

The 'state' of pivot states in south-eastern Mediterranean Turkey, Egypt, Israel, and Tunisia after the Arab Spring

Loretta Dell'Aguzzo
and Emidio Diodato

Collana
Studi internazionali e comparati [1]



PERUGIA STRANIERI
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Collana di
"Studi internazionali e comparati"

[1]

**The 'state' of pivot states in south-eastern Mediterranean:
Turkey, Egypt, Israel, and Tunisia after the Arab Spring**

Loretta Dell'Aguzzo and Emidio Diodato

Collana

"Studi internazionali e comparati"

diretta da
Emidio Diodato

Comitato Scientifico

Daniel C. Bach CNRS - Parigi
Università di Bordeaux
Gian Paolo Calchi Novati ISPI Milano - Università degli Studi di Pavia
Francesco Duranti - Università per Stranieri di Perugia
Francisco Fernández Segado - Università Complutense di Madrid
Federica Guazzini - Università per Stranieri di Perugia
Leonardo Morlino - Università Luiss 'Guido Carli' di Roma
Zyia Oniş - Università di Koç di Istanbul
Mauro Volpi - Università degli Studi di Perugia

Publishing Manager

Antonello Lamanna

Editing, Communication design

Antonello Lamanna

Published by

Perugia Stranieri University Press

University for Foreigners of Perugia
Piazza Fortebraccio 4,
06123 Perugia
www.unistrapg.it
universitypress@unistrapg.it

ISBN: 978-88-99811-03-7 [epub/pdf online]

ISBN:978-88-99811-06-8 [print]

Copyright © 2016 by
Perugia Stranieri University Press
All rights reserved.

The 'state' of pivot states in south-eastern Mediterranean: Turkey, Egypt, Israel, and Tunisia after the Arab Spring

Loretta Dell'Aguzzo and Emidio Diodato

with Francesco Duranti, Giulia Giordano and Ester Sigillò



PERUGIA STRANIERI
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Table of contents

Introduction

The 'state' of pivot states in south-eastern Mediterranean

Loretta Dell'Aguzzo and Emidio Diodato 9

1. Turkey and the seduction of authoritarianism

Emidio Diodato 23

2. The troubled story of post-revolutionary Egypt: the struggle for survival of a fading star?

Loretta Dell'Aguzzo 45

3. Israel between international isolation and internal fragmentation

Giulia Giordano 71

4. Beyond the myth of the Tunisian exception: the open-ended tale of a fragile democratization

Ester Sigillò 95

Constitution of Tunisia, Venice Commission and International Constitutionalism

Francesco Durante 123

Conclusion

Turbulence, chaos, stability: the Arab Spring and its legacy

Loretta Dell'Aguzzo and Emidio Diodato 133

About the authors

143

Introduction

The 'state' of pivot states in south-eastern Mediterranean

Loretta Dell'Aguzzo and Emidio Diodato

The term 'pivot state' was first coined by Halford J. Mackinder in 1904, when he wrote: "in the present condition of the balance of power, the pivot state, Russia, is not equivalent to the peripheral states."¹ Since then, several debates have been held on the topic of what is pivotal and peripheral in international relations. The concept of pivot state has been employed in an extensive sense from global to regional concerns. Broadly speaking, scholars now agree that all those states that are decisive to the fate of their region, in times of changing power configurations, and find themselves in overlapping spheres of interests, can be considered pivotal as opposed to peripheral. This is especially true today since we live in a period marked by the dawn of a complex multipolar system, in which great, middle but also small powers can play pivotal roles. Indeed, pivot states are those states that possess military, economic or cultural strategic assets that could not only influence their regions but also affect international order. They can upstage the regional balance of power and upset global peace and stability. A change in the alignment of pivot states can have important repercussions both for regional and global security.²

During the last five years, the region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has been engulfed in an unprecedented outburst of popular protests. Scholars have investigated how the so-called 'Arab Spring' led to transnational conflicts and civil wars in Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. On the one hand, the royal families of the region overcame difficulties better than external observers might have feared. But, on the other, governments modelled on a Soviet-style one-party state collapsed and major conflicts emerged in countries propped up by powerful security establishments or already affected by Islamic insurgency. In both cases the conflicts have assumed a transnational character as well as an international one, with the participation and support of other states and regional or global powers. Of course, it makes sense that much of the literature on the Arab Spring has been dedicated to the study of the popular protests and the resulting conflicts. However, in this book our aim is to investigate domestic changes in those countries which could have played a pivotal role. This choice has two consequences: 1) a focus on the stability of states rather than on their failure; 2) a definition of the geopolitical area under observation.

In spite of the various definitions of region in international relations, the MENA region is usually considered a large area whose economy, politics and culture are different from other regions. Originally framed by the World Bank for the imple-

mentation of its projects and programs, the MENA region was considered pivotal after the Arab Spring on the part of the G8. The *Declaration of the G8 on the Arab Springs*, delivered in Deauville on 26-27 May, 2011, was very clear to this regard: "The changes under way in the Middle East and North Africa [...] are historic and have the potential to open the door to the kind of transformation that occurred in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall."³ Of course, now we know that this democratic potential greatly diminished since the aspiration of people for freedom, job-opportunities and empowerment failed in a growing number of states. Nonetheless, the G8 countries continued to perceive the MENA region as a 'regional security complex', namely a geopolitical area that requires a comprehensive approach or engagement.⁴ This representation had already emerged at the time of the terroristic events of 9/11 that altered the Arab world's international perception. On 8-10 June, 2004, at the Sea Island's summit, the G8 countries launched the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA), namely an economic and political plan aimed at fostering security in the MENA region.

Rather than the MENA region, our analysis is focused on the south-eastern Mediterranean. The key objective in selecting this geopolitical area coincides with the political drives inspiring the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, which aims to promote stability and economic development between the EU and countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. In 2011, the European Bank for Research and Development (EBRD) expanded its operations including four south-eastern Mediterranean states (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan) and introduced the acronym SEMED to indicate the geopolitical area involved. Since EBRD operates in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, Turkey (which is excluded from the World Bank's MENA) can be included among this group of states. At any rate, our purpose here is not to introduce or define a new region, but to focus on problems of stability of those states that can upstage the Mediterranean and eventually upset global peace and stability. In other words, we chose to focus on the south-eastern Mediterranean according to the pivotal role that some states, from Tunisia to Turkey, can play for the fate of the Euro-Mediterranean relations. The Mediterranean Sea is at the core of our analysis by virtue of its historical value, that is to say as the cradle of Greek culture, the Roman Empire, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and in view of the current security problems, specifically considering that the Mediterranean represents much more than just Europe's southern boundary. It has always been a historical 'pivot of peace or war'⁵

The south-eastern Mediterranean entered a period of changing power configurations after the Arab Spring. In the history of political systems, there are rare moments of political openness and change. In normal times, the dynamics of international relations are regulated by patterns of gradual evolution subject to the logic of equilibrium, power politics, or institutional path dependence. Only occasionally, the antecedent conditions are interrupted by critical junctures, that occur when uncer-

tainty as to the future of international relations allows for political agency to play a decisive role. To this regard, the end of the Cold War marked an important turning point in the structure of the international system, and also a benchmark date for scholars who pay attention to historical changes of the world-system. Likewise, the Arab Spring marked a turning point in the history of the Arab world. It can be considered a critical juncture since the political changes took place in distinct ways in the different countries. 2011 is also a benchmark date affecting all the MENA countries. But our concern is restricted to the south-eastern Mediterranean, since in this geopolitical area a pivotal process for the security of the European Union started developing after the Arab Spring. Indeed, instabilities that run from Libya to Syria have dramatic repercussions on the major challenges the EU is facing: from the African population growth to migration flows, from international terrorism to the protection of political refugees. This makes proper an analysis on the stability of those states that may play a pivotal role.

We consider Turkey, Egypt, Israel and Tunisia as decisive to the fate of the Mediterranean. While Turkey and Egypt are often considered pivotal in the Middle East in terms of population size, history and geography, Israel and Tunisia are much less relevant with regard to demographic, ideational and geostrategic factors. But they can be included in our list considering their strategic or cultural assets in the aftermath of the Arab turmoil. Israel remains an epicenter of crisis in the Middle East, both for the Palestinian issue and the Muslim claim to the Holy City. Tunisia received the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize for the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet. The North African country's contribution to the Arab Spring, in the wake of the Jasmine Revolution of 2011, is still a point of reference for scholars, decision makers and the public opinion. Furthermore, during the constitution-making process, which ended with the adoption of the new Tunisian Constitution in January 2014, a prominent role was played by the *European Commission for Democracy through Law*, better known as the *Venice Commission*. Of course there are differences between the four countries both for their potential role and for the effects of the Arab Spring. While Tunisia and Egypt experienced regime changes with the ousting of Bel Ali and Mubarak, Turkey and Israel were peripheral to the ongoing turmoil. But also in this case, we can include these two last states in our list considering that during the 19th century their peripheral condition in the region was the main driver for bilateral ties and international commitments with great powers. Turkey and Israel's domestic and foreign policies were strongly affected by the neighbour Arab region.

In today's international relations there are almost four great powers: the United States, Russia, China and the European Union (whereby the EU is to be considered as the sum of the member states). According to the relevance of any given geopolitical region, including the south-eastern Mediterranean, a pivot state might remain in overlapping spheres of influence for an indefinite period of time, or might be moving into the sphere of one great power in particular. Turkey, Egypt, Israel and Tunisia all have strong historical ties with the US and the EU countries. Russia and,

above all, China did not act as alternative fulcrum of attraction. But the balance of power in the region could change as a consequence of the domestic and regional transformations. Our focus, therefore, is on the stability of these states rather than on the failure of others. Nonetheless, we give special attention to the nexus between the domestic dimension, on the one side, and the regional and international ones, on the other. As searching dimensions, the three levels of analysis – national, regional and international – are not designed separately. Our purpose is to evaluate the ‘state’ of pivot states and, as consequence, the domestic political stability represents the starting point from which we move including the other two dimensions.

The definition of political stability is a highly debated issue in political science. Whereas earlier studies equated it with absence of violence or with government duration,⁶ we define stability as the capacity of states to adapt to internal and external shocks. In this understanding, political stability is not the absence of change, but concerns how well a political system adapts to change. This means that government or regime change does not necessarily bring about political instability. Anyhow, external and internal political changes put stability to the test. When discussing the stability of a political system a distinction between its main components is required. Any state is composed of a political community, an authority, and a systems of values and institutions, to wit: the *demos*, the government and a regime. The stability of these three components influences the stability of the whole system.

Case-studies included in this book display very different features in terms of *demos*, governments and regimes. As regard to *demos*, whilst Egypt and Tunisia are more ethnically homogeneous, Israel and Turkey can be defined as divided societies due to the presence of aggrieved or not fully integrated ethnic minorities (Palestinian Arabs in Israel and the Kurds in Turkey). Generally, instability related to the political community is supposed to affect not only political order but also the state’s very survival. Indeed, the absence of an agreement on who constitutes the ‘people’ can lead to separatism, internecine conflict and, in some cases, state collapse. But both Turkish and Israeli states in the past decades have proved to be highly resilient to calls for the redefinition of their boundaries. In the first case, Kurds’ claims for autonomy and separatism have never really jeopardized the persistence of the Turkish state. Israel’s statehood has been put into question not only by the Palestinians in Gaza and in the West Bank, but also by powerful neighbors and by active sections of Western public opinion. However, notwithstanding internal and external threats Israel’s military capacities, internal legitimacy and an efficient coercive apparatus have allowed the state to survive and even to expand its borders.

As for differences in the governments, both Turkey and Israel display durable governments, whereas Egypt and Tunisia have experienced several changes in the governing coalitions during the last five years. Government durability is also an often used indicator of stability, but it presents several shortcomings. First of all, it is currently more relevant for the stability of authoritarian regimes than for democratic ones, since in the latter changes in government are subject to routinized

and institutionalized procedures. In addition, frequent government turnovers may decrease the performance of a given country, not its survival as a political object. For instance, since 2011 Tunisia experienced far more changes in the government coalitions than Egypt, but the political system of the latter can in no way be defined as more stable than the Tunisian one.

As far as the regime type is concerned, currently Egypt is an authoritarian regime, Turkey can be seen as a hybrid regime, given that it displays features of both democracy and authoritarianism, Tunisia is a new and consolidating democracy, and Israel is by almost all sources defined as a mature democracy.⁷ Thus, the case-studies included in this book differ very much in terms of regime type since three of them belong to the subset of democracies though Turkey is shifting toward authoritarianism, whereas Egypt displays several features of pure authoritarianism. In 2011 both Tunisia and Egypt underwent a transition from authoritarian rule, but the processes of democratization in these two countries differed markedly. In the first case, after the ouster of Ben Ali a pact between a fairly cohesive opposition and the soft-liners of the previous regime was forged. This allowed for a smooth transition to democracy. In Egypt, contrariwise, the relations within the opposition and between the latter and the remnants of the old regime were extremely more adversarial and a military coup in 2013 abruptly ended the democratic experience of the country. These developments, along with external changes, negatively affected the stability of the Egyptian political system.

Even though the stability of all three mentioned components – *demos*, government and regime – is assumed to play a role in the stability of the state, and thus in its degree of 'pivotness', stability of the latter seems to affect the overall stability of the systems more than the other two components. The stability of regimes is thus considered as the most relevant feature influencing the four south-eastern Mediterranean states considered in this book, in particular their capacity to adapt to internal and external developments prompted by the 2011 Arab Springs.

Classical studies have associated the concept of stability to that of democracy. But more recent contributions on authoritarian resilience have showed that stability can be a feature of authoritarian systems as well.⁸ The Arab uprisings have challenged the findings of this strand of the literature. Indeed, the Arab Spring destabilized several dictatorships that had long seemed immune to change. Our thesis is that regime type matters and that democracies are more stable than non-democratic regimes. However, the stability of both type of regimes rests on two main factors – that is, on the one side, the state's monopoly on coercion and, on the other side, political legitimacy. The degree of reliance to one or the other factor largely influences the degree of stability for both democracy and authoritarianism. Furthermore, the two factors are highly interdependent: an overall high level of support makes the use of state violence to ensure compliance unnecessary. During legitimacy crises, challengers may pose relevant threats to the regime survival making the resort to coercion more likely, not only in authoritarian contexts.

As far as the causal relation between repression and regime type is concerned, conventional wisdom agrees on a 'pacifying effect' produced by democracy at the domestic level. This would happen for three main reasons. First of all, the presence of democratic institutions may increase the costs of repression, given that when state actions are considered inappropriate, citizens can vote executives out of office. Second, democratic values are undermined by state repression. Third, in democracies grievances are channeled through the institutionalization of participation and contestation.⁹ That being said, however, several studies highlight that when the type of threat is taken into consideration the effect of regime type on repression may become less relevant. According to Robert Goldstein, for example, more serious threats to the state can induce democratic executives to resort to repression in order to ensure the security of the population.¹⁰ In dire circumstances, democratic executives may consider using harsh repression and even large scale political restrictions, thus going well beyond considerations of political legitimacy and electoral responsiveness.¹¹ Analogously, Patrick Regan and Errol Henderson find that the level and nature of threat is positively associated with the extent of political repression and that such variables produces a significantly higher effect on state violence than the presence of democratic institutions.¹² The level of threat also has an effect on coalition-building, since previously disparate groups can unify in the presence of threats to regime survival in order to react in a more efficient manner to dangerous challenges.¹³

Obviously, the decision to use repression to induce citizens to comply with the rules of the regime is not inconsequential and it may, in turn, pose a threat to the regime itself and to the stability of the whole system. Indeed, many studies find that a higher degree of state repression may be associated with radical behavior on the part of the challengers. According to Ted Robert Gurr, for example, whereas in the short term coercion increases the costs of collective action, it also fosters grievances and creates incentives for retaliation.¹⁴ In addition, using Donatella della Porta's words: "repressive, diffuse and hard techniques of policing tend to, at the same time, discourage mass and peaceful protest while fueling the most radical fringes."¹⁵ Indeed, repeated clashes with the police may heighten extremism and lead to a justification for more violent forms of action on the part of the regime challengers.¹⁶ During the anti-government Gezi Park protests in May and June 2013, for example, Turkey experienced excessive use of force. Erdoğan's personal defiant attitude towards oppositions seemed to validate the already existing general belief that an authoritarian turn was taking place in democratic Turkey. Moreover, social movements tend to adapt to the political opportunity structure and when regimes close down institutional channels for political opposition, they may opt for violence as a means of last resort. For example, al-Sisi's heavy hand in North Sinai is considered the main factor that is making many Egyptians more susceptible to radicalization.

For the abovementioned reasons, democratic regimes resort to harsh repression only when they perceive a compelling threat to the existing political order. As far as

authoritarian regimes are concerned, their reliance on coercion is higher, especially during the installation of the dictatorial rule. Also in authoritarian countries, however, the use of repression can be a catalyst for destabilization, since it engenders a loss of support over time. Therefore, while not relinquishing repressive institutions, if dictators wish to preserve power, they must still draw on other strategies, that is to say political legitimacy. Actually, any power needs to justify itself by attempting “to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society.”¹⁷ Whereas in the past decades research on the relationship between legitimacy and stability has focused its attention mainly on democratic regimes, in recent years comparatists have examined the role played by legitimacy also in authoritarian systems.¹⁸

To this regard, in this book we adopt the Weberian definition of legitimacy as the belief that a given actor has the right to govern. As a consequence, we consider legitimation as the process through which actors and institutions attempt to legitimate their rule. Conventional wisdom agrees that the higher the legitimacy the more stable is the regime. Thus, in our analysis we assume that the level of legitimacy largely affects the stability of the system as a whole. Moreover, a political system is considered as more stable if the regime’s legitimation claims are based on different sources.¹⁹

When analysing democratic regimes, scholars focus almost exclusively on legitimacy grounded in procedures, which concern how the regime comes to power and how it works and adopts decisions. Procedural legitimacy is closely associated with the Weberian concept of legal authority. Therefore, it rests on “a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands.”²⁰ However, many contemporary authoritarian regimes resort to this legitimation strategy as well. In many autocracies, support is expressed through electoral processes, which are at the same time incapable of disturbing the incumbents and “meaningful in buttressing regime claims to legitimacy.”²¹ In fact, electoral autocracies use (rigged) elections as a means to bolster regime’s political legitimacy.²²

Another source of legitimacy is thus (socio-economic) performance, which is related to what the regime does for the citizens. Performance legitimacy echoes David Easton’s concept of specific support, that is “the *quid pro quo* for the fulfilment of demands”.²³ Like procedural legitimacy, this source of support can be used by both democratic and authoritarian regimes as well. In his discussion of authoritarian legitimacy and democratic opening, for example, Peter Burnell maintains that dictatorships can achieve this type of support “through ensuring an increasing supply of ‘standard public goods’ to society [...] or by dispensing patronage more discriminatingly through patron-client networks.”²⁴

Further sources of political legitimacy are ideology, charisma and international recognition. Following Easton, in a political system “the power of the authorities and of the regime both depend upon continuing validation through some set of va-

lues, a legitimating ideology.”²⁵ This point can be understood as the general narrative regarding the righteousness of a given political order.²⁶ Most common legitimating ideologies in Muslim societies are nationalism and religion. Indeed, Islam has always been one of the most important frames of reference in the Arab world and even secular leaders often claimed legitimacy on religious grounds. Indeed, secular authoritarian incumbents in both Tunisia and Egypt were not able to abandon Islam completely, since this would have implied to sever the most important tie between the political elite and the majority of the people. According to John Esposito, the leaders of independence movements always resorted to religion to gain their legitimacy and mobilize the masses.²⁷ But also in the case of Israel, especially in the last decades, religion has played a strong political role. Since religious parties conquered the public sphere in 1977, also in Israel we witness the so-called ‘post-secular phenomenon’ of the return of God.

The relevance of charismatic legitimacy dates back to Weber, who maintains that it stems from the leaders “extraordinary personality.”²⁸ The charismatic leadership of Erdoğan, for example, was based on his embodying traditions and an ideology, rather than on fear and rewards to his collaborators. But if this characteristic of charisma is the opposite of traditional reverence, then it can generate a sort of confirmation burden for the leader, namely the need to reformulate his mission when it has proved to be defiant. This is exactly what happened to the Turkish leader after his failure to lead changes resulting from the Arab Spring. In post-colonial Tunisia, along with a good economic performance, the most important source of legitimacy was Bourguiba’s charisma, used to spread the state’s hegemonic discourse and to strengthen the regime control over society. In a similar fashion, it is generally acknowledged that much of the popular support for the Egyptian authoritarian regime in the 1950s came from Nasser’s charismatic appeal. But charisma is not episodic or related to single political successes. For example, in October 2011 Netanyahu negotiated with Hamas for the release of some Israeli soldiers contributing to shift in the political agenda from social to security issues. However, it was not the charisma of leadership that played a decisive role. Furthermore, it has to be noted that charismatic legitimacy, if not accompanied by other sources of support, cannot ensure long-term regime durability.

Finally, we must consider the relevance of international engagement, that is “the extent to which a regime refers to its international role in order to legitimate its rule domestically.”²⁹ Indeed, both international legal recognition and material or symbolic support as well as the “portrayal of an ‘enemy at the gates’ [...] are very valuable to the manufacture of legitimacy at home.”³⁰ Egyptian former President Morsi’s decision to cut ties with the Assad regime in 2013, for instance, aimed both at appeasing his Salafi allies at home and at obtaining the support of Gulf States, which backed the Islamist opposition to the Syrian President. In addition, the post-revolutionary Tunisian regime took advantage of the country’s successful transition to democracy and its relative stability if compared to its neighbours to attract material

(mainly economic) support from Western donors. The perception of an existential threat to the state of Israel has bounded together a very diverse society, which included both Jewish immigrants from different countries and the Palestinian minority. In the Turkish case, the hostile international environment, the irredentist Kurdish minority linked to neighbouring foreign powers, and the sources of legitimacy alternative to the West have been three factors that have converged on the broken promise of the Arab revolts and its aftermaths.

Having discussed the main elements that ensure domestic stability – that is, the state's monopoly on coercion and, most importantly, political legitimacy and its sources – the analysis of how domestic stability is influenced by the external environment is required. Indeed, a brief discussion of the interplay between domestic stability and the international context is of utmost relevance. Just as internal processes are assumed to influence foreign policy decisions, the international context feed into the domestic politics in a never-ending process. Thus, internal and external dimensions are in a dialectic relationship. A dialectical interpretation of the interplay between the internal and the external dimensions helps us to recognise both political stasis and policy punctuations, that is to say stability, on the one side, and historical contradictions as source of change, on the other. As already said, however, political stability is not the absence of change. It concerns political systems' capacity to adapt to changes. The mode of political adaptation to regional and international relations – that we may define as international adjustment – does not result from rational calculation but originates “in the cultural impulse, historical precedents, and structural circumstances.”³¹ Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that the mode of adaptation followed by any political entity is a matter of choice. According to John Ikenberry, for example, “the maneuvering of states within national and international arenas can be conceived of as controlled by strategies that states develop to cope with adjustment problems.”³²

As becomes apparent from the analysis of the four case-studies, several examples of complex interplay between the domestic and international dimensions, but also between actors and contexts, can be given. As a matter of fact, the coup staged by the Egyptian military in 2013 against the then President Morsi had not only domestic but also international implications. Indeed, the authoritarian turn of the al-Sisi administration induced the US to change their stance toward Egypt, one of their historical allies in the region. Actually, concerns about widespread human rights abuses during al-Sisi administration were at the basis of the decision of Washington to suspend the delivery of weapons and to cut aid to Egypt. In turn, the cooling of relations between the US and Egypt induced the latter to further revise its foreign policy and to look for closer relations with the Russian Federation. With regards to Turkey, the more unstable the regional environment the higher seems the probability that the country will strengthen its authoritarian turn, redefining its foreign policy principles and, eventually, asking support from Russia or even China. As for Israel, domestic politics and foreign policy have always been strictly intertwined,

due to the presence of a hostile regional environment, the special relationship with the US and, above all, the conflict with the Palestinians. Also in Tunisia the two dimensions are widely interconnected. Actually, after the uprising that toppled the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia, the country's foreign policy was dictated, as in Egypt, by economic and security concerns. Tunisia's need for financial support has led the new government to strengthen its ties with new regional players, in particular with Turkey and Qatar, which have supported the development of Tunisian faith-based associations. However, the incumbents later decided to freeze the activities of some of these associations, because they feared the spread of Islamist radicalization in the country.

In summary, the main argument of this book is that political stability is a key factor in evaluating the pivotness of states, especially in times of rapid change. Sources of legitimacy and the use of coercion can alter domestic political stability and bring about changes at the regional and international level as well. Changes in the latter dimensions can in turn, affect domestic political stability. Against this background, in the following chapters we will evaluate the 'state' of pivot states in the south-eastern Mediterranean through the analysis of the complex interplay between the different dimensions mentioned above. Considering the domestic-international linkage, that is a recurrent sequence of behaviour that originate in one system and is reacted by another, special focus will be put on the south-eastern Mediterranean and the critical juncture of the Arab Spring. In the case of Turkey, for example, its historic pivotal role, which was related to Western leverage in terms of democratizing pressure, underwent a radical change. Turkey's ambiguity in instrumentally exploiting the European anchorage to promote a 'Turkish model' of democratic governance and Islamic values in the Arab world failed. Despite the density of ties and cross-border flows between Turkey and the Western powers, regional instability could foster a 'revolution' in Turkey's alignment with important repercussions both for regional and global security. As a pivot state, Turkey might remain in overlapping spheres of influence for an indefinite period of time, but it might also move into the sphere of influence of other great powers choosing to join non-democratic regimes. Uncertainty as to the future of international relations allows for political agency to play a decisive role and the serious democratic regression that emerged in Turkey since 2011 is related to this uncertainty. Turkey's engagement in the Middle East came as a consequence of the US's partial retreat from the region and the waning credibility of the EU accession process. In a post-Arab spring context, Turkey can continue to turn its hybrid identity into a foreign policy asset. At any rate, Western conditionality no longer represents a viable and acceptable instrument to induce domestic change.

Like Turkey, Egypt has always been considered a pivot state, mainly due to its strategic position, its role in the Israel-Palestinian conflict and its cultural relevance in the Arab world. Even though the international stature of the country has started to decline since the death of Nasser, its pivotness has never been questioned.

However, after the military coup and the rise to the presidency of former General al-Sisi in 2013, important changes concerning domestic stability and international credibility occurred. First, the severe repression against all forms of dissent which followed the overthrow of the Islamist executive have produced unprecedented tensions between Cairo and its western allies, above all with the US, which even opted for cutting military aid to Egypt. Washington has re-examined its decision after a rapprochement between Egypt and Russia and, thus, a shift toward the Russian sphere of influence appears unlikely. That being said, frequent human rights abuses represent a matter of concern, since they could foster renewed protests and jeopardize domestic stability. Second, after 2013, al-Sisi's engagement in an all-out war against the Muslim Brotherhood at home and abroad has induced Egypt to side with the Shia regime in Syria, upsetting both Gulf States and the US and, thus, mining the country's reliability as an ally. The two aforementioned factors may challenge the pivotness of Egypt in the future.

Israel is a small country engulfed by existential threats. While willingly positioning itself at the periphery of the Middle East's dynamics, in the attempt of not getting involved, Israel had historically proved a clear interest in not being left at the periphery of the international system. Consequently, its regional status of peripheral country was transformed into an asset to be considered a pivot state at the international level, also considering its democratic regime in a region replete with authoritarian regimes. Israel has always aspired to play this pivotal role in bringing together actors from different regions, building a solid network of economic, political and military connections. Notwithstanding the Palestinians issue, both the United States and the European Union have strongly supported this situation and, thus, the peculiarity of Israel's pivotness. Israel has also shown great resilience towards the dramatic events taking place in its immediate surroundings. Nevertheless, the winds of the Arab Spring have penetrated the fortress of Israel and played an important role in shaping its national and international agenda. Today, Israel's pivotness seems more susceptible to external dynamics.

In contrast with aforementioned cases, Tunisia was not a pivot state before the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, which ended with a regime change and the installation of democracy in the country. Tunisia represents the only 'success story' that emerged as a consequence of the Arab Springs and its widely acknowledged exceptionalism in the region is the linchpin of Tunisian current pivotal status. Even though this small and peripheral country lacks strategic and demographic relevance, its capacity to adapt to the changes prompted by the revolution has attracted the attention of the Western powers, especially the US, which have supported the democratization process and the much needed economic reforms. Unaddressed socio-economic grievances and a mobilized population can, however, cause a domino effect. Indeed, the economic backwardness of several regions and the steady growth of youth unemployment are believed to boost Islamist radicalization and contribute to the increase of the number of Tunisian IS-affiliates and foreign fighters. This state of af-

fairs would obviously jeopardize domestic stability, the consolidation of democracy and, in turn, put into question the pivotal status of the country.

Time will tell whether political choices made during and in the aftermath of the Arab Spring do constitute a critical juncture, that is whether these choices actually “close[d] off alternative options and [led] to the establishment of institutions that generate[d] self-reinforcing path-dependent processes.”³³ At any rate, empirical evidence suggests that the 2011 revolutions brought about dramatic changes both in the countries where they actually occurred, like Egypt and Tunisia, and in those where no major uprising took place, like Turkey and Israel. In the short-term, the Arab Spring greatly influenced the degree of pivotness of these four south-eastern Mediterranean states, by challenging domestic stability, regional and international alliances. As turning points, critical junctures should be relatively short periods of time during which there is a substantial probability that agents’ choices will affect the outcome of foreign policy and generate a long-lasting institutional legacy. If uncertainty as to the future is rather protracted or the period of transition is longer, then political and social forces may lose the momentum for change. This could result in the greater probability that political decisions will be constrained by some reemerging structural pattern. However, it is very difficult that what happened in south-eastern Mediterranean will not leave a legacy on the ‘state’ of the regional pivot states.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ H. J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *The Geographical Journal*, 1904, 23, 4, p. 436.
- ² T. Sweijjs, W. T. Oosterveld, E. Knowles, and M. Schellekens, *Why are Pivot States so Pivotal? The role of pivot states in regional and global security*, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, The Hague, 2014.
- ³ Declaration of the G8 on the Arab Springs, Deauville May 26-27, 2011, at <https://goo.gl/VnmJt>
- ⁴ According to a classic definition: “security complexes are regions as seen through the lens of security” (B. Buzan, and O. Wæver, *Regions and powers. The structure of international security*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 43-44.
- ⁵ W. Gordon East, “The Mediterranean: Pivot of Peace and War,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 1953, pp. 619-633; P. Gentiloni, “Pivot to the Mediterranean. Understanding the Region’s Global Significance,” *Foreign Affairs*, May, 28, 2015 at <https://goo.gl/xwy2Re>.
- ⁶ For a review of the different understandings of political stability, please see L. Hurwitz, “Contemporary approaches to political stability,” *Comparative Politics*, 1973, 5, 3, pp.449-63.
- ⁷ Sammy Smooha considers Israel as an ‘ethnic democracy’, namely “a system which combines the extension of civil and political rights to individuals and some collective rights to minorities, with institutionalization of majority control over the state” (S. Smooha, “Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype,” *Israel Studies*, 1997, 2, 2, pp. 198-241, p. 199). However, this definition has been variously criticized. Please see amongst others A. Ghanem, N. Rouhana, and O. Yiftachel, “Questioning ‘Ethnic Democracy’: A Response to Sammy Smooha,” *Israel Studies*, 1998, 3, 2, pp. 253-67; A. Danel “A methodological critique to the concept of ethnic democracy,” *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture*, 2009, 28, pp. 37-54).
- ⁸ On authoritarian stability please see J. Gerschewski, “The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression, and Cooptation in Autocratic Regimes,” *Democratization*, 2013, 20, 1, pp. 13-38 and D. Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*, New York, NY, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- ⁹ C. Davenport, “State Repression and Political Order,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2007, 10, pp. 1-23, pp.10-11.
- ¹⁰ R.J. Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America: From 1870 to the Present*, Cambridge, MA,

Schenkman, 1978.

¹¹ C. Davenport, *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace*, New York, NY, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 15.

¹² P.M. Regan and E.A. Henderson, "Democracy, Threats and Political Repression in Developing Countries: Are Democracies Internally Less Violent?" *Third World Quarterly*, 2002, 23, 1, pp. 119-36.

¹³ L.A. Coser, *The Social Functions of Conflict*, New York, NY, Free Press, 1956.

¹⁴ T.R. Gurr, *Peoples versus States. Minorities at Risk in the New Century*, United States Institute of Peace Press, 2000.

¹⁵ D. della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence and the State*, New York, NY, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 80.

¹⁶ D. della Porta and M. Diani, *Social Movements. An Introduction*, 2nd ed., Oxford, UK, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 185.

¹⁷ S.M. Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, (2nd edition), 1969, London, Heynemann, p. 64.

¹⁸ For studies on legitimacy of democratic regimes see amongst others S.M. Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *The American Political Science Review*, 1959, 53, 1, pp. 69-105; H. Eckstein, *Division and Cohesion in Democracy. A study of Norway*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1966; D. Easton, *A System Analysis of Political Life*, New York, NY, John Wiley and Sons, 1965; R.F. Inglehart and C. Welzel *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*, New York, NY, Cambridge University Press, 2005; P. Gilley, *The Right to Rule: How States Win and Lose Legitimacy*, New York, NY, Columbia University Press, 2009. As for contributions on political legitimacy in authoritarian regimes, please see amongst others P. Burnell, "Autocratic Opening to Democracy: Why Legitimacy Matters," *Third World Quarterly*, 2006, 27, 4, pp. 545-62 and O. Schlumberger, "Opening Old Bottles in Search of New Wine: On Nondemocratic Legitimacy in the Middle East," *Middle East Critique*, 2010, 19, 3, pp. 233-50.

¹⁹ P. Burnell, op. cit.; J. Gerschewski, op. cit.

²⁰ M. Weber, *Economy and Society*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1978, p. 215.

²¹ P. Burnell, op. cit, p. 548.

²² A. Schedler, "The Menu of Manipulation," *Journal of Democracy*, 2002, 13, 2, pp. 36-50.

²³ D. Easton, op. cit., p. 278.

²⁴ P. Burnell, op. cit., p. 549.

²⁵ D. Easton, op. cit., p. 292.

²⁶ J. Grauvogel and C. von Soest, "How Do Non-Democratic Regimes Claim Legitimacy?" ISN. ETH Zurich, 2016, p. 3, pp. 1-32.

²⁷ J. L. Esposito, (ed.) *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?* Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienne Publishers, 1997, p. 21.

²⁸ M. Weber, op. cit., pp. 133-4.

²⁹ J. Grauvogel and C. von Soest, op. cit., ibid.

³⁰ P. Burnell, op. cit. p.549.

³¹ J. N. Rosenau, *The study of political adaptation*, London, F. Pinter; New York, NY, Nichols, 1981, p. 14.

³² G. J. Ikenberry, "The State and Strategies of International Adjustment," *World Politics*, 39, 1, 1986, p. 57.

³³ G. Capoccia and R. D. Kelemen, "The Study of Critical Junctures. Theory, Narrative and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism," *World Politics*, 2007, 59, 3, p. 341.

One

Turkey and the seduction of authoritarianism

Emidio Diodato

Introduction

Centre-right parties have dominated Turkey's political scene since the country became a parliamentary democracy in 1950. Yet the Justice and Development party (AKP) has proved to be more durable than any previous centre-right organization (Öniş 2016, 142). From 2002 through 2016, it has ruled seven one-party governments, winning five consecutive general elections. AKP's political legitimacy in ruling Turkey was obtained through electoral races. But two other sources of legitimacy can be identified: the charismatic leadership of Erdoğan and the religious-conservative heritage of the AKP. Despite the international press often describing Erdoğan as a Sultan, his charisma as a source of legitimacy is the opposite of the "personal rulership" that Juan J. Linz associated with "sultanistic regimes" (Linz 2000, 151). Loyalty to the ruler (earlier prime minister and later head of the state) was based on him embodying traditions and an ideology, rather than on fear and rewards to his collaborators. The second and related source of legitimacy was the conservative heritage of the AKP, in particular its national and religious narratives regarding the righteousness of the existent political order and stability. Nationalism and religion are common legitimating ideologies in Muslim societies, but Turkey's peculiarity is that room given to religious-conservative segments in a predominantly Sunni population was at the expense of traditional Kemalist secularism. The combination of these three forms of political legitimacy, electoral, charismatic and ideological, well explains why "governmental fatigue, a common characteristic of Western democracies, simply did not occur in the case of the AKP" (Öniş 2016, 142). A nationwide confidence in the virtues of Erdoğan's party to rule Turkey was not required. It was enough that the electoral mechanism for political stability, that is a 10 per cent threshold to gain parliamentary representation, worked suitably for the AKP in reducing social and political complexity. A successful mix of alternative sources of political legitimacy, from legality to charisma and tradition, was therefore possible.

