth. Conversely, the number of democracies has increased since the late 1980s at the expense of authoritarian regimes, with a significant grey area remaining in between. Although international institutions are often viewed as being of little significance, they actually make their presence felt more than ever before. The number of peacekeeping operations undertaken by the international community—both UN- and non-UN-sponsored—surged steeply after 1989. The 2011 Security Council resolution that contemplated a military intervention in Libya was based on the principle of the “responsibility to protect” civilians—a first application of that international framework. The International Criminal Court, the first such treaty-based body established in the framework of the UN, entered into force in 2002 after ratification by 60 countries, and as of this writing, 120 states are committed to it (excluding China, Russia, and, interestingly, the United States, originally a sponsor of the concept). Moreover, a notable indication of a more widespread respect for human life is the decreasing implementation of capital punishment: the number of countries that are “abolitionist for all crimes” has exactly doubled from 48 in 1991 to 96 in 2010. Yet again, as with conflict resolution and economic interdependence, powerful opposition to international governance exists on the grounds of absolute state sovereignty and the Westphalian principle of noninterference.

Both the ongoing changes and the corresponding resistance by the powerful are subject to the influence of rapidly expanding global communication technology. Individuals and households, often including those earning incomes below average or living in small cities or villages, are increasingly endowed with the capability of spreading as well as receiving informative messages and images. The explosion of interaction with fellow countrymen and -women—and even across borders—although often temporary or ephemeral, has the potential to generate mass mobilization and thus oblige authorities to be more accountable.

Changing societies, greater economic interdependence, the spread of democracy, and attempts at global governance are the result of the long predominant Western influence. Civil societies are stronger in the Old World and in North America than in almost any other areas of the planet. Yet Europe lost its dominant role more than half a century ago, and even the United States now appears increasingly unable to steer world matters in keeping with its status as the only global superpower. Not only are new powers emerging, but the societal and cultural model largely shared by the two sides of the Atlantic is also increasingly being challenged. In order to face the new realities and compensate for the decline in influence, the West has to develop new paradigms for foreign policy options, choices, and instruments to enhance the efficacy of its actions toward what has been called “the rest,” possibly with outdated condescension. The project that led to this book concentrated on that portion of the rest that is the Muslim Arab world, whose societal change is widely perceived in the West as susceptible of generating outcomes incompatible with the established (Western) order, whether secular or religious.

The area of interest is further limited to the southern Mediterranean shores, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Sinai Peninsula. At the beginning of the project, back in 2010, the authors chose to so restrict their focus because transformations in this part of the Middle East are less likely to be affected by the geostrategic issues associated with the southeastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. However, a few months after this choice was made, a Tunisian fruit vendor set himself on fire to protest the hardships imposed by the police state, catalyzing what soon looked like a revolution throughout North Africa. This turn of events was unexpected by many, including the contributors here, but it was not unpredictable. Occasionally political science resembles seismology, which cannot pinpoint when an earthquake will take place nor its

exact intensity on the Richter scale but which can predict that a certain geographical area is likely to experience a serious seismic event sooner or later.

The uprisings in the Arab squares were not isolated phenomena. In a world that is less bellicose and more interdependent than in any time in history, the legitimacy and stability of states today may derive less from their ability to defend their citizens from external threats, as in the Westphalian system, than their ability to provide them basic services, internal security, an independent judiciary, and fairer income distribution, and to accept public scrutiny, beyond the façade of more or less formal democracy. Thus heterogeneous and variously motivated protests have arisen in different parts of the world, from the *indignados* (“angry ones”) spreading from Madrid and the Occupy-Wall-Street movement propagating from New York, to the Russian “Awakening” (a label borrowed from the Arab precedent)—all of which, by the way, have been urban in nature and dimension.

In a way, the currently uncertain outcome of the transformations occurring in a number of Arab countries may also be another element in common with these other instances of widespread and sudden protest movements—besides, of course, the practice of pitching tents in the squares. The heterogeneity of the participants, the organizational improvisation, and, above all, the lack of sound alternative projects have generated limited or even unintended political consequences, at least in the short term. The disgruntled Spanish youth may ultimately have contributed to the decline of the Socialist Party, to the benefit of the conservative and Catholic Popular Alliance in the subsequent parliamentary elections. The New Yorkers camping in Zuccotti Park apparently included socialist sympathizers as well as supporters of Ron Paul, a libertarian Republican presidential candidate, who later fell out of the race. Vladimir Putin’s return to the presidency was not jeopardized by demonstrators defying Arctic temperatures along the Moskva River’s banks in December 2011.

