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The Arab Spring
Its Impact on the Region and on the Middle East Conference

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Abstract

The transformations broadly grouped under the term Arab Spring have shaken the foundations of a variety of Middle East regimes. This Policy Brief provides an overview of different cases where changes of and within the regime have taken place, as well as yet unsolved situations, with a view to the upcoming Middle East Conference.

Although the lack of progress in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as well as the international debate over the Iranian nuclear program are still contentious issues, the Arab Spring uprisings and their aftermath may provide a new context in which arms control initiatives could be more successful. It is too optimistic to think that existing dilemmas can be easily resolved in this new and changing environment, but the Arab Spring may provide strong momentum for change.

For the Facilitator of the Middle East Conference and his team the following factors should form a checklist of issues requiring immediate attention: how domestic events positively or negatively affect the decisions of involved actors; which countries are to take a leading and constructive role in the MEC process; how to benefit from a more visible Arab League; and finally, the Facilitator and his team should not ignore those countries which so far have not been affected by the Arab Spring but which will nevertheless be important for the Middle East Conference process. ■

This Policy Brief draws on the contributions of a number of participants from the Academic Peace Orchestra Middle East workshop held in Barcelona, Spain, from January 24–27, 2012. Participants came from a number of Arab countries as well as Turkey, Israel, the United States, Germany, Spain, and Hungary.

Since the international community agreed to hold a conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery vehicles (DVs) in May 2010, the regional political landscape has changed dramatically. All states of the region are called to attend the 2012 Middle East Conference (MEC). Various factors make this a complex initiative, including the earth-shattering events associated with the so-called Arab Spring that have the potential to transform both national political systems and the regional security landscape. This Policy Brief attempts to analyze whether and how the Arab Spring might affect regional foreign and security policies in the context of conflict formations and arms dynamics. This analysis is important in order to assess the interests and positions of Arab states in participating constructively in the Middle East Conference.

The Relevance of the Arab Spring for the Middle East

The tragic self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a young fruit vendor, in December 2010 sparked a series of unprecedented demonstrations in Tunisia. The success of the protests led to a wave of unrest, which spread to Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, and Yemen, and then to other countries in the region. The causes varied from country to country but mostly derived from domestic issues such as: a lack of democracy, human rights violations, wide-spread corruption, economic decline, unemployment, extreme poverty, rising food prices, and a number of demographic factors, such as a large percentage of educated and dissatisfied young people and the centralized systems that marginalize parts of the population outside capital cities. In some countries protests were aimed at the displacement of the regime, whereas in others demonstrations demanded the improvement of living conditions while leaving the principal foundations of the state unchallenged. Accordingly, the ruling elite responded to the protesters differently: from introducing top-down reforms and making efforts to 'buy' social peace to repression and armed violence.[1]

As of August 2012, governments have been overthrown in four countries: Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled the country in January 2011 in the wake of the uprisings. In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak resigned in February 2011 after the Tahrir Square protests, ending his 30-year presidency. Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was overthrown after massive domestic revolts and international military intervention and was killed on October 20, 2011. Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh resigned and his successor Abdal-Rabah Mansour Al-Hadi formally replaced him in February 2012. Still protests continue for self-determination of the southern part and equality for the majority of the Yemeni population.

Protests in Syria demanding the ousting of President Bashar Al-Assad began in March 2011 and have rapidly developed into a nationwide uprising. The demonstrations have resulted in an ongoing, violent conflict – in fact a civil war – between Assad loyalist and opposition forces. Bahraini protests aimed at achieving greater political freedom and equality for

Box No. 1: Old Dilemmas in a New and Changing Environment

Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East is an immanent threat. Not only are several countries believed to hold nuclear, biological, or chemical armaments and a broad range of delivery vehicles, but disarmament agreements have not been universally accepted in the region. Israel has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), whereas Egypt and Syria remain outside the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) has not been signed by Israel and has yet to be ratified by Egypt and Syria. Furthermore, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) was not signed by Syria and Saudi Arabia and is awaiting ratification by other regional states.

The idea of a regional solution to WMD proliferation in the Middle East is, however, not new: in 1974, Iran and Egypt proposed the establishment of a nuclear weapon free zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East to the UN General Assembly. Each year for the last three decades, the proposal has been unanimously endorsed at the United Nations General Assembly. In 1990, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak extended the original proposal as to make the region free of all weapons of mass destruction.

This proposal was discussed in the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group in the context of Arab-Israeli peace process negotiations. The ACRS talks came to a halt when the political context of the peace process changed and because of the unfruitful juxtaposition of "Peace first!" vs. "Disarmament first!". While Israel maintained that regional peace was the precondition for any disarmament initiative, Arab countries claimed that Israeli nuclear disarmament was a precondition for a peace agreement. Despite their failure, the ACRS talks have been so far the only joint regional exercise at arms control in the Middle East that is still lacking a common security architecture.

Later, the NPT took up the issue at its 1995 Review and Extension Conference, where the parties decided that progress on a WMD Free Zone (including delivery vehicles) should be made in the NPT context. After 15 years, the lack of progress on the zone led Arab countries to request implementation of concrete steps at the 2010 NPT Review Conference. Accordingly, a regional conference was mandated for 2012 to discuss the zonal proposal. Under the auspices of Finnish Ambassador Jaakko Laajava (see Policy Briefs No. 1 and No. 6 by Bernd W. Kubbig, Roberta Mulas, and Christian Weidlich et al.), it is now in the hands of the Middle Eastern states to shape the MEC and make it happen, successful, and sustainable as a regional peace strategy.

Although the lack of progress in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as well as the international debate over the Iranian nuclear program are still contentious issues, the Arab Spring uprisings and their aftermath may provide a new context in which arms control initiatives could be more successful. It is too optimistic to think that existing dilemmas can be easily resolved in this new and changing environment, but the Arab Spring may provide strong momentum for change.

the majority Shia population were initially crushed with the help of the military intervention of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) led by Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia itself also witnessed demonstrations starting in January 2011 and similar protests took place in other Gulf states. In Jordan continuing protests have already led to three changes of cabinet and have begun to be directed at the monarch, King Abdullah II, and his family.

Revolutions and Transformations: Conceptualizing the Events of the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring uprisings were quickly termed 'revolutions' leading to discussions about whether the term was being properly applied. One could define 'revolution' as "attempts by subordinate groups to transform the social foundations of political power."[2] But it remains unclear if the Arab Spring uprisings fall into this category. Here we shall use the more encompassing concept of 'transformation' to describe the political events taking place in Arab countries.

In our view, a transformation process is characterized by an attempt to change the political 'structures' defined as the rules and principles to the establishment of political power.[3] Three main phases of transformation can be identified: opening up of the established regime, the transition to democracy (including the displacement of the authoritarian regime and the process of institutionalization), and democratic consolidation.[4] These phases do not present a precise model, but they do serve as a guide to describe changes in political structures and within them. In fact, transformation is not necessarily triggered by revolutionary attempts: sometimes the governing elite may respond to public dissatisfaction by introducing reform programs that leave the foundations of the political system intact ('changes within the structures').

The concept of transformation gives us a handle on understanding the events connected with the Arab Spring. While revolutionary attempts did not take place everywhere, transformation can be witnessed throughout the Middle East. Our basic distinction is between transformations

of the regime and within the regime, with the former comprising Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya and the latter including Jordan and Saudi Arabia.[5] A third group of states, namely Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria, has witnessed protests challenging the ruling authorities without thorough success so far. As a result, these countries are plagued by violence and political instability. As the case studies will show, the countries of the region are in different phases of their transformation process. Some have successfully displaced their authoritarian rulers, a few have started institutionalizing democracy, but none are as yet in the process of consolidating democracy.

Framework of this Policy Brief

Will developments resulting from the Arab Spring events induce Arab countries to be more willing to discuss regional and global issues, especially matters of arms control? Historical evidence suggests that if new political forces previously not involved in the decision-making process come to power, it takes time for them to develop an understanding of the international system and the obligations entailed. The goal of this Policy Brief is to describe, analyze, and evaluate those factors which may influence the foreign and security policy as well as decision making of selected countries, drawing conclusions as to their impact.

