

University of Southern Denmark, 5 October 2011:  
*Mediterranean Perspectives*

The authoritarian regimes of the Middle East  
and the Arab Spring

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Student Presentation by Vadym:  
The recent development in Libya

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Literature:

- Anderson, Lisa (2011) Demystifying the Arab Spring. Parsing the Differences Between Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 3, pp. 2-7
- Gause, Gregory (2011) Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 4, pp. 81-90.
- Teti, Andrea & Gervasio, Gennaro (2011) The Unbearable Lightness of Authoritarianism: Lessons from the Arab Uprisings, *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 321-327.
- Joffe, George (2011) Libya and the European Union: shared interests, *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 233-249.



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Outline:

- "Enjoy the revolution"
- The Arab revolution(s)
- The different revolutions – and the similarities...
- Why did we miss it? What can we predict?
- The authoritarian regimes and the Arab Spring
- Libya – student presentation...
- Discussions



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### The Arab Revolution(s)

- A revolution – or just "revolutionary spasms"?
- Nobody saw it coming – but we can rationalize afterwards: some economic development before the international financial crisis created expectations for better living conditions. Added to that low wages and rising prices.
- Frustrations over the ineffective, corrupt, bureaucratic, conservative, authoritarian and repressive regimes – without any legitimacy!
- All these elements are underlying factors. Added to that you have events or incidents, which trigger the "revolution"...
- A domino effect? (hardly!, but many seem to be affected): Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Jordan, Bahrain, Syria, Saudi-Arabia...
- Perspectives – at least three possible scenarios: a democratic development in a new Middle East, status quo (look at Egypt...) or a perspective nobody would want: chaos, civil war, etc.

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### The computer "revolution"

INTERNET USERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND IN THE WORLD

MIDDLE EAST REGION	Population (2009 Est.)	Pop. % of World	Internet Users, Latest Data	% Population (Penetration)	User	
					Growth (2000-2009)	Users % of World
Total in Middle East	202,687,005	3.0 %	58,309,546	28.8 %	1,675.1 %	3.2 %
Rest of the World	6,565,118,203	97.0 %	1,744,020,911	26.6 %	387.6 %	96.8 %
WORLD TOTAL	6,767,805,208	100.0 %	1,802,330,457	26.6 %	399.3 %	100.0 %

- Access to computers in the Middle East was earlier at a lower level than in any other region in the world. This is no longer the case. Now MENA is (a little) above the world average (and in Jordan you can find the street in the world with the largest number of Internet café's)
- A net based public sphere is extremely difficult to control
- Weblogs are gradually on their way becoming an important political factor... (see for instance Tomas Demmelhuber, Democratization 18/3)

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### The (old) new media

- The new (old) Middle Eastern media are also in the midst of a rapid development, but – of course – they are not necessarily representing democratic viewpoints...
- The biggest is still Al Jazeera, established in 1996, which since then has developed, so its channels are sending round the clock in most of the world – including a very strong net based news channel
- Important competitors are the international (Western) media like CNN, BBC, Euro-News, but of course also other regional channels like the MBC, Al Arabiya, Al Alam (Iran), Al Manar (Hezbollah) etc.
- Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen: "In the long run, and in more quiet phases of the Middle Eastern development they (the media, ps) will be able to put significant pressure on the local leaders"
- Maybe 2011 is not exactly a "quiet phase", and more than that: we should be aware that media not necessarily create democracy...

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### The different revolutions – and the similarities...

- According to Lisa Anderson the revolution of 2011 is not completely without precedent...in 1919 something similar happened!
- In Tunisia it started in the province, in Egypt it was young, urban, cosmopolitan people, in Libya "ragtag bands of armed rebels..."...reflected divergent economic grievances and social dynamics
- Tunisia was "Orwellian", a modern, technocratic regime, a touristic paradise, a fine education system, large middle classes and a strong labour movement – and an extremely repressive, "family" based society: "more than half of Tunisia's commercial elites personally related to Ben Ali's family"
- Its army had never experienced combat and does not dominate the domestic economy
- An "outdated", weak islamist opposition
- A modern, young generation who never experienced anything but the regimes of Ben Ali and (from 1957-1987) Habib Bourguiba...

### The different revolutions – and the similarities...

- In Egypt the army carefully calibrated its interventions in the uprisings – widely respected among the Egyptians...
- A culture of discussion and egalitarian spirit...
- Altogether a cause for optimism...
- In Libya the Tripoli regime collapsed into civil war – with a regime building on traces of Italian fascism: extravagance, dogmatism and brutality
- A small, yet corrupt public sector needs to be (re-)built
- Added to that a need for uniting the different clans and provinces, a need for strengthening the civil society, a need for a national identity...
- The different preconditions and different "revolutions" will shape the outcomes of their different liberating movements
- Egypt have to struggle with its military, Tunisia and Libya will have to redefine the relationship between their privileged capital cities and "their sullen hinterlands"...

### Why did we miss it? What can we predict?

- Notice Gause's subtitle! (The Myth of Authoritarian Stability) – and then the "confession": *...in FA 2005 I argued that the United States should not encourage democracy in the Arab world because Washingtons authoritarian Arab allies represented stable bets for the future* and
- *"I also predicted that democratic Arab governments would prove much less likely to cooperate with with U.S. foreign policy goals in the region"*
- Which mistakes did we make?
- Arab armies would never break with their rulers...
- But also, in (ethnically or religiously) divided countries: if the regime falls the army leadership is likely to be replaced as well
- The reform factor: first of all economic reforms made life more difficult for the poor, but also: the elites were not happy either, despite the rentier-mechanism...in short:
- "Middle Eastern scholars missed the destabilizing effects of poorly implemented liberal economic policies..."

### Why did we miss it? What can we predict?

- An Arab Nationalism (Pan-Arabism) still exists – however, in a new version: the common enemy is no longer Israel or the US, but Arab's own rulers...
- Consequence: the US will have to reactivate Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in order to meet the demands of the Arab Street throughout the Middle East
- So we have some rethinking to do!
- We shouldn't throw the baby out with the bathwater! It was important to explain authoritarian resilience, but we also have to realise that we underestimated the forces for change...
- Summing up we need to rethink in three areas:
- A) the role of the military
- B) the effects of economic reform on economic stability
- C) the role of Arab identity in a changing world
- ...and this time it might be a good idea to leave it to the Arabs to decide about their future...

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### The authoritarian regimes and the Arab Spring

#### Lessons from the Arab Spring:

- (...even) authoritarianism is fragile...but for a while we insisted on explaining the resilience of authoritarianism by referring to "smart authoritarianism" etc....or to drop the discussion by speaking of post-democratization...
- So...it took a while before we realized that it was possible to "rock the boat" – and that bottom-up aspirations might have a chance in the Middle East
- The reform factor – as the point made by Greg. Gause...The Egyptian neoliberal reforms provoked a reaction from "below"...
- Islam can play a role as a democratic factor – and added to that it seems that right now we see secular parties and movements become strengthened vis-à-vis the Islamist movements
- A "window of opportunity" for democracy – only open for a short period, by the way: the interesting question seen from the West is how to deal with it – pragmatism or democracy promotion in a new setting!

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