Nonetheless, during the AKP era the pendulum of stability has gradually shifted from legitimacy to repression. To this regard, we can divide the years of AKP command into two phases. The first, from late 2002 to 2011, was a period of significant advancements in economic and foreign policy. The second, from 2011 to early 2016, saw these advancements go into reverse. As regards the economy, since 2002 Tur-

key benefited from rapid growth, raising living standards for the middle and poorer classes. After the collapse of the GDP between 2008 and 2009 resulting from the international financial crisis, the country's growth restarted but at a slower pace. In the first phase, the AKP claimed its legitimacy through providing order and stability on the basis of economic performance. However when the annual rate of economic growth slowed, the AKP's ideological source of legitimacy faded. Regarding foreign policy, Turkey affirmed a strategy of zero problems with neighbours and sought to play a mediating role in different regional matters, from the Syrian-Israeli dispute to the Iranian nuclear program. But after the Arab Spring, occurring in 2011, Turkey's extensive involvements in Syria and Egypt failed and this led to growing problems with neighbours. The personal charisma of Erdoğan was weakened and, in general, the international credibility of the AKP was undermined. This trend was also worsened by the stasis in the accession negotiations with the European Union.

Passing from the first to the second phase, serious democratic regression emerged in the 'new Turkey' of the AKP. It would be a mistake to suggest that the old Turkey was more democratic than it was during the AKP command, since "both the coalition government of the 1999-2002 period and the AKP [...] have accomplished a major set of democratization reforms" (Öniş 2013, 105). The role of the European Union was a driving force in this process. Important reforms were implemented in liberalizing the economy, reducing the military's political role, and recognizing the extension of minority rights to the Kurdish citizens. That said, if we consider the effectiveness of the rule of law, then democracy in Turkey remains far from being consolidated. Indeed, today it appears to even be at risk. Whereas in a condition of normality minor social expectations may favour a mix of legitimizing sources for the incumbents, in a situation of economic and international difficulties the process of political neutralization can be interrupted. In few years, the Turkish political system has witnessed a significant democratic hindrance: judicial autonomy has been severely weakened after the 2010 Constitutional referendum, media freedoms have been restricted reaching a dramatic peak in 2014, when the government banned Twitter and blocked access to You-Tube and the police is replacing the military as the newly dominant arm since the 2015 security bill. With Erdoğan's election to the presidency in 2014, and in the aftermath of the failed military coup of 2016, a shift toward a form of authoritarianism based on a narrow majoritarian understanding of democracy is taking place in Turkey. The relentless repression of opponents to government could even lead to a regime change.

In the following pages, three dimensions of Turkish political transformation will be considered. The first one is domestic and concerns the quest for political legitimacy on the part of the AKP and its opponents. The second is regional in scope and focuses on AKP foreign policy. The third is broadly international and it considers the interplay between economic and external factors, on the one hand, and domestic politics, on the other.

Domestic dimension

Sources of popular support for incumbents and challengers: the abortive Kurdish peace process, the anti-government Gezi Park protests, and the failed military coup

In the aftermath of the 2001 financial crisis, the unstable political scene, with fast changing coalition governments, endemic corruption and lack of political will to make hard economic choices all contributed to the victory of AKP in the 2002 election. The Erdoğan's party rose to power because it promised greater stability and economic growth in order to avoid a financial collapse. The AKP gained 34 per cent of the vote and the subsequent one-party government implemented economic reforms, with strong support from conservative religious networks of businessmen that felt comfortable doing business in the Middle East (Altunışık and Martin 2011, 579). Economic reforms were immediately related to foreign policy. To some extent, the "re-invention of homo Islamicus within the context of Islamic economics" was the first and fundamental source of an "ideational legitimacy in line with the dominant discourses of neo-liberalism" (Özel 2010, 140). In the 1980s, during Turgut Özal's years, economic and political liberalisation had facilitated the development of a "religious market" (Rabasa and Larrabee 2008, 13). But in the mid-1990s, the military came back to influence foreign policy in terms of a narrowly defined national interest in the post-Cold War. At that time, Sükrü Elekdağ, former Turkish deputy undersecretary of the foreign ministry and ambassador to Washington, wrote that Turkey needed to plan for a strategy in which the military could conduct two full-scale operations simultaneously, against Greece and Syria, while preparing for an internal half-war instigated by the militants of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The first Erdoğan government, in control from 2003, rejected this post-Cold War scenario and the so-called 'two-and-a-half war strategy'. Erdoğan went back to the 1980s, trying to transform Turkey in a "trading state" (Kirisçi 2009, 33), namely a country in which foreign trade came to constitute a growing proportion of the economy. It was officially stated that Turkey's national interest could not be determined solely in terms of national security. Economic considerations, such as the need to trade, to expand export markets and, above all, to attract foreign direct investment, were considered just as important. As Ziya Öniş underlined, "during the early years of AKP rule important legislative changes took place to protect the interests of foreign investors. Particularly significant in this context was the Foreign Investment Law of 2003, which removed many of the bureaucratic restrictions on foreign direct investment" (Öniş 2011, 718).

Contemplating economic concerns, Turkish foreign policy was based on the principles of stability at home, good-neighbourliness and self-confidence. The most prominent attempt to give a political framework to this new orientation was developed by the academician Ahmet Davutoğlu, who was the chief foreign-policy adviser to the prime minister and, in May 2009, was promoted to foreign minister.

While self-confidence was the prerequisite for strategic depth in the regional environment, and good-neighbourliness was the central idea to switch from a two-wars scenario to a policy of zero-problems with neighbours, stability at home represented the basic code of the Turkish government. Exactly for this purpose, the AKP elite tried to redefine domestic equilibria between political Islam, the Kurdish minority and pan-Turkish nationalism, namely the three main issues that arose in Turkish society during the 1990s. The equilibrium between political Islam and pan-Turkish nationalism was very important for the AKP. The ideational legitimacy of economic liberalism was steadily linked to religious and national narrative reducing space not only for traditional Kemalist secularism, but also for pan-Turkish nationalism (that is the cultural and political unification of the Turkic peoples living outside Anatolia). Within this general framework of ideational/ideological legitimacy, the Kurdish issue was as much important since it was strongly related to the re-interpretation of Turkish nationalism into the Anatolian peninsula. Using his charisma, Erdoğan launched the ‘Kurdish peace process’ to end the long-running conflict between the Turkish state and the large Kurdish minority. This policy of compromise offered advantages for stability at home without looking for adventures outside. On the one hand, talks with the PKK’s leadership pushed the conservative Kurds to vote for the AKP. On the other, Turkey could benefit from the peace process to ameliorate its relations with the EU and also with Syria and Iran, since links with these two states were improved after the capture of PKK leader in 1999 (Kirişci 2012).

Erdoğan received much international appreciation for its domestic and foreign policy, despite the suspicions regarding an alleged Islamist hidden agenda. The combination of the three forms of political legitimacy – electoral, ideological and charismatic – worked successfully for almost eight years. The period which spanned the 2007 and 2011 elections was a “time of transition” (Öniş 2016, 142), since both economic and political reforms slowed. But it was only after the 2011 election that advancements in economy and foreign policy went into reverse opening a new phase for the Turkish political system. Despite the AKP gaining half of the electoral consensus, popular support for Erdoğan and his charismatic leadership began to be challenged. Signals of crisis in political legitimacy clearly emerged two years later, during the anti-government Gezi Park protests in May and June 2013. But the excessive use of force and Erdoğan’s personal defiant attitude towards green opponents of a building project in a central park in Istanbul seemed to validate the already existing general belief that an authoritarian turn was taking place in Turkey. Indeed, Erdoğan’s proposal for a constitutional change, namely the replacing of Turkey’s parliamentary system with a presidential one, had met opposition from large sectors of the population. According to an opinion poll conducted in the February preceding the Gezi protests, 65,8 per cent of the population preferred to maintain the parliamentary system (ANSAméd 2013). When the green protest widened into an open revolt against Erdoğan’s authoritarian leadership, the then prime minister decided on adopting a fierce repression together with a stronger ban on the media.

At that time the domestic landscape was still fluid. The Kurds were largely absent from the Gezi protests because “they were still hopeful about and strongly committed to the peace process [...] and anxious to avoid any confrontation with the government” (Öniş 2016, 154n). But exactly in that period, Erdoğan’s attempt to become the charismatic champion of the Arab Spring completely failed. Egyptian military officers removed Morsi in July 2013 and, one month later, Turkey and Egypt cancelled naval military drills recalling their ambassadors. The Syrian situation became even worse, considering that already by October 2012 the Turkish parliament had authorized the use of military force against Syria. In the months following the Gezi protest the rupture between Gülen and Erdoğan also exacerbated the political climate (Salt 2015). Moderation of religious groups such as the Gülen Movement or Hizmet had strongly endorsed the link between the ideational legitimacy of economic liberalism with religious and national narrative about order and political stability. In 2014, Hizmet was definitively added to a classified list of domestic and external threats.

Nonetheless, Erdoğan’s challengers, be they the opposition parties, the Gezi protesters or even a part of the AKP elite, were not able to expand popular support for their political purposes. The end result became clear in the course of 2014 when local and presidential elections took place respectively in March and August. In the first case, the AKP lost almost 10 per cent of its support, but without a corresponding electoral advantage for the opposition parties and, above all, in default of any Gezi legacy. In the second case, Erdoğan gained more than half of the electoral support to become the president of Turkey.

However, a significant change came from outside. Erdoğan’s October 2014 refusal to help Kurdish forces fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) for control of Kobane induced conservative Kurds to lose their faith in the Turkish-Kurdish reconciliation. In June 2015, the rise of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), a pro-Kurdish formation able to present itself as a nationwide party of the left, prevented Erdoğan’s plan to capture a 3/5 parliamentary majority in order to call a referendum to change the constitution. But the political forces represented in the Parliament were unable to form a coalition government. This failure fostered the general impression that the AKP was the only organization able to guarantee order and political stability. In November 2015, the AKP obtained once again almost half of the consensus in the new general elections, although this time, the AKP success occurred in an atmosphere influenced by a reduction of political liberties.

In July 2016, the domestic scenario underwent another transformation as a consequence of an unsuccessful military coup. During a dramatic night of fighting, the plotters were increasingly opposed by Erdoğan’s supporters, receiving a fatal blow. Turkey has experienced frequent breakdowns due to military interventions (Tachau and Heper 1983). Even under normal circumstances, the military were actively involved in Turkish domestic politics, given self-declared guardianship position over political actors such as the National Security Council (Öniş 2013, 105).

After the reform package introduced by the AKP in July 2003, the National Security Council was not a vehicle for exerting pressure on the civilian government anymore (Larrabee 2010, 161). In 2007, with the failed attempt to prevent the presidential election of Gül, the decline of the military as the ‘guardian’ of the secular state became effective (Kuru 2012). In 2015, as already said, with the approval of a new security bill the police slowly began to replace the military as the newly dominant arm. One can wonder what kind of planning the putschists undertook. According to a military analyst, they “violated Rule No. 1, which is to seize the head of the government before doing anything else, or at least to kill him” (Luttwak 2016, web-page). At any rate, the country’s president Erdoğan resisted to the military coup and, speaking at the Istanbul airport under the official portrait of the father of the secular state, Atatürk, he called the Turkish people to defend democracy presiding the streets. In the following days, Erdoğan accused Gülen of being the planner of the ‘parallel state’ which had inspired or directly organized the coup. The dynamics of these dramatic and confusing events led to a radical change of the political scenario, also considering that all the opposition parties loyally opposed the coup.

Several explanations may be offered to account for these sudden and unexpected changes, and consequently to forecast future developments in Turkey. Certainly, we cannot underestimate the role of Erdoğan and his party. The AKP has not only proved to be durable, but it is likely to remain the hegemonic force in Turkish politics. Of critical importance, in the coming years, will be its own internal politics, whether “more liberal and centrist elements will be able to reassert themselves and contest for power within the party” (Öniş 2016, 153). However, Erdoğan’s mobilization of activists and citizens could bolster his authoritarian understanding of democracy. The birth and growth of mass anti-democratic parties is generally related to the crisis of democratic regimes. In today’s world we are witness to the proliferation of hybrid political regimes in the geopolitical landscape where Turkey is located. As diminished forms of democracy, hybrid political regimes may be conceptualized as partially authoritarian democracies (Linz 2000, 34). Mass mobilization is not necessarily a driver of change from democracy towards authoritarianism. To some extent, regimes of mobilization preserve the principle of direct participation of citizens that is essential for competitive democracy. In Atatürk’s Turkey, for example, the bureaucratic-military regime was an authoritarian one-party system, but thanks to moderate mobilizations after the Second World War Turkey became a competitive democracy (ivi, 180-181). These considerations suggest caution in evaluating the type of regime that Turkey is turning into. However, mass mobilization can prevent centrist elements of AKP to contest for power within the party.

In order to understand contemporary Turkey, it would be simplistic or even naive to include Turkey into the catch-all category of “illiberal democracy” (Zakaria 1997), that is a democratically elected regime that ignores constitutional limits on its own power depriving citizens of basic rights and freedoms. A more nuanced category is required. Although it can be disputed the choice to avoid the word democ-

racy, we believe that the category of ‘competitive authoritarianism’, introduced by Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, is fruitful and productive. Indeed, the two scholars pointed out that the key concern regarding hybrid regimes is the emergence of “an uneven playing field between government and opposition” (Levitsky and Way 2002, 53). The extent to which the playing field is uneven depends on the electoral arena, but also on parliamentary scrutiny, autonomy of the judiciary, freedom of the media. In other words, it concerns not only the incumbents but also the challengers. In a diminished form of democracy with an authoritarian trend, “arenas of contestation exist through which opposition forces may periodically challenge, weaken, and occasionally even defeat autocratic incumbents” (ivi, 54). But “the coexistence of democratic rules and autocratic methods aimed at keeping incumbents in power creates an inherent source of instability” (ivi, 59). Such an instability, in turn, creates a serious dilemma for autocratic incumbents: to repress or not. Repression is costly both domestically and internationally in terms of legitimacy. Not using repression is costly in terms of possible defeat on the electoral arena. Economic crises can also create conditions under which incumbents will be tempted to definitively undermine democratic institutions, even “via a presidential ‘self-coup’ or through selective, incremental abuses” (ivi, 61). Contrariwise, using bribery, co-optation and even personal rulership, incumbents may try to limit opposition challenges without provoking massive protest or international repudiation. However, both these choices would mean reducing mobilization, and incumbents could lose their power if challengers were able to find new sources of legitimacy.

The outcome of this complex process between mobilization, repression or even personal rulership is not foreseeable in today’s Turkey. In general, strong states such as Turkey and strong parties like the AKP “contribute to authoritarian stability” (Levitsky and Way 2010, 67). However, the AKP command faces serious opposition challenges and risks looking like a case-study between democracy and “unstable authoritarianism” (Esen and Gumuscu 2016, 1594). At any rate, the problem of evaluating the current situation in Turkey cannot be solved by separating the endogenous processes, in particular the role of the AKP and its own internal politics, by exogenous factors. According to Linz, a key factor “contributing to the emergence, consolidation, permanence of an authoritarian rule is a hostile international environment that makes the open debate of foreign policy alternatives of a democracy undesirable” (Linz 2000, 282n). This observation is particularly relevant for our analytical purposes. In the following pages, we will take into account Turkey’s foreign policy in order to clarify the probabilities of mobilization, repression or even personal rulership. In addition, according to Linz a related issue to hostile environment is a military or political conflict that can justify discrimination against irredentist minorities and the outlawing of parties linked with neighbouring foreign powers (ibidem). In the Turkish case, of course, this issue coincides with the conflict against the Kurdish minority and, in particular, with the nexus between the HDP and the Kurdish forces fighting in Syria. But also, proximity to the West, as

underlined by Levitsky and Way, is “an important factor shaping the trajectory of competitive authoritarianism” (Levitsky and Way 2002, 60-61). In large part, this last factor is a product of the post-Cold War international environment in which the triumph of Western liberalism and the collapse of the Soviet Union have been replaced by counter-hegemonic or nondemocratic powers, such as Russia and China, that can provide Turkey with alternative sources of legitimacy and military and economic assistance, weakening the incentive for governing elites to maintain formal democratic institutions.

Regional dimension

Principles of stability at home, good neighbourliness and self-confidence: the new Turkey from Europeanisation to its problematic influence in the Middle East

In order to understand current difficulties in Turkey, it is necessary to recognize that the Arab Spring is a key factor. The AKP foreign policy principles, that had been favouring the domestic mix between legality, charisma and tradition, turned into a source of instability. The hostile international environment, the irredentist Kurdish minority linked to neighbouring foreign powers, but also the sources of legitimacy alternative to the West, are three issues that converge on the broken promise of the Arab revolts. Among the most optimistic leaders who saw social upheavals as an opportunity to realize a Muslim democracy, Erdoğan visited Tunisia, Libya and Egypt in September 2011. He supported the regime changes in Tunisia and Egypt sponsoring a ‘Turkish model’, namely a successful fusion of democratic governance and Islamic values. As already said, the Turkish attempts to support and lead Arab changes failed with the emergence of conflicts in Syria and Egypt. But, as we will see, this outcome did not push the AKP elite to re-think the expressive function of its foreign policy’s principles.

Of course, this thesis requires a more detailed examination of AKP foreign policy in the Middle East. We can start from December 2009, when the then foreign minister Davutoğlu delivered his famous keynote speech in Washington entitled “Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy”. Focusing on the formula of zero problems with neighbours, he stated: “When we declared this for the first time we were accused of being Utopian [...]. I gave them an example of a saying by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, ‘peace at home, and peace with our neighbours’[...]. He wanted to show that we need[ed] a new era of peace to recover. Similarly, now, we want to show that there will be a new era with our neighbours” (Davutoğlu 2009, 9). We could find rather inappropriate this historical parallel with the father of the secular state, as well as Edward Luttwak (2016) considered richly ironic Erdoğan’s speech at the Istanbul’s airport under the official portrait of Atatürk. But the theme of continuity between the old Turkey and the ‘new Turkey’ of the AKP deserves more consideration, and this can help us to understand the type of regime that Turkey is turning into. The dif-

ference between the past and the present is related to a secular/old or a religious/new conception of the same traditional mentality. The conventional double-peace formula, peace at home and peace in the world, reflects this mentality. There is no contradiction between traditional mentalities, on the one hand, and legitimizing narratives embodying traditions and religion, on the other. However, Davutoğlu's and Erdoğan's vision of foreign policy introduced a new element, namely a national self-confidence in regional strategic depth. More than the traditional domestic stability, it was self-confidence in foreign policy that represented a break with the past.

Scholars of authoritarianism would find it very difficult to discover explicit references to the leading ideas of traditional regimes in the formulation of their foreign policy's principles. In traditional authoritarian regimes, in particular those located in the sphere of Western democratic influence, authoritarian mentalities refer to general attitudes and values, such as patriotism and nationalism, economic development, social justice and order. They do not include general principles in foreign policy. The regimes that express a traditionalist mentality penetrate the life of society avoiding the political expression of existing principles, as it was with regard to political Islam in Atatürk Turkey (Linz 2000, 160). But for the AKP elite, recovering the Turkish traditional mentality required providing a religious-conservative regeneration of the Turkish society, projecting influence and economics in a more friendly regional environment (particularly in the Middle East). Already in the first phase (from 2003 to 2011), AKP was ready to mobilize activists and citizens to promote its foreign policy principles and maintain the one-party government. When the optimism of an Arab Spring collapsed, Turkey underwent one of the most dramatic changes of its democratic history (Fuller 2014). This happened because the traditional double-peace formula, related to stability at home, had been anchored to the principles of Turkey's self-confidence and strategic depth in the Middle East.

An excessive criticism of Turkey's ambitions and potential in the Middle East today seems very unfair. However, it is important to stress that Turkey's foreign policy was only partially motivated by the double-peace formula and the related economic interests. The Turkish government was also inspired "by its Ottoman legacy and inherited perceptions of self" (Walker 2012, 31). The emphasis on the Islamic civilization and Ottoman Empire was particularly powerful in the geopolitical depiction of the Middle East. According to Davutoğlu's doctrine of strategic depth, Ottoman Turks had to establish relations with global powers starting from a cultural and religious leadership in the Middle East (Erşen 2014). This geopolitical ambition implied putting culture and identity in place of military threat. Thus, an expressive function of foreign policy emerged well beyond the promotion of instrumental economic interests. After all, "Turkey's geopolitical discourse ha[d] allowed the military to not only play a central role in shaping domestic political processes but also make this role seem 'normal'" (Bilgin 2007, 753). The AKP elite took culture and identity as pre-given factors of Turkish strategic depth, denying their constructed nature (Bilgin 2008, 120). The ontological rather than provisional or

heuristic character of strategic depth corresponded to its reification. Of course, we cannot ascribe the outcome of the Arab Spring to the Turkish ambitions. But once the Arab Spring definitively eroded the structure of the Middle East's security regime, Turkish ability to reframe its pro-active foreign policy completely failed. This outcome is imputable to the AKP elite, since the party was incapable of understanding that foreign policies of states are dialectics of inter-subjective relations and not a pre-given format that society cannot change (Teschke and Cemgil 2014).

From 2003 onward, AKP was intent on putting "home affairs in order, gaining self-confidence in international relations, developing a universal vision of foreign policy, and seeking a leadership role in world politics" (Aras 2009, 5). The link between domestic stability and international recovery, on the one side, and vision of foreign policy, on the other, is very relevant. During the already mentioned meeting in Washington, Davutoğlu stated: "the axis of Turkish foreign policy, economy, society, or Turkish politics [are] two permanent elements that this society cannot change. Those two are geography and history" (Davutoğlu 2009, 3, emphasis added). As a large country in the midst of Afro-Eurasia's vast landmass, whose origin was in the Ottoman Empire, Turkey was considered by Davutoğlu as a pivotal state with multiple regional identities and a significant international vocation (Davutoğlu 2008, 78). Behind the global and rather deterministic vision of Davutoğlu, a clear political stance emerges: Turkey's strategic depth in the immediate neighbourhood was conceived as an enhancing and depth driver for the 'new Turkey'. In other words, foreign policy was an additional source of legitimacy. To this regard, we must separate the traditional/old double-peace formula and the new/religious self-confidence in strategic depth: the latter, self-confidence about Turkey's strategic depth in the Middle East, exceeds the traditional formula peace at home and peace with neighbours.

As already stated, despite the broad appreciation it has received from many quarters, the double-peace formula was seriously questioned after the Arab Spring. Turkish pro-activism in the Middle East immediately appeared unrealistic and rather propagandistic. That said, we must consider that before the Arab Spring the AKP government had rightly struggled "to formulate de-securitisation policies at the regional level in a region where the security regime [was] completely constructed around the position of the superpower, the US" (Oktav 2011, 77). The political structure of the Middle East's security regime had a direct impact on Turkey's ambitions to become a trading state. This point clearly explains why constant interventions of the United States in the Middle East were seen as an obstacle for Turkey in realizing its regional integration and economic recovery. Turkey affirmed a strategy of zero problems with neighbours and sought to play a mediating role in different regional matters, from the Syrian-Israeli dispute to the Iranian nuclear program. It was a cunning and pragmatic foreign policy. However, after the Arab Spring the Turkish government was not ready to re-think the expressive function of its strategic depth and, as a consequence, Turkish self-confidence suffered a serious blow with poten-

tial repercussions on domestic legitimacy, in particular, the charismatic legitimacy of its leader. It was not by chance that only after these dramatic changes a military coup occurred in Turkey.

Another issue to be considered in this regard is the impact of EU accession negotiations on Turkish politics and society. In terms of geopolitical depictions, Turkey has often been represented as a country sitting right on the fault-line between the Hobbesian world (that of the Middle East) and the European Kantian one (Kirişçi 2004, 40). In the 1990s, this representation of Turkey being between a Hobbesian war-zone and a Kantian peace-zone favoured the prospects of EU membership. But after the EU decision to open accession talks with Turkey in October 2005, the EU membership process experienced serious stalemates. Scholars interpreted these impasses, according importance to domestic factors, notably the strategic calculations on the part of the AKP (Adam 2012). This interpretation of the AKP's ambiguity is partially correct: the European anchorage was instrumentally considered as a tool to promote the 'Turkish model' in the Arab world. But in order to better place the 'new Turkey' between Europe and the Middle East, we should also consider the ambivalence in the EU policy makers' approach to the issue of Turkey's membership. As Pınar Bilgin correctly pointed out in 2004, the European indecision, "when coupled with the EU's mid-1990s approach to Turkey within a Mediterranean (i.e. Euro-Mediterranean partnership) framework, led some in Turkey to wonder whether in the minds of EU policy makers the boundaries of Europe were being drawn along civilizational lines" (Bilgin 2004, 270). This representation of Turkey as a civilizational fault-line, rather than a fault-line between a Hobbesian and a Kantian world, favoured the AKP's search for strategic depth and, in turn, favoured the move from a peace/war divide to a civilizational one. A number of factors facilitated the opening of a window of opportunity for the AKP in redefining its foreign policy principles as a higher and further source of legitimacy. Among these factors can be included the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent crisis of the euro currency in 2010. When the EU faced both a monetary and identity crisis, the AKP elite really believed it possessed an objective strategic depth complementary or even alternative to the European membership (see Davutoğlu 2013a). In 2015, opinions on EU membership were still positive among the Turks (GMF 2015, 8). But a positive attitude does not mean optimism. In 2016, for example, it was not difficult for Erdoğan to find arguments to attack the European institutions for the delay with which they condemned the military coup. Once again, the European ambivalence was reflected in the Turkish one.

At any rate, an increase in turbulence in the Middle East did not push Turkey on the Hobbesian-Kantian fault-line. On the contrary, discussions about this matter became arguments for mass mobilization within a civilizational framework. In light of this, if foreign policy principles will continue to incorporate less instrumental and more expressive functions, then the international legitimacy for the 'new Turkey' will require only a different kind of self-confidence. At this point, the key issue will

be the repositioning of Turkey and that will depend on exogenous factors fuelled by the Arab revolts, in particular the hostile international environment generated by the resurgence of the irredentist Kurdish minority in Syria. Economic and military links with the European Union and the United States are still considerable. But after the failed coup, counter-hegemonic or nondemocratic powers such as Russia and China could provide alternative sources of legitimacy and assistance, weakening the incentive for the AKP elite to maintain formal democratic institutions.

International dimension

Capabilities in south-eastern Mediterranean and worldwide: the hybridization of Turkey's geopolitics, its post-imperial legacy, and the external-domestic linkage

Even though scholars of regime change have considered several forms of external influence, during the Cold War attention was generally accorded to democratic consolidation and the promotion of Western liberalism. Diffusion, conditionality, transnational human rights networks, democracy assistance programs, etc. were all referred to modernity, secularism and liberalism, namely ideas and values promoted by the United States, the European institutions and Western-led multilateral organizations. In today's world, however, we are witnessing the proliferation of hybrid political regimes characterized by the coexistence of democratic rules and autocratic methods. Scholars of regime change are more willing to take into account the peculiarities of the post-Cold War international system (Levitsky and Way 2010). Since the end of the 1990s, Soviet collapse and Western liberalism's triumph have been replaced by counter-hegemonic or nondemocratic powers, such as Russia and China. On the one hand, the international system seems to be in transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world: the United States maintains its primacy in terms of military capabilities, but the main driving forces for multi-polarity originate from social, economic, and also strategic spheres (Amin 2006; Walton 2007). On the other hand, international actors seem to be more or less able to use multilateral institutions, existing or newly created, to challenge and change rules and practices in the global system (Keohane and Morse 2015).

In developing their research on regime changes and democratic consolidations in the post-Cold War, Levitsky and Way proposed operating conceptually along two international sub-dimensions: 1) "Western leverage, or the degree to which governments are vulnerable to external democratizing pressure"; 2) "linkage to the West, or the density of ties [...] and cross-border flows [...] between particular countries and the United States, the European Union (EU), and western-led multilateral institutions" (Levitsky and Way 2006, 379). This distinction between leverage and linkage is undoubtedly useful to evaluate the post-Cold War situation (Levitsky and Way 2010). However, since Turkey is shifting toward authoritarianism, adopting Levitsky and Way's categorization would imply a reverse pattern of external in-

fluence: that is, why Western leverage and/or linkage no longer works in the Turkish case? More than the international causes of the democratic hindrances, the two sub-dimensions would indicate only the effects. The international causes of Turkish diminished democracy, or its authoritarian turn, should be sought in the regional repercussions of those dynamics of the global system where actors with different capabilities operate. In particular, we should consider the Arab Spring and its aftermath as a critical juncture in Turkey's democratic history.

As already said, the AKP elite and Erdoğan personally failed in facing the resurgence of unfriendly powers in the Middle East. On a personal level, Erdoğan's foreign policy toward Arab uprisings was weakened by his populist rhetoric. He used foreign policy to energize and expand his domestic constituencies, but in the end reducing its charisma. At the national level, Turkey did not have the political and economic capacity to play a leadership role, showing the inconsistency of its strategic depth. At the international level, Turkey's inability to advance the reformist agenda of the Arab uprisings led to the growing influence of the Iran-led Shiite and Saudi Arabia-led Sunni. Besides, Turkey lost Western support when the border with Syria fell under the control of ISIS and the PKK militias (Kuru 2015).

As a period of significant change, which occurred in distinct ways in different countries and which produces a legacy, the Arab Spring can be considered as a critical juncture. Certainly, it is less relevant than the end of the Cold War. The interlude between 1989-1991 was a cluster of events that signified major processes of macro-historical transformation: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany; the fall of the Soviet Union and the agreements on the European Union. On its part, Turkey was profoundly affected by territorial changes originating from the transformation of the political landscape of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, as well as from the eruption of violent ethno-national conflicts in the Balkans and the Caucasus. The events occurring from 2011 onwards displayed a lesser cluster of significant changes, without any being both deep and global: the ousting of both the Tunisian and Egyptian president; the eruption of civil wars in Syria and Libya. Nonetheless, for Turkey it was a period of significant change. The AKP elite had construed its foreign policy presenting strategic depth as a natural driver for the 'new Turkey'. The failure in facing a resurgence of unfriendly powers distressed the governing elite. The AKP rose to power because it promised greater stability and economic growth, invoking an ideational legitimacy in line with the dominant discourses of neo-liberalism. Afterward, the combination of electoral successes, Erdoğan's charismatic leadership, nationalism and religion as ideological stances, allowed the AKP to be more durable than any previous centre-right party in Turkey. The rapid economic growth provided an additional performative legitimacy. But the AKP wanted to establish a 'new Turkey' and employed foreign policy as a further and higher source of legitimacy. When economic growth slowed down, and foreign policy did not keep the promises of stability at home and good neighbourliness, the already latent authoritarianism became plainly operative in Turkey.

Endogenous processes, including the AKP internal politics, were strongly affected by exogenous factors and, in particular, by the Arab Spring's aftermaths. This key point is better understood by considering the geopolitical landscape where Turkey is located. There are many metaphors to label Turkey's geopolitical representation: from bridge to door, from crossroad to gate. The Turkish elite have often used these metaphors "to describe not only Turkey's hybrid location and past, but also the role or the function to which it aspired internationally" (Yanik 2011, 83). However, for the AKP elite Turkey's exceptional geography and its Ottoman legacy were to be considered permanent elements and, as such, legitimizing drivers of the 'new Turkey'. This mystification generated a potential rupture with the secular past: "an exceptional identity based on the hybridization of Turkey's geography and history runs counter to the Kemalist nation-building project [...] because the Kemalist project was based on the idea of 'purity', not hybridity" (ivi, 87). This break between the old/traditional Turkey and the new/religious Turkey remained an aspiration. But, nonetheless, it operated affecting the sources of domestic legitimacy and, in particular, the charisma of Erdoğan. The Arab Spring was a decisive juncture since the promise of the Arab revolts appeared to the AKP elite as the opportunity to finally establish the 'new Turkey', closing the gap between instrumental traditional mentalities, order and economic development, on the one side, and the full expression of the political Islam in the Anatolia home territory and in the Middle East, on the other. But this expressive function of foreign policy was a failure.

Broadly speaking, the distinction between instrumental function and expressive function of foreign policy presents some difficulties in producing typologies to analyze regime change toward authoritarianism (Linz 2000, 171ff). However in the Turkish case, this distinction well explains continuity and discontinuity between the old Turkey and the 'new Turkey' of AKP. There is not a logical contradiction between traditional mentalities, on the one hand, and legitimizing narratives embodying traditions and religion, on the other. But contradictions may emerge in reality. The foreign policy of strategic depth outlined a new centrality rooted in Islamic civilization and post-imperial legacy. Turkey's orientation toward Western powers was reduced from being a long-term identity choice, namely Turkey's position within an expanding international society, to a mere Cold War policy preference. Articulating this new vision, the AKP elite recovered the post-imperial legacy in order to fortify Turkey's self-confidence in the neighbourhood. Central to this revival was "the expanding economic interests and regional dynamism represented by the rise of new rural Anatolian businesses led by devout Muslims competing with traditional metropolitan Aegean businesses" (Walker 2011, 8). Conservative-religious networks of businessmen emerged as strong advocates for further Turkish expansion into the Middle Eastern rather than European markets. But this ambition sets in motion a potential contradiction between a traditional approach, one based on pragmatism, and new legitimizing narratives, embodying a political-religious project. On the one side, efforts to promote trade with the EU realistically continued to be imple-

mented (since Europe, and in particular Germany, remains Turkey's main trading partner). On the other side, foreign policy narratives in the Middle East went well beyond economic interest, since the religious identity of the 'new Turkey' prevailed. At the beginning, the leading elite was able to conjugate traditional orientation toward the Western powers with the new strategic depth. Later, the foreign policy's instrumental and expressive functions to which they aspired internationally tended to diverge.

The nexus between a Turkish hybrid regime and hybridization of Turkey's geopolitics deserves further insights. Since hybridity signifies impurity, it might be expected that the AKP will try to resolve the contradictions that emerged after the Arab Spring through mass mobilization. Still, at the beginning of the uprisings, "the very fact that Turkish democracy [was] a work in progress [was] in itself an asset" (Kirişçi 2012, 146). But the 'Turkish model' has been quickly replaced by a "Turkish paradox" (Koplow and Cook 2012), that is a simultaneously embracing and abusing democracy. Since hybridity may create instability, it might be expected that the autocratic incumbents will try to find a solution through mass mobilization. Right after the failed coup, Erdoğan and the AKP elite mobilized activists invoking Islam. But later they also started to undermine democratic institutions limiting opposition challenges and provoking Western repudiation. If we combine endogenous processes and exogenous factors, then it becomes easier to focus the dilemma between mobilizing and repressing. Indeed, only if an international geopolitical shift occurs, then mobilizing and repressing could suitably reinforce each other. Otherwise it will be very difficult for the incumbents to prevent an eventual challengers' will to reverse the balance of forces. In a climate of strong repression, mass mobilization could favor the condemnation of the same repression on the part of the challengers thanks to the possible international pressure on the autocratic incumbents.

In today's world, there are two great powers apart from the US and the EU: Russia and China. Can these counter-hegemonic or nondemocratic powers provide alternative sources of legitimacy and assistance? Turkey maintains solid trade relations with China. In 2012, the Anatolian country joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a Eurasian economic and military organization led by China. On 20 November 2016, Erdoğan stated that Turkey does not need to join the European Union at all costs; instead, it could become part of the SCO (Hurriyet Daily News 2016, webpage). However, China has no direct interests and capabilities to support Turkey in the south-eastern Mediterranean. Only in the case of Russia, another SCO member, can we seriously imagine a geopolitical shift. Russia is both a solid trading partner and a strategic neighbour. The adoption of a defensive alliance against the Russian threat was usually considered a compulsory choice for Turkey (Hale 2000). For example, when Turkey's involvements in Syria led to growing problems with Russia one scholar caustically underlined that "the realities of the strategic surface proves that Turkey's real friends and allies are located toward its west" (Sen 2012, webpage). In 2015, the Turkish-Russian crisis on an airspace breach

appeared to endorse this point of view. But after the failed coup, Putin strongly supported Erdoğan trying to reverse this idea. Can a geopolitical shift towards Russia occur today? Maybe, if we consider the financial ties between Turkey and the Gulf emirates: Turkey might choose to move towards non-democratic regimes. However, this would imply a radical foreign policy change with a relevant economic impact. Turkey possesses strategic assets in the control of the straits of the Dardanelles, upon which Russia depends for direct maritime access to Mediterranean. Moreover, the possibility of reducing European dependence on natural gas from Russia gives Turkey another strategic advantage. At the time of writing, the US support to Rojava (the so-called Syrian Kurdistan) and the Turkish request for Gülen's extradition from the US are very critical issues. The Obama administration blocked both the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, China) and the MINTs countries (Nigeria, Mexico, Indonesia, Turkey) from the transatlantic and transpacific free-trade negotiations (TTIP and TPP). But after Trump's election, international economic regimes and US foreign policy could undergo another radical change. The EU itself could be isolated from the US and could lose its leverage with respect to Turkey. It is very difficult to assess whether the Turkish government is in the process of shifting toward counter-hegemonic or nondemocratic powers, or whether Turkey will remain linked to the West. However, Turkey's historical linkage to the EU and the US-led world, both in terms of the density of ties and cross-border flows, is still considerable.

