The Changing Face of the Middle East: EUMEF Alumni Conference; Berlin, November 15-17, 2012
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DGAP**report**

EUMEF Alumni Conference
Berlin, November 15–17, 2012
The Changing Face of the Middle East

by Manuela Hager and Thomas Claes
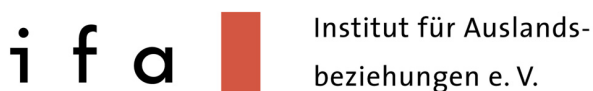*Dina Fakoussa and Christian Achrainer (eds.)*

DGAP

About the EU-Middle East Forum

The EU-Middle East Forum (EUMEF) is a dialogue and networking program for young and mid-level professionals from North Africa as well as Turkey and Europe. The Forum was created in 2011, and it conceptualizes and organizes policy workshops like the New Faces Conferences and International Summer Schools. Every two years, all alumni of the New Faces Conferences and Summer Schools come together for an alumni reunion in Berlin. The forum tackles and analyzes different political, economic, and social issues and developments in the Arab region and Turkey, and it gives critical scrutiny to German and EU responses and policies. EUMEF is the follow-up project of the International Forum on Strategic Thinking (2006–2010) and the Forum European Foreign and Security Policy (1997–2005).

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Foreword

When Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire in Tunis on December 17, 2010, no one could have imagined that this act of protest would eventually lead to the resignation of Tunisia's president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January 14, 2011, after 23 years in power. This, in turn, inspired protests and paved the way for uprisings in several other Arab countries, with varying results. In Egypt, mass protests led to the toppling of long-time president Hosni Mubarak and the beginning of a rocky transformation process; in Libya, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi was ousted by a military intervention; in Syria, the ongoing civil war that started in March 2011 has cost tens of thousands of civilian lives; in Morocco, King Mohamed VI introduced small-scale reforms from above to channel public unrest; Bahrain witnessed mass protests, which have been suppressed by brute force; and even in the oil-rich Gulf monarchies, signs of dissatisfaction and protest can be observed.

The Arab world has always been a heterogeneous region with clear differences in social fabrics, development statuses, political systems, freedoms, alliances etc. This heterogeneity has become even more evident since the uprisings took place. In its formal and informal sessions, the Alumni conference of the EU-Middle East Forum (EUMEF) shed light on different facets and outcomes of the Arab uprisings. It explored different domestic scenes, highlighting the new and old actors who are directing the course within the respective countries, their agendas and level of influence pertaining to the democratization process and political reforms, and the degree to which they respond to the populations' wishes. The conference also addressed how backlashes and developments running counter to the main demands of the uprisings can be counterweighed and reversed. Special attention was given to the economics of the uprisings. At the heart of the protests in the region were demands for social justice, decent education, health, and social security systems, and an end to massive poverty, unemployment, corruption,

and nepotism – to name the countries' most alarming economic and social woes. Discussions therefore scrutinized how these serious deficits were addressed (if they were), the type of reforms adopted, and what economic options were available to the rulers in the first place (against the background of a global neo-liberal order and the reality that neediness might hinder an emancipation regarding a free economic orientation). Finally – since one of the major byproducts of the uprisings is a very likely change of regional and international power relations and dynamics – the conference tackled the geopolitical implications of the uprisings. The impact of this reality, combined with the emergence of new respective political forces and rulers, on relations vis-à-vis regional and international actors such as Turkey, Israel, Iran, the US, and the EU were at the center of the debate.

The reunion gathered 79 promising junior and senior experts and activists from the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) and the EU, all alumni of EUMEF's International Summer Schools and New Faces Conferences over the past 15 years. With the exception of keynote speaker, the conference consisted entirely of alumni speakers, discussants, and participants. These had the chance to explore cooperation opportunities and present their own projects and initiatives. We genuinely believe that these intense platforms for dialogue, learning, and networking (bringing together different perspectives and views from Europe and the MENA region) are essential when attempting to make sense of the current historically unique and very complex developments in the Arab region. Only when grasping the different interests and needs of the various sides can constructive solutions and engagement be developed. EUMEF therefore attaches immense value to its network and is very grateful for the huge interest in EUMEFs work expressed by the alumni.

Dina Fakoussa, Head of EUMEF
Christian Achrainer, Program Officer at EUMEF

Keynote Speech: The Challenge of Pluralism in the Middle East

The keynote speech focused on pluralism in the Middle East and how it will shape the outcome of the ongoing political transformation in the Arab World. The speaker started by pointing out that it was not radical Islamic forces that were threatening the transitions to democracy, but the lack of a pluralist political system. The fact that Egypt and Tunisia are now dominated by one strong religious party, and that the so-called liberal or secular parties are too small and too weak to challenge the ruling party, is the greatest threat for these countries.

In comparison to Egypt, the situation in Tunisia and Morocco is slightly better, because these countries have an uninterrupted history of a multi-party system. Some of those parties have been operating since the 1950s and are deeply rooted in society. Consequently, the political system is more balanced and the Moroccan Islamist party PJD does not dominate the political scene. In Egypt, however, the Muslim Brotherhood's FJP gained the largest share of votes by far.