Yet the Arab Spring, whether or not it may have turned—temporarily?—into a winter in some cases, has its own specificities in terms of both origin and context. One such specificity is that only here do the countries concerned have a colonial past that marks their recent history and thus their culture, their institutions, and even their borders. As a consequence, they are still going through a process of finding an identity, developing a sense of belonging, and building a state—a process in which they are at different, often unstable, yet probably irreversible stages of advancement. The colonial heritage can hardly be erased, and this may make it, along with the factors of proximity and interdependence, an inescapable challenge for Europe and the United States to address.

A Revolution without Revolutionaries

As the dust painfully settles on the stage of the uprisings, a few observations can be made. First, few, if any, members of the new generation that assembled in the North African squares well over a year ago are now in power. The young people and mostly secular intellectuals who were at the forefront of the uprisings had no clear political agenda and were not capable of building strong political parties and promoting an alternative platform for government. Many did not even plan to go into politics. In sum, they did not act like real revolutionaries. The countries are still in the hands of the previous generation, that is, the old political elites, including the Islamists who have been on the scene for decades, though kept on the margins by the regimes. These are people of the past—conservative, even traditionalist people—whatever their background in the establishment, the military, or the religious sphere. They are not revolutionaries, either.

Nonetheless, the widespread impression that a revolution has taken place is not entirely misplaced because the uprisings were the symptom of the profound social, cultural, and religious change that societies in North Africa, and in the Arab Muslim world at large, have undergone—and to a greater degree than in other places where there have been popular protests, which is another major specificity. Thus not only has discontent overthrown the symbols of the past regimes, but expectations, occasionally unrealistic, have been raised that are bound to have political consequences sooner or later. The current leaders, although people of the past, and the newly elected members of parliament—most of whom were, for various reasons, initially extraneous to or reluctant participants in the movement—have had to adapt to the new scene that came out of the movement itself. They must deliver on the economy as well as on governance and stability in order to show that they are trying to meet at least some of the expectations.

The Islamists are now part of the game, and this leads to a second observation: they, too, will have to adapt to this new political landscape. This implies that they will have to make compromises and build coalitions with partners who vary from country to country. The doctrine itself has to be recast in a new context, with no denomination being in a position to claim a monopoly on Islam. This is a way of becoming democratic without being liberal. Actually, the Islamists are very conservative, but they too have to respond in one way or another to the people who voted for them and want results, progress. To be under the scrutiny of the electorate is a new situation for them.

A third observation is about the predominantly domestic nature of the protest movement. Despite the contagion moving rapidly from country to country, first through North Africa and then extending to almost the entire Middle East (thanks to today's highly pervasive telecommunications), both the perspective of the uprisings and the aforementioned expectations they generated have essentially remained within the boundaries of each country. With more or less explicit surprise, Western media noted the fact that no American flags, or for that matter Israeli ones, were initially burned in the squares of Tunis, Cairo, or Alexandria. Throughout 2011 neither the nationalists nor the Islamists substantially raised the issue of the treaty with the Zionist state, not even in a country as sensitive to the issue as Egypt is. Instead, patriotic rhetoric has been widespread and rarely, if ever, associated with militant advocacy to spread the movement abroad, despite the common perception of being watched by the world.

The suggestion here that there was a revolution without revolutionaries, with all the implications just discussed, is reinforced by the striking differences from the Islamic upheaval in Iran back in 1979. There the rebels took over power, did not care about building coalitions, and ended up in charge of the country. Then they tried to export the revolution into the Middle East and to confront the superpowers of the time. Those were revolutionaries.

An Irreversible Transformation

Though the protest movement that shook most of the North African countries stopped short of effecting the replacement of the political class, the transformation that led to the "Arab Spring" is irreversible because it affects the very fabric of society. Three aspects of the process are of the most evident significance. The first one is generational. The demographics of the region have changed, particularly during the last twenty years, because of the drop in fertility rates. Today Tunisia has a lower fertility rate than France, for instance. The current young generation, however, is the last from a period of wild population growth, while also being the first to reach adulthood in a new sociological context. To start with, there is more gender equality than ever before—equality in terms of education and age of marriage. People marry later—in their twenties or thirties—and have fewer children, if they have children at all. They also are more educated than their parents, and since they are more likely to understand and speak foreign—especially Western—languages, they are more connected globally and better informed. Consequently, this younger generation

tends to be less defined by the roles of the family framework and the traditional patriarchal society at large. The undermining of the old social structures carries with it the seeds of a change in the way people see themselves.