This Policy Brief focuses on how the Arab Spring and developments in its wake could affect countries' positions towards the Middle East Conference. Three major questions need to be addressed:

1. What is the current state of political transformation (demonstrations/protests, change of actors and leadership, political reforms, elections, and constitution making)?
2. What impact does the current domestic political situation have on the country's foreign and security policies and on conflict structures in the Middle East?
3. What is the official position towards the Middle East Conference? What is its stance with regard to disarmament and non-proliferation, and have the Arab Spring uprisings resulted in any policy changes in these areas?

The countries selected for the case studies provide a broad overview of the transformation processes associated with the Arab Spring. We have divided these cases into three categories: first, those states such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya which have experienced successful displacement of the regime; second, those such as Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain in the midst of an internal political struggle; and, finally, states such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia which have witnessed sporadic demonstrations and have implemented partial reforms. To complete the picture, we will also provide a brief excursus on the impact of the Arab Spring upon Israel, Palestine[6], and Turkey. Some broad conclusions relating to the expectations for WMD/DVs arms control will also be drawn in view of the upcoming Middle East Conference.

Displacement of the Regime: Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya

Tunisia: Sobering Transition

The demonstrations in Tunisia[7] began in December 2010 and resulted in a wave of social and political unrest that led to the ousting of longtime President Ben Ali in January 2011. Subsequently, the 1959 Constitution was suspended, Ben Ali's Constitutional Democratic Rally Party was abolished, and the country began its political transition. Elections for a National Constituent Assembly were held on October 23, 2011, and Ennahda, a 'moderate' Islamist party led by Rashid Gannouchi, obtained 37 percent of the vote. The composition of the current interim government, as well as the appointment of the President of the Republic and the President of the Constituent Assembly, reflect the pact between three political forces: Ennahda, the center-left Congress for the Republic, and the left-leaning Ettakatol. This 'Tunisian troika' has a comfortable majority in the Constituent Assembly, which is charged with drafting the country's new constitution.[8] The next general election is now scheduled to be held in March 2013.

At this point, the greatest challenge for Tunisia is responding to the demands for democratic representation and freedom, the calls for improved living conditions as well as social and economic equality. As a result, domestic concerns will remain at the center of political attention until the consolidation of the state. In spite of the change in political leadership, Tunisian foreign policy is not likely to fundamentally alter since the coalition partners agree that the partnership with the European Union, Maghreb integration,

and relations with other Arab countries remain priorities. However, a more active policy is expected with regard to neighboring countries to counter possible spillover effects from instability in Libya, including arms trafficking and threats to a very fragile Tunisian economic recovery. The 'troika' also agrees that Tunisia would benefit from a diversified foreign policy, fostering stronger relations with emerging economies such as Brazil, China, and India. Another novelty in Tunisian foreign policy, based on ideological similarities, is Tunis' growing links with Turkey and Qatar, which have been extending their influence throughout the region.

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Tunisia's foreign policy has been subject to a change of principles and tone rather than to a radical shift of geographic priorities or regional alliances. The government's main goal in a democratic foreign policy is to defend Tunisia's national interests rather than its own narrow ones. The Salafis, who were not allowed to run for the elections, could use foreign policy issues, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict, for their own political gain in an attempt to erode confidence in the government and undermine Ennahda's credibility. The rhetoric against Israel is likely to be much harsher than that of previous Tunisian governments. Indeed, there is a consensus that links normalization of relations with Israel to the recognition of the Palestinian state, which is generally characteristic of all Arab countries based on the Arab Peace Initiative, but especially true for those in transition. However, the new institutions have made great efforts to differentiate the critical stance towards Israeli policies from those regarding the Jewish population of Tunisia. Particularly the interim president emphasized in meetings with Jewish community leaders and in public speeches that the Jewish population is an integral part of the Tunisian people.

Tunisia's role in Middle East affairs was especially prominent at the end of the 1980s and beginning of 1990s, when it hosted the headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organization. With regards to arms control, the country is a party to all major multilateral disarmament treaties: the NPT, the BTWC, the CWC, and the CTBT. Tunisia has the Additional Protocol to its safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in force and is a party to the Pelindaba Treaty on the African nuclear weapon free zone. Furthermore, the country has always supported multilateral initiatives on disarmament.

As far as security issues are concerned, the Tunisian army is relatively small and poorly equipped. Even if its defense budget were increased, Tunisia is very unlikely to become a threat in terms of weapons of mass destruction proliferation. In regional dialogues on disarmament issues, Tunisia's major concerns are illegal trafficking in conventional weapons and the situation in the Sahel area rather than in the Middle East.

In short, Tunisia has no reason to oppose the upcoming Middle East Conference but every reason to support it. Although there is no specific information available about the country's official position on the MEC, Tunisia can be expected to follow rather than take a leading position in the Arab World. Finally, it is likely to support the Middle East Conference, based on its well-documented opposition to weapons of mass destruction.

Egypt: Transition to 'Civilian' Control?

Although the Arab Spring uprisings began in Tunisia, Egypt (and Tahrir Square in particular) has become the symbol of these events. Three factors contributed to the protests which began in January 2011.[9] First, the authoritarian rule of the Mubarak regime allowed only limited political freedoms and moved harshly to crush overt expressions of opposition. Second, a dramatic change in demographics occurred: since the 1950s, Egypt's population has quadrupled, increasing from 21 to more than 83 million people. This resulted in growing unemployment especially among the middle class youth, deteriorating health and educational services, and imbalances in the existing social structures. Third, the fact that after two decades of neoliberal economic reforms the Egyptian state was unable to guarantee the population a basic standard of living, called its legitimacy into question.[10]

In addition, there were a number of more proximate causes for the uprisings. Mubarak's efforts to appoint his son Gamal as his successor were considered an affront by many to Egypt's national dignity. The parliamentary elections in November 2010 were allegedly rigged and virtually eliminated the opposition.[11] Furthermore, a wide popular protest movement that was often violently crushed by the security forces had already been active since 2004.[12] These

opposition movements gathered adherents using the Internet's social media networks. Given the tight control of the press and TV, this new technology allowed a younger generation to operate relatively freely in a new virtual reality. Finally, mass demonstrations in Tunisia served as the catalyst for a disparate crowd of labor groups, urban youths, mosques, professionals, and the Muslim Brotherhood to take to the streets. Mubarak was slow to react to the protests and was unwilling to use violence to crush the riots, resulting in his ousting on February 11, 2011.

Soon thereafter, a committee was established to draft a provisional constitution, which was accepted by 77 percent in a public referendum in March 2012. In the parliamentary elections held in November 2011 and January 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood received 47 percent and the Salafist Al-Nour 24 percent of the vote. Presidential elections were held in May/June 2012 and the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate, Mohamed Morsi, won the second round of voting against the former Prime Minister Ahmad Shafiq. Nonetheless, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) still holds considerable power and Parliament was dissolved in June 2012 by the High Constitutional Court. The SCAF issued a constitutional declaration that upholds its legislative powers, its control over the budget, and its right to appoint the committee to write the new Egyptian constitution. In an unexpected move, however, President Morsi defied the SCAF's order and reconvened the Parliament.[13] However, he had to back off after a second ruling of the High Constitutional Court which insisted that the results of the elections were illegal – but the 'battle' is far from over.

A new balance of power is emerging in Egypt among the army, which is keen to preserve its security and economic interests; the Islamists (mainly the Muslim Brotherhood); and the more liberal-secular youth. This is a precarious balance, with each group pursuing disparate aims and cultivating different modes of operation. Furthermore, the country is stuck in a struggle between two schools of thoughts: those preferring a religious state (dawla diniyya) and those aspiring to a civil state (dawla madaniyya). The economy may prove one of the greatest political challenges. High unemployment could provide a fertile breeding ground for political violence. Sectarian conflicts between Muslims and

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Coptic Orthodox Christians have come out in the open due to the increasing instability, and among Muslims the Sunni-Shia animosity is heating up. Since democracy means majority rule, respecting the rights of these minorities will be an important test for the new Egyptian government.

After the dissolution and reconvening of Parliament, the 'divorce' between the military and the Islamists is in plain sight since neither the military nor the Islamists are prepared to cede power. Tensions could increase especially after the unexpected move by President Morsi to send Minister of Defense, Hussein Tantawi, and Chief of Staff, Sami Anan, into retirement. Even though it was short-lived, the Parliament illustrated the difficulties Islamists had in power, both with regard to domestic and foreign policy, as well as the disillusionment of a large segment of the population.