Thereafter, the speaker laid out three reasons why secular parties get few votes, especially in Egypt: First, the secular parties have difficulties spreading their message. Their programs are too abstract and speak mostly to intellectuals (i.e. the Wafd Party) or they are still trying to use socialism as a rallying point (i.e. the Nasserist parties), while the people no longer believe in this ideology. Also, the important issue of social justice has now become the terrain of the Islamist parties. Second, the secular parties are poorly organized on the ground. The third problem is the lack of trustworthy leadership, as nearly all of the secular leaders collaborated with the old regime at some point, whereas the Islamists were brutally prosecuted by the old regimes and therefore have more credibility. Additionally, most secular parties have one strong leader and coalition-building was hindered by the "question of egos." Here again, Morocco can be regarded as an exception, since the secular parties in Morocco have a historical legacy and are organized in the same way as the Islamists; they have a strong presence throughout the nation and not only in the big cities.

Islamist parties are not free from internal divisions or even ruptures, however. Ennahda in Tunisia, for example, postponed its party meeting several times to avoid dealing with problematic issues. It was mostly access to power that kept the victorious Islamist parties together. Hence, the Islamist parties were far more pluralistic than it appeared.

During the discussion that followed, many participants put forward the issues of rigged elections in Egypt and a secret alliance between the Muslim Brotherhood and the military. The speaker said that there was no clear evidence supporting such speculations and dismissed them as conspiracy theories. Participants also mentioned the alleged funding of Islamist parties by some Gulf states, whereas others argued that the secular parties could also gain financial support, for example from the business sector, but this would require better organization and more credibility. Besides, the secular parties could copy the success of the Muslim Brotherhood and mobilize volunteers to improve outreach. One participant asked how the EU or the US could help to achieve a pluralistic system in the region. The speaker stressed that it would not be helpful to give financial support to the secular parties but rather to help them build organizational structures and train young people. Another controversial discussion developed around the question of whether members of the old regime should be integrated into the political arena. While some argued that it would be very dangerous to exclude them completely from the political sphere and that only the highest ranks should be barred because otherwise such prohibitions could be exploited for political purposes, others preferred to reject their reemergence. Asked about the issue of the Coptic minority in Egypt and whether they should form a Christian religious party, the speaker said that the Copts would be more successful if they joined secular parties.

Lectures at the DGAP

The following pages summarize each speaker's contribution to the Alumni Reunion (in order of appearance).

Panel I: A Tour d'Horizon through Domestic Political Scenes (part one)

1. The Interplay of Regime Survival Strategy and Political Reform in Jordan and Morocco after the Arab Spring

Jordan and Morocco are in general no exceptions, as they face the same problems as other Arab countries, such as social injustice, rising energy prices, etc. However, they seem to be immune to the outcomes of the Arab Spring, which in other countries has led to a transition process or to civil war. Jordan and Morocco share some important conditions: both are semi-rentier economies and both are monarchies in which the rule of the king is religiously legitimized by a "civic myth." In addition, in both countries Islamists form the main opposition and foreign policies

are shaped by geopolitical constrains – the West Sahara conflict in the case of Morocco and the Palestinian issue and the situation in Syria in the case of Jordan.

The speaker then went on to describe the political situation in Jordan and the reform projects that have been undertaken after the Arab Spring. Jordan was the site of mostly non-violent protests which were not spontaneous, but organized by the Muslim Brotherhood. The main demands of the protests were economic reform, social justice, and a more effective fight against corruption. The state reacted to these protests mainly with legal reforms and new constitutional amendments. A new election law was implemented and new elections were held in 2012. However, in November 2012 new protests erupted and made clear that such cosmetic reforms were not seen as sufficient by the people. Therefore, the king would have to put much more effort into the reform process, as otherwise the opposition parties would boycott the next elections and bring the reform process to an end. At the same time, the Jordanian regime is stable and not likely to fall.

As for the Moroccan case, the existence of an established multi-party system helped significantly in lending credibility to the elections. In addition, the king called for a public referendum on a new constitution, which now limits the king's powers. As a result, the prime minister is now appointed by the largest party in the parliament, currently the moderate Islamist PJD. Morocco's main challenge remains the modernization of the country. Solving this problem might also be the central test for the new Islamist government. Jordan's biggest difficulties on the other hand are due to its complicated geopolitical surroundings, but also to the fact that the reform process has been rather slow. In sum, the political reform process in Morocco is much more advanced than in Jordan.

In the discussion that followed, the presentation's discussant stressed that the comparison between Jordan and Morocco is very interesting, especially since the two countries are usually disregarded in political analyses of the region. Two more commonalities could be added; first, both kings see themselves as modern and reform-oriented and second, both countries have a loyal opposition, which never challenges the monarchic system as such. One participant asked how reliable economic and election data were and the speaker replied that caution was necessary regarding all data from these countries and that elections were generally manipulated, although no longer at the ballot box, but instead through gerrymandering. Other comments revolved around the idea of "authoritarian upgrading" and on the question of whether regimes can survive if the king exclusively manages the transition.