As a consequence, the father figure embodied in the great charismatic leader no longer resonates—which brings us to a second aspect of the change, one related to political culture. The fall of the great leader, under whom the people were supposed to be united, goes hand in hand with the diminishing appeal of the traditional ideologies, be they Arab, nationalist, or Islamic. People have become more individualistic. They tend to ask for good governance and citizenship rather than ideology. Even the call for dignity, a personal reference, instead of honor, a collective value, is significant in this respect. Thus people are less amenable to the standard propaganda, such as democracy being a foreign, indeed a Western, plot to destroy the unity of the Arab people. Instead, they believe in democracy, though possibly less as a deeply felt cultural conviction than as something that simply must be—a fact of life.

The third aspect of the transformation concerns religion. As stated above, the Islamists are now in the political forefront, which is, however, a pluralist scene in which they do not form a solid bloc. They too are confronted with the surge of individualism and the increased rejection of top-down authority; in addition, the decline of ideology can be extended to faith. The fast-growing access to communications and the Internet may help preach the word of God and spread *fatwas*, but it is a two-way street that puts the hierarchy under a new kind of scrutiny from the believers. Furthermore, half of these happen to be women, whose rapid empowerment in terms of personal choice about reproduction and also access to education affects the basic structure of the family and hence inevitably that of the religious community. In sum, while most observers focus on the issue of Islam taking over the polity and society in Arab countries, what is happening appears to suggest that it is the societal transformation that will affect the religious outlook of the Muslim world in the future.

There are precedents for similar kinds of development in other countries, including Western ones. One telling example can be found in the United States during the second half of the twentieth century. Throughout that period of their national history, Americans consolidated their specificity among Western countries in terms of the nearly unanimous importance given to religion and worship attendance, two features that declined only in part during the eighties and nineties. Most of the Christian denominations initially resisted but then accommodated successive societal transformations that directly affected church doctrine, such as divorce, premarital sex, contraception, and

unmarried couples, all of which were ultimately accepted by a large part of the population—often to a greater degree than in secularist Europe. More recently, faith-based resistance to societal change has retrenched on the issues of abortion and homosexuality. Something not that different has been occurring, by the way, among Muslim societies.

This leads us to underline the fact that there have been religion-related misjudgments in the West about the movement in Northern Africa, at least in its early phase. The widespread view has been that a political upheaval, such as the advent of full democracy, or a social metamorphosis, such as the emancipation of women, among the Arab Muslims had to be preceded by a phase of secularization or some sort of theological reform. This perspective ignores the history of Christianity, which demonstrates that while the same theology has been there for twenty centuries, the reference to religion in the political sphere has taken very diverse and divergent forms. And those who advocate a religious reformation of Islam, on the model of Protestantism, tend to forget that though Martin Luther was a religious reformer, he espoused neither democracy nor liberalism.

The parliamentary elections, held in Tunisia and Egypt in late 2011 and at the beginning of 2012, confirmed both the feasibility of a sufficiently fair vote and the strength of religion among the population. However, their outcomes made plain that it is not the entire society that has been experiencing the transformations just discussed—be they political, religious, demographic, or gender related. The movement that became so visible at a time of crisis turned out to involve perhaps only a minority. The electoral geography revealed the important differences between urban and rural populations. The conservative backlash has come primarily from citizens located in rural areas. But even among urban people, there are those who are afraid of going too far, who are concerned about instability, losing tourists, and seeing the economy at risk of irreparable collapse. The subsequent presidential elections in Egypt have, in fact, illustrated this state of affairs. The standard bearers of conservatism prevailed on both the secularist and religious sides. At the same time, the highly heralded breakthrough of the Islamist vote in the parliamentary elections failed to find confirmation, and the candidate closer to the spirit of Tahrir Square did not end up as marginal as many had predicted. Above all, the first turn manifested a relatively normal “balance of power” among Egyptian political subjects, with none of the candidates getting more than one-fourth of the vote. Hence, we witness the apparent oxymoron of the conservative revolution happening in the area, at least in the short term. Over the longer term, how-

ever, it appears inevitable that the generation behind the Arab Spring, including the teenagers who breathed the air of the uprisings and are likely to grow up clicking incessantly on a personal computer or cell phone, will have growing influence on the way their societies evolve during the next decades. How this will affect national political and institutional frameworks the day after tomorrow—as well as international relations and crises within and beyond the region—is of course an open question.