The era of President Nasser's charismatic leadership is past, but a newly emerging Egypt can once more become a model for Arab states. However, it remains unclear what elements will drive the country's foreign policy. Islam will certainly play a dominant role, but addressing the country's economic challenges and improving the population's standard of living will be the main priority for the government. In spite of the change of leadership, no fundamental changes are to be expected in Egypt's foreign policy, although some modifications may take place. The Arab-Israeli conflict is likely to remain its primary foreign policy concern.

Prior to the Arab Spring uprisings, Cairo supported some Israeli policies in the region, including the blockade of Gaza. Such policies generated a sense of distance between the regime and the people. Under the new government, these policies have already come under revision. The current leadership has shown greater openness towards Hamas than the Mubarak regime and has promised to provide defense to the Palestinians and economic aid in the event of Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip. Whereas the Mubarak regime was seen as partial towards Fatah, the new government has taken a more balanced approach towards the two Palestinian factions and was finally able to broker a reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah (see Policy Brief No. 3 by Margret Johannsen et al. and Policy Brief No. 4 by István Balogh et al.).

Another important pillar of Cairo's foreign policy is its peace treaty with Israel. This accord has been domestically controversial since its conclusion in 1979. The attack on the Israeli embassy in Cairo in September 2011 increased instability in the Sinai and at the Egyptian-Israeli border, and the termination of the gas supply to Israel in April 2012 illustrate why bilateral relations have reached their lowest level since 1979. Nevertheless, the Egyptian military and President Morsi have so far declared that the peace treaty with Israel will not be rescinded. In any event, it is unlikely that the accord would be abolished, though it may be revised upon proposals coming from Egypt or re-negotiated. The fact that Islamic political groups in Egypt (including the Salafis) do not categorically disavow the treaty may indicate a subtle change in policy. In general, Egypt's foreign policy will develop more in line with its domestic aspirations and increasingly reflect popular sentiments. The strong links between the Egyptian elite, the United States, and Israel were deeply unpopular amongst the general public. It remains an open question how American-Egyptian relations will develop in the coming years.

Over the last decades, Egypt has been the leading country in pushing for the elimination of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East as its dominant role in the 2010 NPT Review Conference clearly illustrates. However, Egypt's own history with respect to WMD is mixed. It used chemical weapons in the 1960s in the Yemeni civil war and is still believed to possess them. Egypt is a party to the NPT; it has signed but not ratified the CTBT, the Pelindaba Treaty (African NWFZ) and the BTWC, and remains outside both the Additional Protocol and the CWC. Its position is that unless Israel becomes a party to the NPT, Egypt is not willing to take on any further disarmament commitments. While on some occasions members of the Muslim Brotherhood have pointed to the deterrence benefits of nuclear weapons, it is unlikely that these comments suggest a radical change in Egypt's choices with respect to nuclear weapons.[14]

Overall, Egypt's arms control commitment and its readiness to play a leading role at the Middle East Conference seems to be still in place. Even after the fall of Mubarak, Egypt spared no effort to clarify its undiminished interest in a regional WMD/DVs Free Zone. As its representative stated at the Preparatory Committee of

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the NPT Review Conference in May 2012, "Egypt has conducted and continues to conduct consultations with various parties in this regard, bilaterally, regionally and multilaterally, including within the framework of the League of Arab States."[15] Cairo has been active in promoting the participation of all Arab countries in the MEC and in drafting a common Arab League position.

Libya: 'Surprise' Transition

The Libyan uprising, in spite of the many indications of dire social conditions and resentment against the dictatorial regime, was unique even in Arab Spring terms. First, no one expected that Muammar Gaddafi's 42-year rule could be challenged. Second, it was the first in a series of Arab Spring uprisings in which a dictator fought back. Third, it was the only Arab Spring event in which the international community intervened militarily, and the first case in which the Arab League appeared as a visible actor supporting such outside intervention. Fourth, the uprisings led to a full-scale civil war that ended with the violent death of the former dictator. Libya announced its liberation by the National Transitional Council in October 2011, which has since been running the country through its executive committee.

Elections for a national assembly which will be charged with the task of drafting a constitution were postponed from June 19, but were finally held on July 7, 2012. In contrast to the election results in other Arab countries, the Islamists were beaten by the Liberals. The centrist National Forces Alliance led by Mahmoud Jibril won more than double (41) the seats of the Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Constitution Party (17).[16] In addition, 90 percent of the women's vote went to the liberal parties. However, the political scene is far from settled: the Islamist parties are expected to unite forces and challenge the liberals by presenting them as a threat to the future of Islam in Libya.

The Libyan transformation has been a relatively smooth political process, but it still reflects a redistribution of power along more traditional patrimonial lines rather than a move towards democratization in the European sense. This is reflected in a number of unresolved issues: Islamists vs. Liberals, former regime members vs. rebels, the Political Separation Law, Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi's trial, and most of all the security problems including armed militias, organized crime, and the threat of tribal clashes. While the regime change was widely

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considered to be the direct result of the NATO intervention, by now it has become clear that instead of democracy, a new neo-patrimonial system is in the making, and no genuinely new political force has emerged. At the same time, most observers were surprised to see that the elections went smoothly despite tribal divisions and that the secularists have finally won.

It remains to be seen what impact the political transformation is going to have on Libyan foreign relations aside from the fact that they will most likely be less provocative and less sensational. In the short term, Libya may probably engage in domestic security rather than issues of foreign security and consequently will not be in a position to pursue a very active foreign policy.

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Although the traditional spheres of Libya's foreign policy (Arab, African, Islamic) will remain the same, Tripoli could play a more visible role in the Maghreb, and in specific cases sub-Saharan Africa could be a sphere of influence rather than interference. Libya projects threats in different directions: the EU feels challenged by migration from sub-Sahara and Libya's neighbors are concerned about the spillover of armed clashes and illegal arms flows.

Libya still may have an overall external impact, namely the lessons that some regimes may draw from the fate of the Gaddafi regime: they may, for example, conclude that Gaddafi was weakened by giving up the WMD programs and was forced out of power. Despite past clandestine efforts to acquire nuclear and biological weapons, Libya's WMD threat was primarily its chemical weapon program conducted at three research, development, and production facilities at Rabta, Tarhuna, and Sebha. Libya is one of the few countries that has deployed chemical weapons in a conflict, namely against its southern neighbor Chad in 1987.

In the aftermath of the civil war, Tripoli has neither the political will nor the funds to engage in WMD activities in the short or medium term. While the Gaddafi regime did pursue WMD programs (mostly chemical weapons), Libya signed and ratified all relevant international WMD treaties, following its renunciation of all kinds of weapons of mass destruction in December 2003. Today, the country is party to the NPT, the CTBT, and the Pelindaba Treaty. It has also signed the Additional Protocol to its safeguards agreement with the IAEA. Furthermore, the country is party to the BTWC and the CWC. However, Libya had previously signaled to the OPCW – the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons – that it would not be able to eliminate all its stockpiles by April 2012.

Nevertheless, since Libya is not a primary actor in WMD-related hard security issues, it will be at best a nominal supporter of the relevant arms control negotiations. Libya is unique among the countries involved with respect to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the collection and disposal of which is one of the biggest security tasks and concerns of the new government both domestically and regionally. Reportedly, 20,000 surface-to-air missiles are missing from army weapon warehouses, some of which have reappeared already in the Gaza Strip.[17]

Whether the new Libyan leadership will participate in the MEC is yet to be seen. However, it is likely that the government will play a supportive role in the process due to the debt the National Transitional Council owes the UN, the Arab League, and the African Union for their acknowledgment and support, as well as the role of the global great powers, all of whom support the idea of a Middle East WMD Free Zone. Furthermore, Libya is already part of a nuclear weapon free zone (Pelindaba Treaty). Tripoli's support of the Arab position, especially if framed in Arab League terms, could prove not only to be a confidence-building measure, but could also become a symbol of Libya's reintegration into the Arab fold.