2. The Other Side of a Neo-Liberal Miracle: Economic Reform and Political De-Liberalization in Ben Ali's Tunisia

The presentation focused on the seemingly contradictory fact that economic liberalization in Ben Ali's Tunisia allowed for a deeper penetration of state power into society and for new modes of control in a climate of economic uncertainty. The classic modernization theory sees a correlation between capitalism and democracy but is widely regarded as flawed nowadays. Nevertheless, elements still resurfaced sometimes. No economic statistics were used in the analysis because numbers are always associated with power and are usually manipulated in authoritarian regimes.

Tunisia was seen as a perfect illustration of the failure of modernization theory. The country experienced an "economic miracle," as it was called by the Tunisian state. However, this did not only lead to democratization, but it did lead to further de-liberalization. The case studies depicted in the presentation were two Tunisian financial institutions, the Banque Tunisienne de Solidarité (BTS) and the Fonds de Solidartité Nationale (FSN). Both institutions are presented by the state as institutions for the redistribution of wealth, funded by wealthier segments of society to help those disadvantaged by economic liberalization. However, the BTS and the FSN did not create wealth or fight unemployment, but instead mainly added to an already large state bureaucracy. These institutions in fact served another purpose in which they were quite successful: to create modes of dependency and supervision, which should eventually prolong the regime's grip on power. To this end, the jobs created by the two institutions were precarious and were paid much less than normal jobs. Therefore, people remained dependent on state institutions. For some jobs, young graduates were even required to join or work with the ruling party. Additionally, payments to BTS and FSN were closely monitored and provided a further tool of state control.

The regime's emphasis, also spread via the media, on the need to preserve the Tunisian "economic miracle" acted as a further control tool. The regime pushed the message that the economy was dependent on foreign investment and tourism, therefore nobody should protest in order not to endanger the "economic miracle." In alliance with the Tunisian business sector, the regime also promoted a certain work ethos and the concept of primisme, the nationalist idea that Tunisia has always been more advanced than other Arab countries.

Through such means, the regime's institutions were able to control the unemployed and the employed, the poor and richer segments alike. Even outsiders, such as

European states and analysts or the World Bank, reproduced the economic statistics supplied by the Tunisian regime, although they had previously been proven wrong. Internationally, Tunisia was portrayed as positive and developing, a notion that further invalidated internal dissent. The regime also strengthened its ties with the West by promoting a strong secularism and connecting the road to democracy to anti-Islamism.

In the discussion that followed, many participants compared the situation in Tunisia with that in Egypt, which was also dominated by a franchise economy and focused on consumption and real estate rather than production. In addition, many were reminded by the Tunisian work ethos of similar calls to "go back to work" in Egypt after the revolution. Another part of the discussion revolved around the question of public myths and whether people really believed them. In the speaker's opinion, a regime could not survive by mere repression and that there had to be something else to keep the state together. The last question dealt with the situation of the BTS and FSN after the revolution: They had survived the turmoil, but were also criticized for their notorious corruption.

3. The Role of the Media in Creating Revolutions: The Case of Egypt

The presentation focused on the role of domestic, regional, and international television during the Egyptian uprising that began on January 25, 2011. In regards to domestic television, differences between private and state-owned broadcasters were also taken into account.

The state-owned TV broadcasters from the very beginning ignored the protests or downplayed their size. To illustrate this point, the speaker showed recordings of the state media's covering of the protests and how they only showed small numbers of protesters in side streets of Tahrir Square or ignored the protests and aired pictures of celebrations of national police day on January 25. In the later days of the revolution, state-owned TV was the main tool by which the regime communicated with its citizens and, for example, informed the public about curfews and other measures.

In regards to the private satellite channels, it cannot be said that the regime controlled these stations. Nevertheless, the private broadcasters followed the state-owned TV broadcasters during the first days of the revolution and also ignored or downplayed the protests. However, there was a particular moment during the protests when the style of private coverage changed. This was the "Battle of Camels" on January 28, when regime-hired thugs on camels and horses tried to brutally crush the protestors

on Tahrir Square. After this event, the private TV broadcasters changed to a pro-revolutionary position. This shift in positions can be explained as the private broadcasters' wish to follow the public mood which changed very much after the "Battle of Camels".

The speaker concluded that the change in the private broadcasters' position had been very important for the revolution as it served as a catalyst for the next days, and their positive coverage brought significantly more people to the streets.

The discussant saluted the examination of the role of "traditional" media in a time when most research is done on the so-called new media and on social networks. However, the main critique was that the analysis should have elaborated further on the internal mechanisms of the private broadcasters to better explain their shift. Besides, it was considered helpful to include the role of the new media in an analysis of traditional media. Other participants also said that the presentation could have put more stress on the importance of international media such as al-Jazeera, France24, or BBC Arabic. The speaker replied that France24 and BCC were not very prominent in Egypt and that due to the rivalry between Egypt and Qatar, al-Jazeera was not seen as a very objective source of news by many Egyptians.

Panel II: A Tour d'Horizon through Domestic Political Scenes (part two)

1. Current Issues Facing Lebanon and its Relation to the Syrian Crisis

The presentation provided an overview of the current political situation in Lebanon, delineating the most severe challenges facing the country. Especially in light of the recent assassination of Wissem el-Hassan, head of the intelligence division of the Internal Security Forces, many analysts predict a new wave of violence spreading out across the country.