Adopting a broader definition of linkage, that is any recruitment sequence of behaviour that originate in one system and is reacted to another, two alternative trajectories can be finally outlined. Firstly, the more unstable the region, the higher the probability that AKP elite will be tempted to mobilize activists and citizens in invoking political Islam and the imperial past, thus repressing oppositions and asking Russia and eventually China to provide alternative sources of international legitimacy and economic and military assistance. Secondly, in a more stable region the higher the probability that AKP will continue to undermine some democratic institutions but without mass mobilization, or limiting opposition challenges paying attention not to provoke massive protests and international repudiation.

In the first case, the rise of an uneven playing field between government and opposition would be enhanced by constitutional modifications. Turkey's foreign policy would change with regards to EU and NATO membership, looking for alternative regional and international alliances. The country would find itself in the position of a front state, and this would require a redefinition of its self-confidence in foreign policy. It would be difficult to ignore that strategic depth is, first of all, a geographical factor which naturally strengthens the defense capabilities of any country. On 11 November 2016, the anti-American geo-politician Alexander Dugin was an honorary guest during a parliamentary AKP conference where he met Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım (Turkish Time 2016, webpage). Dugin is Putin's advisor and a very famous theoretician of Eurasianism, which affirms that Russia should occupy a pivotal position between Europe and Asia, being a mix born of the fusion of Slavic and

Turko-Muslim peoples. But the Turko-Muslim people are treated ambiguously by Eurasianism. The Turks are seen as a key element in confirming the distinctiveness of Russia's Eurasian identity. But they are also presented as potential competitor or even an enemy if they decided to no longer go along with a Russian-dominated multinational Eurasia (Laruelle 2008; 2011). Since Eurasianism rejects the view that Russia is on the periphery of Europe, giving Moscow a messianic role against Atlanticist domination, there are elements for a new geopolitical narrative that could justify a Turkish geopolitical shift (Erşen 2013). But there are also great ambiguities with regard to the security relations between Turkey and Russia.

In the second case, more liberal and centrist elements could be able to reassert themselves and contest for power within the AKP. Turkey's orientation toward the Western powers would continue to be perceived as a long-term identity choice. Turkey's position within an expanding international society would be that of a flank state, that is a country working both as bridge and as gate. In consequence, it would be difficult for any single leader to establish complete political control, resulting in a kind of pluralism by default that creates opportunities for challengers. This possibility could be strengthened by the European Union's decision to reinforce custom agreements with Turkey, including a more liberal economic policy despite the stalling of negotiations.

Conclusions

At the end of the Cold War, two famous scholars of regime change and democratic consolidation, Samuel P. Huntington and Zbigniew Brzezinski, proposed divergent interpretations of Turkey: a torn country and a fault-line state (Huntington 1996, 144-149), and a geopolitical pivot of the US-led transatlantic belt (Brzezinski 1997, 133-134; Marchesin 2002). After the Arab Spring, this academic disquisition appeared to be turning into a political reality. Indeed, Turkey underwent one of the most dramatic changes of its democratic history. In power since 2002, the AKP elite launched a foreign policy design based on stability at home, good neighbourliness and self-confidence. Considering the political fragmentation of the nineties, AKP governments aspired to recover the Turkish economy and establish a 'new Turkey' with a leading role in the Middle East. Between 2007 and 2011 Turkey already started to shift towards a narrow majoritarian understanding of democracy. Slowdowns in economic performance in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis encouraged this transformation. But AKP's legitimacy still counted on electoral consensus, Erdoğan's charismatic leadership, and nationalism and religion as ideological stances. However, after the 2011 election advancements in the economy and foreign policy went into reverse. Finally, potential for a regime change emerged with the failure in facing the resurgence of unfriendly powers in the Middle East. Erdoğan's unsuccessful attempt to become the charismatic champion of the Arab Spring revealed the difficulties in promoting a 'Turkish model' for the Middle East. The foreign policy

criticism strongly affected the already latent democratic hindrances. Embodying traditions and religion, AKP foreign policy design incorporated both an instrumental and an expressive function. In particular, self-confidence in strategic depth in the Middle East devised a particular expressive function relating to political Islam and Erdoğan's populist rhetoric. He used foreign policy to energize and expand his domestic constituencies, in particular those religiously conservative networks of executives that felt comfortable doing business in the Middle East. Nevertheless, in the end Erdoğan reduced his charisma and the related ideological stances. As a source of political legitimacy, charisma requires obedience to the leader by virtue of the exemplary value of its mission. This characteristic of charisma is the opposite of traditional reverence and, in consequence, it generates a sort of confirmation burden for the leader, namely the need to reformulate his mission when it has proved to be defiant.

In 2016, the failed military coup gave Erdoğan the opportunity to confirm the AKP's ambition to establish a 'new Turkey'. Turkey's two general elections in 2015 had already proved that, in an uneven playing field between government and opposition, arenas of contestation exist through which opposition forces may challenge and weaken autocratic incumbents. In June's results the rise of the Kurdish HDP prevented Erdoğan's plan to capture a 3/5 parliamentary majority in order to call a referendum to change the constitution. However difficulties in forming a coalition government and the resurgence of Kurdish terrorism enhanced the general sentiment that one-party government is a compulsory choice for political and economic stability. In November's results the AKP obtained almost half of the electoral consensus, although this occurred in an atmosphere influenced by a reduction of the political liberties.

To evaluate future developments in Turkey, we have outlined two alternative trajectories: 1) the more unstable the regional environment, the higher the probability that Turkey will follow Huntington's outlook, strengthen its authoritarian turn, redefining its foreign policy principles and, eventually, ask support from Russia or even China; 2) the less unstable the regional environment, the higher the probability that Brzezinski was right and that Turkey will remain a relevant pivot of the Western transatlantic belt. In the latter case, it would be difficult for any single leader to establish complete political control, resulting in a kind of pluralism by default that creates opportunities for challengers. Of critical importance, in the coming years the AKP and its own internal politics will become of critical importance. Mobilization of activists and citizens could bolster Erdoğan's authoritarian understanding of democracy. But mass mobilization could also create opportunities for challengers, since mobilization is not necessarily a driver of regime change. Autocratic incumbents could also undermined democratic institutions using bribery, co-optation, or simply limiting opposition challenges, without provoking massive protest or international repudiation. But in this case, reducing mobilization, incumbents could lose their power if challenges were able to find new sources of legiti-

macy. At any rate, these complex processes will be influenced by those dynamics of the global system that produces regional repercussions: if Turkish foreign policy design will incorporate more instrumental than expressive functions, reducing the confirmation burden that charisma generates, in the very end the two alternative trajectories will come back, once again, to academic disquisitions.

References

- Adam, L. B. 2012. "Turkey's foreign policy in the AKP era: has there been a shift in the axis?" *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 11(3): 139-148.
- Altunışık, M. B. and L. G. Martin 2011. "Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP." *Turkish Studies* 12(4): 569-587.
- Amin, S. 2006. *Beyond US Hegemony: Assessing the Prospect for a Multipolar World*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- ANSAMED 2013. "Turkey: 65,8% oppose Erdoğan's presidential reform proposal." 20 February. <https://goo.gl/i4fBZO>.
- Aras, B. 2009. "Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy." *SETA Policy Brief* 32:1-16.
- Aras, B. 2014. "Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy Revisited." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 16(4): 404-418.
- Bilgin, P. 2004. "A Return to 'Civilisational Geopolitics' in the Mediterranean? Changing Geopolitical Images of the European Union and Turkey in the Post-Cold War Era." *Geopolitics* 9(2): 269-291.
- Bilgin, P. 2007. "'Only strong states can survive in Turkey's geography': the uses of 'geopolitical truths' in Turkey." *Political Geography* 26(7): 740-756.
- Bilgin, P. 2009. "Securing Turkey through Western-oriented Foreign Policy." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40:103-123.
- Brzezinski, Z. 1997. *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. New York, NY: BasicBook.
- Davutoğlu, A. 2008. "Turkey's New Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007." *Insight Turkey* 10(1): 77-96.
- Davutoğlu, A. 2009. "Principles of Turkish foreign policy. Address by H.E. Foreign Minister of Republic of Turkey Ahmet Davutoğlu." December 8, SETA Foundation's Washington D.C. Branch, retrieved on 12 December, 2012. <http://arsiv.setav.org/ups/dosya/14808.pdf>.
- Davutoğlu, A. 2013. "The Three Major Earthquakes in the International System and Turkey." *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 48(2): 1-11.
- Erşen, E. 2013. "The Evolution of 'Eurasia' as a Geopolitical Concept in Post-Cold War Turkey." *Geopolitics* 18(1): 24-44.
- Erşen, E. 2014. "Geopolitical Codes in Davutoglu's View Toward the Middle East." *Insight Turkey* (16)1: 85-111.
- Esen B. and S. Gumuscu 2016. "Rising competitive authoritarianism in Turkey." *Third World Quarterly* 37(9): 1581-1606.
- Fuller, G. E. 2014. *Turkey and the Arab Spring: Leadership in the Middle East*. Lex-

- ington, KY: Bozorg Press.
- GMF 2015. *Turkish Perceptions Survey 2015*. Washington, DC: The German Marshall Fund of the United States.
- Hale, W. 2000. *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774-2000*. London-Portland: Frank Cass.
- Huntington, S. P. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Hurriyet Daily News 2016. "President Erdoğan: EU not everything, Turkey may join Shanghai Five." November 20. <https://goo.gl/wdeJVR>.
- Keohane, R. and J. Morse. 2015. *Counter-multilateralism* in J. F. Morin, T. Novotná, F. Ponjaert, M. Telò, (eds), *The Politics of Transatlantic Trade Negotiations. TTIP in a globalized world*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 17-26.
- Kirişçi, K. 2009. "The transformation of Turkish foreign policy: The rise of the trading state." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40: 29-57.
- Kirişçi, K. 2012. "Turkey's Engagement with Its Neighborhood: A "Synthetic" and Multidimensional Look at Turkey's Foreign Policy Transformation." *Turkish Studies* 13(3): 319-341.
- Kirişçi, K. 2012a. "Democratic Diffusion: The Turkish Experience." in R.H. Linden *et al.* (eds.), *Turkey and its Neighbors: Foreign Relations in Transition*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 145-171.
- Koplow, M. J. and S. A. Cook 2012. "The Turkish Paradox. How the AKP Simultaneously Embraces and Abuses Democracy." *Foreign Affairs*, 27 June. <https://goo.gl/btbdL5>.
- Kuru, A. T. 2012. "The Rise and Fall of Military Tutelage in Turkey: Fears of Islamism, Kurdism, and Communism." *Insight Turkey* 14(2): 37-5.
- Kuru, A. T. 2015. "Turkey's Failed Policy toward the Arab Spring: Three Levels of Analysis." *Mediterranean Quarterly* 26(3): 94-116.
- Larrabee, S. F. 2010. "Turkey's New Geopolitics." *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 52(2): 157-180.
- Laruelle, M. 2006. "Aleksandr Dugin: A Russian Version of the European Radical Right?" *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, occasional paper n. 294. Translated by Mischa Gabowitsch, 1-26.
- Laruelle, M. 2008. *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*. Translated by Mischa Gabowitsch. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Levitsky, S. and L. A. Way 2002. "The rise of competitive authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 51-65.
- Levitsky, S. and L. A. Way 2006. "Linkage versus Leverage. Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change." *Comparative Politics* 38(4): 379-400.
- Levitsky, S. and L. A. Way 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism. Hybrid Regime After the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Linz, J. J. 2000. *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Luttwak, E. 2016. "Why Turkey's Coup d'État Failed. And why Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's craven excesses made it so inevitable." *Foreign Policy*. <https://goo.gl/1qSst2>
- Marchesin, P. 2002. "Géopolitique de la Turquie à partir du Grand échiquier de

- Zbigniew Brzezinski." *Études internationales* 33(1): 137-157.
- Oktav, Ö. Z. 2011. "Regionalism or Shift of Axis? Turkish-Syrian-Iranian Relations?" in id. (ed.), *Turkey in the 21st Century. Quest for a new Foreign Policy*. Surrey: Ashgate. 75-94.
- Öniş, Z. 2011. "Power, Interests and Coalitions: the political economy of mass privatisation in Turkey." *Third World Quarterly* 32(4): 707-724.
- Öniş, Z. 2013. "Sharing Power: Turkey's Democratization Challenge in the Age of the AKP Hegemony." *Insight Turkey* 15(2) 103-122.
- Öniş, Z. 2016. "Turkey's Two Elections: The AKP Comes Back." *Journal of Democracy* 27(2): 141-154.
- Onur, S. 2012. "From 'Strategic Depth' to 'Strategic Surface.'" *The Journal of Turkish Weekly* 10 October [no longer available on the web].
- Özbudun, E. 2006. "From Political Islam to Conservative Democracy: The Case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey." *South European Society and Politics* 11(3-4): 543-557.
- Özel I. 2010. "Political Islam and Islamic capital. The case of Turkey." in J. Haynes (ed.), *Religion and Politics in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa*. Oxon: Routledge. 139-161.
- Rabasa, A. and F. S. Larrabee 2008. *The rise of political Islam in Turkey*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.
- Salt, J. 2015. "Turkey's Counterrevolution: Notes from the Dark Side." *Middle East Policy* 22(1): 130.
- Sayarı, S. 2000. "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era: The Challenges of Multi-Regionalism." *Journal of International Affairs* 54(1): 169-183.
- Tachau, F. and M. Heper 1983. "The State, Politics, and the Military in Turkey." *Comparative Politics* 16(1): 17-33.
- Teschke, B. and C. Cemgil 2014. "The Dialectic of the Concrete: Reconsidering Dialectic for IR and Foreign Policy Analysis." *Globalizations* 11(5): 605-625.
- Turkish Time 2016. "On US Election Day, Putin Advisor Honored At Turkish Parliament." November 11. <https://goo.gl/ybZolb>.
- Walker, J. W. 2011. "Turkey's global strategy: introduction: the sources of Turkish grand strategy - 'strategic depth' and 'zero-problems' in Context", in IDEAS reports - special reports, N. Kitchen (ed.) SR007. LSE IDEAS, London School of Economics and Political Science, London. 6-12.
- Walker, J. W. 2012. "Reclaiming Turkey's Imperial Past", in R. H. Linden et al., *Turkey and its Neighbors: Foreign Relations in Transition*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.13-34.
- Walton, C. D. 2007. *Geopolitics and the Great Powers in the Twenty-first Century: Multipolarity and the Revolution in Strategic Perspective*. London: Routledge.
- WikiLeaks undated. "What lies beneath Ankara's new foreign policy." January 20. <https://goo.gl/UGtLXR>.
- Yanık, L. K. 2011. "Constructing Turkish "exceptionalism": Discourses of liminality and hybridity in post-Cold War Turkish foreign policy." *Political Geography* 30: 80-89.

Two

The troubled story of post-revolutionary Egypt: the struggle for survival of a fading star?

Loretta Dell'Aguzzo

Introduction

Samuel P. Huntington described Egypt as “an Arab country, with a large population, a central, strategically important geographical location in the Middle East, and the leading institution of Islamic learning, Al-Azhar University. It is also, however, a poor country, economically dependent on the United States, Western-controlled international institutions, and oil-rich Arab states” (1996, 178). In just a few words, Huntington captured most of the reasons for Egypt’s regional and international ascent and for its gradual decline. Historically Egypt has occupied a leadership position in the Middle East, especially in defining the Arab attitudes towards Israel. Moreover, the political and military partnership between Egypt and the United States is a linchpin of the American role in the Middle East. For these reasons, the US has granted the country and its military significant financial support over the last decades.

Beside its strategic relevance, Egypt is also culturally important since it is the home of the most ancient Islamic institution, Al-Azhar University, and it is the country where the Muslim Brotherhood (hereinafter also MB or *Ikhwan*), the largest Islamic organization in the world, was founded in 1928. Strategic and cultural relevance do not come, however, without drawbacks. First, the country’s strategic position is one of the reasons that have contributed to the ascendance of the military as one of the most influential institutions at national level and the most powerful army in the region. The imbalance between civilian and military institutions is among the factors that hampered the country’s transition to democracy after the 25 January 2011 uprising. Second, due to historical and organizational factors, the MB was the best institutionalized and most popularly backed opposition force, if compared with secular anti-regime parties and movements. This state of affairs enhanced MB’s confidence it would win the founding elections after the resignation of Hosni Mubarak in February 2011 and induced the leadership of the movement not to seek allies amongst other opposition groups. The fragmentation of the opposition spectrum, mainly due to a deep-rooted secular-religious cleavage, is another relevant element behind the failure of the Egyptian democratic experiment. Indeed, the

opposition between the Islamist and secular camp has made it difficult for civilian political forces to present a unified front and achieve a more balanced relationship with the military establishment.

The presence of a deeply divided opposition and the military has induced researchers to define the political landscape that emerged in Egypt in the aftermath of the popular uprising that toppled the Mubarak regime in February 2011 as “trichotomous” (Landolt and Kubicek 2013, 6). This triangle is composed by three distinct forces: the Islamists, the secular regime opponents and the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (hereinafter SCAF). The interactions among these actors and the means they used to gain and consolidate power have profoundly affected Egyptian domestic stability both before and after the Arab uprising. In addition, the Ikhwan's majoritarian understanding of democracy and its indifference toward the secular opposition demands induced the latter to side with the military when it staged a coup against the first-elected President Morsi.

Other factors which may jeopardize the stability of Egypt are related to the troubling state of the country's economy. Egypt's economic problems have their roots in Nasser's socialist policies based on the nationalization of enterprises and state subsidies granted to lower and middle classes in order to allow them to buy basic goods. In the long run, this system proved untenable and was partially corrected by Sadat and Mubarak's policies of economic liberalization. However, during the last decades, the gap between the few rich and the many poor has widened and unemployment has risen. Indeed, socio-economic grievances are recognized as the main factor that prompted widespread protests against the regime in 2011. Moreover, economic problems could make Egypt even more dependent from external financial support, thus further reducing its room for maneuver in foreign policy. Indeed, Egypt's balance of payment deficit, extremely high youth unemployment rates and the massive price increases for basic goods on one side have eroded the regime's legitimacy and, on the other side, have induced the incumbents before and after the revolution to rely on external aid and investments in order to face economic challenges.

In the following paragraphs, I will analyze political changes and challenges in Egypt in three key dimensions, to wit domestic, regional and international arenas. The first dimension focuses on how domestic stability has been pursued both during the post-colonial authoritarian regime and after the January 2011 uprisings. The second and third dimensions focus on the regional and international role of Egypt after 2011 and discuss the complex interplay between the country's domestic and foreign policy.

Domestic dimension

A revolution without revolutionaries: political fragmentation and the pursuit of stability at the expenses of democracy

On 25 January 2011 thousand Egyptians poured onto the streets in their 'day of wrath' calling for an end to the presidency of Hosni Mubarak, the longest-serving ruler of the country. As in Tunisia, large strata of the population were angered by rising prices, youth unemployment and decades of authoritarian rule. Indeed, the one-party regime that ruled Egypt since independence had largely exhausted its sources of legitimacy from a long time. A gradual erosion of legitimacy and the rise of regime challengers already emerged during Sadat's years. Indeed, the history of Egypt as a sovereign state can be divided into two main phases: the first roughly coincides with the years of Nasser's rule (1954-1970) and the second developed during Sadat and Mubarak presidencies (1970-2011). Whereas the first decade after the ouster of King Farouk II has been characterized by the ascent of Egypt in the regional stage and by a widespread popular support, the second coincides with the country's gradual international decline and the rise of internal opposition to the regime.

President Nasser could rely on various sources of legitimacy when he took power. First of all, he was perceived as a charismatic leader, who contributed to the liberation of the country from foreign occupation. Second, he sought to enlarge the basis of his support through the formation of a social contract aimed at bringing in the poor masses and at excluding the landowners and the bourgeoisie. This was made possible by the establishment of a lavish welfare system and the growth of the organizational juggernaut (Ayubi 1989, 13). The creation of a 'welfarist corporatist' regime proved useful for legitimizing the incumbents and for justifying the marginalization of their challengers, be they Islamists or secularists. As a matter of fact, apart from corporatism, opposition – especially the MB – was sidelined through systematic repression (Tadros 2012, 6). As far as the relation between the regime and the military is concerned, Nasser attempted at balancing the power of the army by creating competing centers of power, like the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), founded in 1962 with the aim of thwarting class conflict and of acting as a counterweight to the military (Curtis 2001, 28-9). Although during the presidency of Nasser the position of the army in the Egyptian state was largely unquestioned, the military defeat against Israel in 1967 discredited this institution and the ASU became the sole center of power that could rival the executive.

In contrast with his predecessor, Sadat's sources of legitimacy were more limited, given that he had less charisma than Nasser and inherited a very unstable socio-economic situation. Indeed, socialist policies had failed to improve the living conditions of many Egyptians and the 1967 defeat challenged the Arab rhetoric of Nasser. In order to face the legitimacy crisis the regime was experiencing, Sadat adopted

new economic policies and partially opened the political arena to appease demands for democratization. In order to make Egypt more attractive to foreign investments, the new President introduced the so-called *Infitah* (open door) policy in 1973 (Ikram 2006, 19). This liberal turn produced several shortcomings at the societal level, because the state began to reduce its economic activity. Social groups that had benefited from subsidies and other social services provided by the state were profoundly hit by the partial liberalization (Ayubi 1995). Eventually, the liberalization of the political and the economic spheres benefited the regime's main competitor, the MB, which reorganized and moved into the social and economic void that the retreating state left behind (Wickham 2002). The MB developed a parallel Islamic welfare system which became an important provider of social goods normally delivered by state institutions, thus bolstering its legitimacy among the population. At the same time Sadat, in order to weaken the Nasserists and the Leftists, released many members of the organization and encouraged the Ikhwan to organize on university campuses. Finally, Sadat attempted to reduce the political influence of the military through the dismissal of many pro-Nasser security officers and the appointment of personnel who avowed a personal commitment to non-intervention in politics (Brooks 2015, 14). However, the developments occurring during Sadat's era allowed the military to gain the upper hand over the economy. After the 1978 Camp David peace accords the army turned its attention to economic activities.

The assassination of Sadat in 1981 by radical Islamists brought to power his Vice-President Hosni Mubarak, who came from the military ranks as his predecessors. Despite some adjustments due to a changing domestic and international environment, the new President continued with most of Sadat's major policies, including limited political liberalization and *infitah*. Major changes during the Mubarak era concerned the increasing role of the military in the economy and more decisive attempts at cooptation of the Muslim Brotherhood, associated with the suppression of radical Islamist groups. As concerns the military, Mubarak sought to achieve their allegiance to the regime mostly through economic rewards. Besides the privileges – 1.3 billion dollars in annual aid from the US – granted to the Egyptian military by the 1979 Camp David peace accords, starting from the 1980s the army extended its grip not only over the defense industry, but also over the civil industrial sectors. During the 1990s Mubarak adopted a liberalization plan in accordance with the IMF and World Bank's conditional requirements and the military expanded their production of civil goods and services (Abul-Magd 2013, 2).

The loyalty of the military alone was not sufficient to rule the country and Mubarak needed to achieve some degree of popular support. According to Al-Awadi, lacking a legitimacy of his own, Hosni Mubarak adopted "a series of policies and reforms that aimed to bolster the [procedural] basis of his legitimacy" (2004, 49). Interestingly, the new President released Sadat's political critics and allowed limited multiparty competition. During the 1980s the Waft Party reemerged and the MB – in alliance with legal parties – participated in the elections held in 1984 and 1987.

However, during the 1990s the rise of violent Islamist groups led the President to reduce civil freedoms and to use the security services in order to limit the activities of opposition parties and put pressures on the MB (Dunne and Hamzawy 2008, 19). More decisive steps towards political reforms were taken during the 2000s. The changing domestic environment allowed the emergence of new political groupings and parties. The political opening which was assumed to weaken the authoritarian regime paradoxically increased the fragmentation of the opposition. In fact, the steady increase in the number of political parties encouraged competition among them and led to the fragmentation of their support base. This state of affairs definitely reduced their ability to significantly challenge the incumbents. Rather, the latter successfully played off opposition parties against one another, thus ensuring the survival of the Egyptian liberalized autocracy (Shehata 2007, 58).

The relationship between the ruling party and the Ikhwan during the rule of Mubarak went through a series of ebbs and flows between 1980 and 2010 (Tadros 2012, 7). The movement was officially banned, but its participation in parliamentary elections in 2004 was tolerated by the regime, also because of the efforts carried out by the US administration to promote democracy. The relaxed government position towards the Islamists was eventually reversed after 2007 and especially during the 2010 electoral campaign, spoiled by episodes of violence exercised by thugs hired by the ruling party against contenders (ivi, 23). The elections were also marred by the renewal of the state's emergency law, the arrest of opposition figures and large-scale electoral fraud. This state of affairs affected the election turnout, which was extremely low. Retrospectively, we can argue that the 2010 parliamentary elections marked a change, depriving the regime of any basis of procedural legitimacy.

This historical framework is necessary in order to understand the effects of the Arab Spring in Egypt. Protests that broke out in Tunisia in late 2010 led to the ouster of then President Ben Ali, which combined with socio-economic grievances, compounded this shock to Mubarak's legitimacy and accelerated the 25 January Revolution, which culminated 18 days later with the resignation of the Egyptian President. Like in other Arab countries, Egypt's pro-democracy protesters lacked a well-defined organization and leadership. Many of the activists were young, well educated, politically aware and largely driven by political and economic grievances (Esposito et. al 2016, 209-11). The main youth movements that took part in the uprising were the 6 April movement, National Campaign to Support Al Baradie, the youth of the Democratic Front Party, the leftist Freedom and Justice Movement and the youth belonging to the MB (Tadros 2012, 29-30).

As concerns the leadership of the MB, it took a distinct position prior to the protests. Three days before the popular uprising, Essam el-Erian – a senior member of the Ikhwan – said the movement would not take part in the scheduled demonstration because the protest conflicted with a national holiday celebrating the police and all Egyptians “should [...] demonstrate together” (Slackman 2011). According

to most accounts, the Brotherhood's reluctance to participate in the protest is to be ascribed to strategic concerns, first and foremost fear of regime repression in case of failure of the upheaval. However, the leadership of the movement allowed its members to take part in the demonstrations on an individual basis. Moreover, leading figures of the Ikhwan joined the rallies and also played prominent roles. Due to its organizational strength, the Brothers were able to mobilize large numbers of followers and many of them were reportedly at the frontlines during violent clashes with the police (Shahin 2012, 58).

The role played by the military during the protests is even more ambivalent. As the International Crisis Group puts it, "throughout the protests, the army played a consistently ambiguous role, purportedly standing with the people while at the same time being an integral part of the regime they were confronting. It found itself almost literally on both sides of the barricades" (2011, 16). This inconsistent stance towards the protesters reflects the identity and the interests of the military: first, most soldiers belong to lower and middle classes, thus there was an identification with the demands of the demonstrators (Lutterbeck 2013, 37). Second, as aforementioned, the Egyptian military controlled an estimated 30 per cent of the economy and the need to protect their budgetary autonomy and economic and financial interests at large suggested them caution in strongly backing the uprising (Esposito et. al. 2016, 213).

All the aforementioned actors played prominent roles after the resignation of President Mubarak in February 11, 2011. Indeed, the strategic interactions among the Islamists, the secularists, the revolutionary youth and the military largely influenced the fate of the Egyptian transition (Al-Amin 2013, 27). Obviously, the army had the upper-hand during the post-Mubarak phase. The military high command constituted itself as the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and sought to distance itself from the negative aspects of the regime while preserving the military's privileges (Springborg 2014, 144-5). The SCAF attempted to achieve some degree of procedural legitimacy by proposing amendments it had made to the 1971 constitution to the Egyptian citizens through a referendum. On one side, the constitutional proclamation on 30 March established military rule, whereas on the other side it set the ground for military exit from direct rule by proposing a timetable for legislative and presidential elections (Noël 2013, 16).

It is worthy of attention that the referendum on constitutional amendments was strongly backed by the MB, which entered an informal pact with the SCAF. The decision to postpone the constitutional-writing process after the founding elections was again driven by strategic concerns. During the transitional period the SCAF stayed in power for a year and half until June 2012 and managed to entrench its control over essential state institutions, the media, the bureaucracy and the judiciary. Moreover, it further expanded military businesses. As for the Brotherhood, they were quite confident they would win the first elections (Mecham 2014, 204). Thus, they opted to defer the drafting of the new constitution at a moment when

parliament would be dominated by representatives of their party. This decision definitely alienated secular and liberal opposition groups who feared being sidelined in the would-be parliamentary assembly due to a likely landslide victory of the Ikhwan. Indeed, despite the fact that during Mubarak's rule the MB and secular-oriented parties managed to build short-lived electoral coalitions, the willingness of the Ikhwan to cooperate with the SCAF during the early stages of the transition alienated the support of the secularists. As rightly noted by Alfred Stepan "as late as four months after Mubarak's February 2011 ouster, the two key social groups that had opposed him [...] still had not held a single joint meeting to discuss democratic governing alternatives" (2012, 23).

Strategic interactions among the opposition were influenced by the heavy presence of the military, who tried to play these groups against one another (El Amin 2012). However, the unfolding of events after the fall of Mubarak clearly shows how the divisions between the Islamist and non-Islamist camps undermined the opposition's capacity to negotiate a pact and perhaps to achieve better results in terms of democratic prospects. In the aftermath of the government overthrow, the MB was the best institutionalized opposition force and in Egyptian society the belief that it would win the first elections was widespread among other parties. This judgment on the electoral results turned out to be correct. In the polls, the coalition led by the newly established Freedom and Justice Party – the political arm of the MB – took 235 seats, 47.2 per cent of the total, whilst both the revolutionary and youth groups and the secular parties were left with almost nothing (Pargeter 2013, 120). What nobody could have predicted was the surprising result of the Salafi al-Nour Party, which came second with 120 seats. However, with a turnout rate of around 60 percent, approximately 35 percent of all Egyptian citizens cast their vote for one of the two primary Islamist parties (Tessler and Robbins 2014, 262), showing that Egyptian society was clearly divided over the support to political Islam. Indeed, the Islamists' success has been a polarizing issue for two reasons: first, the political divisions have increasingly centered on the role of Islam in government and, second, electoral results combined with opinion polls suggest that a large part of Egyptian society would have preferred a secular government (Mecham 2014, 209). Moreover, ideological polarization increased following the Ikhwan's decision to appoint some 75 per cent of the constituent assembly members to Islamists. As a consequence, the remaining non-Islamists members walked out on the ground that the body was not sufficiently representative and tried to stop the process through judicial means (Pargeter 2013, 120).

Apart from polarization based on the religious-secularist cleavage, the new constitution contained several non-democratic provisions on the issues of civil-military relations and the document made many key state fiefdoms untouchable even by elected institutions (El-Sherif 2014, 19). However, the constitutional process continued and between May and June 2012 the presidential elections were held. In a very close election, Mohamed Morsi of the MB managed to win the presidency

over Ahmed Shafiq, a leading figure of the previous regime (Brown 2013). Morsi received nearly 52 per cent of the vote, whilst Shafiq received slightly more than 48 per cent, thus confirming the deep division of the country. To make matters worse, the new twenty-one strong presidential team was dominated by Freedom and Justice Party members and it did not include any member of the revolutionary youth or members of any other parties other than the Al-Nour party (Esposito et al. 2016, 219-220). Moreover, one of the first moves of the newly elected President was to retire the SCAF leadership and to ensure the passage of a new constitution that would decidedly enhance his presidential powers. This led to massive protests against his rule that forced Morsi to withdraw the most criticized amendments. The situation in Egypt grew worse in early 2013 when a new civil movement, Tamarrod, started to collect signatures in favor of ending Morsi's rule. During the 2013 Spring, the movement gathered in the tens of thousands in the streets of Egypt to demand that Morsi step down and new elections be held. According to many accounts, the huge numbers of protesters gave the military a mandate to demand the President's resignation (Kingsley 2013).

We cannot discard the possibility that the military would have staged the coup against Morsi even without public backing. The military/security and intelligence forces had both economic and institutional interests to protect and felt seriously threatened by Morsi's willingness to concentrate power in his own hands. However, the harsh polarization between Islamists and secularists gave the coup a mantle of 'revolutionary legitimacy', essentially based on the widespread opinion that the MB had betrayed the spirit of the revolution. Though the putsch that removed Morsi from power in no way can be defined as 'democratic', it certainly had popular backing. Indeed, the strong opposition to Morsi was so deeply rooted in a hatred of Islamists that several opposition groups aligned with remnants of the old regime. In Khanfar's words, "in their desire to topple the Brotherhood [...] they seem prepared to commit the greatest of profanities: to ally themselves with the former regime's forces" (2012, webpage). Actually, non-Islamist opposition forces lacked electoral support, but were still relevant since in many cases they represented the well-educated secular elites who formed the core of the privileged class running the country. In addition they "refused to accept the idea that they needed to forego their lifestyles and social status and submit to the uncertainties of intolerant, divisive, and hate-based religious politics just because the Islamists received strong electoral support in Upper Egypt and rural parts of the Nile Delta" (El-Sherif 2014, 9). In a recent volume on the Arab Spring, John L. Esposito and colleagues define these opposition groups as 'illiberal democrats', namely "those Egyptians who advocate democracy but are so worried that its presence would bring to power groups like the Muslim Brotherhood that they often turn to illiberal positions hoping to thwart such a possibility. That fear often led them to support the prolonged presence of military rule" (2016, 213-214).

After the overthrow of President Morsi in July 2013, the interim government

drafted a new constitution, which was finally adopted following the January 2014 referendum. Moreover, presidential elections were held in June 2014, when former army chief Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi was elected President (Gur 2016, 1). From mid-2013 onwards, the post-coup regime sought to consolidate power in an adverse political context. However it lacked both legitimacy grounded in socio-economic performance, due to a deep financial crisis, and procedural legitimacy, given that the SCAF took power through the ouster of the first democratically elected President in the history of the country. Moreover, the turnout of the elections that brought al-Sisi to power was so low that the electoral commission was forced to extend voting for a third day (Roll 2016, 39). Under these circumstances, in order to consolidate power the new government sought to marginalize its main challengers. Indeed, whereas until mid-2013 state violence was largely selective, after the coup every sign of dissent was systematically cracked down on by security forces. Between July and October 2013 the government arrested thousands Ikhwan's members and confiscated financial assets of the movement's leadership. Moreover, in December 2013 the regime declared the Brotherhood a terrorist organization (Al-Anani 2015, 541-2).

Even though the main targets of the post-coup regime's repression were the MB, youth movements and secular opposition were not immune from the states relentless campaign to roll back the gains of the Arab Spring. Over the past three years, the Egyptian media has been bent into submission, foreign scholars have been barred and both secular and Islamist domestic critics have been arrested (Puddington 2015, 123). In the spring of 2014 the 6 April Movement – the major catalyst of the 25 January 2011 protests – was banned and its leaders jailed for participating in demonstrations. Moreover, the al-Sisi government curbed the activities of the Tamarod Movement, whose petition and protests against Morsi provided the military with the opportunity to stage a coup to overthrow the elected President (Ottaway 2015, 21).

As this outline of the events that followed the 2013 military coup shows, President al-Sisi's main goal is to silence any form of dissent which could pose a threat or destabilize the regime. However, even authoritarian rulers are aware that in the end harsh repression can turn peaceful protesters into violent ones. Therefore, regime stability and survival cannot be granted only by the suppression of the opposition, but the incumbents need to forge a base of support through co-optation and legitimacy. To this purpose, al-Sisi allied himself with the country's leftist groups (social democrats and Nasserists) in order to appease the working classes and reduce their protests centered on economic demands (Abul-Magd 2014, 7). In addition, he tried to build consensus by capitalizing on popular discontent over the long-standing economic crisis and terrorism. Thus, he stood as the defender of the state from these existential threats. However, attempts at calming the workers' strikes were doomed to fail. Consequently, the President replaced leftist ministers with technocrats and liberals.

With regard to the economy, it is worth noting that the current situation repre-

sents only a worsening of the crisis that Egypt has been experiencing for decades and – besides structural problems – it is also affected by circumstances beyond the government's control, like low oil prices, wars and terrorism that caused a collapse of tourism in the region. Currently, high unemployment rates especially among the youth and women and a recent spike in inflation are expected to further increase poverty. In addition, the measures the government has undertaken in order to appease public anger – the construction of homes for young people and attempts at controlling the cost of food – are coupled with energy price adjustments which risk to worsen an already troubled business environment (Devarajan et.al. 2016, 43).