The Geostrategic Context

For the first time in the history of the Middle East since decolonization, the upheavals within the area were not related to geostrategic issues, such as great power rivalries or security of oil supplies—or indeed a conflict with Israel—nor to supranational movements, such as pan-Arabism or pan-Islamism. Nonetheless, they have set in motion a profound change in the geostrategic picture of the region, either directly whenever the spread of the revolt takes a sectarian form, as in Bahrain and Syria, or indirectly as the rules of the game for policymaking—foreign policy included—come under increasing public scrutiny. Gone is the era of the dictators' club, within which disagreements could be settled by personal phone calls or private meetings, occasionally followed by a generous exchange of cash—the favorite tools of Saudi foreign policy.

The end of this era is confirmed by the actions of the surviving authoritarian regimes, which are attempting to overshadow the reform movements by shifting attention to issues that could fuel a broader regional crisis. Today the main divide in the Middle East is less and less related to the Israel-Palestine issue. The Palestinians have been unable to adopt the new tools of protest that developed out of the North African squares, so Israel can continue to have a substantially free hand in developing settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. At the same time Israel has resented the changes brought about by the Arab Spring, above all with regard to its future relationship with Egypt, and has tried to minimize its impact by focusing attention on Iran and its uranium enrichment activities. Tehran, in turn, has threatened to retaliate against Western pressures and more or less open Israeli threats of attack by blocking the Persian Gulf, an act that would translate into a direct challenge to the Sunni Arab kingdoms and emirates of the Gulf. Thus the remaining Sunni authoritarian regimes of the region find themselves sharing with Israel both the dislike of Arab populaces taking to the streets and the Iranian leadership seeking regional dominance.

In fact, the emerging geostrategic divide of the Middle East appears to be between a Sunni camp, led by Saudi Arabia and comprising also the Muslim Brotherhood, and a Shiite camp, led by Iran and including the Assad regime in Syria as well as Hezbollah. To an extent, Turkey could be seen as part of the former, at least as long as Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) is in charge, and Iraq part of the latter, thanks mainly to the U.S. intervention of 2003. The protagonists of the Arab uprisings, particularly in Bahrain, would reject this new divide but have little choice other than being enlisted on either side of it and conforming to the new rules of the game. Hamas, for instance, despite its political proximity with Iran and Hezbollah, closed its offices in Syria and moved to Egypt.

The events in Syria have absorbed much of the international attention during the first half of 2012. This is not surprising because in contrast to what has been happening in North Africa, related developments in Syria are key to the geopolitical transformation in the Middle East and come as a confirmation of the new divides. The crisis of the Assad regime and the protracted and bloody civil conflict in that unfortunate country have the potential to strengthen the Sunni camp, diminish Iranian influence in the Arab Middle East, and isolate Hezbollah.

At the same time Turkey has gained soft influence throughout the upheavals as a paradigm of a relatively successful Muslim and democratic state. It is regarded as an emerging regional power because of its role in the sectarian and multiethnic conflict taking place across its southern borders—notwithstanding a potential recrudescence of the Kurdish issue to trouble the waters in Ankara.

The other game in the area that has attracted media coverage is the interplay of negotiations, sanctions, and possible military action to stem the Iranians' potential nuclear capability. The scenario of a major Israeli strike against a Muslim country has been held out as a way to mobilize the Arab streets against imperial Zionism and its American protector—and that scenario may, in fact, be developing, at least at a preliminary stage. But the assumption that this contingency would turn into a systematic rally in favor of Iran, thus offsetting the growing Sunni-Shiite divide, will likely prove groundless. Instead, the Tehran ayatollahs might ultimately find themselves as isolated as the Assad regime.

The Syrian crisis has further highlighted the decreased role of the great powers that was demonstrated throughout the Arab Spring. This applies to the United States in particular. The war in Iraq contributed to this state of affairs

because it had unexpected and unwelcome consequences, such as the already mentioned strengthening of the Shia camp. Moreover, democratization is not making progress in that country—nor is that happening in Libya either, by the way—further demonstrating the failure of the policy of exporting democracy. European leverage has proved even weaker, both at the national and EU level, despite the recurrent clauses of conditionality (linked to human rights protection) in the scattered attempts at cooperation with the countries of the area. Democratization, when and where it takes root, is done through laborious national and domestic processes, and the resulting regimes, while not necessarily anti-Western, are not going to be indebted to the West should they achieve some political stability.