Political stagnation as well as corruption within all levels of government are serious internal issues. The Lebanese political system can be described as "consociational" and confessional; power is divided among the country's communities according to their demographic weight, half of the seats in parliament are ascribed to Muslims and half to Christians. Furthermore, the country is divided into two coalitions consisting of different political parties and communities: the March 8 coalition, which nominated the current head of government, Najib Mikati, and which is affiliated with Hezbollah, and the March 14 coalition, which acted against the Syrian occupation and gath-

ers the majority of Sunni Muslims, the fact that there has been no renewal of the political class has led to political stagnation and consequently, desperately needed political and economic reforms have not been implemented. In addition, the country is politically divided with regards to the crisis in Syria. While the March 8 coalition supports Syria logistically and Hezbollah has sent troops, the March 14 coalition supports regime change.

The deteriorating economic situation was mentioned as a second challenge. Growing insecurity and incidents of kidnapping of tourists from the Gulf region, in addition to the Syrian crisis, have harmed tourism, which is one of the country's main economic sectors. Corruption, massive unemployment, and inflation create further tensions. Even more severe, however, is the situation of the Palestinian refugees who have no citizenship and hence enjoy neither economic nor political rights. As the role of the Palestinians during the Lebanese civil war is still very present within society, the issue of their critical living conditions is hardly tackled. Ignoring this problem is very dangerous, as the situation could explode at any time.

Not only the domestic background, also the regional context as well as the behavior of the international community have to be taken into account when analyzing the situation in Lebanon, so the argument went. Foreign influence on internal issues in Lebanon has always been dominant. This can be exemplified by Wissem el-Hassan's assassination, after which Western governments ignored opposition claims to a new government and backed the current administration, because they considered stability in Lebanon more important in light of the Syrian crisis.

According to the presentation's discussant, the division between the two coalitions must also be linked to the political division in the region. While the March 14 coalition is supported by the US and Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iran side with the March 8 coalition. Lebanon can be considered as a playground for East and West: whereas the West sees the country as a continuation of Syria, predicting that Hezbollah will fall after the fall of Assad, Iran considers Lebanon as an alternative to Syria as regards support for Hezbollah and against Israel. Not only political actors were heavily influenced by foreign agendas, but also civil society in Lebanon. However, new groups are emerging that are frustrated with the current situation and both coalitions because they are allegedly pursuing an international, instead of a national, agenda.

Despite the deteriorating situation, the speaker sees little chance that recent events will lead to a civil war in Lebanon. Since Hezbollah is the only armed group in the country apart from the state, no oppositional group or ac-

tor equipped to start an armed conflict can be identified. During the discussion, this view was heavily contested by the argument that every group in Lebanon has arms and even if the tensions do not lead to a civil war, civil violence is very likely to break out. In addition to serious internal problems, the international environment contributed greatly to instability in Lebanon. Above all, the state has to regain its authority in order to be able to control all actors in the country, especially Hezbollah, and to initiate reforms.

2. Suppressing the Uprising in Syria: Bashar al-Assad's Counterinsurgency Strategies

Since the beginning of the uprisings in Syria, political analysts and journalists have been predicting that Bashar al-Assad's fall is only a matter of time, given his decreasing support within the Syrian population. Pointing out that, so far, Western predictions have not come to pass, the presentation deconstructed common assumptions in support of the conclusion that Assad's regime will sooner or later be toppled.

The first argument that was challenged in the presentation is: If a regime loses the support of the population, it will lose the war. According to the speaker, it is not popular support that leads to a shift within the balance of power, but active support. Only when the opposition receives active support in terms of logistics, information, money or recruits, can it inflict damage on the regime's infrastructure and consequently win the war. Popular support, on the other hand, is not the decisive factor that leads to victory. Assad's regime knows very well that it cannot win the hearts of the population. Nevertheless, its counterinsurgency strategies prove to be successful.

In addition, analysts using this line of argument assume that there is only the possibility of siding with the regime or acting against it. Neutrality, or behavior which supports none of the opposing parties, is usually not considered. These analysts ignore the crucial fact that active support is in most cases provided by minorities, while the large silent majority becomes visible only at the end of the war or conflict, siding with the victorious party. The fact that this silent majority grows in number suffices any regime in order to survive. In the case of Syria, Assad's brutality is the reason why he is losing popular support, but it is also the reason why he is still in power. The situation in Iraq in 1991 can be used as a reference to illustrate this point, as Saddam Hussein, a minority leader like Bashar al-Assad, was in a far more fragile situation. After Saddam's army was decimated by coalition forces during the Second Gulf War, public dissent against the Baath

regime grew and Saddam's forces lost control over 14 of the country's 18 provinces. Yet, by using extreme violence, Saddam managed to survive and won the conflict. Likewise, Assad's brutality may ensure the survival of the regime.