Countries of Instability: Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain

Yemen: Negotiated Transition

In January 2011, Yemen's youth reacted to the events in Tunisia and Egypt by demonstrations which soon spread to important Yemeni cities. Protesters initially opposed governmental plans to modify the country's constitution. They also opposed high unemployment, poor economic conditions, and widespread corruption. However, the demands soon included a call for the removal of long-time President Ali Abdullah Saleh who responded with a mix of political maneuvering: patronage and bribery, co-option, repression, and propaganda.[18] In a notorious incident,

snipers shot and killed dozens of unarmed civilians on March 28, 2011, declared as the 'dignity day'. In the face of this brutal repression, the initially youth-dominated movement expanded into a mass uprising. Furthermore, the support for the protests declared by a key figure of the regime, Major General Ali Muhsin Al-Ahmar, opened the way to mass defections by half of the army, most of the government's civil servants, and prominent politicians. Therefore, the uprising gained unprecedented momentum, but at the same time it became dominated by the defected figures, who favored a mediated resolution to the conflict.

The mediation proposal of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which included immunity for Saleh and his family members, initially received broad support from opposition groups. But after the government resorted to massive violence against protesters, large segments of the opposition rejected the deal and demanded Saleh to be charged with the deadly shootings. An attack on the presidential compound in Sana'a on June 3, 2011, injured Saleh who was evacuated to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment, but remained unwilling to resign. During his absence, Vice President Abdal-Rabah Mansour Al-Hadi took over as acting president. Finally, Saleh signed the GCC initiative and Al-Hadi was elected as the new President of Yemen on February 21, 2012. Steps towards further political transformation are planned for the near future, including a comprehensive national dialogue conference, a reform of the constitution, reorganization of the military and security services, and finally presidential and parliamentary elections by 2014.

However, the ongoing violence between heavily armed factions transformed a peaceful youth movement into an elite power struggle among Yemen's key powerbrokers: the military, the tribes, and the Islamists. Since the 'new' regime is still dominated by former power holders, the protesters are frustrated that their movement has been co-opted by elites who operate according to highly personal 'rules' outside the scope of Yemen's weak formal institutions.[19] It is unclear whether Yemen's transition will proceed or the country will descend even further into instability. However, the weakness of state institutions, the division of the security apparatus resulting from defections during the protests, and the fact that only some opposition groups signed the GCC deal, could well undermine the ability of Saleh's successor to establish stability and preserve political unity (see Policy Brief No. 7 by Lars Berger et al.).

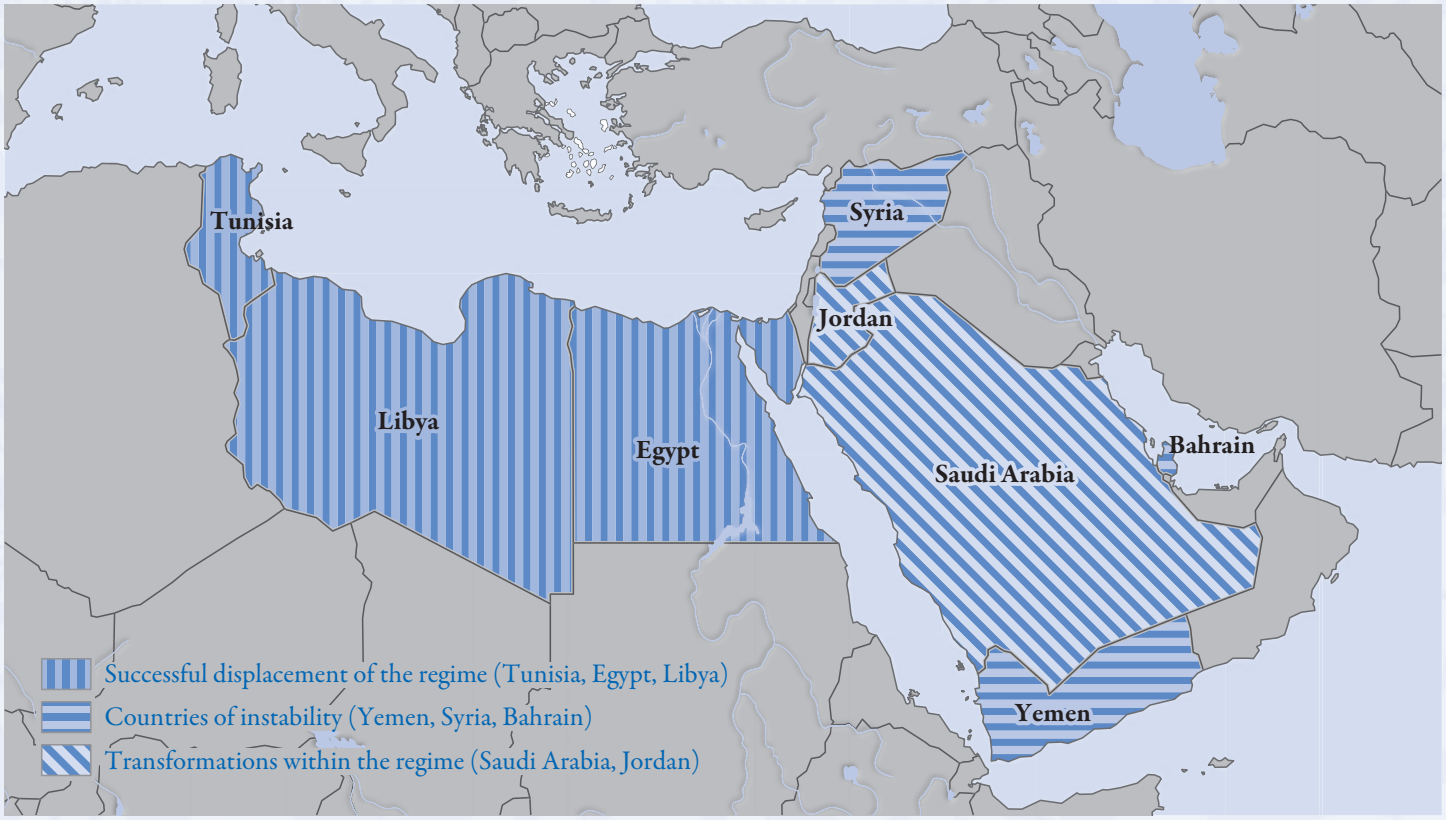
Yemeni foreign policy in the post-Saleh period is not yet well defined, although it will most likely continue to reflect Saudi positions, given the crucial importance of the country's relations with Riyadh. Yet, the Yemeni foreign policy will continue to strive for membership of the GCC and its partnership within the international coalition to combat terrorism. With regard to disarmament, Yemen has traditionally stressed the need for a Middle East region free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. This view was emphasized during the meeting of Yemeni Foreign Minister Abu Bakr Al-Qirbi and the non-resident ambassador of Finland to Yemen, Jarno Syrjälä, in preparation for the Middle East Conference.[20]

Nevertheless, in a geographical and political sense, Yemen is far from being a central actor in the envisioned Middle East Conference. However, its political future could easily shape the initiative on several levels: Yemen might store chemical weapons and has imported various WMD-capable aircraft and missiles; the country is one of the region's preeminent weapon markets with the potential to serve as a major gateway for illicit conventional and unconventional weapons; in the ongoing tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Yemen could play an increasingly prominent role; and the country's instability provides a basis for Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula, posing a direct threat to the vicinity and to the larger Western world (see Policy Brief No. 7 by Lars Berger et al.). In 2011, turmoil in Yemen produced a political vacuum. Accordingly, Al-Qaeda tried to fill this void in some areas. The Yemeni army, however, was able to hit at the organization's stronghold in the first half of 2012.

Yemen is a party to the NPT, the BTWC, and the CWC as well as a signatory to the CTBT. In the context of the Middle East Conference, the Yemeni government would need to ensure that any existing stockpiles of chemical weapons within the country are secure and that a strategy to destroy all existing material covered by the BTWC and CWC is developed. Such a strategy should also cover the non-proliferation of dual-use chemical and bilogical technologies in order to avoid any

»The ongoing violence between heavily armed factions transformed a peaceful youth movement into an elite power struggle among Yemen's key powerbrokers: the military, the tribes, and the Islamists.«

Transformations in the Middle East in the Wake of the Arab Spring



access by terrorists. Yemen's compliance would be facilitated if other countries such as Israel and Egypt were willing to sign and/or ratify both conventions.