Along with a stagnant economy, terrorism is the main perceived threat to the regime's stability. Since al-Sisi took power, a substantial increase of violence has been taking place, especially, but not limited to, the resumption of the hostilities in Sinai. Whereas during the SCAF and Morsi's rule limited military campaigns were carried out in the region, since the coup the number and intensity of the Egyptian military's operations in North Sinai has substantially increased (Gold 2015, 56-7). Indeed, in October 2014, in order to create a 14 km long buffer zone along the Sinai's border with Gaza, the government gave roughly 800 households 48 hours to vacate their homes before the military destroyed them (Watanabe 2015, 3). The brutal methods used in the marginalized Sinai region are considered as among the main factors that are making many Egyptians more susceptible to radicalization (Dunne and Williamson 2014). In reality, al-Sisi's heavy-hand in North Sinai can also produce setbacks in the battlefield, further alienating the aggrieved population of the region, whose lives have been totally interrupted (Gold 2015, 57).

In summary, the transition process that started with a popular uprising abruptly ended two years later through a coup staged by the Egyptian military and the overthrow of the first elected President Mohamed Morsi. The fragmentation of the opposition and the economic interests of the military were among the major factors that hampered the instauration of democracy in Egypt. Indeed, secularist forces and part of the youth movements that rose up against Mubarak in the name of democratic freedoms did not hesitate to back a military coup against the Islamist forces. The wave of violence that washed across the country after the 2013 coup induced Egyptians to support the candidature of former Defense Minister al-Sisi as President, in order to restore order and stability. Lacking a popular basis of his own, al-Sisi sought to marginalize any social force that could threaten his hold on power. The new government silenced through repressive measures both the Islamist and secularist challengers. As aforementioned, the heavy-hand toward dissidents and common citizens, along with rising poverty and unemployment, could threaten regime survival in turn. Thus, the account of the events that developed over the last five years in Egypt suggests that the current domestic political situation in the country is extremely volatile and the regime's attempts to consolidate power could also spur renewed protests and instability.

Regional dimension

An unstable regime in a volatile environment: how Egypt is trying to survive in the south-eastern Mediterranean region

Whereas the domestic stability of post-revolutionary Egypt has been largely influenced by the complex interplay among different actors, the country's regional foreign policy after the revolution appears to be driven also by structural constraints. Even though some accounts of Morsi's foreign policy emphasize the continuity with the Mubarak era, ideology and identity have played a relevant role in the Islamist President's attitude toward regional players. Notwithstanding, both economic and security factors have hugely affected Egyptian relations with Saudi Arabia (and the Gulf Cooperation Council, GCC), Turkey, Iran as well as Israel. Broadly speaking, we can observe both continuities and changes between the post-revolutionary leaders' and Mubarak's regional policy. Beside ideology and identity, discontinuities can also be attributed to the changing and volatile post- 2011 regional environment.

Despite the pivotal role Egypt has played in the Arab world for much of the 20th century, after the end of Nasser's rule and especially during the presidency of Hosni Mubarak, the most populous Arab nation's dominance declined and Egypt could not set the tone in the region anymore. Over the last three decades, the need to address economic and security challenges has moved Egypt toward the "West axis", which also included Saudi Arabia and – tacitly – Israel. This alliance was opposed by the so-called "Resistance Front", led by Iran and including Syria, Hamas and Hezbollah. Whilst the first camp supported the efforts of the US to impose a "Pax Americana" in the region, the latter strenuously opposed US hegemony (Valbjorn and Bank 2007). The positioning of Egypt in the pro-Western camp was essentially due to the country's dependence on the US and US-led international organizations and to the need to defuse the existential threat Israel could pose to the country.

After Morsi rose to power in 2012, the international community and regional leaders were concerned about the future trajectory of Egypt's foreign policy. Widespread uncertainty was mostly related to whether the MB's transnational ties and ideology would influence Egypt's regional policy. As we will see, despite few changes, Morsi's external action was all but 'revolutionary'. Indeed, in one of his first public declarations, Morsi assured the rulers of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States that they were crucial in Egypt's regional policy. The relevance of Gulf countries for the Egyptian government was demonstrated by the fact that the new President paid his first official visit to Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Morsi underlined that his Islamist executive would never incite Egypt-style uprisings in the neighborhood (Darwisheh 2015, 52). Morsi's attempts at appeasing relations with the Gulf countries were mainly driven by the government's economic dependence on the GCC aid and investments. In May 2012 the first Saudi aid package worth \$ 500 million was provided to Egypt and in June Saudi Arabia deposited \$1 billion with the Egyptian

central bank and transferred \$500 million to buy Egyptian T-bonds (Talbot 2012, 4).

Even though pragmatism dominated Egyptian and Saudi foreign policy during Morsi rule, the new President's rapprochement with Iran strained the relations with the Sunni ally. Actually, Morsi was the first Egyptian President to visit Iran since the 1979 revolution on the occasion of the summit of the non-aligned movement (NAM) and this visit was reciprocated by one made to Cairo by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on 5 February 2013 (Meringolo 2015, 3). However, some details surrounding the visit of Morsi to Teheran may give the due weight to the Egyptian President's decision. According to Esfandiari, President Morsi could not abstain from visiting Iran since Egypt had held the NAM presidency for three years and had to pass it onto Iran, therefore "declining the invitation would have been a strong anti-Iran statement – stronger than Morsi was willing to make at a time while he was still formulating the new government's foreign policy" (Esfandiari 2012, webpage). Despite this, Egypt rapprochement with Iran increased Saudi Arabia's suspicion about Mohamed Morsi's true intentions.

Relations between Egypt and Qatar represented a further cause of concern for Saudi rulers. Unlike most Gulf States, the Qatari monarchy supported the Arab uprisings and welcomed the rise to power of the MB. Indeed, in contrast with Saudi Arabia, Qatar has never had tensions with the Islamist movement who, in turn, never undermined the Qatari regime's legitimacy (Haykel 2013, 2). During Morsi's rule, Qatar offered the Brotherhood both financial capital and extremely favorable Al Jazeera coverage, thus approaching the economic and cultural influence of Saudi Arabia (Morsy 2013). From an economic perspective, moreover, Qatar had provided Morsi's government with \$8 billion in exchequer, and also promised 18 billion in additional investments over the period of five years (Siddiqui 2016, 7). Along with Qatar, an improvement in Egyptian relations with Turkey can be observed during the presidency of Mohamed Morsi. During the January 2011 uprising, Turkey was the first country that publicly expressed support for the will of the Egyptian people. Moreover, the Turkish Islamist Justice and Development Party greeted the rise to power in Egypt of the Freedom and Justice Party with enthusiasm. Soon after being elected President, Mohamed Morsi sought to strengthen ties with Turkey – and Qatar as well – in order to lower the Saudi influence over Egyptian foreign policy and the economy. Turkish support for the popular uprising can be explained both by the past tense relations between the two countries and by the ideological affinity between the two Islamist parties in power (Tocci 2011, 1).

As far as relations with Israel are concerned, Morsi followed the same foreign policy path of his predecessor, preserving existing diplomatic ties. This approach was clear from the very beginning of the Morsi presidency, when the head of State confirmed his adherence to the Camp David agreement, notwithstanding the pressure coming from certain fringes of the Brotherhood (Meringolo 2015, 2-3). In the case of Israel, Morsi's attempts at maintaining good diplomatic relations were driven

by security concerns, especially the crisis in the Sinai Peninsula. Egyptian efforts at maintaining the peace treaty with Israel intact culminated with Morsi's successful brokering of a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas in 2012. Egypt's good stance towards Israel, however, did not appease the latter's uneasiness, due to the continued functioning of the Gaza-Sinai tunnels and the movement of jihadists across the Sinai border (Aly 2014, 4).

Morsi's stance towards the civil war in Syria is worthy of attention as well. Since his election in March 2012, he called for the resignation of Assad, describing him as a dictator during the NAM summit in Teheran (Grimm and Roll 2012, 1). Moreover, Morsi strongly advocated for the creation of an "Islamic Quartet" comprised by Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey in order to mediate the Syrian civil war and end the fighting. The Egyptian President supported the inclusion of Iran, stating that he did not "see the presence of Iran in this quartet as a problem, but is a part of solving the problem" (Al Jazeera, 23 September 2012). However, the success of the mediating coalition was undermined by the notable absence of Saudi Arabia's representatives during the first meeting of the Quartet (Haaretz, 18 September 2012). During the first half of 2013, Morsi took a hostile stance against the Syrian regime by participating in the 'Support for the Syrian Uprising' conference organized by several Salafi parties and the MB. On that occasion, the President broke relations with the Assad regime and pledged the Egyptian people and army's support to the Syrian uprising (Grebowski 2013). This abrupt policy change is better explained if domestic factors are taken into consideration. Indeed, Morsi's decision was first and foremost influenced by the need to strengthen ties with the Gulf States – which backed the Islamist opposition against the Syrian regime – and to appease his Salafi allies at home, whose base of support was considered fundamental for his staying in power. The break of relations with the Syrian ruling elite was one of the last moves of Morsi as President of Egypt and is also one of the factors that induced the military to stage a coup against him in July 2013. Even though constitutional provisions state that the President is the supreme commander of the armed forces, top military officials were alarmed by Morsi's unprecedented public appeal to the Egyptian army to engage in war against a foreign country.

When Al-Sisi took power the few novelties in regional policy introduced by the former President were doomed to be reversed. Indeed, the 'new' political course inaugurated by al-Sisi shares many similarities to the Mubarak era's policies towards neighbour states. First of all, the new President abandoned the path of rapprochement towards Iran. The coup against the former Islamist President was obviously criticized by Teheran. However, the unstable domestic situation, the urgent need to consolidate his power and to reassure the United States that Egypt could help to stabilize the region induced al-Sisi to adopt a non-confrontational stance towards Iran (Darwisheh 2015, 56). In a similar fashion, Teheran avoided clashing with Egypt by refusing to be a safe haven for members of the Brotherhood that started fleeing the country after Morsi's removal (Zecchinelli 2015, 74). A foreseeable

setback in relations between Egypt and the Islamist party in power in Turkey occurred after the removal of President Morsi. Like Teheran, Ankara harshly condemned both the 2013 military coup and the silence of the Western powers. Indeed, the breach with Turkey appears even deeper than that with Iran. As a matter of fact, after the Rabaa massacre of protesters in August 2013, the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on the UN Security Council to meet and impose sanctions on Egypt (Al-Rasheed 2013). The diplomatic crisis between the two countries continued during 2014 and culminated with the repatriation to Cairo of Egypt's ambassador in Turkey. Along with Turkey, Egypt's relations with Qatar – a supporter of the Arab uprisings and of the Brotherhood – have been tense since al-Sisi has won the presidency. After the military coup, Qatar did not express any kind of apology for its involvement during the 25 January revolution and refused to expel members of the Ikhwan from the country (Sons and Wiese 2015, 42). However, contrary to current deteriorating relations with Turkey, ties between Egypt and Qatar are characterized by ups and downs. Whereas during 2014 the two countries engaged in a 'diplomatic war', during 2015 several signs of reconciliation were made both by Doha and Cairo. In late 2014, Qatar suspended the broadcasting of Egypt-focused TV channel Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr and Egypt, in turn, released three Al Jazeera journalists who had been jailed in 2013 (Zecchinelli 2015, 70). Moreover, in March 2015 President al-Sisi received Qatari Emir Tamim at the Arab League Summit. Finally, in June 2016 relations worsened again after an Egyptian court sentenced former President Morsi to life in prison and ordered the death penalty for two Al Jazeera journalists for leaking state secrets to Qatar (Kessler and Weinberg 2016).

Contrariwise, the election of al-Sisi appeased Israel's anxiety about the threat posed by the ideological and historical ties between its internal enemy, Hamas, and the MB. As his predecessor, the new Egyptian President confirmed his commitment to respect the 1973 Peace Treaty with Israel. Moreover, the deteriorating situation in North Sinai, along with the new regime propaganda against all the Islamist forces, depicted as 'terrorists', induced al-Sisi to adopt a tougher stance towards the Sinai jihadist groups. The ideological affinity between Hamas and the Ikhwan, the former's ties to the Sinai insurgents and its ability to "arouse undesirable unrest in the Egyptian streets by fanning the flames of the conflict with Israel" were considered by al-Sisi as bigger threats to state security than that posed by Israel (Winter 2015, 15-6). Security concerns, therefore, induced the Egyptian President to strengthen cooperation with Tel Aviv in order to contain the weapons smuggled along the Sinai border and to sever ties between Hamas and Egyptian Islamists. Thus, the current regime undertook an aggressive operation to shut down the underground tunnels from Sinai to Gaza (Diamantopoulos 2015, 3).

Relations with Saudi Arabia also significantly improved after the elections of al-Sisi. Indeed, Saudi rulers welcomed the military overthrow of the Islamist President, since the Muslim Brotherhood-led Egypt – along with the rise of regional competitors, like Qatar and Iran – posed a challenge to the longevity of their pro-

minence in the region (Ennis and Morani 2013, 1139). Closer economic ties were established since the putsch in 2013, as Saudi Arabia (with United Arab Emirates and Kuwait) has provided Egypt with considerable economic assistance. According to some estimates, the Egyptian military received more than US \$ 39.5 bn since 2013 (Zecchinelli 2015, 66). However, some tensions recently emerged after the appointment of Mohammad bin Nayef as the new crown Prince, who appears more concerned in curbing Iran's ambitions than in crushing the MB – that is al-Sisi's main priority. Beside foreign policy priorities of the two countries, some disagreements have also emerged with regard to the war in Syria. As a matter of fact, al-Sisi's call for a solution to the conflict that includes the Assad regime alarms Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, who strongly back the Islamist forces against the Baathist ruling elite. Al-Sisi's stance mirrors his belief that Sunni extremism in the region represents a bigger threat than the Shi'a axis, composed by Iran, Syria and Hezbollah.

With regard to the conflict in Yemen, al-Sisi's intervention within the Saudi-led anti-Houthi coalition has to be interpreted as the result of considerations based on the state of the country's economy and on security. Indeed, when al-Sisi rose to power, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States offered substantial economic assistance and the Egyptian President, in exchange, offered to help them in the fight against Iran and its allies in the region. Moreover, al-Sisi sought to defuse the threat posed by the Houthis to maritime security in the Red Sea (Trager 2015). A further reason behind the Egyptian intervention in Yemen is that the President saw the war as an opportunity to present, internationally, his state as "a bulwark against extremism in the Middle East" (Diamantopoulos 2015, 2).

Domestic security concerns also drove the President's foreign policy towards the Libyan civil war. Egypt shares a 1115 kilometer border with Libya and since Gaddafi's ouster in 2011 a huge flow of weapons from raided Libyan storehouses entered into the Sinai peninsula, along with IS-affiliated fighters, thus influencing the escalation of violence in the region (Gold 2015, 55). Furthermore, Egypt was increasingly concerned with the rise to power in Tripoli of a coalition of Islamists and regional militias. Thus, al-Sisi strongly supported the secular and internationally recognized government exiled in Tobruk (Diamantopoulos 2015, 3). When 21 Coptic Egyptian workers were kidnapped and beheaded in Libya, Egyptian army bombed training camps and ammunitions caches of the Islamic State around Derna (Zecchinelli 2015, 77-8). Yet, al-Sisi – contrary to expectations – sought not to escalate the conflict and called for military action in its neighbor by the US-led coalition against the Islamic State.

This brief outline of the Egyptian regional policy after the 2011 upheaval has shown how domestic and, to some extent, ideological factors have shaped both Morsi and al-Sisi stances towards their neighbors. As we have seen, both Presidents' foreign policies have been largely driven by the country's economic dependence on foreign aid and investments and security concerns related to political violence in North Sinai. From this perspective, we can support the thesis according to which

Egypt's post-revolutionary policy in the MENA region has remained stable despite internal turmoil and regime change. Yet, some changes occurred after the military coup, especially in the relations with relevant regional players, like Turkey and Qatar. Indeed, relations between the two countries were good under former President Mubarak and Erdogan's stance toward Egypt was positive when a like-minded Islamist President was elected. During the one-year rule of Morsi, Ankara and Cairo signed several agreements in the fields of trade and tourism. After the 2013 coup and the return of the military in Egypt, relations became increasingly tense. Against this background, we argue that post-2011 foreign policy has been characterized by both continuity and change. In particular, the 2013 coup has on the one side appeased relations with historical allies, and on the other, increased tensions with Islamists governments. Thus, despite that the military coup against Morsi has frequently been considered as a return to the past, that is to pre-revolutionary politics, the short interlude between 2012 and 2013 in which Islamists rose to power has indeed had repercussions in Egypt's regional policy during the subsequent years.

International dimension

The search for external patrons: Egypt between US, EU and Russia

As well as Egypt's foreign policy in the region, the stance of foreign powers towards the country have been largely influenced by Egypt's volatile domestic environment. In particular, international uncertainty dominated during the short-lived presidency of Morsi, whereas concerns about frequent human rights abuses and the sharp turn to authoritarianism affected relations between Egypt and both United States and the European Union under al-Sisi. As far as the rapprochement between the Arab state and Russia during al-Sisi's presidency is concerned, it may be explained by the disagreements that emerged between the Egyptian ruling elite and the country's western historical allies. However, it has to be noted that current tensions between great powers and the extremely uncertain situation which characterizes the international system may have had an impact on Egypt's foreign policy over the last three years.

Since the Camp David Accords signed in 1978, Egypt and the United States have established close ties in the field of security and military cooperation. Starting from 1979, the US provided Egypt with economic and military assistance, thus helping the country to upgrade its military facilities and modernize its infrastructure (Sharp 2016). According to some estimates, the United States, between 1977 and 2007 provided Egypt with \$62 billion in aid, which amounts to an average of \$2.1 billion per year (Felsberger 2012). Since Sadat's presidency and until the end of Mubarak's rule in 2011, Egypt's economic dependence on US economic aid and loans and the constant need of debt relief from the International Monetary Fund dragged the Arab country into the umbrella of Gulf-US-Israel security architecture and left the

state with little room for maneuver in foreign policy (Siddiqui 2016, 3).

After the 2011 uprising and during the SCAF-dominated transitional period, the orientation of Egypt's foreign policy did not change, since the arm strictly adhered to Mubarak's policy towards the US and other allies. Several minor changes occurred when the MB won the founding elections of the new regime and when Morsi won the presidency in 2012. At first, the United States remained silent during the transition period, when the MB and the SCAF cooperated in drafting the new Constitution, assuming that this would bolster national and regional stability at least in the short term (Brownlee 2012). Moreover, the US assumed that the Ikhwan were committed to establishing a democratic regime in Egypt and to maintaining peaceful relations with Israel. Indeed, the Director of National Intelligence James Clapper even testified in front of Congress that the Muslim Brotherhood was a 'moderate' and 'largely secular organization' that has «eschewed violence» and has «no overarching goal, at least internationally» (Pierce 2014, 75). During 2012, delegations of the Ikhwan visited Washington and the US embassy in Morocco (Wolff 2015, 8). Even during Morsi's rule the relations between Washington and the Egyptian military remained steady. In addition American defense and intelligence officials frequently visited Cairo during 2012 (Morsy 2013). In November of the same year President Obama praised President Morsi for negotiating a cease fire between Israel and Hamas. The US also went forward on its ESF package of \$190 Million to Egypt in March of 2013 (Sharp 2016).

That being said, Western capitals were alarmed by several episodes that marked Morsi's administration. The US concerns were mostly related to the President's stance on minorities, his relationship with Hamas, security ties with Israel and ideological politics within and outside the country (Siddiqui 2016, 8). In addition, on 11 September 2012 protesters scaled the US embassy in Cairo and Morsi's delayed reaction and provision of security led some in Washington to call for cutting off aid to Egypt (Times of Israel, 28 September 2012). Furthermore, in Western capitals there was growing impatience with Morsi's ambiguous twin-track course. Washington expressed sharp criticism of the Egyptian leadership's slowness to condemn the violent attacks on the US embassy in Cairo and pressed for a clearer pro-Western alignment in Egyptian foreign policy (Grimm and Roll 2012, 4). Finally, Morsi's plan to visit the US never materialized, reflecting a potential weakening of US-Egypt relations (Aly 2014, 3).

The European Union's policy toward Egypt has always been influenced by security and strategic considerations and these factors have long played a prominent role in the formulation and implementation of EU democracy promotion towards the country as well (Youngs 2013). Indeed, the EU has sought to find a balance between the need to promote good governance – considered as a part of a long-term solution to many security threats stemming from the south Mediterranean – and the need to preserve the stability of many non-democratic governments, because of their moderation in foreign policy (Isaac 2013). For this reason, EU's reaction to

the Arab uprisings was hesitant at first and EU member states that maintained close ties with North African autocracies remained very cautious. Europe's stance towards Egypt's upheaval was an echo of the American position. Indeed, only when President Obama openly backed the protesters and invited Mubarak to step down, France, Germany, the UK and Italy called for an orderly power transition in Egypt (Metawe 2013, 145). Soon after the collapse of the Mubarak regime, the EU adopted a new initiative known as 'Partnership for Democracy and Stability with the Southern Mediterranean'. This new partnership was based on the 'more-for-more' approach, to wit the higher the country's commitment to democracy, the higher the economic and financial assistance it would receive by the EU (Schumacher 2011, 110-13). The European Union believed that the promises of assistance – offered mainly in the form of grants and loans – and the future negotiation of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement would be sufficient to gain some leverage with the government under Morsi's administration. However, EU conditional aid was too small to significantly influence Egypt's domestic politics (Blockmans 2013, 1-2). As a matter of fact, EU financial assistance to Egypt is negligible if compared to other donors. Between 2007-2013, the EU allocated \$ 207 million annually, whereas in the same period the US allocated \$ 1.6 billion and tiny Qatar even \$ 7.5 billion (Sadek 2016, 105).

During Egypt's transition from authoritarian rule the European Union also attempted at normalizing its engagement with Islamist actors, by setting up a Task Force with Egyptian political leaders –including members of the MB – to discuss how to ease the transition to a democratic regime (Wolff 2015, 8). The Task Force took place in Cairo on 14 November 2012, just a week before Morsi's constitutional declaration, which substantially increased Presidential powers, and that prompted the angry reaction of opposition parties. The European Union did not officially react to Morsi's initiative until March 2013, when the ENP Egypt Progress Report (2012) was published. This document did include some criticism to the Egyptian government. Therein it was stated that "President Morsi's constitutional declaration of 22 November giving him near absolute power, the rushed adoption of a draft Constitution by the Constituent Assembly, the abrupt interruption of the dialogue on its provisions, and the President's subsequent call for a constitutional referendum have pitched the nation into a deeply divisive political crisis between supporters of the President, on the one hand and the secular liberal opposition" (ENP Progress Report 2012, 2). Beside this timid criticism, EU-Egypt bilateral relations continued "business as usual" during Morsi's short-lived administration.

More relevant changes in the country's relations with great powers occurred after the military staged a coup in July 2013. Egyptian foreign relations with the United States were notably affected by the putsch that removed the first democratically elected President from power. Indeed, it was not the return of military rule in the country that posed a problem to the Obama administration, but the modality through which this power transition occurred. Actually, the US – like other western

governments – has always had close ties with Egyptian’s authoritarian rulers and provided the military with financial aid. However, when Morsi was overthrown by a military-staged putsch, US government had to decide whether or not to continue supporting Egypt. According to the most recent US foreign appropriations act, government funds cannot be expended to “finance directly any assistance to the government of any country whose duly elected head of government is deposed by military coup d’état or decree [...] in which the military plays a decisive role” (112th Congress Public Law 74-112, Sec. 7008). For this reason, according to some observers “Washington had refrained [...] to define as a coup the military’s overthrow of Egypt’s only democratically-elected President and brutal suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood that left more than 1,000 people dead, to avoid being legally obliged to cut off aid” (Dorsey 2013, webpage). Concerns about human rights abuses in Egypt were raised by the US State Department as well, which – in its annual human rights report – denounced a pattern of excessive use of force including unlawful killings, torture and mass arrests of political opponents (Al Monitor, July 2016). Against this background, the Obama administration decided to suspend the delivery of Apache attack helicopters, Harpoon missiles, M1-A1 tank parts and F-16 warplanes, as well as \$260 million for the general Egyptian budget (Gordon and Landler 2013). Even though US-Egypt relations after the coup were tense, the US were not willing to see a rupture with Cairo and feared that a tougher stance against al-Sisi’s government would foster a rapprochement with Russia, one of the main US competitors in the region. Concerns about the potential warming of relations between Cairo and Moscow were all but baseless, given that – since coming to power – President al-Sisi has tried to broaden Egypt’s diplomatic relations in order to decrease the country dependence on the United States. In particular, the new President sought to “diversify its sources of weaponry” (Daily News Egypt, 15 February 2015). Since 2013, the Egyptian military has reached new arms agreements with France, Germany, United Kingdom and Russia. Whereas deals with European allies are not a matter of concern, weapons purchases from Russia – which sees an opportunity to extend its hold on a strategic region – alarm Washington.

The Washington attempt to link arms sales to democratic advancements and respect of basic human rights has not been successful. Actually, al-Sisi has often expressed the desire to maintain good relations with the United States but has been deaf to Washington’s repeated calls for preserving democratic procedures in the country (Dunne 2014). This state of affairs – along with the need to fight the Islamic State – induced the Obama administration to unfreeze its military assistance in March 2014, but continued to denounce authoritarian practices in Egypt, especially the persecution of Islamists and political dissidents. Moreover, the US President announced that – beginning in 2018 – he would end Egypt’s ability to buy US equipment on credit and restrict military aid to four sectors, to wit the Sinai peninsula, counterterrorism, border security and maritime security. This decision was grounded on the awareness that Egyptian military were more prepared to fight a conven-

tional war than to fight the current unconventional, asymmetric wars.

Despite Washington's attempts at unfreezing relations with Egypt, military cooperation with Russia has increased during 2015. In February, during President Vladimir Putin's visit to Cairo, he and al-Sisi posited a deal on building a nuclear plant in Egypt (Dunne 2015, 88). Moreover, on 6 June 2015 Russia and Egypt conducted the first joint naval exercise – the 'Friendship Bridge 2015' – as part of the effort to strengthen military cooperation. This joint drill came on the heels of a nearly \$2 billion arms deal for Moscow to supply Egypt with the advanced S-300 air defense system, MiG fighter jets and other arms (Shay 2015). Both Egypt and Russia have motives to establish closer relations: beside the United States' temporary freeze of military aid and pressures on human rights, al-Sisi and the army perceived Obama's support for the former President Morsi as an abrogation of the diplomatic understanding between the two countries (Dunne 2015, 86). Russia, in its turn, obviously sees increased cooperation with Egypt as an opportunity to boost its resurgent presence in the region to the detriment of its historical rival.

Following Morsi's removal from power, relations between the European Union and Egypt did not change significantly. After the ouster of the Islamist President, the EU limited itself to attempts to mediate and to make demands for reconciliation. Due to divisions among member states, European institutions were unable to take any side (Virgili 2014, 56). Indeed, whereas some European leaders were alarmed by the military takeover and called for the return to a civilian-led government in Egypt, others greeted the power transition that occurred in mid-2013 in the name of stability. These two positions toward al-Sisi government are mirrored in the EU-Egypt relations over the last three years. On one side, the European Union continued to criticize human rights abuses and setbacks in democratic transition and on the other the focus of relations with Egypt shifted towards the country's social and economic development. As an example, during a summit in Sharm el Sheikh in March 2015, the EU and Egypt signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and joint declarations to support Egyptian development with a grant amounting to 130 million euros. The MoU highlights the development of the EU Single Support Framework (SSF) for Egypt for 2014-2015, which includes the following priority areas: Poverty Alleviation and Economic/Social Protection, Governance, Transparency and Business Environment, and Quality of life. Moreover, EU financed projects for the agricultural and rural development, for education, for the support of the private sector and small and medium enterprises (Delegation of the European Union to Egypt, 14 March 2015).

In summary, post-revolutionary Egyptian rulers have sought to maintain well-established relations with the United States and the European Union. However, the ambiguity of Morsi's stances towards Western allies, the military coup and the subsequent return to authoritarian rule partially alienated US Looser relations with the West and the need to diversify weapons suppliers favored the rapprochement, during al-Sisi's administration, with Russia. Even though Washington has several

concerns about human rights violations in Egypt, as in the past, it turns a blind eye for the sake of regional stability.

Conclusions

Although written half a century ago, Huntington's statement "the wealthy bribe; students riot; workers strike; mobs demonstrate; and the military coup" (1968, 196) successfully describes Egypt's recent history better than many more contemporary accounts. Indeed, as in modernizing praetorian societies, in Egypt each group has acted with its own weapons in order to promote its own interests. Thus, secularized and educated youth staged protests under the flag of democracy, the working and middle classes took to the streets calling for the improvement of their poor living conditions, and the military staged a coup since they felt the election of a civilian government was jeopardizing their privileges. What the quotation from Huntington leaves aside is the presence, in Egypt, of a well-institutionalized Islamist movement capable of mobilizing the masses but unable to bridge the gap between competing worldviews and to heal the wounds of decades of authoritarianism. Indeed, the Muslim Brotherhood overlooked the fact that years of regime propaganda against the Islamists, along with the movement's ambiguous political program, were able to unite secular opposition and the remnants of the old regime.

Political fragmentation and the clash between different systems of values have certainly favored the military takeover and the rise of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Nonetheless, the new President has to face the same challenges encountered by his predecessor and the reliance on solely coercion may have devastating consequences for the stability of the country and regime survival. Al-Sisi's legitimacy was largely based on the widespread fear of the Islamists, but the new government's relentless brutality against any form of dissent has alienated his electoral support. Moreover, the military's accumulation of wealth and marginalization of the business elite with which it shared power during Mubarak's rule may open the way for another uprising.

Beside al-Sisi's outright authoritarianism, longstanding economic problems and Egyptian dependence on foreign aid and investments can hinder the prospects for stability in the country as well. As we have seen, Cairo's foreign policy, both in the region and towards great powers, is hugely influenced by the country's economic needs. That being said, Egypt is still the most populous Arab state and has the largest army in the region. Moreover, its unchanged good relations with Israel are key in ensuring peace in the Middle East. Therefore, it is unlikely that the US – despite concerns over the military takeover and widespread human rights abuses in the country – will turn their back on Egypt, especially until Islamic terrorism represents a common enemy and Russia seeks to extend its grip on the region. Indeed, Egypt is still a relevant actor in world politics and, as Germany's former Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer put it, "Egypt – with its strategic location, stable borders, large po-

pulation, and ancient history – has been the principal power of the Arab world for centuries, defining the movement of history there like no other” (2013, webpage). Despite domestic problems, Egypt is considered a vital ally by Gulf States as well, given their common opposition to the Shia axis.

By way of conclusion, concerns about the country's future stability are all but unjustified. Egypt has experienced a gradual but relentless decline since the 1970s. Nasser's successors – due to a different domestic and international environment and to the erosion of legitimacy – could not manage to equate his popularity, Egypt's socio-economic situation is deteriorating by the day and the post-revolutionary regime's brutality has put an enormous strain on the population. This mix of factors may pave the way for renewed protests and political instability. Yet, a different set of factors could enhance the probabilities of regime survival. Both Arab and Western powers consider Egyptian stability as a fundamental requisite for regional peace and Cairo is a precious ally in the fight against Islamic terrorist organizations. Thus, we can expect that foreign actors will continue to support al-Sisi's regime until the region is stabilized. That being said, changes prompted by the Egyptian uprising are likely to affect the country's role as a pivot state in the region. The US have always considered Egypt as a provider of regional stability, especially after the 1979 Camp David Accords. However, due to recent foreign policy changes, they might reconsider this idea. Current security concerns represent one of the main drivers of Egypt foreign policy in the region. Indeed, the war against the Muslim Brotherhood and against all the Islamist galaxy has induced al-Sisi to side with Assad in Syria, a move that sharply contrasts with the positions of US and several Sunni powers. Hence, Egyptian domestic conflicts may somehow decrease the country's international credibility and put into question its pivotal status.

References

- Abul-Magd, Z. 2013. "The Egyptian military in politics and the economy: Recent history and current transition status." *CMI Insight*, 2. <https://goo.gl/ImhXg9>
- Abul-Magd, Z. 2014. "Egypt's Adaptable Officers: Power, Business, and Discontent." *ISPI Analysis* 265. <https://goo.gl/bd53CR>
- Al-Amin, E. 2013. *The Arab Awakening: Understanding Transformations and Revolutions in the Middle East*. Washington, DC: American Educational Trust.
- Al-Anani, K. 2015. "Upended Path: The Rise and Fall of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood." *Middle East Policy* 69(4): 527-44.
- Al-Awadi, H. 2004. *In Pursuit of Legitimacy: The Muslim Brothers and Mubarak, 1982-2000*. London: Tauris Academic Studies.
- Al Jazeera. "Morsi: Iran's Vital to Ending Syrian Crisis." 23 September 2012. <https://goo.gl/rZwLqO>
- Al Monitor. "US grudgingly accepts new normal with Egypt." July 2016. <https://goo.gl/ACWqC4>
- Al-Rasheed, M. 2013. "Saudi Arabia and Turkey Falter Over Egypt." *Al Monitor* 20 August 2013. <https://goo.gl/mcwzJS>
- Aly, A. M. S. 2014. "Post-Revolution Egyptian Foreign Policy." *Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Middle East Brief* 86.
- Ayubi, N. 1989. "Government and the State in Egypt Today." in C. Tripp and R. Owen (eds) *Egypt Under Mubarak*. London: Routledge.
- Ayubi, N. 1995. *Overstating the Arab State. Politics and Society in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Blockmans, S. 2013. "Egypt and the EU: Where next?" *CEPS Commentary* 4 November 2013.
- Brooks, R. 2015. "Understanding Shifts in Egyptian Civil-Military Relations. Lessons from the Past and Present." Egypt Civil-Military Relations Conference Paper Series, DCAF. <https://goo.gl/JOIbMz>
- Brown, N. J. 2013. "Egypt's failed transition." *Journal of Democracy* 24 (4): 45-58.
- Brownlee, J. 2012. *Democracy Prevention: The Politics of the US-Egyptian Alliance*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Curtis, R. C. 2001. "Political Strategies and Regime Survival in Egypt." *Journal of Third World Studies*. 18(2): 25-46.
- Daily News Egypt. "Egypt seeks to 'diversify' weapon providers: Experts." 15 February 2015. <https://goo.gl/98CRz1>
- Darwisheh, H. 2015. "Regime Survival Strategies and the Conduct of Foreign Policy in Egypt." *IDE ME Review* 2: 43-64.
- Devarajan, S., L. Mottaghi, Q. Do, A. Brockmeyer, C. Joubert, K. Bhatia, M. Abdel Jelil. 2016. "Economic Perspectives on Violent Extremism." *Middle East and North Africa Economic Monitor*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Diamantopoulos, E. 2015. "The MENA Foreign Policy of Egypt under Sisi." *Center for Mediterranean, Middle East & Islamic Studies, Middle East Flashpoint*, 68.
- Dorsey, J. 2013. "US Freezing of Military Aid to Egypt: How much of a dent?" *The Worldpost* 18 October. <https://goo.gl/D3fh07>
- Dunne, C. W. 2015. "Cairo Between Washington and Moscow: A New Theatre for Global Confrontation?" in (ed.) S. M. Torelli *The Return of Egypt, Internal Challenges and Regional Game*. Milano: ISPI. 81-95.
- Dunne, M. 2014. "A US Strategy Toward Egypt Under Sisi." *Carnegie Endowment for*

- International Peace, Policy Outlook*, June 2014.
- Dunne M. and A. Hamzawy. 2008. "The Ups and Downs of Political Reform in Egypt." in (eds) M. Ottaway and J. Choucair-Vizoso. *Beyond the Façade: Political Reform in the Arab World*. New York, NY: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Dunne, M. and S. Williamson. 2014. "Egypt, Counterterrorism, and the Politics of Alienation." *Carnegie Endowment for Peace*, 20 August 2014.
- El Amin, E. 2012. "Showdown in Egypt." *CounterPunch* 30 November. <https://goo.gl/Sy6Y7d>
- El-Sherif, A. 2014. "The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Failures." New York, NY: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Ennis, C. A. and B. Momani. 2013. "Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi foreign policy strategies." *Third World Quarterly* 34(6): 1127-44.
- Esfandiari, D. 2012. "Iran and Egypt: a complicated tango?" *EUISS Opinions*, 18 October. <https://goo.gl/rHMYPq>
- Esposito, J. L., T. Sonn and J. O. Voll. 2016. *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Felsberger, S. 2012. "The Future of Egyptian Foreign Policy: To what extent will Egypt's foreign policy change under President Morsi?" AIES Fokus 4.
- Fischer, J. 2013. "Egypt after Morsi." *Project Syndacate* 26 July. <https://goo.gl/B2j9UJ>
- Gilley, B. 2013. "Did Bush Democratize the Middle East? The Effects of External-Internal Linkages." *Political Science Quarterly* 128(4): 653-85.
- Gold, Z. 2015. "Adding the Security Ingredient: The Jihadi Threat in the Sinai Peninsula." in (ed.) S. M. Torelli, *The Return of Egypt, Internal Challenges and Regional Game*. Milano: ISPI. 45-62.
- Gordon, M. and M. Landler. 2013. "In Crackdown Response, US Temporarily Freezes Some Military Aid to Egypt." *New York Times* 9 October. <https://goo.gl/OAZcbD>
- Grebowski, S. 2013. "Morsi's Cheap Win in Syria." *Atlantic Council* 18 June.
- Grimm, J. and S. Roll. 2012. "Egyptian Foreign Policy under Mohamed Morsi: Domestic Considerations and Economic Constraints." *SWP Comments* 35.
- Gur, S. 2016. "The 2015 parliamentary elections in Egypt." *Electoral Studies* 44: 461-464.
- Haaretz, "Seeking Syria Peace: 'Islamic Quartet' Meets in Egypt for First Time Since Launch." 18 September 2012. <https://goo.gl/Mo3GVN>
- Hashim, A. 2011. "The Egyptian Military, Part One: From the Ottomans through Sadat." *Middle East Policy* 18(3).
- Haykel, B. 2013. "Saudi Arabia and Qatar in a Time of Revolution." *Center For Strategic and International Studies* February. <https://goo.gl/Wsb74M>
- Huntington, S. P. 1968. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Huntington, S. P. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Ikram, K. 2006. *The Egyptian Economy, 1952-2000: Performance, Policies, and Issues*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- International Crisis Group. 2011. "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (I): Egypt Victorious?" *Middle East/North Africa Report* 101.
- Isaac, S. K. 2013. "The EU's Democracy-Stability Dilemma Persists in Egypt." *E-International Relations* 8 January. <https://goo.gl/xnZvLI>
- Kessler, O. and D. Weinberg 2016. "No Neutral in the Egypt-Qatar Quarrel." *US News*

- & *World Report*. <https://goo.gl/qhyGBC>
- Khanfar, W. 2012. "In a Polarized Egypt, the Thugs and the Remnants Return to Centre Stage." *Guardian* 11 December. <https://goo.gl/iEAKcn>
- Kingsley, P. 2013. "Tamarod campaign gathers momentum among Egypt's opposition." *The Guardian* 27 June. <https://goo.gl/Xnjooq>
- Landolt, L. K. and P. Kubicek. 2013. "Opportunities and constraints: comparing Tunisia and Egypt to the coloured revolutions." *Democratization* 21(6): 984-1006.
- Lutterbeck, D. 2013. "Arab Uprisings, Armed Forces, and Civil-Military Relations." *Armed Forces & Society* 39(1): 28-52.
- Mecham, Q. 2014. "Islamist Movements." in (ed.) M. Linch, *The Arab Uprisings Explained. New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. 201-217.
- Meringolo, A. 2015. "From Morsi to Al-Sisi: Foreign Policy at the Service of Domestic Policy." IAI, *Insight Egypt*, 8.
- Metawe, M. 2013. "How and Why the West Reacted to the Arab Spring: An Arab Perspective." *Insight Turkey* 15(3): 141-55.
- Morsy, A. 2013. "Morsi's Un-Revolutionary Foreign Policy." *Middle East Institute*. <https://goo.gl/nysFmi>
- Noël, E. 2013. "The Military and the Egyptian Revolution: Resistance to Reform." McGill University, <https://goo.gl/3klzTt>
- Ottaway, M. 2015. "Al Sisi's Egypt: The State Triumphant." in (ed.) S. M. Torelli, *The Return of Egypt, Internal Challenges and Regional Game*. Milano: ISPI. 15-28.
- Pargeter, A. 2013. *The Muslim Brotherhood. From Opposition to Power*. London: Saqi Books.
- Pierce, A. R. 2014. "US 'Partnership' with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its Effect on Civil Society and Human Rights." *Global Society* 51.
- Puddington, A. 2015. "A Return to the Iron Fist." *Journal of Democracy* 26(2): 122-38.
- Roll, S. 2016. "Managing change: how Egypt's military leadership shaped the transformation." *Mediterranean Politics* 21(1): 23-43.
- Sadek, S. A. 2016. *EU Foreign Policy Toward the Southern Mediterranean: The case of Egypt during the Arab Spring*. Dissertation, Master in European and International Studies, Nice, Centre International de Formation Européen.
- Shahin, E. 2012. "The Egyptian Revolution: The Power of Mass Mobilization and the Spirit of Tahrir Square." *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 3: 46-69.
- Sharp, J. M. 2016. "Egypt: Background and US Relations." *Congressional Research Service: CRS Report for Congress* 25 February. <https://goo.gl/qv9THI>
- Springborg, R. 2014. "Arab Militaries." in (ed.) M. Linch, *The Arab Uprisings Explained. New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. 142-159.
- Shehata, D. 2007. *Islamists and Non-Islamists in the Egyptian Opposition: Patterns of Conflict and Cooperation*. PhD dissertation, Georgetown University. ProQuest, <https://goo.gl/gMghV1>
- Shay, S. 2015. "Egypt's Arms Diversity Strategy." *Israel Defense*. <https://goo.gl/uZ-MeZZ>
- Schumacher, T. 2011. "The EU and Arab Spring: Between spectatorship and actor-ness." *Insight Turkey* 13(3): 107-19.
- Siddiqui, F. R. 2016. "Changing Contours of Egypt's Foreign Policy in the Aftermath of Uprising." *Indian Council of World Affairs, Issue Brief* 8 September.