The fragmented condition of the opposition is further complicating the situation. Although Syrian opposition factions agreed to unite in a National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces at the beginning of November, unity is far from achieved. Consequently, Syrian insurgents are disorganized and poorly equipped and the use of improvised explosive devices (IED's) such as roadside bombs will not suffice to defeat the regime. Moreover, the opposition could start venting its frustration with the persistency of the regime on the Syrian population.

Concerning the use of the term "opposition", the presentation's discussant stressed that journalists usually did not make clear whether they referred to armed rebels, political movements, or civil opposition. The term is used rather to describe any action or attitude against the government. Furthermore, the discussion focused on whether the international community will acknowledge the newly formed coalition. So far, the fragmentation of the opposition has been the main reason the international community has not provided arms and military equipment. In the light of the unification, excuses for not supporting the opposition in Syria are running out. Yet reactions from the US and France have been reserved and reluctant.

The speaker concluded that analysts were much too optimistic when writing about Syria's future because their argumentation was logically inconsistent. Instead, he urged them to be more moderate regarding their assumptions and predictions and to abstain from confusing analyses with political positions or wishful thinking.

3. A Middle Eastern Model of Democracy? Comparing Tunisian, Egyptian, and Israeli Discourses of Citizenship

Despite differences between the countries analyzed, a regional pattern in Middle Eastern understandings of "democracy" and "citizenship" that deviates from Western understandings can be depicted. Taking the catchphrases after the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia as a starting point, the speaker pointed out that in both countries, the discourse about democracy and

citizenship revolved around the issue of identity. Muhammad Morsi as well as Rashid Ghannouchi have claimed to be fully representative of their peoples in domestic and foreign policy as they, unlike the former

regimes, fully incorporate their respective country's Islamic identity. Thus they are building on a broad national consensus about the Islamic identity of their respective countries and adopting religious language as a means to mirror this consensus.

While the concept of individual citizenship is the basis of the Western democratic model, it is much less widespread in the Middle East. In the case of Egypt, Morsi never speaks of individuals but addresses the nation as a whole or as "sisters and brothers" or "sons and daughters." Therefore, he prizes collective community and national belonging above the individual citizen and his rights. He fosters a narrative of national cohesion by assuming that the nation has one shared goal, avoiding sectarianism. This indicates that democracy in Egypt is still at stake. Although civil society in Egypt is often regarded as a positive modern concept that was jeopardized by former regimes, but became independent from the state after the revolution, there is no link to the promotion of individual rights, because efforts usually address groups as a whole.

Israel, which perceives itself as a Western-style democracy in which individual rights are fully endorsed, has not witnessed a revolution similar to the one in Egypt. However, developments over the past forty years can be described as a demographic revolution, which is also reflected in the parliamentary and democratic system. Taking a closer look, discourse about citizenship or connected issues follows similar patterns as described for Egypt. Like the Egyptian leadership, Israeli leadership tries to represent the majority of the country. The majority narrative in Israel can be described as an ethno-nationalist discourse, as it refers to ethno-national groups, but also to religion.

During the discussion, the speaker pointed out that the main risk of this understanding of citizenship was the fact that the majority sets structures in which minority rights are endorsed as such, but individuals who are not accepted as minorities do not enjoy any rights or security. This is especially critical for persons who do not belong to one of the three acknowledged monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). In Egypt, for example, groups such as the Bahá'i are not recognized as minorities and hence lack full citizenship rights. It is therefore difficult for them to take equal part in society or to practice their religion, and they lack equal access to state institutions. This problem became very visible during the constitution-writing process, which was by no means inclusive, since groups that were not accepted were not involved in the process and persons who do not belong to the three acknowledged monotheistic religions will again

neither be recognized nor treated equally. In Tunisia, on the other hand, where the opposition parties are much stronger, a much more inclusive and all-encompasing discourse on individual rights is taking place within both different religious communities as well as secular groups.

Panel III: Geo-Political and Security Implications of the Arab Uprisings

1. Unintended Consequences? Coping with the Consequences of the Arab Spring in the Sahel

The presentation focused on the "unintended consequences" of the Arab Spring for the Sahel, especially the violent uprising against the Qaddafi regime in Libya. The Sahel is a historical frontier region. It has always been a buffer zone, dividing the Arab Maghreb from sub-Saharan Africa. The borders which nowadays exist between countries were once drawn by colonialists and have never really been accepted by the inhabitants of the region. Additionally, the region had largely been absent from the agendas of international policy after the Cold War, and even during the Cold War interest had never been high. However, after 9/11 and the appearance of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), interest reappeared although the terrorist groups in the Sahel are more Mafia-like organized crime organizations than jihadists.

The uprising and the ensuing civil war in Libya changed the situation dramatically. Well-armed Touareg groups, who had previously fought for Qaddafi, returned to northern Mali and quickly defeated the official army. The events also triggered a military coup in southern Mali and Malian democracy fell in only two months. Mali was previously regarded as a model state and the only democracy in the entire region. These events and the fact that the Touareg rebels worked closely together with militant jihadists quickly brought the Sahel onto international agendas. Many feared that northern Mali could become like Afghanistan in the 1990s and turn into a safe haven for terrorists.