Bahrain: Suppressed Transition

Inspired by the popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, mass protest began in Bahrain in February 2011, calling for greater political freedom and equality for all Bahrainis. Although the ruling monarchy in the small Gulf state has witnessed popular opposition for decades, the local Arab Spring events constituted an unprecedented wave of protests across the country.[21] Socio-economic discontent, a high level of unemployment, especially among the youth, discrimination against the Shia majority, the slow pace of democratization, and popular anger at perceived corruption have brought tens of thousands of mostly young Bahrainis to camp in the center of Manama. The panicked reaction of the Al-Khalifa regime resulted in a brutal response, as government forces opened fire on sleeping demonstrators in the middle of the night.[22] Immediately thereafter, armed soldiers, tanks, and military checkpoints were deployed in the streets of the capital.[23] As a response, 200,000 people (one in six of all Bahraini citizens) participated in a peaceful pro-democracy march on February 25, 2011.

On March 14, the GCC deployed its 'Peninsula Shield Force' to Bahrain, including 1,000 Saudi Arabian troops and about 500 police officers from the United Arab Emirates. King Hamad declared a state of emergency, followed by a crackdown of the oppositional movement in which the Bahraini government pursued all forms of dissent.[24] Allegedly, 85 persons were killed in the protests, and hundreds wounded; nearly 3,000 people were detained during the 2011 protest movement.

In June 2011, Bahraini King Hamad set up an (ostensibly) independent commission to investigate the events of February and March. Its chairman, Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni, concluded in a televised speech in the presence of the King that the authorities had used excessive force during its crackdown on protesters. In addition, the commission's report found that many detainees were subjected to torture and other forms of physical and psychological abuse while in custody.[25] In response to the protests, the

King also convened the National Dialogue in July 2011, an initiative to promote reform and encourage discussion on the governance of Bahrain. But the transformation process was completely in the hands of the ruling elite. The opposition agreed to this initiative since Saudi Arabia, as proven by its military intervention, was unwilling to allow a fellow ruling family in the Gulf to fall from power. The Al-Wefaq, the largest opposition group, was designated only five seats out of 300 in the National Dialogue and therefore withdrew from the forum, questioning the regime's commitment to reform. Since then Bahrain's policies have swung "between reform and repression" leaving the roots of Bahrain's political and economic inequalities unaddressed and thereby empowering radical voices across the political spectrum.[26] On March 9, 2012, hundreds of thousands again protested in one of the biggest anti-government rallies to date.

In spite of these internal political upheavals, Bahraini foreign policies have not changed dramatically. The kingdom usually takes positions in line with the GCC, especially with Saudi Arabia, and the Arab League. Furthermore, it promotes the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. It enjoys a close relationship to the United States as major non-NATO ally. Manama hosts the headquarters of the U.S. Fifth Fleet and benefits from one of the strongest missile defense umbrellas anywhere in the world.[27] However, Bahrainis look with concern to the nuclear potential and the missiles of Iran. The government has repeatedly accused Tehran of meddling in its domestic affairs.

With an eye on the Islamic Republic, the GCC states have endorsed the initiative to declare a Gulf WMD Free Zone. In addition to including its member countries, the plan calls for an incremental integration of the other three Gulf states, Iran, Iraq, and Yemen, and finally the entire Middle East, including Israel. Representatives of Bahrain have consistently supported the call for the Middle East Conference on the establishment of a WMD/DVs Free Zone, including nuclear weapons.[28] In combination with the possible strategic challenge arising from Iran's nuclear program, there is increasing interest in nuclear politics in Bahrain. The kingdom is a party to the NPT, the BTWC, the CWC, and the CTBT. It has signed the Additional Protocol to its safeguards agreement with the IAEA and ratified it in 2011. It can be assumed that without game-changing developments in Bahrain, which are unlikely from today's perspective, the country will participate in the Middle East Conference.

Syria: Bloody Transition with No Clear Prospects

After the authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt had already been toppled, the Syrian town of Deraa witnessed an uprising in March 2011. While protesters initially claimed reforms, demands rapidly escalated into a call for the resignation of President Bashar Al-Assad. Resentment against his rule had been on the rise as complaints about the power position of the Alawi sect and dissatisfaction with the country's economic situation had mounted. The increasingly violent response of the Syrian Army, deployed by the president to suppress the initially peaceful protests, fuelled the anger. Assad blamed "criminal armed gangs, intent on stirring up sectarian divisions within Syria's heterogeneous population" for the violence.[29] At the same time, he also introduced some reforms, ending a 48-year long state of emergency and offering a constitution that allowed parties other than the ruling Ba'ath to run for elections, as well as limiting presidential rule to two terms. These modest reforms were greeted with widespread skepticism.

The opposition mobilized by creating various factions, including the Syrian National Council and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) to respond with force to the regime's army, which inflicted over 9,000 deaths during the first year of the uprising. The overarching goal of the opposition forces is to remove Assad from power. Violence spread to the disenfranchized areas of the country – infamously to the towns of Homs and Hama, among others – while the capitol of Damascus and the city of Aleppo remained relatively peaceful until July 2012. Afterwards, both cities were massively affected forcing hundreds of thousands to flee. What had started as a quite moderate attempt to introduce political freedoms to the country, soon turned into a bloody internal confrontation. In July 2012, the International Committee of the Red Cross declared the internal fighting in Syria a civil war.[30]

The international reaction to the Syrian crisis has been mixed. In contrast to the Libyan case, armed intervention has not had many supporters. The League of Arab States suspended Damascus' membership

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in November 2011 and then focused its efforts on mediating a solution by sending international monitors. The Arab League also tried to introduce a UN Security Council resolution, which was vetoed by Russia and China. Former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, was subsequently appointed as Special Envoy and, in March 2012, he was able to convey a six-point peace plan acceptable to both the government and the Free Syrian Army. However, the ceasefire crumbled as a consequence of increased repression. After the resignation of Kofi Annan, Lakhdar Brahimi was appointed as the joint UN-Arab League Special Envoy in August 2012.

While the humanitarian situation keeps getting worse, the international community remains divided about what path to take. On the one hand, the EU and the U.S. have imposed sanctions on the regime and called for Assad to resign. On the other hand, Russia and China continue to support the regime and have blocked all efforts in the UN Security Council to sanction Syria, in line with their refusal to interfere in the internal affairs of other states. Moscow attaches special importance to the survival of the present government given that Syria hosts its only naval base in the Mediterranean and is an important market for Russian arms.

In the region, Syria has few supporters: Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah remain close to President Assad and Tehran even provided, in addition to military aid, economic support to ease the impact of sanctions. By contrast, Saudi Arabia and Qatar spoke in favor of arming the opposition in order to increase its chances of success. Turkey initially reacted with caution but then grew weary of the violence in its own backyard that was leading scores of refugees to flee into the Anatolian peninsula. The incident involving the Turkish fighter jet brought down by Syria's air defense demonstrated that, despite its rhetoric, Ankara has so far shown little intention of getting involved militarily with its southern neighbor.

The situation in Syria is in continuous flux, with the opposition forces sometimes hitting important targets (e.g. the Damascus bombing of July 20, 2012) and the regime reacting with increased violence. From today's perspective, an international intervention on the Libyan model can be ruled out and it is doubtful that any Western power will be willing to intervene in the absence of a UN mandate. At the same time, the regime's willingness to remain in power is undiminished as is the determination of the FSA. What seems likely is that a continuation of the present conflict will result in a long-lasting civil war. The joint mediatory efforts of the UN and the Arab League could offer a way of scaling down the conflict. However, their mission might well be seen as "a way to drag the process on and shift the focus from regime change to regime concessions."[31]

What does this mean for the participation of Syria to the Middle East Conference in December 2012? It is clear that the Syrian government is primarily concerned with ongoing domestic violence and that little effort will be expended on questions of arms control. Moreover, Syria will likely be on the agenda of the conference. The country's WMD record, in fact, is far from clean: while a member of the NPT with IAEA Comprehensive Safeguards in force, Syria has not ratified the BTWC and not even signed the CWC. More importantly, the country is suspected of having a chemical arsenal whose future remains increasingly uncertain in the current conflict. The Syrian government at some point threatened to use these should Syria be attacked from the outside. Yet, it ordered the facilities be put under strengthened guard against possible confiscation by the opposition forces. In parallel, fears have been raised that these agents could be used by the regime against the protesters or get lost in the resulting chaos. These chemical capabilities, together with its arsenal of mostly short-range Scud missiles, are considered a deterrent against Israel's nuclear arsenal. Tensions among the two are an old issue, dating back to the Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights. The WMD component of this rivalry was heightened in 2007, when an Israeli air strike destroyed an undeclared supposedly nuclear facility in Syria.