- Slackman, M. 2011. "Mideast Activism, New Tilt Away From Ideology." *The New York Times* 23 January. <https://goo.gl/SLx6bc>
- Sons, S. and I. Wiese. 2015. "The Engagement of Arab Gulf States in Egypt and Tunisia since 2011: Rationale and Impact." *DGAP Analyses* 9 October. <https://goo.gl/ZLqWGw>
- Stepan, A. 2012. "Tunisia's transition and the twin tolerations." *Journal of Democracy* 23(2): 89-103.
- Tadros, M. 2012. *The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt: Democracy Defined Or Confined?* London: Routledge.
- Talbot, V. 2012. "The Gulf monarchies in a changing MENA region." *ISPI Analysis* 139.
- Tessler, M. and M. Robbins 2014. "Political Systems Preferences and Arab Publics." in (ed.) M. Linch, *The Arab Uprisings Explained. New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. 249-272.
- Times of Israel. "US congresswoman blocks \$450m. in aid for Egypt." 28 September 2012, <https://goo.gl/TYAf61>
- Tocci, N. 2011. "Turkey and the Arab Spring: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy in Transatlantic Perspective." Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Trager, E. 2015. "Egypt's Yemen Campaign." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Alert* 27 March.
- Valbjorn, M. and A. Bank 2007. "Signs of a New Arab Cold War. The 2006 Lebanon War and the Sunni-Shi'i Divide." *Middle East Report* 242 Spring.
- Watanabe, L. 2015. "Sinai Peninsula – from Buffer Zone to Battlefield." *CSS Analyses in Security Policy* 168.
- Wickham, C. R. 2002. *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism and Political Change in Egypt*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Winter, O. 2015. "El-Sisi's First Year as President: Legitimacy, Democracy, and Relations with Israel." *INSS, Strategic Assessment* 18(2).
- Wolff, S. 2015. "U.S and EU Engagement with Islamists in the Middle East and North Africa." *Transatlantic Academy Paper Series* August 2015.
- Youngs, R. 2003. "European Approaches to Security in the Mediterranean." *Middle East Journal*. 57(3): 414-31.
- Zeinad, A. 2013. "The Egyptian military in politics and the economy: Recent history and current transition status." *CMI Insight* n. 2. October. <https://goo.gl/BjEG8K>
- Zeinab, A. 2014. "Egypt's Adaptable Officers: Power, Business, and Discontent." *Analysis* 265.
- Zecchinelli, C. 2015. "Egypt and the Middle East: a new Regional Protagonist?" in (ed.) S. M. Torelli. *The Return of Egypt, Internal Challenges and Regional Game*. Milano: ISPI. 68-80.

Three

Israel between international isolation and internal fragmentation

Giulia Giordano

Introduction

With the outbreak of the uprisings known as the Arab Spring, the reactions in Israel ranged from skepticism to apprehension and fear. While American and European commentators were often saluting the beginning of a new era of democratization for the Middle East, Israelis were preoccupied with securing its borders and strengthening its internal security infrastructure to contain any repercussions that might have risen from the regional turmoil. Located in the heart of a hostile region, Israel's relationship with the world has always been controversial, divided between the inclinations towards ethno-national particularisms, the struggle for its survival against hostile neighbours and the aspiration of being recognized as a legitimate state and integral part of the international community.

Israelis, indeed, see their own state as a "small country engulfed by hatred and existential threats, an embattled and besieged democracy in a region replete with authoritarian and sometimes fundamentalist regimes, some of whose leaders publicly advocate its destruction" (Avineri 2010, 53). The initial hopes expressed by David Ben Gurion, the country's first Prime Minister, that the region would democratize after the 1948 war with 'decent people at the helm' (Aslan-Levy 2012) were sadly unfulfilled, fostering Israel's feeling of exceptionalism, as the 'sole democracy of the Middle East', or in the words of former Prime Minister Ehud Barak 'a villa in the jungle', an island of western civilization surrounded by hostile and underdeveloped countries. Nevertheless, however despotic these rulers might have been, Israel has managed to achieve in the last few decades a state of cold peace with them, which ensured tranquility at its borders for most of the time. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that many in Israel interpreted the events unfolding since 2011 as worrisome. The fear that the old and status quo oriented autocrats of the neighbouring Egypt and Syria might be replaced by new leaders emerging from the ranks of radical Islam and that these movements might spread to Jordan and even reinforce Israel's bitter enemies Hamas and Hezbollah has motivated Israel further into self-isolation, with the erection of stronger virtual and even physical barriers, such as the one along its 240 km border with the Egyptian Sinai, to protect

itself from the region and as Netanyahu explained “to ensure the Jewish and democratic character of the state of Israel” (CBC News 2010, webpage).

The perception of a continuous threat to Israel’s existence has acted as the binding force of a very diverse society, which since its establishment has gathered together Jewish immigrants of various origins and social backgrounds, added to a considerable Palestinian minority. The relatively homogenous European composition of Israel at the time it achieved statehood in 1948, was soon altered with the arrival of Mizrahi immigrants, Jews from Middle Eastern countries during the early years, and further developed with the arrival of Ethiopian Jews in the early 90’s, and a considerable wave of Russian immigrants following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Israeli society is further divided along the secular/religious cleavage, with the latter growing more numerous due to the high birth rate and assuming increasing weight in the political arena. Israel’s internal diversity is well reflected by its political system, a unicameral parliamentary democracy based on a proportional system with a 2% threshold, increased to 3.25% in 2014, which has usually led to political fragmentation and the formation of coalition governments.

David Ben-Gurion’s *Mapai* (the forerunner of the Labor Party) was the hegemonic governing force of the country roughly until the 1977 elections, when the Likud rose to power for the first time. In time the right-wing forces obtained increasing popularity, due to the combination of both domestic and regional circumstances. It is important to note that at the time the Arab Spring occurred the country was governed by the right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu. Episodes such as the August 2011 terroristic attack of a bus in Eilat, near the border with Egypt – which resulted in clashes between Israeli and Egyptian soldiers and eventually in the death of 5 Egyptians, and which motivated the September assault at the Embassy of Israel in Cairo – increased the level of insecurity of the country and its inclination towards self-isolation. Despite the barriers that Israel has erected around itself, the winds of the Arab Spring have reached the country and marked important changes. During the summer of 2011, the ‘Tents Protest’ started in Tel Aviv and rapidly spread all over the country. Slogans such as ‘walking as an Egyptian’ or the more explicit ‘*Rothchild cmo Tahrir*’ (which referred to the Rothchild Boulevard, i.e. the place where the protests started, as an Israeli Tahrir square) brought the spirit of the Arab Spring to the heart of the Jewish state. In addition, the unravelling of the neighbouring countries into what was soon labelled as the ‘Arab Winter’ accompanied by the rise of radical Islam, has brought about significant transformations in Israel’s foreign policy.

In the next pages, the political changes triggered in Israel by the Arab uprisings will be presented and discussed within three dimensions, domestic, regional and international, which are extremely intertwined and whose interplay has produced a more right-wing, fragmented and isolated Israel.

Domestic Dimension

The wave of social protests: from the pursuit of national cohesion to the disclosure of Israeli social and political fragmentation

Notwithstanding the constant levels of economic growth and the relatively low levels of unemployment that Israel registered in recent years (less than 7% in 2010, according to Rosenhek and Shalev 2014), the lack of effective welfare policies and the highly consumerist life style that followed the liberalization and privatization process which started in the 1990s have caused a general malcontent among the population. This popular feeling has often been suppressed by the constant presence of security concerns that have traditionally been the first priority in the Israeli political agenda with the result that “distributive issues and class interests played a marginal role in electoral politics” (ivi, 4).

When in July 2011 Daphni Leef pitched a tent in the middle of the elegant upper-class Rothchild Boulevard as a desperate and spontaneous act of protest against the extremely high costs of rent in Tel Aviv, the latent malcontent suddenly exploded and very rapidly tent camps were set up all over the country, protesting the expensive cost of living, housing prices, depreciation in wages, absence of childcare and welfare and demanding social justice and the return to the old welfare state. From July to October, hundreds of thousands of Israelis gathered in what was the largest and most unprecedented social protest in the history of the country. Born as the protest of the urban middle class youth, it rapidly expanded to embrace a variety of social groups in the attempt to create a cohesive and inclusive movement that would represent all Israeli citizens, overcoming the deep social cleavages that traditionally divide the country. Historically, “the main political conflicts in Israel were perceived and interpreted as enacting a fundamental struggle between contradictory political and cultural collective identities” (ibid.). It is very hard to find precedents of social involvement of a similar extent, apart maybe from the Black Panther movement that originated in the 1970s among second-generation Mizrahi immigrants against discrimination inflicted by the government.

The concurrence with the Arab Spring and the explicit reference to the protests happening in the neighbouring countries might lead some to see the Israeli hot summer as part of the cascading effect of the Arab uprisings. However, while some continuity might be recognized, at a closer look significant differences reveal the anomalies and peculiarities of the Israeli phenomenon. Not only was the mobilization milder and far less dramatic, but the protesters were not demanding the capitulation of the regime nor the resignation of Prime Minister Netanyahu, but rather their requests, intentionally presented as apolitical, were calling for the current government itself to solve the country’s problems. In other words, “these protesters focused on demands to be included in the national hegemony rather than to change its frame of reference. Public protest in Israel, therefore, historically reinforced ra-

ther than challenged the basic terms of the state” (Allweil 2013, 46). Moreover, the main focus on the housing issues can also be read within the Zionist mythological foundation discourse of providing a homeland to all Jews in the world and the image of tents is associated in Israeli collective memory to that of the first settlements established by the pioneers at the beginning of last century (ibid.).

To a certain extent, the so called July 14 or J14 movement succeeded in creating a sense of unity and solidarity and in presenting a new inclusive Israeli ‘we’, overcoming important social cleavages. While around 6% of the population actively participated in the protests (Harkov 2016, webpage), a poll released by Israel’s Channel 10 reveals that 85% of the country supported the movement (Bronstein 2016), a data inclusive of left and right wing voters, secular and religious, Jewish and Arab citizens. As Member of the Knesset Trachtenberg commented “the protests were undoubtedly the most significant socioeconomic event in Israeli history, and one of the most significant in the last decade in the world. Six or seven percent of the population took part; no other economically significant country experienced a phenomenon like that” (quoted in Harkov 2016, webpage). This explains the moderate although sometimes reluctant participation of Palestinian citizens of Israel in the protests along their Jewish neighbours in the major mixed cities such as Jaffa, Haifa and Nazareth, and even the presence of independent tent camps in the Israeli Arab towns of Qalansuwa, Lydda, and in the conservative Islamic town of Umm Al Fahim. Unexpectedly, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Israeli Communist Party issued a joint declaration in September 2011, praising the participation of Palestinian citizens of Israel in the movement and calling for a joint struggle against the occupation. Later, the experience of an active Palestinian involvement in Israeli politics was translated into the formation of the Joint List, a political party born from the alliance of four Arab parties, which obtained 13 seats at the 2015 elections becoming the third political party in the Knesset. Nevertheless, Palestinian participation in the social protests during the 2011 summer was only partial and at the margins, with the majority of Palestinian citizens of Israel perceiving the wave of protests as an internal Jewish-Israeli matter. Their impression was soon proven correct, when the military escalation between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, following the Eilat terroristic attack in August, brought the country back to reality and the movement’s narrative was soon redesigned to fit the hegemonic discourse of security in terms of Zionist identity. The movement revealed in this way the unprecedented prominence that “the chilling effect of the patriotic, state-loyalist discourses” (Gordon 2012, 351) plays in the Israeli society.

Following the failure of the Camp David II and the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000, a general feeling of disappointment and mistrust spread among the Israelis, paving the way for the increasing popularity of the right-wingers, who always claimed that Oslo was a real strategic mistake for Israel, along with the unilateral withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000 and especially from Gaza in 2005. The increasing number of rockets fired from Gaza into Israel by Hamas in the last few

years seemed to prove real Israeli concerns and led to significant military offensives against Gaza: 'Operation Cast Lead' in 2008/2009, 'Operation Pillar of Defense' in 2012 and 'Operation Protective Edge' in 2014. These events constituted a breeding ground for the existential threat discourse, further inflamed by a wide array of institutional measures approved by the Knesset and which can be seen as anti-democratic and discriminatory, such as the NGO Transparency Bill (2010) targeting left-wing NGOs, the Law for the Prevention of Damage to the State of Israel through Boycott (2011), which enables lawsuits against individuals who call for boycott of settlement products, the Citizenship Loyalty Law (2011) which enables the state to revoke the citizenship of persons convicted of terrorism, espionage or disloyalty, the Nakba Law (2010), which criminalizes the commemoration of the Nakba Day and which obviously targets the Arab Israeli minority, and several other policies which mark a clear extreme rightward orientation of the country.

In such a 'McCarthyist political environment' any association with the 'left' is seen as a betrayal of the Jewish state, its security and identity. This explains the intentional estrangement of the social protest leaders from any association with a left-wing agenda. Social issues were framed as the fulfilment of the original Zionist values, recalling memories of collectivism and socialism of the early state. The movement deliberately avoided any reference to the Palestinians, their housing conditions and their social problems, ignoring that the image of tents was also a reminder of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees that in 1948 fled their villages and were settled in camps around the region. Even the national debate over the costs of the occupation, an important additional burden on taxpayers who pay for large military expenses, subsidize the provision of public goods, housing, and other services to a minority of Israelis living in settlements beyond the green line, was censored. Criticism was raised towards the protest leadership, accused on the one hand of carrying on an 'Arab Spring without any Arabs' (Burriss 2013), and on the other of being spoiled middle class youngster without any realistic claim to represent the whole Israeli society, been described as 'sushi eaters and shisha smokers' (Monte-rescu and Shaindlinger 2013).

Notwithstanding the criticism that the movement received from the left as well as from the right, for the first time in its history Israel experienced an unprecedented bottom-up mass mobilization, which was explicitly and intentionally framed within a regional phenomenon. A letter published in Arabic, Hebrew and English titled '*Ruh Jadida: A New Spirit for 2011*' (+972 2011, webpage) contained the appeal of young Mizrahi intellectuals to their peers in the Arab world, expressing their solidarity with their protests and attempting to draw a line of continuity between Tel Aviv, Cairo, Tunis and Damascus, reclaiming Israel's Middle Eastern identity. As a matter of fact, several Arab media, including the London based *Al Hayat* and the Egyptian *Al Youm al Sabeh* portrayed the wave of protests in Israel as a revolutionary movement in line with what was happening in all the major Arab capitals (Haaretz 2011). This happened despite the fact that on several aspects, including

the demands raised, the Israeli protests could be assimilated to other movements spread in the Western world, such the protest of the *Indignados* in Spain. Nevertheless, media statements about Israel's regional Middle Eastern identity have an unprecedented value.

At the end of the summer 2011, the tents were gradually removed from the streets, while sporadic protests continued to occur. An ad hoc committee, the Trachtenberg committee, taken from the name of the Tel Aviv University professor who headed it, was appointed by Prime Minister Netanyahu in order to address the grievances raised by the protesters. The committee produced a set of recommendations, some of which were adopted by the Knesset. In June 2012 a new wave of protests seemed ready to take to the streets again and with renewed rage. The authorities reacted by carrying out violent arrests, including that of Daphne Leef who initiated the protest the year before. In July, during a march in Tel Aviv, activist Moshe Silman, emulating the martyrdom of Tunisian Mohammad Bouazizi, poured fuel over his body and set himself on fire dying a week after. His extreme act of protest 'against all social injustices' as he explained in a letter he had written previously, resulted in a considerable decline of the protests, given the fear of radicalization of the movement shared by the majority.

The two most prominent leaders of the summer movements Stav Shaffir and Itzik Shmuli joined the ranks of the Labor Party, gaining a seat in the Knesset at the 2013 elections and again in 2015. However successful this social experience was and however critical the impact on the political dynamics of the country was, it failed to translate in a political victory of the left. The great cross-cutting popular support gained by the movement during the 2011 summer represented the expression of Israelis' need for political normality, a denial of the security circumstances that render Israel exceptional and a rebellion against the existential threat narrative. It did not take too long however before the politics of survival surfaced again taking over the agenda. As the movement leader Shmuly explains, people "care about social issues on the street, but security in the voting booth" (quoted in Harkov 2016, webpage). While the political left has shifted its focus from the conflict to social issues, the mainstream mindset remained focused on security, with the result of strengthening the political right. In October 2011, Netanyahu scored an incredible political success when he negotiated with Hamas the release of the IDF soldier kidnapped in 2006 Gilad Shalit as part of a massive exchange of prisoners. This episode together with the Palestinian bid to the UN contributed to shift again the focus from social to security issues. Indeed, in September 2011, the president of the Palestinian Authority Mahmud Abbas formally requested full United Nations membership for Palestine, obtaining in November 2012 a significant status upgrade from 'entity' to 'observer non-member state'. Israel condemned the Palestinians for finding shortcuts to bilateral talks and Netanyahu in response authorized the construction of more settlements in the West Bank. Soon after, 'Operation Pillar of Defence' started, following Israeli targeted killing of Ahmad Jabari, Hamas Chief

of the Military. For the first time rockets from Gaza reached the areas of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, creating an unprecedented feeling of fear in the country. In 2013, Netanyahu, leading an alliance between the Likud and *Yisrael Beitenu* and with an electoral campaign based on a combination of security and social issues, formed a coalition government with former TV celebrity Yair Lapid's party *Yesh Atid*, national religious party *HaBayt HaYehudi*, and Tzipi Livni's *Hatnuah*. Lapid's political success can definitely be considered as another outcome of the social protests. His party managed to capitalise on the claims of the secular middle class of Israel, which accused the state of neglecting them in spite of their contribution to the country by working, paying taxes and serving in the military, contrary to other sectors of the society like the ultra-orthodox population (Rosenhek and Shalev 2014).

The conflict with Gaza in the summer 2014, following the kidnapping and murder of 3 young Israeli residents of the West Bank by Hamas members, intensified the politics of survival. A ground invasion was carried out to destroy underground tunnels built by Hamas. In November, Jerusalem witnessed one of the deadliest terror attacks of the last few years, the massacre of the *Kehilat Bnei Torah* synagogue. In general, the number of terror attacks gradually grew. At the 2015 elections, Netanyahu's Likud obtained the highest number of votes, defeating the Zionist Union, an alliance between the Labour party and *Hanuah*. The government was then formed with *HaBayt HaYehudi*, ultra-orthodox parties United Torah Judaism and *Shas*, centre party *Kulanu*, and *Yisrael Beitenu*, marking the most right-wing government in the history of Israel.

After five years from the outbreak of the protests, the country has witnessed an intensification of the security discourse consequent the exceptional wave of terror that shook the country, including the so called 'knives intifada' started in September 2015. Most of the socio-economic problems of the country remained unsolved, with housing prices that rose 32% from 2011 against a 12% increase in the average wage. A survey of 500 Israelis shows that "half believed the protests had no impact at all. Another 24% said the effect was simply in raising consumer awareness and the public debate on cost-of-living issues. Another 7% said the protests had only a small/short-term effect" (Dovrat-Meseritz 2016, webpage). The illusion of national unity experienced during the J14 protests seems to have faded away almost immediately and today Israeli internal polarization is as strong as ever. In the summer 2016 hundreds of Israelis of Ethiopian descent protested against police brutality, attracting media attention for the first time towards their discriminatory treatment and the conditions of inequality experienced by the Ethiopian minority, which represents less than 2% of the population. The Israeli puzzle remains particularly complex and reveals a multiple identity, which produces contrasting needs, reconciled by the constant perception of a common threat on the survival of the state coming from neighbouring countries.

Regional Dimension

Israel: building up its fortress on the shifting sands of the Arab Spring

Israel's regional stand has always been inevitably tied up with its immediate neighbourhood and shaped by the Arab-Israeli conflict, whose roots are in the establishment of the Jewish state in mandatory Palestine in 1948. The core of the conflict revolves around the Palestinian issue and despite several attempts to negotiate a final resolution, it still presents the most prominent threat to Israel's national security, in the form of waves of terroristic attacks or in the form of massive rockets strikes from Gaza into Israeli territory. The Arab-Israeli conflict comprises also other tracks, some of which have been solved through the achievement of a peace treaty, such as in the case of Egypt, with which a treaty was signed in 1979 by Egyptian President Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Begin, the famous Camp David Accords; and in the case of Jordan, which signed a treaty with Israel in 1994, when the Peace Process was at full swing. These two peace treaties are regarded by Israel as the cornerstone of its regional security. Another important component of the Arab-Israeli conflict unravels on the northern border and comprises the Syrian and the Lebanese tracks. Despite numerous and lengthy rounds of talks with Syria, a formal agreement has never been reached but a strategic status quo has maintained tranquillity at the borders during the last years before the outbreak of the civil war in Syria.

Starting from the 1980s, the Arab-Israeli conflict has witnessed a reduction of violence, with a significant drop of both military and civilian fatalities. The last conventional inter-state war fought by Israel was the 1973 *Yom Kippur War*. After that, the first Lebanon War in 1982 fought against PLO militants who fled from Jordan after the Black September events, was already an example of a new kind of warfare, based on the confrontation against non-state actors. Finally, the last time Israel endured a military attack by a state was during the 1991 Gulf War, when Saddam Hussein's Iraq launched missile strikes against Israeli towns. Notwithstanding such a remarkable reduction of Israel's conventional military involvement, the country still keeps highly securitized relations with the region, dominated by fear and mistrust. In this context, non-state terrorist formations, namely Hamas and Hezbollah, and the state of Iran, which has backed them financially and militarily, have represented the major security threats of the last years. Indeed in 2009 a ship carrying weapons was intercepted in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and believed to be destined to Hezbollah from Iran and again in 2011 another ship travelling from Syria to Gaza carrying weapons was intercepted and believed to be sent from Iran. Israel was particularly concerned with Iran's ambitions to become a regional power, given its anti-Israel rhetoric, strong connections with Syria and the nuclear program. In conclusion, in the years preceding the Arab Spring, Israel developed an approach based on maintaining the status quo, by "preserving the channels of negotiation

insofar as possible; keeping the peace with Jordan and Egypt; conducting relations with the Palestinian Authority in such a way as to maintain relative stability on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip; and finally, handling matters on the northern front, along the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese borders, in a way to ensure continued calm" (Zisser 2015, 330).

When the first protests in the Arab countries broke out, Israel was caught off guard. Just before the demonstrations started "official Israel's assessment was that the political stability in the Arab world was destined to be preserved for many years" (Zisser 2015, 332). Great concerns rose when from a distant and less worrisome Tunisia the protests spread to Egypt, leading to the overturning of the regime of Mubarak, and then reached Jordan and finally Syria, where soon after the uprising turned into a civil war. From an Israeli perspective, these events confirmed the long-standing pessimistic vision of the region, as inherently unstable and prone to conflict. Few voices expressed hope in the change, like former President Shimon Peres who claimed "poverty and oppression in the region have fed resentment against Israel and the better our neighbours will have it, we shall have better neighbours" (quoted in Haaretz 2011). Aside from few exceptions, most politicians and commentators expressed concerns from the very early stage of the Arab Spring. In a memorable address to the Knesset in 2011, Netanyahu warned that the Arab Spring would soon turn into an "Islamic, anti-Western, anti-liberal, anti-Israeli and anti-democratic wave" (quoted in Ravid 2011, webpage) calling those who did not recognize the implications on Israel naive: "I will not establish Israel's policy on illusions. There's a huge upheaval here [...] whoever doesn't see it is burying his head in the sand" (ibid.). As Efraim Inbar explains, from an Israeli point of view the threats are numerous, "of foremost concern are the heightened risks of rapid change and strategic surprises, greater uncertainty regarding the behaviour of leaders in neighbouring states, increased terrorist activity, reduced deterrence, growing regional isolation, emerging threats in the eastern Mediterranean, and the continuing Iranian nuclear challenge" (Inbar 2012, 1). In addition, the prospect that the rise of political Islam in the region would reinforce Hamas and weaken Fatah in the Palestinian arena was another source of concern. While literally 'sitting on the fence' (Dekel and Einav 2015), Israel has closely monitored the developments taking place in its surroundings and adopted a minimalist and risk-adverse approach, which consisted in strengthening its national defence and preserving its existing regional ties (Berti 2014). Israel avoided any direct involvement and simply adjusted its policies to the change. Its priorities were the maintenance of the status quo including the limitation of suspicious activities on its borders, and the containment of Iran and radical Islam.

Following the election to president of Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi in 2012, Israel feared that the new political scenario would translate into a dramatic change in the bilateral relations. Despite a diffused anti-Israel sentiment among the population and even a frequent use of anti-Israel rhetoric by Mu-

barak himself, during his regime Israeli-Egyptian relations were solid and a state of cold peace was maintained. The 1979 peace treaty was fully implemented, including keeping the Sinai Peninsula demilitarized and granting Israeli warships passage through the Suez Canal. In addition, Mubarak's regime was a strong opponent of Iran and radical Islam, while keeping robust relations with the US, ultimate guarantor of Israel's security in the region. Bilateral relations further developed with the signing of a gas deal, which made Egypt the largest provider of natural gas to Israel, before Israel's discovery of gas fields in the Mediterranean. Given the multiple benefits granted by Mubarak's regime, it does not come as a surprise that his fall alarmed Israeli political and security establishments. The newly elected president Morsi, while ensuring Egypt's commitment to preserving its international agreements including the peace treaty with Israel, allowed for the first time in 30 years Iranian warships to use the Suez Canal, declared its support to Hamas, and cancelled its natural gas deal with Israel, after repeated sabotage of the trans-Sinai pipeline (Scheinmann 2013). The August 2011 terroristic attack on a bus near Eilat, which eventually led to an armed confrontation between Israeli and Egyptian soldiers, added more fuel to a situation already perceived as critical by Israel. After 30 years of tranquillity, Israel's southern border again became a source of concern. Jihadist forces, like the *Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis* (Supporters of the Holy House, later known as *Wilayat Sinai*, after claiming allegiance to ISIS) took control of the Sinai and started anti-Israel actions, such as attacking Israeli patrols along the border and even launching missiles against Eilat. When in 2013 the military coup removed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood from power, Israel breathed a sigh of relief. General Al-Sisi, who would become president in 2014, made sure to guarantee cooperation with Israel. The two countries found themselves sharing again a set of common interests, including their opposition to the Muslim Brothers, Hamas and radical Islam. Several harsh counterterrorism operations were conducted in Sinai, including an Israeli drone strike against a terrorist cell, presumably with Egyptian permission, proving a high level of military cooperation (Scheinmann 2013). Egyptian forces have also carried out campaigns against Hamas's underground tunnels connecting Sinai to Gaza and to date Egypt continues to tackle the issue of underground tunnels and the smuggling of weapons to Hamas (Berti 2013). The good state of relations was also proven by Israeli efforts to diminish US criticism towards the military establishment.

The wave of protests also reached the territory of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, at the eastern border of Israel where the Islamic Action, the Jordanian spinoff of the Muslim Brothers, demonstrated among other things against the peace treaty with Israel. In order to attenuate the unrest, King Abdullah adopted a mixed policy of cooptation, including approaching Hamas leaders, and repression. Since the signing of the peace treaty, Jordan has been regarded by Israel as its buffer zone against potential enemy lines to the east, while the Jordanians see cooperation with Israel as an insurance policy against its neighbours (Inbar 2012). The outbreak of

the Syrian civil war and the repercussions on Jordan in terms of a massive flow of refugees has exacerbated the social malcontent of the population, and reports show that an increasing number of Jordanians has joined the ranks of radical Islamic organizations, including ISIS. Nevertheless, relations between the two governments are stable and cooperation even increased with the recent signing of a historic agreement on gas, which will allow Israel to sell natural gas to Jordan from the newly discovered Leviathan field.

The Arab Spring made a timid appearance also in the Palestine, in the Gaza Strip ruled by the de facto government of Hamas, and in the West Bank under Fatah's government and Israeli military occupation. Wide spread frustration among the Palestinian population, due to social and economic problems, and mistrust in a non-elected political leadership perceived as corrupted and inept, developed into a mild wave of non-violent protests, which took to the streets at various times in 2011 and 2012. In Gaza the protests were immediately repressed by the Hamas government, which accused the protesters of collaborating with Israel in the attempt to delegitimize the authority of Hamas. Protests in the West Bank cities of Ramallah, Hebron, Nablus, Bethlehem obtained moderate success, full coverage on national media and the attention of the decision makers in Ramallah. Palestinian malcontent was rooted in a variety of issues. While still imbued with a strong anti-Israel character, increasing criticism was expressed towards the Palestinian Authority. Indeed, President Mahmoud Abbas's legal mandate expired twice, in 2009 and again in 2010, after being extended by decree. No presidential or legislative elections have been held since Hamas' victory in the January 2006 parliamentary elections. In addition, the division between Hamas and Fatah was generally perceived as failing Palestinian interests. Finally, security cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel was criticized as harmful to the Palestinians. Both the Palestinian and the Israeli leadership saw the situation as a ticking bomb ready to explode. The potential fall of Fatah was seen by Israel as paving the way to Hamas and other radical forces, especially in consideration of the regional circumstances. In an attempt to contain the malcontent and divert the internal struggle against the common enemy, Abbas presented the Palestinian bid to the United Nations in 2011 at the Security Council, and then in 2012 at the General Assembly. This diplomatic success granted Abbas and the Fatah government an increasingly popular support. Israel made it clear it did not appreciate the internationalization of the conflict, while Hamas, which only formally supported the bid, continued losing legitimacy. Only the prisoner exchange with Israel, which entailed the release of more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for one Israeli soldier, restored temporarily Hamas' legitimacy. Indeed soon after, Hamas again lost popular support due to the harsh living conditions in Gaza, but managed to increase its popularity after engaging in a war with Israel. Following requests of reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, a national unity government was formed in June 2014, but did not survive the summer war with Israel (i.e. Operation Protective Edge) and Israel did not hide

its relief. In general the effects of the Arab Spring in Palestine were contained, yet contributed to the exacerbation of the conflict with Israel and had a clear impact on Israel's security. The latest round of negotiations led by US Secretary of State John Kerry failed, increasing the general level mistrust. To date, Palestinian popular malcontent has been mostly directed towards Israel, in the form of waves of lone terroristic attacks against the civilian population. These attacks were not controlled by the Palestinian leadership, on the contrary young Palestinians were rising against the Israeli forces on their own, without orders from any political party or leader. Several commentators indeed wonder whether the 'knives intifada' was the real Palestinian Arab Spring.

Moving to the northern border, it became a considerable source of concern for Israel when in 2011 the protests in Syria escalated to an armed conflict between the protesters and the governmental forces of Bashar Al Assad. As the demonstrations turned violent, Israeli reactions were mixed, divided among those who saw the demise of the Alawite regime as the defeat of a long-standing enemy and a setback for Iran and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah, and those who instead preferred the 'devil you know' (Zisser 2015) over a possible rise to power of political Islamic movements. Although the two countries never reached a formal agreement, Assad's policy towards Israel was rather mild and predictable, keeping the border on the Golan Heights relatively quiet for almost 40 years. In addition, the proliferation of armed jihadist groups among the rebels increased Israel's concerns about the outcomes of a regime change. Israel therefore opted for a cautious approach and refrained from expressing its support for either side. On several occasions Assad attempted to drag Israel into an armed confrontation, with the clear intent of diverting the internal struggle against Israel. In June 2011 Assad encouraged the Palestinian refugees from the Syrian camps to march towards the border with Israel and force their way in. The protests resulted in the worst bloodshed in the Golan Heights since the 1973 war. As analysts pointed out, protesters could not have approached the border without government acquiescence (Kershner 2011). On other occasions, attacks were struck against Israeli towns in the Golan prompting the IDF to return fire. By the end of 2011, a consensus emerged that the regime would have collapsed soon, impelling Israel to express a clear condemnation of Assad's violent repression. Moreover, on several occasions Israel reportedly intervened with direct attacks to prevent the transfer of Syrian arsenals to Hezbollah (Rogin and Lake 2013). Hezbollah's military support to Assad resulted in a major backlash, in terms of a huge loss of militants and a diminished appreciation of the group among the Lebanese public opinion. Therefore Hezbollah, being already engaged in other fronts, has avoided direct confrontation on the border with Israel, which turned from the most troubling border in the pre-civil war era to the most peaceful. In such circumstances, a state of mutual deterrence between Hezbollah and Israel prevailed. Israel's fears deepened when in the summer of 2014 under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Salafist jihadist group ISIS advanced and seized control of huge areas

of the states of Iraq and Syria, proclaiming the Islamic Caliphate. Israel feared that ISIS or similar forces could indeed overthrow Assad's regime, in particular when Al-Qaida affiliated *Jabhat al-Nusra*, which would later split from ISIS, took control of the Syrian Golan. However, by late 2015 following counter actions by an international coalition, ISIS forces retreated from large areas. The puzzle on the ground now included a continued presence of Iranian and Iranian-proxy forces in support of the Assad regime, a discontinuous presence of Turkish ground and air forces in addition to American, French, British, Jordanian, Russian, and Israeli air forces, all motivated by a diverse array of interests (Heller 2015). Israel mainly carried out small operations, such as air strikes to stop the transfer of weaponry.