The irony is the fact that the success of the movement for freedom and democracy in Libya had led to the fall of the only existing democracy in the Sahel. This development entails many risks and during the Libyan uprising, no one in the West had thought about the consequences the fall of the Libyan regime might have for the countries in the Sahel, which were closely connected and whose economies were largely dependent on remittances and funding from Libya.

The discussion that followed focused mainly on the possibility of a military intervention in northern Mali and on how neighboring states would react to such plans. The speaker emphasized that the ECOWAS intervention was in the main accepted by Mali's neighbors, but that its efficiency was questionable and that it might also be too late. Other questions were related to the role of Algeria, a country which has been largely against any Western intervention. Algeria did not want to be involved in any international intervention and therefore was not very supportive of an intervention in Mali either. The speaker concluded that any military intervention in the region would be very difficult due to the large area of operation, the high number of internally displaced persons, and the fact that AQIM has been operating in the region since 25 years.

2. Egypt-Israel-Palestine: The Bermuda Triangle?

The presentation focused on the situation in the Sinai Peninsula, and on how developments there influenced relations between Egypt, Israel, and Palestine. Israel has had a rather safe southern border over the past years, enabling it to deploy most of its troops to the northern frontier and around Gaza. However, after the regime change in Egypt, Israel faced new threats on its long border with Egypt. This had nothing to do with the actions of the Egyptian state, as both Israel and Egypt wanted to keep the "cold peace," which is also kept in place by the strong US influence on both countries. It is rather the threat from small terrorists groups operating in the security vacuum in Sinai which is worrying Israel the most. Local Bedouin groups in Sinai, who have been politically and economically neglected over centuries, took advantage of the security vacuum after the Egyptian Revolution. The Bedouins also allowed some jihadist groups to operate in the area and these groups undertook several attacks on Israel. Israeli security forces quickly reacted to the new threat and started to fortify the border with a fence, which will be finished by the end of 2012. Additionally, more troops and the Iron Dome missile defense system were deployed, and Israel was quite successful in building a human intelligence network in the border area.

From the Egyptian perspective, it is of crucial importance to regain the monopoly of force in the Sinai, as violence also poses a great security threat to Egypt and the tourism sector.

The relationship of the new Egyptian government and Hamas, a movement which originated from the Muslim Brotherhood, is complicated. Unlike what one might expect, Egyptian leadership had not given Hamas a blank

check, since they also wanted to build up international credibility and reestablish Egypt as a regional power. For the same reason, the border crossing at Rafah is still closed for trade, a fact that helps Israel maintain its blockade of Gaza. Due to its position in the Syrian crisis, Hamas also lost Iran and Syria as allies and suppliers of weapons and therefore needs to look for new funds. This is one of the reasons why Hamas split its leadership between Egypt and Qatar.

In the subsequent discussion, the presentation was criticized by some participants for mainly focusing on Israeli interests and for not looking at the issue from a human security perspective in Gaza or Egypt. One participant stressed that most of the attacks by jihadists in the Sinai were directed against Egyptian security forces and citizens and not against Israel. The speaker explained these attacks on Egyptian security forces as attempts of the jihadists and Bedouins to create an operational space in the Sinai which would allow for more coordinated attacks in the future. The emerging role of Qatar in the region was also part of the debate. It was put forth that Qatar plays both sides, as it replaced Syria and Iran in funding Hamas, but also has one of the largest US bases on its soil.

3. The Kurdish Question and the Arab Uprisings

Even though Kurds and Palestinians both have their own distinctive history, many similarities exist. Large segments of both populations live in the diaspora, spread out among different countries. Furthermore, both groups formed armed militias that have partly transformed into political actors, but have also resumed armed activities and have split into different factions that sometimes seem more concerned with fighting each other than fighting for some broader goal.

The Syrian revolution had dramatically changed the established power dynamics in the Kurdish regions, as the Kurdish movement in Syria, the PYD, had been able to secure a quasi-autonomous area. The PYD is aligned with the Kurdish movement in Turkey, the PKK, and therefore is an opponent to the Iraqi fraction, the Kurdish National Congress (KNC).

In regards to the situation of the Kurdish groups in the different countries, the speaker urged to understand that Turkey is first and foremost concerned about Kurdish military activity in northern Syria, as the area has already been used as a staging ground for attacks on Turkey. However, the reconciliation process in Turkey has been frozen for years now, and the legitimate demands of Kurdish political forces are not being answered, which might again strengthen the violent PKK. A military solu-

tion to the Kurdish question is impossible and would only support the radicals, a fact in which the speaker again saw a similarity to the Palestinians.

Iran is also trying to use its influence on Kurdish politics to make sure that Iraqi Kurds will not support Syrian Kurds in a potential fight against Assad. In Iraq, the party of President Talabani, the PUK, and the KNC are increasingly becoming rivals. But as the KNC is still dependent on the Iraqi central government, it is unlikely that they can openly support Syrian Kurds against Assad. However, the situation in northern Syria is getting worse as the PYD is increasingly fighting against the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and other Arab rebel groups. Until now, both sides have been trying to downplay the confrontation, but things might change over the next months.