The United States and the European countries have a limited capacity to influence the unfolding of events in the Middle East, both in terms of soft economic power, because of the limited incentives they have to offer, particularly in the current adverse economic circumstances, and of hard military power, notwithstanding the successful intervention in Libya to which the Americans contributed reluctantly and in which the Europeans soon reached the ceiling of their modest war-waging capability. The hope of reproducing the convergence of favorable circumstances that brought about the fall of Qaddafi has proved illusory in other contexts, such as in Syria. Moreover, further options for initiative have largely been held hostage to the “poker game” with the Iranian regime. Thus, in the short run, the West appears to have little choice other than to assume a low profile in the region and follow a realistic approach based on a cool assessment of national interests.

In a time when there is much talk on both sides of the Atlantic about rising new powers (the BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), it may be worth noting, however, that none of these emerging actors has taken advantage of the changes in the Middle East—either by choice or through lack of clout—to substantially increase its role in the region. Those having a seat in the UN Security Council, either permanently or by turn, gave a lukewarm green light to the action in Libya and then dragged their feet when resolutions concerning Syria were put on the table, while the protesters were being massacred by the regime. Regarding Iranian nuclear capabilities, neither Moscow nor Beijing—nor for that matter Delhi, Brasilia, or Pretoria—favors nuclear proliferation, but they also dislike the idea of international pressure being exerted, via sanctions or other methods, on sovereign states. In general, the more or less shared preference among the BRICS seems to have been to let the West burn its fingers with the hot potatoes while confronting a loss of leverage in the area

rather than to seek for themselves new popularity and influence among the changing Arab polities and societies through active engagement in the region.

Thus, Americans and Europeans would be well advised not to limit themselves to the realistic and sober approach just suggested for the immediate future in view of the current constraints. They should give due consideration to the longer-term and deeper causes of change in North Africa and the Middle East. The innovative foreign policy paradigms presented in this volume are an attempt to adapt to an international system experiencing societal transformations. Leaders on both sides of the Atlantic may find that the implementation of policies based on these paradigms is most fruitful in those countries of the region that are undergoing the agonizing processes of renewal while being less subject to the distortions of broader geostrategic factors.

Presentation

The preceding introductory remarks were intended to help the reader understand the rationale and organization of this volume. The first part examines the transformations that have occurred in Arab societies. Although the primary focus is on the countries along the southern shores of the Mediterranean, this discussion also covers what is shared by the broader region in terms of geography, history, religion, and culture. Six areas of change have been chosen as particularly relevant and thus deserving of specific analysis.

Demographics and two-way migrations between North Africa and Europe constitute the first such area and are treated by Philippe Fargues, director of the Migration Policy Center at the European University Institute (EUI). The issue of compatibility between Islamic revival and democracy is discussed in the context of Egypt and Tunisia by Olivier Roy, head of the Mediterranean Program at the Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies of EUI. How the fast-changing roles of women in Arab society interact with both demographics and religion is a topic covered by two Italian university professors, Maria Cristina Paciello and Renata Pepicelli. Another case of rapid transformation is the extraordinary penetration of telecommunications—particularly the Internet—into Arab societies so as to become a vehicle of Islamic expression, as Gary Bunt of the University of Wales, himself a blogger, claims in his piece. Modern small and medium-size commercial and social entrepreneurship is also an important factor of change, at least potentially, as two academics from Madrid, Gonzalo Escribano and Alejandro Lorca, explain in their chapter. Moving from the micro to the macro level, the subsequent contribution by

Caroline Freund and Carlos Primo Braga of the World Bank examines the economic framework and consequences of the current Arab transitions.

The second part of the book is about those cultural and religious as well as political and economic factors that have influenced the Western response, or lack of it, to the Arab Spring. It is also about the policy options that remain open. To begin with, Jonathan Laurence, of Boston College, deals with the policies the United States has pursued toward North Africa in recent years and the future choices to be made. American attitudes underlying foreign policy are frequently affected by stereotypes, and Middle East policy is no exception, as another academic from Boston, Alan Wolfe, discusses in his contribution. Turning to Europe, the unsatisfactory political response of the European Union to the ongoing societal change occurring on the other side of the Mediterranean is treated by Roberto Aliboni of the Italian Institute of International Affairs. The problem is not only political but cultural since the Islamist challenge has to be confronted by the Europeans, and Western culture at large, at a time of changing religious perspectives in the world, as discussed in the subsequent chapter by Olivier Roy. The final chapter by Cesare Merlini, of the Italian Institute for International Affairs and a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, analyzes the reactions on both sides of the Atlantic to the unexpected events in North Africa and explores the policy options still open to a less influential West.