The regional scenario which emerged from the ashes of the Arab Spring is far more complex than the one Israel had grown accustomed to. Analysts' opinions are divided as to whether the new geopolitical order favours Israel or not. It is undeniable that the uprisings have diverted the attention from Israel. When people took to the streets of the Arab capitals, they did not focus on the destruction of Israel, but rather on demands for democracy and social justice. In addition, most of the old enemy states are now busy dealing with post-Arab Spring internal fractures. In general, the turmoil has resulted in the weakening of the major Arab powers, namely Egypt, Syria and Iraq, the rise of non-Arab states, Iran and to some extent Turkey, and the strengthening of Saudi Arabia's role in the Arab Middle East. In addition, the emergence of new forces in competition with the old powers to gain regional supremacy brought about antagonisms and a precarious balance. At any rate, Israel's attitude remained mostly passive, deliberately avoiding any direct involvement in the processes of regime change, and keeping a distance from regional conflicts. Several fronts or axes surfaced, whose dynamics became apparent by looking at the role they played in the Syrian chessboard.

The Shiite front, also known as the 'axis of resistance' given its anti-western character, comprises Iran, Hezbollah, Shiite militias in Iraq and minor Shiite groups dispersed in the region. The Iran-led Shiite front has supported the Alawite regime of Assad against the rebels and is regarded by Israel as one of, if not the most threatening actor in the region. In clear contraposition is the Sunni front, which in turn is split into different alignments. The Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries front, the 'pragmatic states' promote the Wahabi form of Islam and are in competition with other Sunni alignments. Notwithstanding the deep cultural and religious divide, the Saudi-led front has developed a pragmatic approach and has traditionally lined up with the US and Western powers. In this new scenario, it even emerges as a tacit ally of Israel in an anti-Iranian function. In this sense this front can enlist also Egypt and Jordan, although the Egypt of Al Sisi has assumed an ambivalent attitude towards Assad's regime. Another Sunni alignment includes Turkey and Qatar. This alliance supports a moderate version of political Islam, is in line with the Western powers but in competition with the Saudis for the supremacy over the Sunni camp. However, on the Syrian ground the Saudi front and the moderate

Islamic front found themselves side by side against Assad, at least most of the time. Relations between Turkey and Israel, historically close allies, became strained since the Flotilla events of 2010 until a recent reconciliation deal reached in 2016. From an Israeli perspective, the deterioration of these ties increased the perception of regional isolation. The Salafist-jihadist front comprises ISIS forces, located mainly in Syria and Iraq but with cells present across the region. Within this front are also minor Al-Qaida affiliated groups, such as *Jabhat al-Nusra*, in competition with ISIS. This front has a clear anti-western nature and promotes a radical interpretation of Islam and a jihadist warfare against the enemies of Islam in the region, namely Assad in Syria, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Israel (Zisser 2015). The Syrian stage is further complicated by the presence of another active actor, the Kurds, Sunni Muslims supported by the Western powers, opposed to ISIS, but also opposed to Turkey and Iran. Estranged by any religious or ideological affiliation and aware of its limited soft power capacities, based on the general aversion that it generates in the region, Israel has adjusted to the regional developments rather than attempting to influence their course. As Efraim Inbar explains, “despite its economic and military strength, Israel remains a small state with limited resources and diplomatic leverage to shape its environment. [...] Moreover, as a status quo power, it has displayed little desire to play any leading role in regional affairs. [...] Israel carries some weight in the international politics of the region; however, mainly it must adjust to – rather than try to shape – regional and global developments” (Inbar 2012, 7).

A new ‘peripheral policy’, based on the periphery doctrine developed in the early years of the state by Ben Gurion, has been recently adopted. This strategy involves developing or expanding security relations with strategic partners within and around the region, including ethnic minorities excluded in the game of the alignments in the region. In doing so Israel diversifies its goods supply, expands its market, establishes military cooperation and enhances its international standing. Most recently, Israel has also started behind the scenes cooperation with Saudi Arabia, as a direct result of the Iran nuclear deal concluded by the United States. Indeed, “the Iran nuclear deal has dramatically shifted Middle Eastern geopolitical tectonic plates, and has heralded a new reality in which Sunni Arabs need Israel more than ever to solidify their front against Iran” (Klein 2015, webpage). The Saudi front fears that the new deal will strengthen Iranian-American relations at the expense of their own relations with the US, especially in light of the reduced American dependence on oil from the Gulf. The new geo-strategic situation creates favorable conditions for cooperation with Israel, based on common interests and shared enemies, which are Iran, its proxies and radical Islam. However, it is very unlikely that the Saudis, as well as other states in the region would publicly establish ties with Israel before officially solving the Palestinian issue. Indeed the resolution of the conflict constitutes a prerequisite for a future integration of Israel in the region.

International Dimension

Israel and the world, widening the gap with the global powers: United States, European Union and Russia.

Since its early years, Israel's international status has been controversial, characterized by two essential traits, strong relations with the United States and a wide diplomatic isolation from the rest of the world. Its legitimacy has been questioned since its establishment. Many states have no diplomatic ties with Israel, including several developing countries in South America, Africa and Asia and all member states of the Arab League, with the exception of Jordan and Egypt. At various times, Israel's status experienced ups and downs. During the 1970s, the years of Arab oil supremacy, Israel's status reached a low point. A general climate of condemnation of its policies and actions led to the adoption of several UN resolutions addressing Israel, including the 1975 resolution that denounced Zionism as a form of racism. In the early 1990s due to the "disappearance of several inhibiting factors" (Inbar 2013, 30) Israel's international status greatly improved. The collapse of the Soviet Union made it possible to engage with states that until that moment were hostile to the Western bloc and, as a consequence, to Israel. In addition, the close relations with the US, emerging as the hegemonic power, encouraged several states to approach Israel. Asia's most populated countries, such as India and China, established diplomatic relations with Israel, and many others followed their example (Abadi 1995). The opening of the Arab-Israeli Peace Process at the Madrid Conference in 1991, which saw the participation of senior diplomatic delegations from almost all Arab countries, further contributed to legitimize Israel as part of the international community. But the failure of the Peace Process, which led to the escalation of violence with the Palestinians, and eventually served as a justification for the expansion of settlements in the West bank, the construction of the separation barrier and the intensification of Israel's restrictions on Palestinians, contributed to the deterioration of Israel's international position. The outbreak of the Arab Spring further influenced Israel's relations with the world and in particular with the global powers, the US, the European Union and Russia, which are members of the 'Quartet', together with the UN, which in 2002 launched the 'road map for peace', an initiative aimed at finding a final resolution to the conflict. It goes without saying that their relations with Israel have been shaped by the evolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and most recently by wider regional dynamics.

The United States was the first state to recognize the establishment of Israel, followed shortly by the Soviet Union, only a few hours after the declaration of independence. Their relationship rests on shared values and strategic interests; while Israel relies on American military assistance and political support, the US sees Israel as an ally in a strategically important, yet highly unstable region. Nevertheless, their ties were not always that strong. During the early years, Washington maintai-

ned a policy of neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict, in order not to compromise its cooperation with some Arab actors, strategically more valuable at that time, as it was in the case of Egypt during the Suez Crisis. According to Yakov Bar-Siman-Tov, until Israel's resounding victory during the 1967 War, the US saw it more as a burden than an asset. After the war, American perceptions changed and so did their policies, and by the late 1970s Israel became the largest single recipient of American foreign aid. Nixon regarded Israel as "the best Soviet stopper in the Mideast," and provided the weaponry during the 1973 *Yom Kippur War* (Oren 2008, 124). The so-called 'special relationship' between the two states was finally forged, sealed by the existence of a potent pro-Israel lobby in Washington (Bar-Siman-Tov 1998). Over time, efforts were made to ensure the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the signing in Washington of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty in 1979 and later the Oslo Accords under Clinton's administration. Indeed during the 1990s, relations with the US grew stronger and widened to include other regional partners such as Turkey and Jordan, creating a robust security network. Bilateral strategic cooperation witnessed a considerable expansion following the 9/11 events, around the common threat of Islamic terrorism. During the 2003 war in Iraq, American and Israeli security forces reached an unprecedented degree of military and intelligence coordination, added to shared threat perceptions and a similar worldview. During the first Obama administration, despite different opinions on the Palestinian issue, security ties increased. Only after the outbreak of the Arab Spring, their different response to the events revealed increasingly divergent strategic interests. In 2013/2014, a long round of peace talks led by then Secretary of State John Kerry failed and this further increased American feelings of frustration towards Israel.

Relations with the European Union are also traditionally highly regarded by Israel's leaders, but are not exempt from controversies. Israel is formally associated to the European Union through an Association Agreement signed in 1995 and under the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership later incorporated in the Union for the Mediterranean Initiative in 2008. Scientific cooperation and trade have been flourishing in recent years, with the European Union being the main commercial partner of Israel. However political relations have been strained as a result of the detrimental developments of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. European perceptions of Israel have been historically driven by what some commentators described as a "double guilt complex" (Bar Navi, in Maddy-Weitzman and Susser 2005, 99). This guilt complex stems from two benchmark moments in European history, the legacy of the Holocaust and the colonialist experience, and operate in two opposite directions: "roughly until the Six-Day War, the European guilt complex worked for the benefit of the Zionist enterprise and the State of Israel, and then, and more and more, against it. As the spell broke in the aftermath of that fateful war, the Europeans discovered the shortcomings of Israeli democracy" (ibid.). The general opinion in Israel is that the extreme European sensitivity toward the Palestinian issue is ba-

sed on a different culture of international relations in Europe that excludes almost in principle the recourse to violence, “whereas Israel is perceived as a pugnacious bully, armed to the teeth” (ibid.). To date, the European Union is the largest donor to the Palestinian state-building. A great part of the disagreement with Israel revolves around some core issues, such as the political status of Jerusalem, the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the increasing presence of Israeli settlements in the West bank. In June 2008, during the 8th EU-Israel Association Council, bilateral relations were supposed to be upgraded with the inclusion of Israeli representatives in several EU strategic committees. Yet, the outbreak of hostilities with Hamas and ‘Operation Cast Lead’ carried out by the Israeli army interrupted the process and exacerbated European criticism towards Israel (Du Plexis and Tovias 2014, 5). Within the European institutional infrastructure the position towards Israel is diverse, with the EU Commission having a different view than the European Parliament, which is directly accountable to European citizens and with a veto power on any foreign policy agreements. The general approach however can be described as one of ‘sticks and carrots’ that is sanctions and incentives. In 2013, the European Union declared that if peace talks were to fail, it would have interrupted European budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority and to the United Nations Rehabilitation and Works Agency (UNRWA), obliging Israel to assume directly the cost of occupation. The Europeans however also offered to both Israel and Palestine a ‘special privileged partnership’ in the context of a final-status agreement, which would have granted the highest level of ties with the EU for a non-member state. The failure of the peace talks in 2014 did not see the end of European aid, which would have further destabilized the region, but it was translated in an exacerbation of its policies to Israel, including the recent legislation on labeling products manufactured in the settlements destined to the European markets (Gomel 2016).

Relations with Russia started with the USSR’s immediate recognition of Israel’s independence in 1948 but were severed following the 1967 war, and remained strained during the whole Cold War period. The situation changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which led to the restoration of diplomatic ties in 1991 and the arrival *en-masse* of Russian Jews to Israel. Today Israel hosts a population from the former Soviet Union of over a million immigrants (Borshchevskaya 2016). Since Putin came into office in 2000, ties further improved on a number of fronts, especially with regard to trade. Nevertheless, contrasting strategic interests in the region and diverging views on the Palestinian issue have hindered a further evolution of their relations. On the one hand, the two countries shared similar threat perceptions emanating from radical Islamic forces. Indeed, on several occasions Putin has linked together their respective struggles against Islamic terrorism, and Israel was among the few countries that did not criticize Russian operations in Chechnya (Borshchevskaya 2016). On the other hand, Putin’s friendly attitude toward the Arab world and Iran and his opinions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were not seen well by Israel’s leaders. The outbreak of the Arab upheavals has had a mixed

impact on their bilateral relations, based on an increasing divergence of views over the region, including Iran, combined with a convergence of strategic interests.

When the protests started in Tunisia and rapidly spread throughout the region, the reactions in Washington, Brussels and Moscow varied and to a certain extent affected their policies vis-à-vis Israel differently. Around a year before the outbreak of the Arab Spring, in June 2009, Obama gave a historical speech in Cairo, in which he addressed his vision for the region and expressed his wish for reconciliation with the Arab and Muslim world. His speech was a turning point from Bush's 'Greater Middle East Initiative', which resulted in the failure of the experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq and in the creation of deep anti-American feeling in the region. Combined with this wish for reconciliation there was also a clear intention to slowly disengage from the region, keeping American involvement as minimal as possible. Therefore when the uprisings started, Obama's administration welcomed enthusiastically what was thought to be the beginning of a new wave of democratization, which would have stabilized the region and allowed a complete American disengagement. Support for these anti-authoritarian movements came in the form of training provided to grass-root activists. As reported by *The Telegraph* which disclosed a document sent from the US Embassy in Cairo to Washington in January 2011, the United States has acted in favor of a transition from Mubarak's regime by supporting the protesters. It goes without saying that this constituted an important setback in Israeli-US relations, as Israel was inclined towards the preservation of the status quo and did not see well the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood at its doorstep. Again, after the removal of Morsi, America's ambiguous stance towards the new President Al Sisi did not please Israel, which instead saw the fall of the Muslim Brothers positively.

The outbreak of the Arab Spring also amplified the divergence with the European Union. EU policies in the region were until then generally based on the belief that trade liberalization would result in progress and development, paving the way for democratization and political reforms. Multilateral dialogue and multidimensional cooperation were therefore the key factors in the EU security agenda. According to this perspective, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remained an obstacle, which impeded the development of a comprehensive multilateral strategy with several actors opposed to engaging in any form of cooperation involving Israel, forcing to opt for less effective bilateral initiatives. After an initial state of confusion, due to the regional upheavals, the European Union opted for formulating a new policy to adapt to the changing reality of the region named 'Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean', which focused on civil society and economic development but that eventually proved ineffective (Guzansky and Heller 2012). In general, Europeans tended to read the regional events as proof of Arab states' aspirations to democracy, and therefore as an opportunity for Israel to tackle the Palestinian issue and eventually normalize relations in the region. However Israelis remained skeptical and even saw the uprisings as the demonstration of the

inherent incompatibility of the Arab states with Western values and as the confirmation that Israel and the Palestinian issue do not constitute anymore the core of the Middle Eastern conflicts.

This strong divide with regards to the regional events with both the United States and the European Union further increased Israel's feeling of international isolation. On the other hand, Russia shared a pessimistic view of the Arab Spring with Israel, and rumors spread that the events were orchestrated by the Western powers to hinder Russian ascendance in the region. Indeed, the uprisings had a negative impact on the economic and trade relations that Moscow had established with several states in the Middle East. While the developments in Tunisia were not of interest to Russia, the first scenario where Russia's view clashed with the US and the European Union was Libya, with an American-European entente pushing for an intervention and Russia attempting to prevent it, in consideration of the long-standing relation with Gaddafi. However, with the aim of preserving its interests in the region, Russia opted for a policy of adaptation, which eventually led to its support of the international intervention in Libya. This left Russia with only two allies in the region, Syria and Iran, both part of the Shiite front. From an Israeli perspective, the alignment of Russia with Syria and Iran was particularly worrisome, especially with regard to the supply of weaponry, which would also strengthen Hezbollah.

The outbreak of the civil war in Syria triggered a much wider chain of dynamics, with significant international implications. A flux of people from around the world deciding to join the battle fields in Syria and Iraq, a massive flow of refugees escaping the war and seeking shelter abroad, in addition to the increasing proliferation of attacks perpetrated by Islamist terrorists all over the world, all contributed to internationalize the conflict. Therefore, after an initial resistance toward a direct involvement the main international actors were compelled to take action. In particular the military advance of the ISIS forces urged some EU countries, the US and Russia to implement military operations, which required a certain level of coordination between them and the other actors involved, namely Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries and Israel. "In the relatively small space of Syria, Russian fighter jets operate in close range to the United States, as well as to American allies such as Turkey, Jordan, Britain, France, Israel, and so forth" (Eran and Magen 2016, 2). Israel for its part, following a risk adverse policy, preferred not to maintain a cautious approach. Despite Russian alignment with Iran, its position on Syria and its criticism toward Israel with regard to the Palestinians, Israel, well aware of Moscow's influence also in potentially containing Iran's ambitions, opted for a policy of appeasement. Israel refrained from any criticism of Russia's operations in Ukraine, as Russia did during Israel's 'Operation Protective Edge'. Economic relations expanded together with the transfer of Israeli technologies to Russia. In addition, on several occasions Russian military aircrafts trespassed Israeli borders while conducting operations in Syria and Israel opted for an inoffensive warning.

Conclusions

The upheavals in the Middle East have definitely brought about deep changes in the region. Long standing regimes and clear alignments have been replaced by a new complex, unstable and highly fragmented reality. Faced with such a scenario Israel has reacted by fortifying its defense and securitizing its relations with the world. This approach has sheltered Israel from potential repercussions but at the same time has increased its isolation at the international level while shifting its political orientation rightward at the domestic level. Indeed, considering its geopolitical location and its history of contention with the region, Israel's domestic, regional and international dimensions tend to be strictly intertwined. Israel as many other states was caught by surprise by the regional events, which contrary to Europe and the US, took place in its own backyard. Its immediate reaction was of skepticism and contrary to most Western states, Israel did not welcome the change but favored the maintenance of the regional status quo, which, far from being ideal, ensured a state of more or less calm at its borders during the last years before the Arab turmoil. Since the occurrence of the Arab uprisings Israel has managed to navigate the turbulent waters by shaping a political agenda based almost entirely on security. The demand for security does not express solely the concerns of the leadership, but it is widely shared by the citizens.

The analysis of the J14 movement that shook Israel's internal balance in the summer of 2011 showed very clearly that as soon as the perception of an external threat becomes evident, people tend to prioritize security issues over social and economic ones, and radical voices gain more popular support over moderate forces. Not by coincidence Israel's electorate since 2011 moved increasingly rightward, and at the current state Israel has the most right-wing government of its entire history. As in a vicious cycle, the recent right-wing policies resulted in an exacerbation of the Palestinian issue, which in turn amplified the country's regional and international isolation, a price to be paid in terms of image and international legitimacy. In spite of Israel's attempts to forge new approaches to foreign policy, pursuing a revived version of the old 'peripheral policy', the cost of an unsolved conflict with the Palestinians has been visibly growing.

While willingly positioning itself at the periphery of the region in the attempt of not getting involved in the complexity of these dynamics, Israel has historically proved a clear interest in not being left at the periphery of the global arena. Israel aspired to play a pivotal role in bringing together actors from different regions, building a solid network of economic, political and military connections. However its ongoing conflict with the Palestinians continued to hinder its international ambitions. Both the United States and the European Union have already made it clear that the unsolved issue constitutes a major obstacle. At the same time, regional actors willing to forge strategic rather than tactical alliances with Israel will not openly do so as long as the conflict persists. This general attitude towards Israel however has not

been received by Israeli public opinion as an incentive for a change, on the contrary it has fomented the 'David versus Goliath' rhetoric. While criticism coming from the region is immediately labeled as an expression of hatred, European and American criticism has often been perceived as a betrayal, caused by an inherent anti-Semitism. These feelings reinforce a right-wing mindset, which in turn keeps favoring a security oriented national and international agenda. This vicious cycle might deepen the gap between Israel and the rest of world, unless the rest of the world starts looking at Israel's security policies as an example to follow, as it has occasionally happened in the aftermath of dramatic terroristic attacks occurred in Europe and United States. These tragic events might bring international public opinion closer to Israel. At present however, relations with the region and the rest of world are still highly dependent on the developments of the Palestinian issue. The Arab Spring and its aftermaths have further exacerbated this state of affairs.

The small Jewish fortress at the heart of the Arab-Muslim Middle East has shown great resilience towards the dramatic events taking place in its immediate surroundings, managing to exclude itself from them. Nevertheless, the winds of the Arab Spring have penetrated the fortress and played an important role in shaping its national and international agenda, proving that as high and strong as its walls may be, Israel is still susceptible to external dynamics, both in the form of regional threats and international alliances.

References

- Abadi, J. 1995. "Israel and Turkey: From Covert to Overt Relations." *The Journal of Conflict Studies* 15(2).
- Alpher, Y. 2010. "Israel's troubled relationship with Turkey and Iran: the 'periphery' dimension." *Noref Report*, December.
- Allweil, Y. 2013. "Surprising Alliances for Dwelling and Citizenship: Palestinian-Israeli Participation in the Mass Housing Protests of Summer 2011." *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 2(1).
- Aslan Levy, E. 2012. "Israel and the Arab Spring." *The Jerusalem Post* 19 December. <https://goo.gl/75RGP3>
- Avineri, S. 2010. "Israel: Power, Vulnerability, Perception, and the Quest for Peace." *Halifax Paper Series*.
- Bar-Siman-Tov, Y. 1998. "The United States and Israel since 1948: A Special Relationship?" *Diplomatic History* 22(2): 231-262
- Berti, B. 2013. "Israel and the Arab Spring: Understanding Attitudes and Responses to the «New Middle East»" in L. Vidino (ed.) *The West And The Muslim Brotherhood After The Arab Spring*. Philadelphia, PA and Dubai, UAE: Al Mesbar Studies and Research Center and Foreign Policy Research Institute.
- Berti, B. 2014. "Weathering the 'Spring' Israel's Evolving Assessments and Policies in the Changing Middle East." *Analysis* No. 277, ISPI.
- Borshchevskaya, A. 2016. "The Maturing of Israeli Russian Relations." *Focus Quarterly*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.
- Brecher, M. 1974. *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy*. London: Oxford University

Press.

- Brecher, M. 1972. *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting. Images. Process*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Bronstein, Y. 2016. "Five Years After the Huge Social Justice Protests, What Has Changed?" *The Tower Magazine* 40. <https://goo.gl/Ea8b1A>
- Burris, G. 2011. "In Tel Aviv, an Arab Spring that ignores the Arabs." *Electronic Intifada*, 14 September. <https://goo.gl/EOG4g2>
- CBS News, "Israel to erect barrier along Egypt's border", 11 January 2010, <https://goo.gl/9caXV8>
- Dessi, A. 2012. "Israel and the Palestinians After the Arab Spring: No Time for Peace." *IAI Working Papers* no. 1216.
- Dekel, U. and O. Einav. 2015. "Challenges and Opportunities for Israel in the Coming Year," in S. Brom and A. Kur (eds) *Strategic Survey for Israel 2015-2016*, Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies.
- Dovrat-Meseritz, A. 2016. "Five Years After Israel's Social-justice Protests, Prices Are Back Up." *Haaretz*, 8 July. <https://goo.gl/yo5qVG>
- Du Plessix, C. and A. Tovas. 2014. "The EU, Israel and the 'Arab Spring' States: Beyond the Status Quo? Strategic considerations." *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem*.
- Eligür, B. 2014. "The 'Arab Spring': implications for US-Israeli relations." *Israel Affairs* 20(3): 281-301.
- Gold, D. 1996. "Israel and the Gulf: New Security Frameworks for the Middle East." *The Washington Institute Policy Focus* 31 November.
- Gomel, G. 2016. "Europe and Israel: A Complex Relationship." Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), May.
- Gordon, U. 2012. "Israel's 'Tent Protests': The Chilling Effect of Nationalism." *Social Movement Studies* 11(3).
- Guzansky, Y. and M. A. Heller (eds) 2012. "One Year of the Arab Spring: Global and Regional Implications." *Memorandum* No. 113 March 2012. Tel Aviv: The Institute for National Security Studies.
- Haaretz. 2011. "Arab Media Calls Social Protests «Israeli Spring»." 08 August. <https://goo.gl/CJbAb0>
- Haaretz. 2011. "Mideast Revolutions Could Be Good for Israel, Says Peres." 28 March. <https://goo.gl/gjC9Bf>
- Harkov, L. 2016. "Five years after social protests, has anything really changed?" *The Jerusalem Post*, 16 July. <https://goo.gl/blsBIV>
- Heller, M. A. 2008. *The Middle East Strategic Balance 2007-2008*. Tel Aviv: The Institute for National Security Studies.
- Inbar, E. 2013. "Jerusalem's Decreasing Isolation: Israel in the World." *Middle East Quarterly* Spring 2013: 27-38
- Inbar, E. 2013. "Israel Is Not Isolated." *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* 99, March.
- Inbar, E. 2012 "Israel's National Security Amidst Unrest in the Arab World." *The Washington Quarterly* 35(3).
- Inbar, E. 2012. "The 2011 Arab Uprisings and Israel's National Security." *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* No. 95. Tel Aviv: BESA-Bar Ilan University.
- Kershner, I. 2011. "Israeli Soldiers Shoot at Protesters on Syrian Border." *The New York Times*, 5 June. <https://goo.gl/cMBgHe>
- Klein, A. 2015. "Time for open Israel-Saudi relations." *Jerusalem Post*, 20 August.
- Kurz, A. and S. Brom. 2011. *Strategic Survey for Israel 2011*. Tel Aviv: Institute for

- National Security Studies.
- Kurz, A. and S. Brom. 2013. *Strategic Survey for Israel 2013-2014*. Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies.
- Kurz, A. and S. Brom. 2014. *Strategic Survey for Israel 2014-2015*. Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies.
- Kurz, A. and S. Brom. 2015. *Strategic Survey for Israel 2015-2016*. Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies.
- Kurz, A. and S. Brom. 2016. *Strategic Survey for Israel 2016-2017*. Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies.
- Lawson, F. H. 2014. "Implications of the 2011-13 Syrian Uprising for the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex." CIRS Occasional Papers no. 14. Washington, DC: Georgetown University.
- Maddy-Weitzman, B. and A. Susser. 2005. "Turkish-Israeli Relations in a Trans-Atlantic Context: Wider Europe and the Greater Middle East. Conference Proceedings." Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies – Tel Aviv University.
- Magen, Z. and N. Vitaly. 2013. *Russia and Israel in the Changing Middle East Conference Proceedings*, Memorandum No. 129, Tel Aviv: INSS.
- Mearsheimer, J. J. and W. M. Stephen. 2006. "The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy." *Middle East Policy* 13(3), Fall.
- Monterescu, D. and N. Shaindinger. 2013. "Situational Radicalism: The Israeli "Arab Spring" and the (Un)Making of the Rebel City." *Constellations* 20(2).
- Oren, M. B. 2008. "Israel Is Now America's Closest Ally." *The Wall Street Journal* 7 May. <https://goo.gl/AZmnsR>
- Podeh, E. and G. Nimrod. 2013. "Israel in the Wake of the Arab Spring: Seizing Opportunities, Overcoming Challenges" Position paper for the 2013 Israeli Presidential Conference.
- Rabinovich, I. 2015. "Israel and the Changing Middle East." *Middle East Memo* 34, January 2015.
- Ravid, B. 2011. "Netanyahu: Arab Spring Pushing Mideast Backward, Not Forward." *Haaretz*, 24 November. <https://goo.gl/6EX3gH>
- Rosenhek, Z. and M. Shalev. 2004. "The political economy of Israel's 'social justice' protests: a class and generational analysis." *Contemporary Social Science* 9(1).
- Rogin, J. and E. Lake. 2013. "US Intelligence Confirms Latest Israeli Strike Inside Syria." *The Daily Beast* 16 July. <https://goo.gl/Ug08R9>
- Satloff, R. and D. Schenker. 2013. "Political Instability in Jordan, Contingency Planning Memorandum." 19 Council on Foreign Relations.
- Scheinmann, G. 2013. "The Real Big Winner of the Arab Spring." *The Tower Magazine* 7.
- Tal, D. 2013. *Israeli Identity. Between Orient and Occident* London: Routledge.
- The Telegraph. 2011. "Egypt protests: secret US document discloses support for protesters." 28 January 2011. <https://goo.gl/W0tQAZ>
- Verter, Y. 2011. "How 9/11 changed US policy toward Israel." *Haaretz*, 9 September 2011.
- Zisser, E. 2015. "Israel and the Arab World: In the Shadow of Regional Upheaval: from the Arab Spring to the Summer of ISIS." *International Relations and Diplomacy* 3(5): 329-340.
- +972. "Young Mizrahi Israelis' open letter to Arab peers." 24 April. <https://goo.gl/EUu3iQ>

Four

Beyond the myth of the Tunisian exception: the open-ended tale of a fragile democratization

Ester Sigillò

Introduction

The story began on 17 December 2010, when Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of the governorate building in Sidi Bouzid, a rural town two hundred miles South of Tunis. This desperate act became the catalyst for demonstrations and riots that spread throughout the country, based on pre-existing social and political grievances against the authoritarian regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The wave of protests triggered in turn the so-called Jasmine Revolution, with an intensification of public anger and sporadic violence, which led the president of Tunisia to step down on 14 January 2011, after 23 years in power. The revolutionary spirit that was fuelled in Tunisia soon overflowed beyond national borders and affected other countries of the region from Libya to Yemen, creating a broader phenomenon, the so-called Arab Spring. Thus, Tunisia, the smallest country of the Maghreb (with just 11 million inhabitants per 160.000 km²), was abruptly projected on the international media scene and its post-revolutionary process was put under careful observation.

Presented by foreign press as a Mediterranean country open to Europe, Tunisia was internationally legitimated during the years of authoritarian regimes as a peaceful and stable country contributing to the security balance of the region. After its independence in 1956, the 'father of the nation' Habib Bourguiba was named as the apostle of a Western modernity in a Muslim society, whilst during the 1990s his successor Ben Ali contributed to reassure the international community against the spectre of the Islamist threat through massive repressions throughout the country. Thus, until the events which unfolded in Tunisia in 2011 the country was internationally acknowledged as a soft dictatorship that could be tolerated. Notwithstanding the interests of the international powers in the stability of the region, this international legitimacy was also possible because of a certain scarcity of protests and uprisings against the two apparently resilient authoritarian regimes. Tunisians, indeed, were described as co-opted citizens bartering their freedom with a 'security pact' (Hibou 2006).

After the revolution, the international spotlight focused on Tunisia to observe

the country's transition to democracy after more than half a century of dictatorship. This special attention was due to the fact that Tunisia was the first country in the Arab world where an Islamist party assumed power in response to popular demand. Indeed, the greatest challenge for Ennahda after its outstanding victory on the first free and fair elections in 23 October 2011 was to clear up the widespread suspicion about its commitment to democracy. This general suspicion was exacerbated by the anti-Islamists propaganda launched by Bourguiba and Ben Ali, who felt politically threatened by the religious political movement's strong popular backing. Actually, the victory of the Islamist party contributed to the normalization of the transition process, which culminated with the approval of the Constitutional chart in January 2014. In fact, the search for a common ground in the name of national cohesion has proven to be the key concept of Ennahda's public discourse since early 2011, when a process of consensual national decision-making laid down the rules for political transition.

The narrative of the 'Tunisian success story', which often portrayed the country as a model, nonetheless invites some criticism. Five years after the revolution Tunisia is still fragile and divided between the horizon of democratic consolidation and the spectre of authoritarian resilience. Although the international community welcomed the young democracy by conferring the Nobel Prize to the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet¹ for its contribution to the democratic transition, Tunisia continues to suffer a slow and arduous recognition of socio-economic rights, which eventually questions future political developments of the country. Indeed, the increasing poverty and the youth unemployment crisis, which ignited the revolution in 2011, continues to cyclically spread tensions erupting into mass protests in most marginalized areas of the country and overflowing to the peripheries of the capital. The last episodes of riots, urban guerrilla unrest and sits-in have been registered during the winter of 2016, and they originated in the centre-west region of Kasserine, the least developed area of the country and the epicentre of protests in 2011.

The resurgence of political mobilization and urban revolts has reactivated the attractiveness of radical Islamic subjects, which emerged after the revolution as the political alternative closest to disenfranchised youth unwilling to support a transition process that they perceive as contributing their marginalization (Merone and Cavatorta 2012; Merone 2014). Indeed, if on the one hand Ennahda managed to integrate a moderate Islamist-middle class excluded from power since the independence, on the other hand it left the lower classes at the periphery of the new social contract. To be sure, in 2011, the disregarded demands for socio-economic rights were taken over by different voices of popular discontent. During the initial phase of the transition process the Tunisian communist party, having emerged in the post-authoritarian scenario after decades of repression, cultivated the myth of revolutionary Committees, thus disentangling itself and its constituency from the democratic/liberal institutions. However, the attempt to build the Committees for the defence of the revolution ultimately failed. Salafist/Jihadist movements' success

since 2012 can be explained by considering the extreme social exclusion experienced by the social bloc of those who took part in the revolution but later felt betrayed by the new political forces unable to represent them. This anger and inability to integrate into the economic fabric and the common national narrative has led them to seek their own identity and its expression in anti-system movements such as *Ansar al Sharia*. Indeed, after the revolution, Ennahda was not willing to include the Salafist movements in a common political strategy. Actually, its democratic discourse based on the compromise with secular counterparts was built along its effort of detachment from radical Islam. The fracture between Ennahda and Salafist groups became evident from the summer of 2013, when *Ansar al Sharia* was banned as a terrorist organization.

This complex scenario requires an investigation of the dynamics of an uneven democratization rather than uncritically relying on the tale of the ‘Tunisian exception’. Five years after the revolution the challenges for the consolidation of a democratic system are still multifaceted and are linked to the evolution of the interplay between old and new political forces, an unstable regional environment and the support of international powers. In the following pages we will analyse three dimensions of the Tunisian political transformation. The first is domestic and concerns the quest for political legitimacy of the authoritarian regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali and of the young democracy emerged as a compromise between Islamists and secular forces after elections on 23 October 2011. An analysis of a historical perspective, focused on the construction of the legitimacy of the authoritarian regimes since the independence of the country, is functional to the understanding of the delicate political balance which characterized post-revolutionary Tunisia. The second dimension is regional in scope and focuses on Tunisia’s role in the region and the activation of contradictory trends after the revolution. The third section is broadly international and considers the impact of exogenous factors, such as international funding, on changes in domestic politics.

Domestic dimension

From the construction of the Tunisian ‘exceptionalism’ to the emerging challenges to the rhetoric of national consensus

More than fifty years of authoritarian regime in Tunisia have been characterized by a striking continuity and stability when compared to other Arab states. Literature focused in particular on the capacity of the regime to control society through policies of inclusion and exclusion aiming at the creation of a shared system of values (Camau and Geisser 2003). State intervention, from the independence of the country in 1956 to the fall of the authoritarian regime in 2011, has been mainly oriented to establish an institutional apparatus rooted and spread throughout society. Indeed, social policies undertaken by Habib Bourguiba (1956-1987) and successively

by his successor Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011) were similarly characterized by actions of toleration, containment, control and even co-optation of challengers. In particular, the paradigm of social regulation undertaken by Bourguiba and Ben Ali consisted of the strategic use of welfare policies, the co-optation of like-minded groups under the label of 'civil society', and the institutionalization of Islam with the consequent marginalization of groups considered as extremists.