If the MEC can manage to negotiate reciprocal arms reduction, linking negotiations on Syria's chemical and Israel's nuclear weapons could turn out to be quite useful. Verified reductions by one could lead to similar steps by the other, effectively demonstrating that both Israel and Syria could gain by limiting their armaments. At the moment, Syria is certainly not interested in this prospect, but it has traditionally supported the idea of establishing a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East.

Transformations within the Regime: Saudi Arabia and Jordan

Saudi Arabia: Cautious Top-Down Transformation

The Arab Spring events are seen in the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council in general, and Saudi Arabia in particular, with a mixture of trepidation and skepticism on the one hand, and hope on the other. The ruling monarchies dislike the uncertainty associated with a change in the status quo and there is a distinct worry that without strict vigilance and control, similar scenes could emerge in their own countries. Meanwhile, the population in the Gulf has been inspired by the action of their fellow Arabs and as a result there is a certain degree of hope that the ruling families will now begin the process of implementing some political and social reform.

For the moment Saudi rulers are still in firm control, although in the long run a slow transition towards constitutional monarchy is discernible. The ruling family has maintained its legitimacy and popularity: not only have they provided stability to their societies, but they have also steadily increased the welfare of their people through unprecedented economic and social development. A cautious social reform program, mostly connected with King Abdullah, has been on the agenda even prior to the start of the Arab Spring, in spite of more conservative forces within the ruling family. However, the death of Crown Prince Nayef in June 2012, who had usually been portrayed as the conservative counterbalance to the 'reformer' King Abdullah, has brought the issue of succession to the fore and has raised serious questions about the future of the monarchy.

It has not been Saudi Arabia's own transformation, but that of other states, especially in its direct proximity (Bahrain, Yemen), that has had an impact on Saudi external relations. On the one hand, an armed conflict would not only threaten the domestic security and economic output of Saudi Arabia, but could also upset the precarious balance within the GCC at a stage when (further) integration is envisioned. On the other hand, both Bahrain and Yemen have become the scenes of a proxy conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, with the latter supporting the Shia population against the Sunni rulers in Bahrain and challenging the Saudi authority and leadership in the Gulf. The ambition of the Iranian leaders to establish the Islamic Republic as a major regional power, illustrated by its program to acquire nuclear capabilities and its willingness to meddle in the affairs of other countries, has led Saudi Arabia – in spite of its usual cautiousness – to act openly to stabilize neighboring countries. Yet, the Saudi/UAE military intervention in Bahrain has raised concerns not only in the Gulf, but in the wider Arab region as well.

Saudi Arabia is a policy maker in the region and although it does not like to act overtly, it considers itself a leading political actor in Arab and Gulf affairs. In the past decade or so, it has undertaken several initiatives to resolve inter-Arab issues. In this capacity it has recently been challenged by an increasingly active Qatari foreign policy. Saudi Arabia has no open relationship with Israel, but its concern over Iranian ambitions partially coincides with Israeli threat perceptions. Yet, without peace between Israel and the Palestinians, the Saudis will not publicly take up common cause with Israel. In 2002 it was Saudi Arabia, which, in the name of all Arab countries, put forward the Arab Peace Initiative. It offers Arab recognition and diplomatic relations in return for an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines. Although the peace plan has not been implemented, Saudi rulers take credit for putting it forward and keeping the proposal, officially at least, on the table.[32]

Due to its geographic position, Saudi Arabia is much more concerned with the developing Iranian nuclear program than with Israel's established nuclear arsenal. In a move officially designed to counterbalance potential Iranian nuclear capabilities, the kingdom has also announced it will start a civilian nuclear program, which many fear could serve as a basis for a future nuclear arms race, should Iran develop nuclear weapons. For the time being, however, Saudi Arabia is a party to the NPT, the BTWC, and the CWC, but has not signed the CTBT, and while it has a full-scope safeguards agreement with the IAEA, it has yet to sign the Additional Protocol.

Because of its leading role in the Islamic world, its responsibility for the Palestinians on the one hand, and its threat perception of Iranian hegemonic policies and the nuclear program on the other, Saudi Arabia will most certainly be one of the

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arbitrators of an Arab League common position on arms control if there is one. However, given its preference for keeping a low-key profile, it could leave the presentation of that position and the leadership at the MEC to Egypt. Yet, as much as the Saudis do not like the spotlight, they have little choice: if they do not take a leading role, others will act and the Saudis will have to follow.

Jordan: Efforts at Top-Down Transformation

Jordan has been profoundly influenced by the Arab Spring and is undergoing a semi-transitional period of political changes, a top-down reform process, in which many Jordanians are reluctant to challenge the legitimacy of the Hashemite monarchy despite an unprecedented willingness to criticize King Abdullah II.

Starting at the beginning of 2011, Jordan experienced protests mainly focused on the poor economic conditions and demands for political reforms. Yet, Prime Minister Samir Al-Rifai, rather than the whole monarchical establishment, was blamed for the country's tax policy. King Abdullah II was therefore able to assuage the protesters by installing three different prime ministers in 18 months and by introducing some limited reforms.[33] Although the situation is not comparable to Egypt or Tunisia, the extent of reforms was unprecedented in Jordanian history. Particularly important was the fact that the protests were also joined by parts of the society traditionally rather loyal to the Palace. Nonetheless, not even the Muslim Brotherhood challenged the existence of the monarchy but instead limited itself to asking for greater representation.

The most serious dilemma facing the Jordanian community today is posed by the trend towards 'political culture extremism' based on misperceived loyalty and conflicts of identity. Tribalism for instance, is a threat to maintaining and preserving domestic stability. Yet, the emergence of young technocrats within the tribes may introduce a pattern of modernization and challenge the existing political order ('new tribalism').

The cornerstone of popular demands for domestic reform consists of fighting corruption and hastening legislative reforms such as new election laws. Neither the Palestinian-Israeli conflict nor weapons of mass destruction are significant issues for the majority of Jordanians today, despite the fact that the developments in the Arab-Israeli conflict have an effect on the country's internal cohesion and stability. The conflict can be seen as a unifying factor among the different segments of society and contributes to reducing internal violence. This poses a serious dilemma for the government, especially after the current impasse in the peace process. Friction between the government's foreign policy vis-à-vis Israel and public opinion has been growing, yet the 1994 peace treaty has not thereby been threatened.

Box No. 2: The Arab League in Times of Transformation

If past experience is any indication, Arab countries tend to pursue a common position in arms control initiatives. The forum where the joint Arab position is likely to be formed is the Arab League, which established the Arab Committee on Drafting a Treaty on the Establishment of a Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction as the responsible unit.[i] Consequently, if there is a common decision to participate in the Middle East Conference, all Arab states can be expected to join the initiative. The preparatory meeting of Arab foreign ministries' senior officials in May 2012 furthermore demonstrates the seriousness of Arab preparations. The working paper submitted by the Arab League to the 2012 Preparatory Committee for the next NPT review cycle affirmed that the MEC should be attended by all states of the Middle East, "given that it is the participating regional States that will determine the follow-up procedures that will be undertaken by the facilitator."[ii] However, there are two issues that may prevent a pan-Arab participation and/or position: Syria, which has been subject to Arab League suspension and sanctions, may decide to stay at home; and Palestine, still a state 'in nascendi', is not yet in a position to officially join or sign the relevant treaties and initiatives.