In the discussion that followed, it was mentioned that dealing with the Syrian Kurds would also affect the Turkish Kurds and that the Arab Spring had already brought changes to Kurdish political agitation, such as the recent hunger strikes. The speaker again stressed that Turkey wants to keep Syria as a state, because if Syria splits up, the Kurds would have their own state in the region, which Turkey regards as being unacceptable. At this point, someone also asked whether Kurds would leave Turkey in this case to live in a new Kurdish state. In the speaker's opinion, this would probably not be the majority and any future Kurdish state would be at least economically dependent on Turkey.

Panel IV: External Actors and the Arab Uprisings

1. Overcoming Mutual Mistrust: A Consideration of America's Strategic Intentions in the Middle East

The presentation provided an overview of US strategy in the Middle East since World War II, focusing on Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. These three countries were not only selected because they are the closest allies of the US in the region, but also because they are the countries that have received the largest US investments. However, there have been differences regarding their ability to exert influence on the US. America's key strategic goals in the region are the interest in oil, security and stability, counter terrorism and, in light of the revolutions, the promotion of democracy and American values. Mutual mistrust between the US and its allies as regards the development of US involvement is growing, which is likely to have a serious impact on US strategy in the future.

Since 1970, Egypt has been America's closest ally, receiving almost $70 billion, mostly in the form of military aid. The US has focused on fostering peace between

Egypt and Israel and, after 9/11, on counterterrorism. Especially in the context of the latter, the US has been seriously concerned about Islamist activism in Egypt and connections with al-Qaeda. Despite these concerns, American support continued after the Muslim Brotherhood won the parliamentary as well as presidential elections. This is putting US President Barak Obama in a difficult situation as he is supporting a democratically elected government on the one hand, but has to bear in mind America's interest – namely Egypt adhering to the peace treaty with Israel and to counterterrorism efforts – on the other hand.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, US interests have been concentrated on oil. Since 9/11, however, distrust toward its ally has been rising on the American side, after Saudi involvement in terrorism was discovered. From Saudi Arabia's point of view, the relationship was further strained by America's intervention in Iraq, which has led to a shifting Sunni-Shia power balance in the region. In addition, the fact that Saudi Arabia could not manage to keep the oil price low – a key interest of the USA – could be a game changer within the relationship, as America has been starting to intensify relations with other oil exporting countries that have a growing impact on oil prices. Furthermore, the US is wary of Saudi Arabia's global missionary activities, whereas Saudi Arabia was shocked to see how quickly Egypt's Hosni Mubarak lost the support of its long-standing ally.

Regarding the American-Israeli relationship, there were deviating opinions about how to deal with the consequences of the Arab uprisings. Israel is mainly worried about the rise of Arab Islamism and Iran's nuclear program and is unsatisfied with America's policies in the region. In addition, the personal relationship between Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has not been very good, illustrated, for example, by Netanyahu's support for Mitt Romney during the presidential election campaign. The influence of the USA in the region was found to be diminishing due to the growing mistrust between America and its allies and America's inability to find suitable means to counter these developments. Furthermore, the speaker regarded America's current efforts as an anti-ideological pragmatism, because US practices are more pragmatic than strategic and do not follow a certain ideological or strategic framework.

During the discussion it was mentioned that it was indeed difficult to set up a clear strategy for a situation as complex and uncertain as the current situation in the Middle East. The speaker projected that the US would either revive its engagement in the region, for example

get actively involved in the Syrian crisis, or retreat and reorient toward other regions.

2. The European Parliament and EU Foreign Policy in the MENA Region

The presentation focused on defining the role of the European Parliament in establishing a European foreign policy in the MENA region. Providing a general description of the different organs of the European Union and their respective competences, the speaker compared the EU to a traditional "family". Within this metaphor, the European Commission (EC) plays the role of mother, as it is taking care of home issues, such as the internal market. The father on the other hand, in this case the member states and the European Council (EC), is responsible for those issues that are considered to be more important, for example issues closely related to the sovereignty of the member states such as health, education or foreign policy. The European Parliament (EP) in this picture resembles the son who has a voice, but not a vote.

In general, the EU has only a limited scope of power in terms of foreign policy, as member states decide these issues on their own. With the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, however, the EU introduced a new foreign relations framework, which included the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS), headed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR). Yet these changes did not widen the European Parliament's scope of influence on foreign policy issues, which continued to be outside the decision-making process.

The fact that the European Parliament does not have a decisive influence on foreign policy, however, does not mean that it cannot play a role. This can be exemplified by referring to the MENA region, where the EP's role can be fostered in the future. According to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR), Catherine Ashton, the MENA region is a top priority, not only due to the fact that it is a neighboring region, but especially due to recent events and the concomitant challenges, as well as member states' involvement in the region. There are eight EP delegations (out of a total of 41) that focus on the MENA region, partly by building on past initiatives, such as the Union for the Mediterranean, and partly by creating new ones, for example in cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council. So far, the EP has been balancing a mix of democracy-based and economy-based approaches. Illustrating the EP's successful engagement in the region, the speaker referred to the examples of Libya and Israel-Palestine.