The exceptional resilience of the authoritarian regime was built on a high degree of legitimacy, grounded in different sources. Habib ibn Ali Bourguiba, the father of independent Tunisia, started to rule the country by developing a political culture which helped him to gain a wide consensus and to marginalize the most dangerous regime challengers, that is the Islamists. Thus, the most important source of legitimacy of Bourguiba's regime was pursued through the diffusion of a shared system of values among Tunisians (Ben Achour 1987). Public speeches – mixed with the personal qualities of a charismatic leader, renamed *Mujhaïd Akbar* (the great warrior) – have been used as the main instruments to spread the state's hegemonic discourse throughout society (Hibou 2010). State intervention was based in particular on the diffusion of the ethos of *tunisianité*, a Tunisian way of being, grounded in a strong sense of belonging and citizenship. In the official rhetoric, it represents the firm belief that Tunisia is by nature an exception (Camau and Geisser 2003). This exception resides in particular in the synthesis between western modernity, nationalism and a sense of belonging to the Arab and Muslim community – which Bourguibian reformism itself encapsulated (Hibou 2010). Thus, the term *tunisianité* by itself suggests the willingness to make a compromise, the key-strategy to unite different social forces, paving the way for the reinforcement of a sense of national cohesion. Indeed, with the foundation of the Neo Destour party, Bourguiba was able to gain the support of both the masses and the elites by elaborating “an operative synthesis of French radical socialism and ‘Jacobin’ Islam that defined Tunisia as a Mediterranean [...] nation-in-becoming that would be modern and Francophile as well as independent and Muslim” (Moore 1970, 315). The process of *tunisification* of the country set after the colonial period then allowed Bourguiba to undertake huge reforms affecting large sectors of society while avoiding the risk of popular upheavals.

Soon after achieving power, Bourguiba was able to adopt sweeping reforms based upon strong anticlerical accents. In particular, he directly opposed the traditional religious apparatus, considered as a competitive power, which could delegitimize the nascent regime from below. Indeed, Bourguiba implemented measures conceived to reduce the influence of religious social forces. He abolished the *Sharia* courts and nationalized private *habous*² and *zawiyas* (religious schools). In this way, the financial resources of the religious apparatus became considerably limited and, from that time, the latter became financially dependent on the state. Beside these measures, he also decreed the Code of Personal Status, known as the most modern civil code in the Arab world. This secular outlook does not imply a total separa-

tion between politics and religion and does not mean that Bourguiba relinquished his claim to legitimacy on the basis of Islam. He was not able to abandon Islam completely, as this would have implied severing the most important tie between the political elite and the majority of the people. Thus, even if Bourguiba has often been compared to Atatürk for the modernist audacity that forged his reformist policies, Tunisian historiography is increasingly rediscovering his image as a mediator between religion and secularism (Durham et al. 2016). This is particularly evident if we analyse state's relationship with religious actors. In fact, Bourguiba's strategy to acquire legitimacy consisted of implementing a secular political program while appealing to Islam, thus trying to avoid breaking with long local intellectual and educational tradition that combines important secular and spiritual elements (Longo 2015). From this perspective, he positioned himself as a reformist of Islam rather than the father of secularization.

Therefore, instead of allowing an institutional separation between religion and state, the policy initiated under Bourguiba appears like a Tunisian version of the political Gallicanism, which establishes the primacy of the state over the religious sphere through the systematic control of the latter. This was achieved by the establishment of a department of religious affairs under the direction of the Secretary of State to the Presidency, which would subsequently be attached to the Prime Minister's office, and then to the Ministry of the Interior from July 1986. This department was responsible for the coordination of the government's actions in religious affairs, appointment and training of Imams, and their remuneration as government employees, as well as the regulation of religious rituals and education programmes.

The failure of the Bourguibian socialist experiment of the 1960s put the regime legitimacy under strain, especially in terms of the political elite support for his economic strategy. Indeed, Bourguiba's socialist policies were extremely unpopular amongst the landowners of the Sahel – who feared their lands would be collectivized – and among workers, who feared an erosion of their wages (Beinin 2001). Domestic discontent induced the President to remove the minister of planning Ben Salah from office and to purge the most powerful labour union, the UGTT. These decisions weakened the ruling coalition and favoured the re-emergence of the Islamist movement. Thus, following this loss of legitimacy, in the early 1970s Tunisia witnessed its first liberalization, with the return to some forms of private ownership and also some readjustments towards the religious system, shifting from a modernist paradigm to a religiosity of state (Geisser and Gobe 2008).

Reinforced ties between Islam and the state gradually led to the official promotion of an increasingly confessional Tunisian society. This opening counter-balanced socio-political forces and, as a result, the Islamic influence moved gradually out of the shadows and gathered around the Movement of the Islamic Tendency (MIT), which converged with the Social Destourian Party (SDP, ruling party from 1964 to 1988) on the basis of an anti-Marxist agenda (Durham et al. 2016). As a matter of fact, the Tunisian Islamic movement took its first steps in a context of conflict

between trade unionists and the Bourguibust Destour Party. Indeed, at the beginning the Islamic group was a pure movement of *dawa*, preaching Islamic principles in mosques, issuing a magazine entitled *al-Maarifa* (knowledge) that addressed social and religious topics (Allani 2009). However, after the bloody confrontation of January 1978 between the government and the UGTT (Yousfi 2015), *al-Maarifa* began to take an interest in politics, by implicitly backing the government against the leftists, considered as the traditional enemies of the Islamic movement. Notwithstanding initial attempts to create favourable conditions for its development, the movement continued to work clandestinely until its first congress in 1979. Events that unfolded in Gafsa in 1980³ provided the movement an opportunity to present itself as the only alternative in the political field to solve the socio-economic problems of the 'neglected' interior regions of Tunisia (Allani 2009). In June 1981, the Islamic group officially became the MIT, assuming the typical features of political Islamic movements, thus adopting the inseparability of religion and politics. Once its own political identity was defined and social support was obtained, the movement adopted a more confrontational stance towards the party in power. In order to do so, it looked for the support of other opposition parties with the clear aim of overthrowing the regime (Allani 2009). As a consequence, from 1981 the regime started its first persecution against the MIT. Repression of the Islamists certainly revealed the weakness of the Tunisian regime during the last years of Bourguiba's presidency. Another element suggesting an imminent economic crisis was the pressures from the International Monetary Fund to lift subsidies on wheat, which provoked a steady rise of commodity prices. This decision ultimately caused the January 1984 Bread Revolt, a series of spontaneous protests originated in the most marginalized regions of the country and then spread to the capital. The regime crisis opened a window of opportunity for the MIT, which became more vocal in demanding political change.

Readjustments towards the Islamist socio-political forces continued once Ben Ali came to power on 7 November 1987. In fact, the main goal of Ben Ali's regime was to achieve national reconciliation. Indeed, at the onset of his presidency, Ben Ali could not rely neither on personal charisma nor on a well-defined political ideology like his predecessor. Moreover, a strong demand arose from Tunisian society, namely the request to introduce a more democratic system through the expansion of civil and political rights. Thus, in order to gain legitimacy, Ben Ali undertook a reformist path and started a limited political liberalization. During his first year in power, Ben Ali seemed bent on establishing himself as the country's most dedicated reformer: he amnestied thousands of political prisoners, revamped Bourguiba's *Parti Socialiste Destourien* (PSD) into the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Democratique* (RCD), abolished the state security court and the presidency for life, reformed laws governing pre-trial detention and ratified the United Nations' convention on torture. Ben Ali also supported new legislation that made it easier to form associations and parties, and he negotiated a National Pact with the country's principal social and political

organizations (Alexander 1997).

Besides a radicalization of the logics of clientelism, neo-corporatism and neo-patrimonialism, reconciliation with moderate Islamists occurred under the umbrella of the National Pact. Among his first actions, Ben Ali facilitated the re-Islamization of society, whose purpose was to neutralize Islamic contestation (Hermassi 1989). During his first years of regime, he undertook a reevaluation of the Islamic social forces, re-inscribing Islam in the political practices and institutional activities of Tunisian society. According to this logic of strengthening the administrative structure of Islam, places of worship were subjected to greater regulation and oversight by the state (Frégosi 2005). During this phase, the Islamic movement began a new process of transformation, starting to participate in political life. Indeed, the passage from the MIT to *Haraket Ennahda* was aimed at seizing the opportunity of temporary political openness after Ben Ali's coup in 1987, which ousted president Bourguiba. In order to be consistent within the Tunisian law which banned religious parties, Rachid Ghannouchi – the charismatic leader of the movement – decided to change the name of the organization into *Ennahda* (the rebirth), so to remove the word 'Islamic' (Chouika and Gobe 2015).

This political strategy dictated by historical contingences gradually and unavoidably triggered a process of ideological transformation. From being an anti-democratic and illiberal movement with a *tawhid*-based (principle of unity) vision of politics and society determined to impose religious law over democratic electoral decisions in the 1970s, Ennahda moved towards the acceptance of the procedural mechanisms of democracy in the context of a pluralistic vision of society by the late 1980s (Cavatorta and Merone 2013). At this stage, a large number of leaders started to review the ideological basis of the movement. This reflection was characterized by two contradictory trends: a moderate and a radical one. The result of this re-evaluation was the adoption of a 'Tunisian way' of being Islamists. Therefore, the Islamic movement approached the same *tunisianité* that paradoxically Bourguiba had been building since decolonization (Cavatorta and Merone 2015). The new Ennahda eventually adopted an orthodox version of the Muslim Brothers' ideology, mixing it with other intellectual sources including the Tunisian reformist legacy, Shiite political Islam ideologues and Western political ideologies (Allani 2009).

Besides these adjustments, the confrontational process between the state and the party continued over the 1990s, especially after the unexpected success of the Islamic movement in parliamentary elections in 1989. As a matter of fact, the Islamic movement, which was allowed to participate with an independent list and not as an official party, paradoxically emerged through elections as the second political force of the country, achieving 17,75% of suffrages (Hermassi 1991). Indeed, increasingly worried by the great social support obtained by the Islamic party, the state started to heavily repress Islamism in the name of safeguarding the country from a dangerous ideology (Allani 2009). From 2001, the repression gained the legitimacy of the so-called 'war on terror' and the Tunisian government expanded

and intensified repressive activities to such an extent that Human Rights Watch declared Tunisia to be one of the most coercive states in the world (Gelvin 2012). Notwithstanding the exacerbation of the confrontational game, the party had already undertaken a process of transformation and rapprochement with other opposition political forces. This attitude of compromise, grounded on the rhetoric of *tunisianité*, seamlessly continued until the present. In 2003, representatives from four of Tunisia's major non-regime parties (Ennahda, the CPR, Ettakatol, and the PDP) met in France in order to negotiate and sign a common programme for 'the day after Ben Ali'. Tunis Declaration of 17 June 2003, therefore, was a compromise text, aimed simultaneously at reassuring secular opponents and getting the Islamists to sign it (Hibou 2010). This document represents the emblem of what Stepan calls the 'twin toleration', that is the compromise between secular and religious forces, with secularists agreeing that Islamists could participate fully in democratic politics, and Islamists agreeing that popular sovereignty is the only source of legitimacy (Stepan 2012). According to this document, any future elected government would be "founded on the sovereignty of the people as the sole source of legitimacy" (quoted in Stepan 2012, 96); and the state, while showing "respect for the people's identity and its Arab Muslim values, [would provide] the guarantee of liberty of beliefs to all and the political neutralization of places of worship" (ibid.).

Compromise is particularly evident in the declaration text as general terms such as 'specific nature of Tunisian identity' were precisely chosen so that everyone could read into them the meaning that best suited them: some could hear it as a synonym of 'Islam-ness', others as 'Arabness', and yet others as a reference to the 'western' meaning of reformism (Hibou 2010). Moreover, in 2005 the four political parties mentioned above, together with representatives of smaller parties, met to reaffirm and deepen their commitment to the Declaration. One document produced under the heading of *The 18 October Coalition for Rights and Freedoms* in Tunisia stressed that, after a three-month dialogue among party leaders, they had reached consensus on a number of crucial issues. Indeed, all the parties, including Ennahda, supported in great detail the existing liberal code of personal status decreed by Bourguiba in 1956. The document added that any future democratic state would have to be a "civic state [...] drawing its legitimacy from the will of the people," [...] for "political practice is a human discipline [without] any form of sanctity" (quoted in Stepan 2012, 97). Then, despite the regime's regulations and repression, Tunisia's political and civil society groups benefited from the relatively cohesive make-up of the Tunisian society developed over the years. This legacy has been evoked by all political forces after the fall of the authoritarian regime in 2011, when the country's secular and Islamist parties decided to negotiate new rules and form coalitions in order to create a political context in which religion, society, and the state could relate to one another under democratic conditions (Stepan 2012). Indeed, the greatest challenge for Ennahda having won the first elections after the revolution was to clear up the widespread suspicion about its commitment to democracy. The victory

of the Islamist party in Tunisia did not produce an Islamization of society but rather accelerated a process of secularization already in place within the party itself.

The search for a common ground in the name of national cohesion continued to be the key-concept of Ennahda's public discourse since early 2011, when a process of consensual national decision-making laid down the rules for political transition. In other words, Islamists accepted the concept of *tunisianité*, striking an uneasy compromise with sectors of the secular-left. To be sure, the Islamist party's room for manoeuvre was reduced by the awareness that the Tunisian 'deep state' was still in place after the ouster of Ben Ali (Sadiki 2016). Despite the former President being gone, the remnants of the old regime remained and the high offices of state, the secret services, and the police were still controlled by allies of RCD. Thus, any disruption of the constitutional process or a widespread impression of political instability could bring the former regime back onto the political stage, as happened in Egypt in 2013 (Netterstrøm 2015, 117). Therefore, in this adverse political background, party leaders understood that in order to maintain power after winning elections they had to convince both part of the population and political elite that they would not threaten past secular achievements and especially that they would not take advantage of their electoral success by monopolizing power. These pragmatic considerations induced Ennahda to seek democratic legitimacy through the adoption of a consensual approach to democratic politics and its re-secularization.

Therefore, convergence with rules of political transition provided evidence of Ennahda's willingness to continue compromising with other political forces and accept consensual solutions (Cavatorta and Merone 2013). This is evident also during the period between October 2011 and the summer of 2013, when the party entered a coalition government, composed of Ennahda, CPR and Ettakatol, and "in the name of the national interest, it accepted to leave the power for the formation of a technocratic national unity government" (Cavatorta and Merone 2015, 31). Last but not least, the party accepted the notion of a civil state, the inclusion of freedom of conscience and that references to sharia would not appear in the Constitution approved in January 2014. Then, the whole transition process was characterized by the search of a compromise in the name of the national unity built with the concept of *tunisianité*.

The recent decision of Ennahda to abandon the traditional pan-Islamic agenda and to adopt a new one focused around national unity does not represent a surprise for a party that has been transformed over time. Indeed, the tenth congress of the party held in May 2016 started with an opening ceremony with the presence of the President of the Republic Beji Caied-Essebsi and a large number of guests from outside Tunisia (around 150 delegations), members of diplomatic corps, and representatives of political parties and national organisations, as well as prominent figures. This seems to mirror the strategy of the party to look both for internal and external legitimacy. Moreover, the functional specialisation between the political and preaching dimension (*dawa*), thus the acknowledgment of the social functions

of religion as a reference and guidance just for social life, seems to reflect a further pragmatic decision of the movement to create a professional political party: “Ennahda has moved beyond its origins as an Islamist party and has fully embraced a new identity as a party of Muslim democrats. The organization, which I co-founded in the 1980s, is no longer both a political party and a social movement. It has ended all of its cultural and religious activities and now focuses only on politics” (Ghanouchi 2016). Finally, a specific focus on the development of the economic sphere is part of the new brand: “Ennahda became a civil party, mainly proposing economic programmes. Now we need to respond to urgent questions such as how to develop the country and to fight unemployment. This is the role of a modern party.”⁴

Beside the narrative of the success story, the tale of the democratization process can be also read through other lenses, according to which Tunisia has undergone a difficult transition, where the final outcome might not be the liberal-democratic system that many external observers wished for. Indeed, if on one side Tunisia witnessed a rather smooth political transition, on the other side the acknowledgment of socio-economic rights has been disregarded. If the achievement of rules and procedural mechanisms of the transition phase have been detrimental to the regulation and the solution of economic and social conflicts, the deepening of the economic crisis, together with the absence of material benefits for large strata of the population has led to accusations of unresponsiveness against the parties in power (Del Pistoia and Duchemin 2016). Indeed, if the revolution and consequently victory of Ennahda in the elections gave the opportunity to a conservative middle class to be included within the structures of power, this has come at the price of the continuous neglect of Tunisia’s disenfranchised lower classes that eventually remain excluded from enjoying the benefits of the revolution (Merone 2014).

This discontent has gradually been channelled by Salafi/Jihadist movements, which emerged after the revolution as the main political challenger, close to the poorest strata of society. Indeed, *Ansar al-Sharia* started to gain strong support in most marginalized areas of the country. The huge success of the movement can be explained by starting from the extreme social exclusion experienced by the social bloc of those who took part in the revolution but later felt betrayed by the new political forces unable to represent them. Perception of an exclusionary process has in turn triggered dynamics of polarization and radicalization. After the political assassinations of leftists’ militants in February and July 2013, the extreme fringes of the left tried to push the country to a National Health Committee in order to expel moderate Islamists from the government. At this time, *Ansar al-Sharia* proposed to moderate Islamists of Ennahda the establishment an Islamic front in a context of a growing polarization between modernists and Islamists. Ennahda eventually did not accept the proposal of the Salafi group that was finally declared a terrorist organization in August 2013.

The revolutionary separation with radical Islam was followed by Ennahda’s search for common ground with secular-neo-bourgeois political forces. Thus, armed

struggle became an option for part of the Salafist movement, which felt excluded from the public arena after being outlawed, and which gradually gained strong support among the lower class living in the popular neighbourhoods of large and medium sized cities of the country (Merone 2014). The criminalization and consequent disappearance of *Ansar al-Sharia* from the country gave leeway to regional terrorist groups such as *Okba Ibn Neefa* to operate. Eventually, widespread violence across the country, such as the terrorist attacks in March and July 2015 in Sousse, reiterated a system of strong repression reminiscent of the old regime. Indeed, the Tunisian social context started to be characterized by a reversal in terms of freedoms and rights, repressed in the name of fighting terrorism.

The official compromise established in 2014 between Ennahda and the secular neo-conservative party Nida Tounes, funded by Essebsi in 2012 and including veterans of the old regime, was perceived as a further betrayal of the principles of the revolution. Main challengers of this 'rotten compromise' talk about an uneven democratization process excluding part of Tunisian political and social forces (Marzouki 2015). This unequal process of democratization continued to simmer a discontent rooted in social inequality, economic alienation, and political disillusionment, especially in the most marginalized areas of the country, where the revolution began in 2011. In January 2016, new urban revolts exploded in Kasserine after the death of Ridha Yahyaoui, a young unemployed university graduate, who had climbed a telegraph pole and threatened suicide after learning that he had been removed from a shortlist of names for employment issued by the Department of regional education. More recently, the Tunisian government has been mired in a political impasse and the growing pains of a fledgling democracy with few resources to support it. After being blamed for the laggard reforms set to ease popular tensions about the mounting economic crisis, lingering unemployment and security issues, Habib Essid was removed from the prime ministership following the parliament's no-confidence vote in August 2016. His removal and the search for a cabinet compounded delays in responding to public calls to improve service-provision, rectify regional inequality, job creation, and improved security.

Five years after the revolution we can observe a process of normalization characterized by the spectre of the resurgence of authoritarian strategies of repression and exclusion. President Beji Caid Essebsi has been reticent to allow reforms which could threaten the financial interests of his business contacts belonging to the same social strata which were privileged during Ben Ali's regime. The national unity government formed in August and the almost hysterical search for a consensus as a mechanism of regulation of socio-political conflicts, is considered a vehicle for the revival of the old regime. Indeed, the current Prime Minister Youssef Chahed appointed twelve new governors, nine of whom were officials of the old regime. Indeed, principles of political consensus in the name of stability, reconciliation and the fight against terrorism included only particular segments of Tunisia society in an institutional pact, thus reiterating old socio-political divides which characteri-

zed Bourguiba and Ben Ali's regimes. Recently, young leftist activists opposed the so-called 'reconciliation bill', aiming to revive the economy by offering amnesty to businessmen accused of corruption under the old regime in exchange for a closed-door confession and pay-backs. This in turn triggered new political mobilisation, bringing about new forms of contention claiming old rights, and challenging the legitimacy of a rhetorical national unity upon which the democratization process has been framed since the fall of the authoritarian regime.

Regional dimension

The myth of stability and the call to Jihad: which regional role for post-revolutionary Tunisia?

Tunisian events have triggered a domino effect that led to major socio-political changes in the MENA region after decades of a geo-political stalemate based on the strong resilience of authoritarian regimes. Indeed, the Jasmine revolution that broke out in December 2010 has triggered a process of regime's contention spreading throughout MENA region under the label of Arab Spring. After the emergence and success of protests in Tunisia, learning and imitation brought about similar mobilizations throughout the countries of the Arab league and surroundings, although with different repertoires and evolutions. Major insurgencies and civil wars occurred in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, along with civil uprisings in Bahrain and Egypt, large street demonstrations in Algeria, Iran, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman and Sudan, and minor protests in Djibouti, Mauritania, the Palestinian territories, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and the Western Sahara. The major slogan of the demonstrators in the Arab world was *Ash-sha`b yurid isqat an-nizam* (people want to bring down the regime).

Besides Tunisia, governments have been overthrown in three countries. 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 20 October 2011. Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh resigned and his successor Abdal-Rabah Mansour Al-Hadi formally replaced him in February 2012. Apart from Tunisia, only Egypt undertook a process of democratization, which was however, interrupted by the military coup on July 2013. Then, after the adoption of the constitution in January 2014 and the achievement of the minimum standards of democratic practices, Tunisia has been internationally hailed as a virtuous model for the other countries of the MENA region which contrariwise fell into a dramatic phase of uncertainty often characterized by socio-political violence.

Caught in an unstable regional environment, post-revolutionary Tunisia needs to address its economic and security problems while consolidating its nascent demo-

cracy. Tunisian regional policy in the last five years has focused on these priorities by strengthening the image of a stable country in a chaotic region. The image of stability of this small country of the Mediterranean dates back to the years before the revolution and in particular during the regime of Ben Ali. Indeed, the celebration of Tunisia as the good student of democracy in the aftermath of the revolution is reminiscent of the 1990s and the early 2000s, when the international community lavished praise on President Ben Ali's regime for his 'good example'. Indeed, under President Ben Ali, Tunisia became firmly committed to becoming a benchmark for stability through its effort to be a pivot state in the regional integration project. This strategy was rooted in the concerns raised by the situation in the Maghreb countries. At the beginning of the 1990s, Algeria rocked slowly but surely towards a civil war, Libya entered the cycle of international sanctions because of its support for terrorism, and Morocco was suffering the blows of the war against Polisario and drifted to a more despotic monarchy.

In this climate of violence, Tunisia was considered a haven of peace and security in which millions of tourists could spend their holidays without fear for their safety. Moreover, the arrival of Ben Ali was considered as the beginning of a path of renewal for a Maghreb encysted in authoritarian and corrupt regimes. As a matter of fact, the first decisions of Ben Ali suggested that Tunisia would commit to a greater political openness and a more active role in fostering regional political and economic integration. His inaugural statement of 7 November 1987 confirmed the intention of Tunisia to achieve the unity of the Greater Maghreb based on common interests (Abbassi 2008). The Arab Maghreb Union was established in 1989 when the five founding members (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya and Mauritania) signed the Treaty of Marrakesh. If the consolidation of the Union was arrested by inter-state political tensions – especially between Morocco and Algeria over the status of Western Sahara – Tunisia continued to strengthen the process of regional integration. In July 1991, Ben Ali emphasized that “the Union has a future, we believe it, and working in this direction. *Le Grand Maghreb* is not just an ideal, it is also a requirement of our time” (Martinez et. al. 2009, 5). Beside the uneasy construction of the Maghreb Union, Tunisia continued to be actively engaged in the regional integration process advocated by the international community: in May 2004, the country welcomed the 16th ordinary Session of the Arab League (of which it has been a member since 1958). The country is also a founding member of the Organization of African Unity, over which it presided in 1994-1995, before taking part in the founding of the African Union in July 2002. In February 2001, Tunisia joined the Community of Sahel-Saharan states and hosted the headquarters of the African Development Bank in 2003.

The issue of Tunisia's role in the MENA region has revived in the aftermath of the revolution. As a small and relatively poor country with limited natural resources and military capabilities, Tunisia has to carefully manage its relationship with volatile regional partners in order to ensure its stability. The troika government of

2012 and 2013 followed a ‘revolutionary diplomacy’ that relied mainly on Qatar and Turkey – the main backers of a new regional order after the Arab uprisings – for support. In fact, these two countries engaged in Tunisia as international donors supporting the transition process through the implementation of development programmes. The Arab Spring brought new external influential regional players an opportunity to play a more important role in the affairs of the Maghreb and in particular in the affairs of post-revolutionary Tunisia. Qatar Charity and TIKA (Turkish cooperation and coordination agency), in particular, are two important actors active throughout the country, directly targeting civil society actors as beneficiaries of their development programmes.⁵

This bottom-up approach resulted particularly effective for those associations, especially faith-based organizations, which were not able to obtain financial support from Western donors due to the stricter procedures of selection of their beneficiaries (Sigillò 2016). However, the financial relationship between Tunisian religious associations, and in particular Gulf donors, generated a widespread suspicion among Tunisian leftist-secular counterparts and their constituencies. This diffused antipathy against foreign funding coming from the Gulf has been transformed into a real political campaign against the Islamic social bloc’s alleged financial opacity, which culminated in 2014 with the decision of the new government headed by Habib Essid to freeze the activities of some associations accused of receiving illicit funding. Moreover, after terrorist attacks in March and July 2015 several associations with religious references have been shut down for allegedly funding jihadist activities.

Many analysts had expected the government appointed by Nidaa Tounes in 2014 to join the Saudi Arabia/UAE/Egypt axis. Indeed, upon his inauguration, president Essebsi immediately received an invitation to visit both the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, and travelled to Saudi Arabia for King Abdullah Bin Abdelaziz Al Saud’s funeral. Essebsi and the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi met three times in six months. However, Tunisia sided with Algeria’s non-interventionist stance in Libya and, more importantly, included Ennahda in the government. These policy positions reveal a considerable degree of autonomy from the axis and especially from the Emirates. Indeed, the UAE made it clear to Tunisian policymakers that investment and aid would be conditional on excluding Islamists from politics.⁶ However, Saudi Arabia’s reconciliation efforts with Qatar and its reception of Ennahda leaders twice in 2014, and again during the royal funerals, suggests that the new Saudi regime may consider Ennahda as an interlocutor with the Muslim Brotherhood in the region (Cherif 2015). Besides its effort to be independent, Tunisia of Caid Essebsi keeps flirting with Gulf monarchies by attracting investments and tourism. Indeed, we are witnessing a progressive phenomenon of Islamization of tourism in those areas of Sahel (Hammamet and Sousse) and Djerba, that before were exploited by Ben Ali’s mass tourism (Carboni, Perelli and Sistu 2014).

Tunisia today leans much further toward status-quo seeking policies. Indeed, un-

der President Essebsi the country consolidated the so-called 'zero-enemy' policy, similar to the diplomatic strategies of former presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali that sought to keep the country away from regional rivalries. Post-revolutionary foreign policy seeks to limit any international adventure, choosing instead to focus on bilateral economic and security cooperation with neighbouring countries and by reviving the longstanding project of developing a regional project of integration built upon a Maghrebi identity. The regional turmoil in the wake of the Arab uprisings created further uncertainty about the Maghreb Union's future. Despite widespread scepticism about the viability of the possibilities of the Arab Maghreb Union, the European Union continues to support further Maghreb integration. A 2012 joint communication by the European Commission and the European External Action Service, which focuses principally on the development of political dialogue, especially on the issues of security and defence, as well as on the promotion of human rights and democratisation, explained that "a stronger and more united Maghreb will help address common challenges" (quoted in Bigoni 2014). Thus, post-authoritarian Tunisia was supported in order to maintain a fragile balance in an unstable regional context. This ambitious mission was suddenly internalized by president Moncef Marzouki who aimed at making his country the leader of regional economic cooperation at the time of his visit to Morocco and pushed for the revival of the Maghreb Union process: "We will work this year to restore cohesion with our Algerian, Moroccan, Libyan and Mauritanian brothers, with the aim of reviving the Maghreb Union's great dream, frozen for years" (quoted in Dubruelh 2012).

After the revolution, Tunisia has increased the level of bilateral cooperation with Algeria, mainly based on economic and security issues. In 2012, Rachid Ghannouchi was received by the Algerian President Bouteflika. The two leaders expressed their 'satisfaction' with the evolution of Algerian-Tunisian relations in security and the economy for the benefit of stability in the region (Alaoui 2014). As well, as the wealthiest immediate neighbour, Caid Essebsi visited Algeria after his presidential election. As the largest North African country, Algeria balanced Libyan hegemony during Qaddafi's regime, with Tunisia tipping the scales as needed to promote the balance (Cherif 2015). After Libya struggled in a civil conflict, Tunisia started to manage its relationship with Algeria differently. Tunisia's bandwagon with Algeria can be explained by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates' call for an international military intervention in Libya, which Algeria opposed (Cherif 2015). Furthermore, security cooperation between Tunisia and Algeria has grown because of the increase of terrorist activity on the borders of the two countries, mainly in the Mount Chaambi region. Algerian security officials asked their Tunisian counterparts for the right to conduct cross-border counterterrorism operations in 2014. During President Caid Essebsi's visit, Algeria asked to be notified beforehand if Tunisia was to sign a military agreement with another country.

Libya remains the main challenge for Tunisia after 2011. Indeed, the conflict escalation and the divided government in Libya has posed a threat to Tunisia's

economy and security. As Tunisia's second largest economic partner, Libya was the primary source of informal cross-border trade, which amounts to roughly 40 percent of Tunisia's gross domestic product (Cherif 2015). Yet, since 2011 Tunisia is increasingly becoming the target of significant investments of Libyan businessmen, because of its relative stability compared to the other countries of the region. Then the economic dependence between the two countries is noteworthy. Despite the occasional closure of Ras Jedir border-crossing, hundreds of thousands of Libyans have taken refuge in Tunisia to escape the ongoing conflict and thousands of Tunisians continue to work in Libya. Due to this interdependence, since 2011 Tunisian civil society activists, cross-border traders, and merchants protested the shutdown of the border crossing between the two countries.

Tunisia and Libya are also connected by the attractiveness of the call for the jihad for many Tunisian young people. This trend is in striking contrast with the image of the 'good student' that the Tunisian government wants to show to the world, and highlights that despite the unifying discourse on democratization, Tunisia is a divided country characterized by contradictory impulses. While both the terrorist attacks at the Bardo Museum in Tunis in March 2015 and at the beach resorts in Sousse in July 2015 were committed by Libya-trained militants linked to the Islamic state, the attacks represented the continuation of a relationship between Tunisian and Libyan militants, which intensified from 2011 (Zelin 2015). In particular, the closest relationship between Tunisian and Libyan militants is occurring through sister organizations of *Ansar al-Sharia* in Tunisia (AST) and *Ansar al-Sharia* in Libya (ASL). ASL learned from the AST the *dawa* (preaching) model, with Tunisians providing assistance on how to implement it. There were already signs that Tunisians were trained in Libya as early as the spring of 2012. These camps are likely to be where the original failed Sousse suicide bomber of October 2013 trained. Within Libya, many attacks against Tunisian diplomatic facilities, such as against its embassy and twice against its consulate in June 2012, were connected with ASL. Moreover, after the designation of AST as a terrorist organization in late August 2013, several militants, including AST's leader, fled to Libya and ASL. Furthermore, as a result of the breakdown in AST, a short-lived integration between Tunisian and Libyan militant networks took place through the rebranding of AST to Shabab al-Tawhid (Zelin 2015).

Beyond the AST and ASL networks, since the fall of 2014 Tunisian activity in Libya with the Islamic State (IS) has increased. According to the Tunisian government, it is believed that up to 7,000 Tunisian are currently fighting or training in Syria and Iraq and around 1,000 in Libya (Trofimov 2016). Dozens of Tunisians have died on the battlefield in Libya and a Tunisian was one of the attackers of the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli in late January 2015. Additionally, a number of these Tunisian IS operatives have been dispatched back home and been involved in a spate of low-level insurgent attacks since early April 2015. Thus, even if Tunisia is the only Arab country undergoing a successful democratic transition in the aftermath

of Arab uprisings, it has also been a huge source of so called *foreign fighters*. In fact, after the fall of Ben Ali, Tunisia witnessed the growth of the Salafi-jihadi movement. Indeed, Ben Ali's monopolization of the religious sphere and his neglect of socio-economic issues, opened the door to radicalization, and these factors, combined with the disillusionment of the youth and the mishandling of Salafists after the revolution, have resulted in escalating violence in Tunisia and the export of jihadists to Syria, Iraq, and Libya. The Hay Ettadhamen suburb, one of the poorest peripheries of Tunis, is one of the hot spots for such departures.

International dimension

The post-revolutionary foreign policy between old and new alliances

As a small country, since its independence in 1956 Tunisia has built a cautious foreign policy, opting not to antagonize anybody while supporting international organizations. In particular, the United Nations was viewed as the protector of smaller states and the defender of international law. This strong support for the international system allowed the country to be exemplarily supported by the international community and to attract foreign investments and tourists, especially in the coastal regions. Thus, even if maintaining a certain degree of independence during the Cold War by joining the non-aligned movement, president Habib Bourguiba and his successor Ben Ali made the common choice to build a pro-western friendship based on the warranty of being a politically moderate country with a sound economic performance and on the path of modernization in an unstable region, thus muting international criticisms of its human rights records. That was the official policy of the country until after the revolution of January 2011.

On the one side, the Jasmine Revolution gave Tunisia the opportunity to rebrand its position towards international powers due to the opening of new international opportunities through the massive intervention of donors committed to support the democratization process of the forerunner of Arab uprisings. In recent years, Tunisia has been promised billions of dollars in aid from multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, the EU, United Nations Development Programme, and the IMF. Moreover, it joined the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, maintained bilateral relations with European countries and also signed onto multi-million dollar deals with new investors such as Gulf countries and China. On the other side, the socio-political turmoil caused a renewed scepticism of international actors, worried for the future political scenarios of the country. This double aspect of the international dimension has characterized the delicate reconstruction of the Tunisian foreign policy in the aftermath of the revolution. With the worsening of the economic crisis, Tunisia enhanced its effort to seek international investments by flattering old and new friends. Since 2011, Essid's government has done its utmost to maintain the so-called 'privileged partnership' status gained by Tunisia in

2011, marketing its improvements in human rights, its efforts to fight corruption, and the central role his country plays in stopping illegal migration and fighting terrorism. On 29 and 30 November 2016, the Prime Minister Youssef Chahed stated 'Tunisia is back' by inaugurating 'Tunisia 2020: Road to Inclusion Sustainability and Efficiency', the conference aimed at raising the foreign capital needed to fund a five-year development plan for the country of 141 projects worth a total of 50-60 billion euro. The country obtained promises of funding from the US, the European Union, Qatar and Kuwait, followed by France, Italy, Switzerland and Germany (Cappelli 2016).

The strategy adopted by new government leaders after the revolution has succeeded in selling Tunisia as a 'start-up in democracy'.⁷ In particular as the first successful experiment of Muslim democracy in the Arab world or, better, a Muslim democracy which could please both old Western friends and new Arab partners. Moreover, its capacity to handle political crises stemming from the revolution had a positive impact on foreign admirers as it distinguished itself as a model for the region in the sound management of its transition process. Indeed, President Moncef Marzouki, soon after his appointment, stressed the importance of Western support in the delicate transition phase, emphasizing the role of Tunisia as a model for the entire region: "We badly need the help of our friends in Europe, in the United States, because Tunisia is now a kind of lab, the whole Arab world is watching." (quoted in Inskeep 2012). However, with the rise of the Islamist party to power, the new post-revolution government tried to widen its alliances also on the basis of the ideological affinity, thinking that looking east towards oil rich Arab Gulf countries and beyond would usher a new era of prosperity. As Rachid Ghannouchi stated: "... so our people are very open to Europe. But at the same time, our people are very keen to preserve its Muslim identity" (quoted in wilsoncenter.org 2014).⁸ This double strategy has put Tunisia's diplomacy to difficult tests every step of the way in its quest to make new international alliances while not antagonizing old partners. This attitude has in turn prompted Tunisia into a relationship of weaknesses and dependence with foreign powers.

Europe and the United States are historical friends of Tunisia. Since 2011, the country has restarted to feed relationships with them, which continue to have a significant impact as they have maintained a steady position of support for the transition phase; however, the relative weight of these alliances has changed over the five years since the revolution. In particular, the foreign policy of the European Union vis-à-vis Tunisia has progressively registered a lower impact than that of single European states, such as France. Moreover, by enhancing the intervention of NGOs and private foundations, Washington has progressively overcome Brussels in quantity and quality of financial support to the democratization process. The United States assists pivotal local associations working for transitional justice and mushrooming faith-based organisations traditionally neglected by the EU's democracy promotion policy.