Arab states have been quite clear about their expectations regarding the Middle East Conference: "any resolutions that are adopted by the 2012 Conference should propose genuine steps, specific undertakings and a schedule for talks on establishing a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East."[iii] Moreover, the 2012 Arab League Summit's declaration emphasized the need to "come up with practical results that clearly lead to the establishment of the free-zone" pinpointing that "the failure to achieve the goals of the 2012 Conference will push Arab states in the direction of searching for decisive steps to insure its safety."[iv] However, the dramatic changes unfolding in many of its member states will continue to transform the pan-Arab body in new ways: since the Arab uprisings began, the Arab League has transformed itself from a "glorified debating society" into an organization with enhanced credibility and diplomatic standing thanks to a number of bold actions that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago.[v]

i. Besides the Arab League the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is usually also an important format in setting arms control related to a common Arab position, and its secretary at the moment is Mohamed Morsi, the newly elected President of Egypt, but in August 2012 the NAM rotating presidency will be assumed by Iran. What impact, if any, that will have on the elaboration of the common Arab position within the NAM is not clear.

ii. Working paper concerning implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, submitted by the United Arab Emirates, on behalf of the States members of the League of Arab States, to the First Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, NPT/CONF.2015/PC.I/WP.17, p. 3.

iii. League of Arab States Working paper, op. cit., p. 4.

iv. Declaration of Baghdad, The Arab Summit Conference, March 29, 2012. Online, available at http://www.arabsummit.iq/ArticleShow.aspx?ID=28 (July 3, 2012).

v. Khaled Elgindy (2012) 'A New and Improved Arab League?', Up Front, Brookings Institution, March 27, 2012. Online, available at http://www.brookings.edu/up-front/posts/2012/03/27-arab-league-elgindy (July 25, 2012).

For Jordan the Arab Spring's greatest impact has been to increase the kingdom's vulnerability: first, by exposing the country's economic crisis and, second, through events in the region, especially in Egypt and Syria. The influx of about 140,000 Syrian refugees is a further cause of concern. The chaos following protests in other Arab states seems to have convinced Jordanians that the path of political reform is safer than that of regime change.[34] Besides the general security implications of having armed conflicts in neighboring countries, Jordan should not neglect its huge Palestinian community (approximately 60 percent) and should monitor the situation between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as the relations of Egypt and Syria to Israel. Although a new Arab-Israeli war is not expected, there is the fear that any dimension of the crisis could easily escalate into one. At the same time, Jordan seems to be increasingly gravitating in the Saudi orbit. It enthusiastically responded to the offer of membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council and as a result reveived billions of dollars of economic aid from Riad.[35]

Jordan has never pursued WMD programs and is a party to all the relevant multinational arms control agreements (NPT, BTWC, CWC, CTBT). Accordingly, Jordan is viewed positively when it comes to non-proliferation and disarmament to the extent that its plans to start a civilian nuclear program have not raised any security concerns. However, in the past U.S. diplomats have tried to prevent Jordan from getting the necessary technology for uranium enrichment and proposed to purchase nuclear fuel on the open markets.[36] Since reform demands decisively focus on domestic matters, no change is expected in Jordan's foreign policy and arms control activities. Jordan will most probably participate in the Middle East Conference and should there be a joint Arab position, it will support that.

The Arab Spring and the Regional Environment: Israel, Palestine, and Turkey

The Arab Spring developments in a variety of Middle Eastern countries have already had repercussions on states that were not directly affected by it. Israel, Palestine, and Turkey have felt the winds of change sweeping across the region and are in the process of responding to these events.

Palestine

Though the Palestinians were the first in the Middle East to initiate mass waves of demonstrations and riots in the two Intifadas, they have recently not undergone an Arab Spring-like uprising but remained relatively calm. The most important issues are still the conflict with Israel and the relationship between Fatah and Hamas (see Policy Brief No. 3 by Margret Johannsen et al.). However, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip saw rallies calling for an end to the political split between Fatah and Hamas. National unity was presented by demonstrators as a national goal and as a means to end Israeli occupation.

Palestinians viewed the Arab Spring as a window of opportunity, hoping that the emerging new Arab regimes would be more supportive of the Palestinian cause. This was proved by the change in the Egyptian attitude to Hamas, the fundamental improvements at the Rafah crossing, and the Egyptian effort to prevent Israeli aggression against Gaza. Egypt is expected to play a constructive role in mediation between Israel and Palestine on the one hand, and between Fatah and Hamas on the other. It is also expected that under the greater umbrella of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas will become more moderate and eventually be integrated into the political system.

The Arab Spring demonstrations focused on internal issues by calling for democracy, justice, and social equality; however, they were silent about freeing Palestine. Thus, when it comes to their struggle against the Israeli occupation, the Palestinians have modest expectations of the newly created Arab regimes. Stabilizing their rule at home will limit the Arab states' ability, if not their desire, to take a clear stance in favor of a historic reconciliation with Israel and support for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA). Furthermore, the concern about widespread public protests in neighboring states will make it hard for the PA to soften its demands and bargaining stance as preconditions for resuming talks with Israel.

However, the positive global and regional resonance of the Arab Spring events did provide an opportunity for bringing

»Israel, Palestine, and Turkey have felt the winds of change sweeping across the region.«

the issue of the Palestinian statehood before the United Nations in September 2011. The international sympathy for the Palestinian case and the Palestinian diplomatic offensive at the UN has freed the PA from the immediate need to relax its conditions for engaging in dialogue with Israel and compromise on the parameters of an agreement. The extended political deadlock has also allowed the PA to attempt to regulate relations with Hamas with little fear of significant damage to its image.

As far as the Middle East Conference is concerned, Palestine, which is not yet recognized as a state, is not a party to the major multilateral arms control agreements. However, it can be assumed that representatives of the Palestinian Authority will join the Middle East Conference.

»The Arab Spring might also provide an opportunity for improving relations between Israel and its neighbors. If the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan remain in force, they would gain in legitimacy by having been endorsed by an elected majority.«

Israel

The recent escalation in regional instability appeared to actually narrow the chances of reviving the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. From Israel's perspective, the transformations in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen make the region look more chaotic and dangerous as well as more Islamic and, therefore, more threatening. This strengthens the voices against taking risks and it moves the country in the direction of isolation, including the quite unlikely dissolution of existing peace treaties (with Egypt and with Jordan). Accordingly, the immediate fear for Israel is the policy of the new Egyptian leadership, which seems to have already lost control over the Sinai Peninsula. However, in August 2012 Egyptian President Morsi sent soldiers into the peninsula as a reaction to the shooting of 16 Egyptian soldiers by terrorists. This was a move that caused severe criticism among his followers within the Muslim Brotherhood, but was welcomed by the Israeli government.

The 'only democracy' in the Middle East, as Israel proudly describes itself, has concerns regarding the political transitions of its neighbors. Israeli analysts, and even more Israeli officials, fear that the overwhelming support for Islamic parties throughout the region demonstrates that the Arab world is not really moving towards democracy. "Egypt will go in the direction of Iran,"[37] argued Benjamin Netanyahu before the fall of Mubarak, highlighting the fact that the only revolution that took place in the Middle East before 2011 resulted in the rise of an Islamic leadership and did not yield the expected fruits in terms of civil and human rights.

However, the Arab Spring might also provide an opportunity for improving relations between Israel and its neighbors. If the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan remain in force, they would gain in legitimacy by having been endorsed by an elected majority. Moreover, moving towards reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas was only possible thanks to the mediation of a post-Mubarak Egypt. This split was seen by Israel as precluding engagement with a legitimate Palestinian leadership. Another possibly positive element is the rapid change in Hamas' course: although it still supports a continued struggle that includes violent means, the pressures from the wider Muslim Brotherhood umbrella, to which it historically belongs, are likely to turn it into a more 'normal' political power.

Overall, an attractive offer to the Palestinians would extricate Israel from its growing isolation in the international and regional arenas, and it would strengthen Fatah and Mahmoud Abbas in their internal struggle for legitimacy and leadership. Failing to restart the peace process might even lead to a Palestinian revolution, not only against its own leadership but also against the occupying power. Because the Palestinian problem is still a core Arab issue, its solution would undoubtedly create a better atmosphere between Israel and the Arab states. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, as well as the North African countries, would gratefully accept such a development. "Beyond the usual reasons that peace is desirable security for Israel, justice and dignity for the Palestinians, and greater stability for the region a successful peace process would take away one of the greatest rhetorical weapons of extremists and make it harder for demagogues to create an escalatory spiral."[38]

Yet, resistance to change will remain strong in Israel and a 'wait-and-see' attitude seems to prevail. With Syria falling deeper into civil strife and the Muslim Brotherhood winning elections in Egypt, Israel's concerns are that it will end up being the loser in the Arab Spring events. Despite the importance for Israel of a dialogue (or lack thereof) with the Palestinians, Israel's most pressing security concern remains the

Iranian nuclear program. Unfortunately, even peace with the Palestinians will not be enough to reverse that threat.