In 2011, months before the toppling of Gaddafi, the EP addressed the European Council with recommendations regarding the EU-Libya Framework Agreement, stipulating, among other things, the inclusion of human rights issues and migrant rights in the agreement, as well as the opening of an EU delegation in Libya. When the uprisings started, the EP approved a resolution condemning human rights violations in the country and calling for an end to brutality and for Gaddafi's resignation. Additionally, the EP called on the HR to establish relations with the Libyan interim Transitional National Council and to support elections. The Libyan case shows that the new diplomatic framework, although it did not touch the EP directly, widened its scope of influence by providing the EP with the HR – a new ally who could spread the EP's views.

Regarding the EP's engagement in Israel-Palestine, the EU and Israel Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA), approved by the EP in October 2012 after two years of debating, was mentioned. Despite the main concern that pharmaceutical products from the occupied territories could enter the EU zone, the EP proved its strength by debating and finally deciding the issue.

The speaker concluded the lecture by proposing policy recommendations that aim to widen the scope of the EP's influence on foreign policy issues. Among others, a more specific framework targeting the MENA region should be developed. The EP should also act as a valuable partner of the EEAS, for example as a platform for greater access to civil society in the region, which is to a growing extent influenced by Islamist actors. Here again, the importance of lobbying the HR in order to compensate the EP's lack of legislative power in foreign policy issues must be stressed. Furthermore, the EP could implement the EC's tool of "naming and shaming" member states that do not act in line with the EP's recommendations. The Multiannual Financial Framework provides another new possibility through which the EP can use its power in order to create a more coherent and comprehensive approach to the MENA region.

The discussion highlighted in particular the limits of the conditionality linked to EU support in the MENA region. While the EU can use the prospect of membership in order to influence policies in Eastern Europe, potential membership and the concomitant benefits can obviously not be implemented in a Middle Eastern context. Thus, it was stipulated that the EU must find new mechanisms in order to make the less for less and more for more approach more effective.

3. Turkey and the Arab Uprisings

Over the past years, Turkey has undergone a tremendous transformation regarding its foreign policy and the status it enjoys within the international community. The presentation delineated how shifts in Turkey's foreign policy can be regarded as a precursor of the role it has played since the Arab Uprising.

The speaker started by providing a general background of the history and development of Turkish foreign policy. When Atatürk founded Turkey as a modern, secular Western republic in 1923, he made a clear break with the Muslim caliphate and, with it, the Muslim past and the heritage of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, Turkey detached itself from its "natural habitat" in the Middle East, reorienting itself toward the West. During the Cold War, Turkey was an ally of the US and its foreign policy depended on the interests of the West. However, the presentation's discussant pointed out that Turkey was never completely cut off from the Arab countries, but has always had relations to its neighbors. Instead, it should be regarded as a step-by-step shift toward the West.

Turkey's foreign policy strategies, however, changed with the AKP electoral victory in 2002. As a reformist pro-Western party that stands for a moderate interpretation of Islam, it continued to focus on the West, but included the element of natural habitat into its foreign policy strategies and turned toward its Muslim neighbors. The theoretical foundation was provided by the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who had authored and designed the change in his 2001 book Strategic Depth (in Turkish). Therein, he described the potential of Turkey's geopolitical and geostrategic position and how to realize it by opening to the East without breaking with the West. Although this did not imply imperial policies, it was often criticized as a new Ottoman policy.

Instead, Turkey wanted to revive the relations it once had with its neighbors but had neglected during the Cold War, and introduced a "zero problem policy" into its foreign relations. This included approaching Syria and Iran, which was highly problematic for the Turkish government, as it meant going against the interests of its Western allies. Nevertheless, without this partial turn toward the East, Turkey could not have played a credible role during and after the Arab Spring.

There are additional factors that turned Turkey into the main supporter of the uprisings. A thought articulated was that as a country with Muslim heritage and a secular system, Turkey was welcomed as a role model for the states undergoing political change. The AKP itself, having embraced Islam as part of their political think-

ing and interests, provided a role model for the newly formed (moderate) Islamist parties in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco. Turkey not only organized conferences for moderate Islamist political movements, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan also traveled to Tunisia and Egypt in order to offer the newly elected governments his advice and support. Concerning Syria, Turkey had in the past been most active in initiatives to build friendly economic relations and encouraged the Syrian government to introduce political reforms. After the conflict broke out, Turkey reacted quickly by assuring support for the opposition, hosting the Syrian National Council in Istanbul and taking in Syrian refugees. Furthermore, it mediated between different factions within the opposition, and played a significant role in bringing them together in the National

Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces at the beginning of November 2012. However, the war has spilled over to Turkey and criticism has arisen concerning Turkey's overly ambitious role in the Arab uprisings.

As to Turkey's relations to the US, they were found to have suffered from a deep crisis before and after America's invasion of Iraq in 2003, but have been successfully mended. Meanwhile, Turkey is recognized as the most important US ally in the region and cooperation regarding Syria has been very close. Turkey's relations with the EU, on the other hand, are not as close due mainly to the freeze of Turkish accession talks. The speaker concluded that the transformation of Turkey's foreign policy must be seen as the reason for the republic's growing influence in the Middle Eastern region today.

Note

The conference was held under the Chatham House Rule.

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