Irrespective of these new developments, Israel's position on the Middle East Conference remains unchanged: the Netanyahu government has neither rejected nor confirmed its participation in the MEC (see Policy Brief No. 2 by Bernd W. Kubbig and Christian Weidlich et al.).

Turkey

Turkey has often been cited as a model for state-building efforts in the changing Arab states. Ankara's nearly eight decades of political practice that combines a liberal market economy with secular democracy in a predominantly Muslim society, has made the 'Turkish model' a touchstone for the Arab transition. The 2002 'electoral revolution' brought to power the Justice and Development Party of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, replacing the Kemalist cadres with a new Islamic leadership that "also believes in modernization in the Western-democratic style and even in the secularity of the state."[39] The Turkish alchemy of democracy and religion would be a needed model for those Arab states which are starting the path towards democracy, possibly demonstrating that radicalism is not a necessary component of political Islam.

Yet, while parts of the international community see the Turkish experience as a factor for stability and debate about its replication in other parts of the Middle East, others warn that the international community would be mistaken to present Turkey as the model for Arab states in transformation. Turkey can only be a source of inspiration for some of the Arab countries which are ready and able to benefit from Ankara's experiences. The Turkish understanding of secularism reflects the maturity of its Islamic parties, which have the experience of legitimizing themselves within the parliamentary system. The attractiveness of the Turkish model lies in its exceptional economic development. In this regard, Turkey's policies before the outbreak of Arab revolts – emphasizing the flow of people, trade, and ideas – could still be helpful in the creation and projection of the basic norms of democracy and a liberal market economy in the region even under current conditions.

Concerning the MEC dimension, Turkey is likely not to be a (full-fletched) member of the Middle East Conference since it is not considered to be part of the region. However, as an important geographically adjacent player, one cannot rule out that Ankara will be involved in the process starting in Helsinki.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Regardless of the theoretical debate over the term 'revolution', the events that started in Tunisia and spread to other Arab states constituted the first successful attempt in the Arab world to topple authoritarian regimes through popular uprisings. The Arab world witnessed regime changes solely through military coups, mainly during the 1950s and 1960s. And though these changes were depicted as revolutions, the fact of the matter is that they usually represented only a change in the governing elite.

The Arab Spring has shown that the 'impossible is possible' and that even in places where popular protests traditionally have not been tolerated, a bottom-up transformation process can be launched from the streets. Moreover, the dissatisfaction of Arab youths is likely to persist if not adequately addressed by the reform policies of the remaining or newly formed regimes. Yet, demonstrators should develop organized structures and a political agenda to participate in decision making. The Arab world is facing unprecedented transformation, a process few analysts foresaw based on the previous stability of Arab autocracies.

Democratization in the Arab World?

It is usually taken for granted that the transformation, which has begun in the Arab world, would necessarily lead to the democratization of the region. One and a half year later, however, it is increasingly evident that although 'democracy' is a keyword in the political rhetoric, the ongoing transformations are far from the democratic transitions initially hoped for. On the one hand, there is a democratic deficit from the Western point of view if in free and fair elections Islamist parties are winning the biggest share of the votes like in Tunisia or Egypt. Hopefully, once these parties get into a majority governing position, they will not turn their backs on the democratic process that made it possible for them to gain power, and they will follow

»The Arab Spring has shown that the 'impossible is possible'.«

the 'Turkish model'. This, however, cannot be taken for granted. On the other hand, developments elsewhere indicate that the traditional patrimonial social context has not disappeared, but social actors are in fact reorganized along the same traditional patterns. This is most clearly visible in Libya, but to a certain extent can be seen in other cases as well. At the same time, the most relevant underlying elements of the Arab identity – Islam, nationalism, and traditional values – are in conflict as well, and the new identities that will emerge may be very different from country to country. While Arab unity has been given a new meaning and filled with new emotion, country-specific Arab 'nationalisms' have also become increasingly manifest.

What appears after a year and a half is that transformation processes are not easy and that the decades-old structures of power are hard to replace in a relatively short period of time. This holds true for all the categories that we have defined: transformations of the regime, transformations within the regime, and repressed transformations. Various examples illustrate this finding: the military is in many respects still the most powerful actor in Egypt; in Yemen, the new president is the old vice-president; and the monarchies in Saudi Arabia and Jordan have maintained their legitimacy by adopting a strategy of "pre-emptive reform."[40] It is worth mentioning that the most extensive transformations so far have occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, which were all republics, while the monarchies have resisted revolutionary change.

The precise political outcomes of the Arab Spring cannot be predicted. So far, no new social contract, in terms of stable relations between ruler and ruled, has emerged

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6. Palestine here is meant to refer to the Palestinian territories, including the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza, as a 'state in nascendi', the statehood of which has not yet been approved by the United Nations.
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in Tunisia, Egypt, or Libya, while in the Arab monarchies, except for Bahrain, the old social contracts still go unchallenged. However, ordinary citizens are likely to put pressure on the governmental sphere through protests to defend what they consider fair and legitimate. In addition, the new 'language of Tahrir Square' – the discourse of human rights, democracy, and pluralism – is taking root. This can also be seen in the 2012 Arab League Summit's declaration, which praised the political changes and developments that took place in the Arab region, along with the big democratic steps and directions that raised the status of the Arab people.

The Arab Spring and the Middle East Conference

The current focus of the regional states affected by the Arab Spring is mostly on domestic issues. But this does not exclude that the transformations could – in the mid and long term – have an impact on the countries' specific foreign policies and, therefore, on the readiness to discuss and negotiate disarmament agreements. It will also remain vital to look at these issues on a country-by-country basis. The forces of continuity may vary from state to state. But we assume that greater influence of public opinion will be manifest in foreign policy choices which are unpredictable from today's perspective.

For the Facilitator of the Middle East Conference and his team the following factors should form a checklist of issues requiring immediate attention:

- To closely monitor how domestic events positively or negatively affect the decisions of involved actors. The

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emergence of civil society actors as cooperation partners could be of great value.

- To check which country will take the Arab leadership in foreign and arms control policies. Two main candidates come to mind as possible agenda setters for the MEC: Egypt for its historical relevance in disarmament and Saudi Arabia for its newly developed Arab leadership.

- To evaluate how the Arab League will act as the consensus-building forum for Arab positions. Whether and how to optimize its constructive role remains to be seen.

- Not to ignore those countries which so far have remained unaffected by the Arab Spring in the Middle East – Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, UAE, Iraq, and Lebanon – but which will nevertheless be to different degrees important for the MEC process. This would especially apply to Qatar which has emerged as a most visible regional actor with a flexible foreign policy profile which could be used for the benefit of a successful and sustainable Middle East Conference.

Arms control, especially in the realm of WMD, is usually considered an elite exercise belonging to the state's capacity. This does not mean, however, that the popular events would not indirectly have an impact on arms control or that arms control would not resurface at some point as an issue of popular concern. Both the tensions between Israel and Iran over the nuclear issue and the fact that nuclear weapons are sometimes considered a sign of modernization, have the potential to mobilize public opinion.

The emerging political structures in the Arab world will continue to be unstable in the short run. We may witness instability and the possible use of violence by governments and underprivileged tribal, sectarian, or religious groups, particularly in heterogeneous societies. Nevertheless, emerging political structures will be more legitimate and more responsive to the demands of the people. It is indeed possible that Arabs came together to bid farewell to an age of quiescence. ■

About the Academic Peace Orchestra Middle East (APOME)

The Orchestra is the follow-up project of the "Multilateral Study Group (MSG) on the Establishment of a Missile Free Zone in the Middle East". The Academic Peace Orchestra Middle East is a classical Track II initiative: it consists of some 70 experts – mainly from the Middle East/Gulf, one of the most conflict-ridden areas of the world. The Orchestra is meeting regularly in working groups (Chamber Orchestra Units) on specific topics in the context of a workshop cycle from 2011-2014. The main goal of this initiative is to shape the 2012 Middle East Conference on the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles agreed upon by the international community in May 2010.

For this reason, these experts develop ideas, concepts, and background information in a series of Policy Briefs which are the results of intense discussions within the Chamber Orchestra Units. In this framework, the broader normative Cooperative Security Concept will be further developed, embedded, and institutionalized in the region. At the same time, the Orchestra meetings serve as venues for confidence building among the experts. The networking activities of PRIF's Project Group are documented by the Atlas on Track II research activities in or about the Middle East/Gulf region.

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