Europe is historically the largest economic partner of Tunisia. This trend is continuing even in the aftermath of the revolution. In fact, nearly 80 percent of all trade in Tunisia occurs with European countries. Moreover, given the proximity, roughly 10 percent of all Tunisians live and work in Europe. Although Europeans are often seen as placing greater importance on the issue of Tunisian immigration to Europe, Tunisians as well have long relied on Europe as a destination for higher studies or short periods of training (Jebel 2014). Probably due to this geographical proximity, Tunisia was the first Mediterranean country to establish a partnership with the European community at the end of the 1960s. Indeed, contrarily to other states of the Mediterranean which used to counteract globalization and economic liberalization, Tunisia saw in the relationship with Brussels an opportunity to increase investments and market, and a strategy of international legitimacy. The European Community's formal relations with Tunisia started out with an early form of economic and association agreements establishing a free trade area in 1969 and 1976. In 1995, Tunisia associated with the European Union in an agreement which provides extensive trade liberalization and cooperation in a variety of sectors. An agreement with the European Union, which came into effect in 1998, also tied Tunisia's economy and security to the Mediterranean community. Since 2004 Tunisia has become a partner of the EU in the European Neighbourhood Policy. After the revolution, the EU decided to double its financial contribution to cooperation with Tunisia. In 2012 the two actors established a *privileged partnership*: "the special status granted to Tunisia, reflects the Union's commitment to supporting Tunisia's transition. It also gives practical expression to the shared ambition of strengthening bilateral relations in politics, culture, the economy, trade and security."⁹

Notwithstanding this rich legal framework underpinning the economic relationship, the EU's relative impact on the country is weaker than that one of single European states, and in particular France, which holds a political and cultural role besides the economic sphere, thus aiming at penetrating even the social fabric. Indeed, if Tunisia has tried over the decades to diversify its European partners, the country continues to maintain the strongest relationship with France, progressively deepened during the 75 years of colonization but still active even after the revolution. However, after 2011 we assist to a first attempt of enfranchisement from Paris. Indeed, France's previous history supporting the Ben Ali regime, its hesitations towards the rise of Islamism, and its own economic difficulties has prompted Tunisia to reach out to countries such as Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Then, while France will remain Tunisia's top partner, others will compete for that rank (Jebel 2014). In fact, Italy assumed a greater role for the control of illegal maritime immigration, and coordinated on strategies regarding the Libyan crisis. Germany is also keen to support democracy while expanding economic partnerships. The UK has provided security training and material, also using Tunisia as a platform for its Libya-related activities.

Relationships with France have always been controversial since the independen-

ce of the country. France still continues to consider Tunisia to be in its sphere of influence due to a legacy of personal, linguistic and economic connections that still play a role even after decolonization. The independent Tunisia of Habib Bourguiba, who graduated and worked as a lawyer in Paris, retained strong links to the former colonial ruler. Over decades France continued to be Tunisia's leading economic partner and a critical export market for many French products. The Tunisian community in France numbers in the hundreds of thousands including students in French universities. There are many French businesses with subsidiaries and tens of thousands of French citizens living in Tunisia. About 3,000 French companies operating in Tunisia remain the cornerstone of Tunisia's trading partnerships. According to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, between 2006 and 2010, France allocated 950 million euros to Tunisia in loans and grants. Moreover, for 2011-2012, the government decided to release 350 million euros of loans through the French Development Agency (Wood 2002).

However, disaffection towards France is also an indirect consequence of the new attraction to Arab partners. After the revolution, and with the rise of the Islamist party to power, Tunisia was ready to restore its forgotten Muslim-Arab identity to the detriment of its traditional affiliation with France. Indeed, the Troika government (the alliance of parties that ruled after the 2011 Constituent Assembly election) made the reduction of the study of French language and the expansion of international ties beyond the traditional colonial relationship a priority, looking away from Europe. However, this process of disentanglement was characterized by a certain ambivalence. Notwithstanding its efforts to appear more independent, the country is keen to maintain its 'special relationship' with France, based on political and economic interests. It is not a coincidence that Houcine Jaziri, minister during the Troika government, wanted to make clear that "giving more value to our mother tongue (Arabic) has nothing to do with keeping a distance from France" (quoted in Jebel 2014, 12).

In addition to the ties with Europe, the other historical partner of Tunisia is the United States. Tunisia-US relations date back over 200 years. The United States has maintained official representation in Tunis almost continuously since 1795, and the American Friendship Treaty with Tunisia was signed 1799. The relationship between the two countries became warmer at the time of the struggle for the independence of Tunisia. As a matter of fact, thanks to the capacity of the 'Supreme combatant' Bourguiba to advocate the Tunisian struggle all over the world, the liberation from France garnered US support, with America becoming the first great power to recognize the country's sovereignty. After independence, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) made billions of USD in loans, grants, technical assistance and sales available in Tunisia. Tunisia also became the first Arab country to request for the Peace Corps in a security program that existed for many years. With regards to trade, a bilateral investment treaty in 1990 was signed. Moreover, in October 2002, a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) was

signed. However, before the revolution Tunisia did not represent a priority for the US, remaining largely unknown at American eyes, and in turn limiting its ability to attract US foreign investment. Moreover, generally good relations with Tunisia over the decades have had moments of strain. In 1985 Bourguiba accused the US of involvement in the Israeli special operations bombing of the PLO headquarters in Tunis and in the 1988 assassination of the PLO chief deputy (Sakthivel 2016). Other differences such as former President Ben Ali's wish to end Libya's diplomatic quarantine in the 1980s, while the U.S. wished to maintain pressure on Gaddafi, as well as Tunisia's support for Iraq in the 1990-1991 Gulf War, served to drive intermittent wedges between the two allies.

A greater attention paid to Tunisia has surged since the outbreak of uprisings and the consequent regime change. After 2011, the US had to contend with other international powers to encourage Tunisia's fledgling democracy. President Obama created new windows of opportunity stressing an unconditional support for the Tunisian revolutionary process. Then, contrarily to the European Union which remained too timid in supporting Ennahda, the US decided to fully back the transition and to work with any democratically elected party. Indeed, US leaders considered that the isolation of the winning Islamist party Ennahda, as vehicle of values which were in contrast with the Western idea of democracy, could have jeopardized American interests in Tunisia and in the region. Thus, the country that has supported the Ben Ali dictatorship and his campaign against the Islamist movement, nowadays collaborates with the latter for the transition process by funding both the party and Islamic-oriented associations. This approach prompted political forces that emerged from the revolutionary process to build a renewed relationship with the United States, to the detriment of relations with European countries, which adopted a more selective approach. Since 2011, the reinforcement of relationships with the United States progressively became one of the government's main priorities. The appointments of Essid, a US-educated agronomist, as Prime Minister in 2014 and Mohamed Ezzine Chelaifa, Tunisia's most recent ambassador to Washington, as Assistant Foreign Minister suggests Tunisia's focus on strengthening ties with US (Jebel 2014). Accepting Ennahda's participation in government, a pressing US demand, is another example. A number of high-level US official visits to Tunisia seems to recognize and reciprocate the commitment to the US-Tunisian 'Strategic Dialogue'.

Tunisian officials used the discourses of democratic consolidation, the socio-economic development and the 'war on terror' when addressing their US counterparts. Since 2011, Washington has provided additional billions in direct aid and three rounds of loan guarantees to lessen the shock of the economic crisis and to support economic reform and small/medium enterprises (Cherif 2015). Expanding the Tunisian army's capacity and equipment to help face terrorist threats and secure the borders with Libya and Algeria also fall on US support as well. The security support is strategic for the United States also due to the fact that Tunisian foreign fighters

to Iraq and Syria constitute one of the largest contingents of IS. In November 2015, the US announced the inauguration of the US-Tunisia Joint Military Commission and in 2015, Tunisia joined Morocco as a non-NATO ally (Sakthivel 2016). Thus, after 2011 political ties between Tunisia and the US have strengthened due to the renewed role of the country in a changing regional landscape. Tunisia officially became a strategic partner of the US security policy in the MENA region.

Conclusions

Tunisia is back'. This statement pronounced by the Prime Minister Youssef Chahed in November 2016, on the occasion of the inauguration of Tunisia 2020, sounded as an ominous threat to the revolutionary dream of Tunisia (Capelli 2016). Indeed, five years after the revolution Tunisia presents an ambivalent scenario. If compared to the other Arab countries which experienced revolts and regime changes, Tunisia can be presented as the success story as it has undertaken a democratization process, through free elections, the willingness of the Islamist party to embrace compromise with secular political forces, the adoption of a new constitution and a process of transitional justice. However, besides the rhetoric of Tunisia as a model for the region, the tale of the democratization process can be read through other lenses, where the final outcome of the revolution might not be the liberal-democratic system that many external observers wished for. If Tunisia witnessed a rather smooth political transition, the progress in the protection of socio-economic rights is very slow. Then, the deepening of the economic crisis with the absence of material benefits for large strata of the population has led parties in power to be accused of unaccountability. If the revolution and the victory of Ennahda at the first elections gave the opportunity to a conservative middle class to be included in the transition process, this has come at the price of the continued neglect of lower classes that have ultimately remained excluded from enjoying the benefits of the revolution. Discontent for unfulfilled requests led to the resurgence of new socio-political grievances: in January 2016 new revolts re-exploded in the poorest regions of the interior, where the spark of the revolutionary movement broke out in December 2011.

Today, at its fifth government in just five years, Tunisia has found itself on two parallel tracks, which in perspective risk to represent the two alternative scenarios to the democratic consolidation. On the one hand, we find the traces of the old regime, underpinned by the business world that invokes incentives and 'stability' to attract investments to chase a future of modernity and that belong to the same middle class which was privileged during the past two authoritarian regimes. On the other hand, we assist to the resurgence of political mobilization and new protests of young people contesting the current regime, which is blamed to reiterate old policies that exacerbate old socio-economic inequalities. Among these forms of contention there are also Salafists/Jihadists groups that have progressively emer-

ged after the revolution by proposing themselves as the actors closest to the disenfranchised strata of society and one of the main political challengers of the “rotten compromise” between the Islamist party and the remnants of the ancient regime.

The role of Tunisia in the south-east Mediterranean region and in the world reflects the ambiguity of the domestic sphere. As a small country with scarce resources, Tunisia has long played a moderate role with the intention of getting along with everyone in order to ensure its security. Caught in a tumultuous region and suffering terrorist violence in its recent history, Tunisian regional and international policy in the last five years has focused on strengthening the image of a stable country. However, if Tunisia is the only Arab country undergoing a successful democratic transition in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, it also represents the greatest source of contingents for the IS, sending up to 7.000 foreign fighters attracted by the call of the Caliphate in Syria, Iraq and even in the nearby Libya. This striking contrast reflects the schizophrenic impulses of a fragile country still in the process of building a post-revolutionary identity. As a matter of fact, after the revolution, Tunisia struck a balance between a traditional pro-Western vision and its identity as an Arab-Muslim country, flirting both with old friends and looking for new strategic alliances with regional powers such as Turkey and the Gulf monarchies. To be sure, the revolution has created new opportunities for international partnerships, but at the same time the conditions for foreign meddling. However, if on the one hand the country was forced to align to great powers due to its conditions of relative instability, on the other Tunisia succeeded in keeping a certain degree of autonomy, choosing its international partners according to its multifaceted needs.

Thus, avoiding the teleological perspective according to which the consolidation of democracy will follow the fall of the authoritarian regime, we would conclude by saying that the end of the tale is not obvious, as it has yet to be written. The conclusion will depend on the multi-level and contradictory dynamics unleashed by the revolutionary movements, and by different actors playing in a renewed arena characterized by the opening of socio-political structure at domestic, regional and international level.

ENDNOTES

¹ A consortium of four organizations: the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH), and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers. It was created in Summer 2013 to solve the alarming political crisis that followed assassinations of leftist militants Mohamed Brahmi and Chokri Belaid. The Nobel Prize was awarded in October 2015.

² Also called *Awaqfs*, pious properties or foundations whose revenues paid for mosques and some Muslim social programs.

³ The events in Gafsa refer to an armed action against the Tunisian regime organized by its neighbor Libya. A raiding party armed by Libya and supported by Algerian military intelligence took control of the central Tunisian city of Gafsa on 27 January 1980 and called for a popular revolt.

⁴ Interview of the author with a party's member at the 10th Congress on 22 May 2016 in Hammamet.

⁵ Information obtained during fieldwork of the author in Tunisia from September 2015 to June 2016.

⁶ Interview of the author with a militant of Ennahda held in Paris, 14 November 2016.

⁷ Info-center of the Union for the Mediterranean (2014), *Invest in Tunisia: start-up democracy*, accessed on September, 10, retrieved on November 2016 from <https://goo.gl/MYk0Oo>

⁸ Ghannouchi: Tunisia's New Political Order", accessed on February, 26 <https://goo.gl/JW3uI0>

⁹ Cooperation Report prepared in 2015 by the EU delegation in Tunisia, *Relations between the EU and Tunisia*. <https://goo.gl/JauD9j>

References

- Abbassi, D. 2008. "Le Maghreb dans la construction identitaire de la Tunisie postcoloniale." *Critique Internationale* 40(3): 115-137.
- Alaoui, A. 2014. *Are Algeria and Tunisia holding friendly talks?* MEMO Middle East Monitor, <https://goo.gl/giXTnI>
- Alexander, C. 1997. "Back from the democratic brink: Authoritarianism and civil society in Tunisia." *Middle East Report* 205 (October-December): 34-38.
- Allani, A. 2009. "The Islamists in Tunisia between confrontation and participation: 1980–2008." *The Journal of North African studies* 14(2): 257-272.
- Bayat, A. 2007. *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Beinin, J. 2001. *Workers and Peasants in the Middle East*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Ben Achour, Y. 1987. "La Réforme des mentalités. Bourguiba et le redressement moral." in M. Camau, (ed.). *Tunisie au présent. Une modernité au-dessous de tout soupçon?* Paris: Editions du CNRS.
- Bigoni, M. 2014. "The Union of the Arab Maghreb and regional integration: challenges and prospects." European Parliamentary Research Service Blog, <https://goo.gl/sYax4E>
- Camau M. and V. Geisser. 2003. *Le Syndrome autoritaire. Politique en Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.
- Capelli, C. 2016. "Tunisia 2020: speranze e attese di una rivoluzione incompiuta." *Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale*. <https://goo.gl/2OWuHs>
- Carboni, M., C. Perelli and G. Sistu. 2014. "Is Islamic tourism a viable option for Tunisian tourism? Insights from Djerba." *Tourism Management Perspectives* 11: 1-9.
- Cavatorta, F. and F. Merone. 2013. "Moderation through exclusion? The journey of the Tunisian Ennahda from fundamentalist to conservative party." *Democratization* 20(5): 857-875.
- Cavatorta, F. and F. Merone. 2015. "Post-Islamism, ideological evolution and 'la tunisianité' of the Tunisian Islamist party al-Nahda." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 20(1): 27-42.
- Cherif, Y. 2015. *Tunisia's foreign policy: a delicate balance*, Mena Source, Atlantic Council, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/tunisia-s-foreign-policy-a-delicate-balance>
- Chouikha, L. and E. Gobe. 2015. *Histoire de la Tunisie depuis l'indépendance*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Del Pistoia, D. and D. Duchemin. 2016. "Tunisia. Tra aspettative di riscatto e contro-rivoluzione." Osservatorio Iraq e Un ponte per... (eds.) *Rivoluzioni Violate. Cinque anni dopo: attivismo e diritti umani in Medio Oriente e Nord Africa*. Roma: Edizioni dell'asino.
- Dubrueh, C. 2012. "Tunisie: Moncef Marzouki au Maroc pour promouvoir une union maghrébine." *Jeune Afrique* <https://goo.gl/719rUp>
- Durham, C., C. Cianitto, S. Ferrari, and D. Thayer. 2016. *Law, Religion, Constitution: Freedom of Religion, Equal Treatment and the Law*, London and New York, NY: Routledge.
- Esposito, J. L. 1997. *Political Islam: revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Frégosi, F. 2005. "La régulation institutionnelle de l'Islam en Tunisie: entre audace

- moderniste et tutelle étatique." in F. Frégosi F. and M. Zenghal (eds.), *Religion et Politique au Maghreb: les exemples tunisien et marocain*. Policy Paper n.11, Paris: Institut Français de Relations Internationales.
- Geisser V. and E. Gobe. 2008. "Un si long règne... Le régime de Ben Ali vingt ans après." *L'Année du Maghreb*, Dossier: La fabrique de la mémoire 4: 347-381.
- Gelvin, J. 2012. *The Arab Uprising: What Everyone Needs to Know*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Ghannouchi, R. 2016. "From Political Islam to Muslim democracy. The Ennahda Party and the Future of Tunisia." *Foreign Affairs* September/October issue. <https://goo.gl/FHbQFj>
- Jebel, A. 2014. "Tunisia's Foreign Relations before and after the Arab Spring. Relations with Major Powers." Proc. of the Intl. Conf. on Advances In Economics, Social Science and Human Behaviour Study- ESHB.
- Hermassi, E. 1989. "L'Etat Tunisien et le mouvement Islamiste." *L'Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*. 28: 297-308. Paris: Editions du CNRS.
- Hermassi, E. 1991. "The Islamicist Movement and November 7." in (ed.) W.I. Zartman *The political economy of reform*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Hibou, B. 2006. *La force de l'obéissance. Économie politique de la répression en Tunisie*, Paris: La Découverte.
- Hibou, B. 2010. "Discipline and Reform - I." *Sociétés Politiques Comparées: Revue Européenne d'Analyse de Sociétés politiques* 22 (February): 1-40.
- Inskeep, S. 2012. "Tunisia's Leader: Activist, Exile And Now President" Special Series: revolutionary Road trip, <https://goo.gl/vQ5bl4>
- Longo, P. 2015. "Bourguiba e l'Islam. Ritratto del 'Mujahid Akbar' in rapporto alla religione." *Giornale di Storia Contemporanea* 18(2): 25-38.
- Martinez, L. et al. 2009. "La Tunisie, l'Union du Maghreb Arabe et l'intégration régionale." EuroMesco paper 78 (January): 1-54.
- Marzouki, N. 2015. "Tunisia's Rotten Compromise." *MERIP*. <https://goo.gl/JlEPVa>
- Merone, F. and F. Cavatorta 2012. *Salafist mouvance and sheikh-ism in the Tunisian democratic transition*. Working Papers in International Studies, Paper No. 2012-7. Dublin City University.
- Merone, F. 2014. "Enduring Class Struggle in Tunisia: The Fight for Identity beyond Political Islam." *British Journal of Middle Eastern studies* 42(1): 74-87.
- Moore, C. H. 1970. "Tunisia: the prospects for institutionalization", in (ed.) S. P. Huntington *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Societies*. New York, NY: Basic Book. 311-36
- Murphy, E. C. 1999. *Economic and Political Change in Tunisia from Bourguiba to Ben Ali*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Netterstrøm, K. L. 2015. "After the Arab Spring. The Islamists' compromise in Tunisia." *Journal of Democracy* 26(4): 110-124.
- Sadiki, L. 2016. "Why is Tunisia's Ennahda ditching political Islam?" *Al Jazeera*, <https://goo.gl/nzEg7Y>
- Sakthivel, V. 2016. "Taking Stock of U.S. Policy Options in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia." *E-notes*, Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI). <https://goo.gl/4qZFdO>
- Sigillò, E. 2016. "Tunisia's evolving Islamic charitable sector and its model of social mobilization." *Informal networks and political transitions in the MENA and the Southeast Asia*. Middle East Institute essay series. <https://goo.gl/6WDmt5>
- Stepan, A. 2012. "Tunisia's transition and the twin tolerations." *Journal of Democracy* 23(2): 89-103.

- Trofimov, Y. 2016. "How Tunisia Became a Top Source of ISIS Recruits." *The Wall Street Journal*, <https://goo.gl/OZmMeB>
- Vandewalle, D. 1980. "Bourguiba, Charismatic Leadership and the Tunisian One Party System." *Middle East Journal* 34(2):149-59.
- Wood, P. C. 2002. "French foreign policy and Tunisia: Do human rights matter?" *Middle East Policy* 9(2): 92. <https://goo.gl/h33ed5>
- Yousfi, H. 2015. *L'Uggt, une passion tunisienne: enquête sur les syndicalistes en révolution (2011-2014)*. Tunis: IRMC-Med Ali.
- Zelin, A. 2015. "The Tunisian-Libyan Jihadi Connection." Policy Analysis, The Washington Institute for Near-East policy, <https://goo.gl/g1YLpg>

Constitution of Tunisia, Venice Commission and International Constitutionalism

Francesco Duranti

Introduction

With the adoption of the new Constitution on January 26, 2014, Tunisia completed the long and difficult constitutional process which began over three years earlier, in the aftermath of the Jasmine Revolution, and which was marked by a complex transition from authoritarianism to democracy (Ben Achour and Ben Achour 2012). The Constitution – approved almost unanimously, with 200 votes, 12 against and 4 abstentions – by the *Assemblée Nationale Constituante* (ANC) – elected by proportional electoral system in October 2011 and composed of representatives of a wide variety of political parties – placed Tunisia “in a unique position, because is the only country in which the Arab Spring gave rise to a new constitutional settlement that replace an authoritarian regime with a democratic one in a process in which the electorate was properly represented” (Grote and Röder 2016, 26).

The Tunisian constitution-making process included the participation of the population, a number of other actors, but also, albeit not widely recognized, the *European Commission for Democracy through Law*, better known as the *Venice Commission*.

The Venice Commission

The Venice Commission is an independent consultative body established by the Council of Europe (CoE) in 1990, under the initiative of the Italian European Affairs Minister Antonio La Pergola, who developed the idea – after the fall of the Berlin Wall – to bring together in Venice the representatives of the CoE member countries in order to create a body originally charged with the task of assisting, by constitutional advice, especially the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the delicate transition from communism to democracy (Craig 2016). According to its Statute – extensively amended in 2002 – membership in the Commission is reserved to the member States of the CoE and to non-European States willing to become full member.¹ At present “the Commission has transformed from a European club into a global, transnational, constitutional forum” (Tuori 2016, 2).

As for the composition of the Commission, the Statute provides that only «*independent experts who have achieved eminence through their experience in democratic institutions or by their contribution to the enhancement of law and po-*

litical science» (art. 2) can be part of it. The members of the Venice Commission serve in their individual capacity and cannot receive or accept any instructions. They are appointed by their respective countries, and hold office for four years, renewable. The individual members are professors of constitutional and international law, constitutional judges, lawyers, members of national parliaments or high independent authorities. Independence and impartiality are, moreover, essential features of the Commission that has, from the outset, always operated with the necessary equidistance from the various political parties involved in the constitutional or legislative reform processes, and refrained, for example, from intervening in the heat of an electoral campaign or referendum (Buquicchio and Granata-Menghini 2013).

The tasks entrusted to the Commission are regulated by the Statute (art. 1): strengthening the understanding of the legal system of the participating states, notably with a view to bringing these systems closer; promoting the rule of law and democracy; examining the problems raised by the working of democratic institutions and their reinforcement and development, giving priority to the constitutional, legislative and administrative principles and techniques which serve the efficiency of democratic institutions, as well as the principle of the rule of law, fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizens and, more in general, the enhancement of democracy.

In view of these statutory aims, “constitutional reform is central to the Venice Commission’s work, including the drafting of constitutions and constitutional amendments, and legislation of a constitutional nature” (Craig, 2016, 6). The Commission has, indeed, been actively involved in the main constitution-making processes that have taken place in Europe since 1990, moving “from an experimental laboratory of institutional changes to an essential point of reference for professional and independent expert advice in constitution-making, in Europe and beyond” (Buquicchio and Granata-Menghini 2013, 242).

According to the Statute (art. 3), the Commission may supply opinions upon request submitted by the main organs of the CoE;² or by a State or International organisation or body participating in the work of the Commission. Finally, any State which is not a member of the Venice Commission may benefit from the activities of the Commission by making a request to the Committee of Ministers.

The *Rules of Procedures* – published in the Commission’s website – carefully provide the working methodology that the Commission applies when a request of opinion arrives, along the following lines, as summarised by the Commission itself:

- a) reference to the Commission of a (draft) constitutional or legislative text by a national or international body or the Council of Europe;
- b) setting up of a working group of rapporteur members and experts assisted by the Secretariat;
- c) draft opinion on compliance of the text with international standards and proposed improvements;

- d) visit to the country for talks with the authorities, civil society and other interested stakeholders;
- e) final draft opinion;
- f) submission of the final draft opinion to all members of the Commission before the plenary session;
- g) discussion of the draft opinion in a sub-commission and with the national authorities;
- h) discussion and adoption of the opinion at plenary session;
- i) submission of the opinion to the body which requested it;
- j) publishing of the final text of the opinion on the Commission's website.

As can easily be observed, the Commission adopts a dialogue-based working method with the national or international institution that requires its intervention, in order to facilitate the implementation and adoption of its opinions.

It is worthy of note that all the opinions expressed by the Venice Commission are non-binding, and represent, at most, a clear example of soft law, a growing tendency of all contemporary legal systems. As recently observed, "the work of the Venice Commission provides examples for the general observation that the increased internationalization of the law is accompanied by a growing fragmentation of norms: traditional hard law is increasingly complemented and/or replaced by soft law; the concept of soft law includes norms that are legally non-binding, or binding to only a very limited extent, and lack sovereign enforceability/sanctionability, but nevertheless provide other *stimuli* for compliance and thus for enabling effectiveness; soft instruments can implement soft law – as well as hard law – and/or add to its efficacy; soft instruments dispense with legal formality and, above all, with legal bindingness; they include critical evaluations, moral persuasion, recommendations etc." (Hoffmann-Riem 2014, 580).

It should also be emphasized that the impact of the constitutional advice offered by the Commission appears more significant when requested by a national authority, with an immediate and direct interest in the implementation of the suggestions and indications contained within the opinions adopted by the Commission, with the equally obvious consequence that "when opinions requests come from the interested States themselves, it is the rule that opinions are followed, in part or in full" (Buquicchio and Granata-Menghini 2013, 250). Therefore – especially in cases where a country is facing the adoption of a new constitution – the opinion of the Venice Commission is now almost invariably required, including countries far from the borders of Europe, in order to increase their level of 'democratic standing' in the international community (Craig 2016).

All this accounts for the growing prestige of the Venice Commission with national and international partners and the authoritativeness of its work, which is constantly enhanced by the many new cases – such as the Tunisian one – where its constitutional assistance helps to secure the difficult transition towards democracy.

The Opinion of the Venice Commission on the Constitution of Tunisia

The advice and assistance provided by the Venice Commission during the Tunisian constituent process has developed along a wide and continuous dialogue that began during the early stages of the process, first by means of an informal exchange of views (De Visser 2015) and, then, with the formal request for advice sent by the Speaker of the ANC after the approval of the final draft of the Constitution in June 2013, at a very delicate stage for the Assembly itself (Groppi 2015). In order to allow the ANC to take into account the advisory opinion of the Venice Commission as quickly as possible, the *plenum* of the Commission has asked for a report on the final draft of the Constitution to be prepared by eleven rapporteurs, more than generally used in such cases. This report was to be approved, subsequently, by the *plenum* itself.

In July 2013, after just a month the rapporteurs completed their task – that would have been shared unanimously by the plenary of the Commission during the session of October – by issuing a detailed opinion taking into analytical account the draft Constitution submitted for its consideration (*Opinion 733/2013 on the Final draft Constitution of the Republic of Tunisia*).

The *fil rouge* that guides the reasoning of the Venice Commission on the Tunisian draft Constitution is, of course, directly related to verifying the compatibility of the chosen solutions with respect to the values of the CoE, namely democracy, human rights and rule of law. These principles are accepted since the Preamble as is clarified from the draft Constitution, has full legal force and the violation of which can, therefore, provide reason to appeal to the Constitutional Court, in order to impose an harmonic interpretation of the entire Constitution, including the recalled constitutional values of the Preamble.

As in Chapter I, dedicated to the general principles of the Constitution, the Commission expounds, in particular, the question of the relationship between State and religion, noting a possible line of tension between Article 1, which (similarly to the text of the Constitution previously in force) proclaims Islam as the religion of Tunisia, and the subsequent Article 2, which states, however, the civil nature of the Tunisian State: a standard (as the same draft Constitution shall clarify) that constitutes an absolute limit to constitutional revision as non-amendable provisions. This tension is also exacerbated by Article 6, which gives the government the task of ‘guarantor’ of religion and, at the same time, proclaims the freedom of conscience and belief, the practice of worship and neutrality of mosques.

According to the Commission’s line of thought – that has influenced, on this point, the subsequent work of the ANC (Groppi 2015) – the interpretation to be accepted, in order to avoid possible antinomies, sees the Islam as the religion of the majority of citizens, without compromising the civilian character of the State and allowing inadmissible discrimination against non-Muslim citizens. This is the only interpretative stance consistent with the norm envisaged by Article 18 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR, an international agreement

also signed by Tunisia), according to which the fact that a religion is recognised as a State religion or that it is established as official or that its followers comprise the majority of the population, shall not result in any impairment of the enjoyment of any of the rights under that Covenant, nor in any discrimination against adherents to other religions or non-believers.

As in Chapter II, dedicated to the rights and fundamental freedoms of the citizens, what is most remarkable, from a comparative perspective, is the indication of the Venice Commission – then transposed into the final text of the Constitution (De Visser 2015) – about the necessity to incorporate in the Charter (art. 49) a general limitation clause on fundamental rights (also protected, as an absolute limit, from subsequent revisions of the Constitution), which is expressly referred to as the principle of proportionality of the restrictions to the objective pursued. Furthermore, it is underlined that any limitation on rights should be undertaken only with the law and that they can be taken only in cases of real need being compatible with a civil and democratic State. This is essentially analogous to what happens in the constitutional experiences of established democracies, among which, in particular, the Anglo-Saxon jurisdictions of Canada and New Zealand (Duranti 2012).

On the separation of powers and the form of government, the Venice Commission made extensive use of comparative law, constitutionally recalling many experiences of European systems, with particular reference mainly to the French model of the Fifth Republic, which appears to be that which most inspired Tunisians constituents.

With regard to forms of government, it is useful to recall – in the words of one of its influential members – the consolidated interpretation followed by the Venice Commission in the matter:

“the establishment of the new democracies required fundamental choices about the system of government to be adopted at the approval of the Constitution (...) but the Commission has correctly abstained from expressing a preference in favour of a parliamentary, or presidential or semi-presidential government: general principles about this problem are missing, the choice which has to be made is a choice of opportunity in view of the peculiarities of the concerned societies, and the freedom of the States to select one solution instead of another solution has to be recognized (...) therefore, the Commission has frequently underlined the exigency that a system of checks and balances between powers and the inter-institutional cooperation shall be insured and its approach certainly implies the reference to the models of the forms of government which the legal doctrine and the political science have elaborated” (Bartole 2016, 8-9).

Based on this shared methodological premise, the Commission has analysed the III and IV chapters, dedicated to the Legislature and the Executive, in order to check their compatibility with the models of government in the comparative dimension of established democracies.

From the examination of the pertinent rules contained in the draft Constitution,

the Commission notes, first of all, that the form of government can be included under the semi-presidential model, with a President of the Republic elected by universal suffrage,³ which grant to the President significant policy-making powers, alongside a government politically responsible before the Parliament, appointed by the President of the Republic taking explicitly into account the results of the general election. Unlike the French model, the Tunisian Constitution does not assign to the President the power to freely dissolve Parliament, but only in the event of specific institutional conditions, specifically articulated by the constitutional rules, thereby significantly reducing one of the major powers available to the President in the classic semi-presidential model. Comparing again with the Fifth French Republic, the Venice Commission underlines that a clearer delimitation of the relationship between the President and Prime Minister has been introduced in the draft Constitution. The former is expressly reserved competencies in the areas of foreign policy, defence and national security, and any conflicts of competence between the two must be settled through legal channels – unlike the French system – through their allocation to the jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court, called upon to resolve these conflicts within a period of one week since receiving the appeal. Still in analogy with the French constitutional system, the President of the Republic may, in exceptional cases of constitutional crisis, make use of emergency powers – delimited by a series of guarantees provided by the Constitution – and remit a law to the Parliament for further deliberation, and may submit it to the judgment of the Constitutional Court for *a priori* constitutional review. The President also has the power to activate the procedure of legislative and constitutional *referendum*. On the President of the Republic, the Commission critically notes, however, the choice of reserving eligibility for election only to citizens of the Islamic religion, as well as the power granted to the President himself to appoint the *Grand Mufti*. These standards appear incompatible with the explicitly non-confessional institutional condition of the Tunisian State.

The powers of the Parliament are also largely based on the French model. In particular, it is fully accepted the distinction between ordinary and organic laws and, above all, the division of the sphere of competences between the legislative power of Parliament – which can only legislate in subjects set out exhaustively by the Constitution – and the regulatory power of the Government, which is assigned the entire (large) residual regulatory powers. Finally, the Venice Commission expounds the issue – frequently at the core of its interventions (Bartole 2016) – of the separation of powers in relation to the effective independence of the Judiciary and on the overall configuration of the constitutional justice system established by the Tunisian constituent.

As for the independence (external and internal) of the Judiciary, the Commission addresses particularly the question of the composition of the Supreme Judicial Council to point out that the procedure for appointing members (half elected by the judges and half appointed from outside the judiciary) is not in line with the need for

effective institutional guarantee of the independence of the Judiciary. This organ is largely modelled on the basis of the Judicial Councils in the constitutional experience of Italy, France and Spain. Hence the suggestion – accepted in the final text of the Constitution – to provide for a different composition of the Council, with a majority of 2/3 of the members elected by judges and the remaining third chosen, such as lay members, from outside the judiciary.

On the Constitutional Court and, more generally, on the review of constitutionality – largely inspired by the European model of constitutional justice – the Commission makes some critical remarks regarding the composition and the conditions of access to the Court.

As for the composition, the Venice Commission suggests to adopt the *prorogatio* system (borrowed by the Spanish experience) in order to prevent possible cases of voids in the composition of the Court that might, hypothetically, be determined by the high majority required for the election of its members.

As for the mechanisms of access to the Court, the Commission points out critically that appeal to the Court is reserved, in advance, only to the President of the Republic, suggesting to extend the recourse to the Constitutional Court – similar to the French model – even to a qualified parliamentary minority, thus increasing significantly the powers available to the opposition: this indication is also finally introduced in the text of the Tunisian Constitution.

The overall opinion of the Venice Commission on the draft Constitution is ultimately largely positive as to the compatibility with the fundamental values of European constitutionalism, albeit under of the mentioned critical remarks, many of which have been accepted in the final text of the Constitution of Tunisia (De Visser 2015).

Comparative Constitutional Law and International Constitutionalism

The advice rendered by the Venice Commission under the Tunisian constituent process can be used as an opportunity to make considerations on the current dynamics of contemporary constitutionalism. First among them is the widespread trend of the migration of ideas and constitutional institutions of the different legal systems of the world, struggling with the writing of a new constitution or with the adoption of important constitutional revisions. This trend – variously defined as “global constitutionalism” (Tushnet 2009, 895); “transnational constitutionalism” (P. Zumbansen, 2012, 75); “internationalization of constitutional law” (Chang and Yeh 2011, 1165); “globalisation of constitutional discourse” (Tuori 2016, 2); “migration of constitutional ideas” (Choudhry 2006, 2); “constitutional transplant and borrowing” (Perju 2012, 1304) – is one of the most interesting dynamics in progress in the constitutional systems of several countries.

From this point of view, a powerful incentive for constitutional cross-fertilization is the rapid proliferation of sources (Bills of Rights) and locations (Courts) for the international protection of human rights. These carry out the daily work of

protecting fundamental rights and profoundly affect the interpretative activities of the national Constitutional Courts called upon to similar functions, thus promoting broad interpretative circulation among the various Courts of the rules and institutions which tend increasingly to converge in order to ensure effective mechanisms for safeguarding the rights of the citizens (Groppi and Ponthoreau 2013).

In this context, the *European Court of Human Rights* holds an absolute leading role through its dynamic interpretation of the ECHR, which is impressive. At present, it is the cornerstone of Europe's constitutional heritage on the protection of fundamental rights. Other international courts have a similar functions, for example the significant activities of the *Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos*. In this respect, the work of the Venice Commission is equally relevant. Indeed, it is more and more frequently called upon as an advisory body assisting the constitution-making processes of countries including those not belonging to the CoE. In order to provide this advice, the Venice Commission – in addition to employing hard law sources, such as the jurisprudence of the Strasbourg Court – mainly uses what may be called the European constitutional heritage, that descends from settled constitutional cultures developed in Europe since the dawn of constitutionalism.

The reconstruction, identification and understanding of what can actually be appreciated as European constitutional heritage – i.e. how much the Commission employs in order to make its work of constitutional assistance – is one of the more prominent functions of comparing constitutional jurisdictions, so that “comparative constitutional law constituted a vital resource for the Commission” (Tuori 2016, 3), because “the Venice Commission's business is comparative constitutional engineering, which is a very complex and delicate exercise” (Buquicchio and Granta-Menghini 2013, 246).

Through this complex work of the analysis – and subsequent application – of the founding principles of contemporary constitutionalism, the Venice Commission is actively involved in the spread and circulation of constitutional ideas even in distant jurisdictions (not only geographically) from the European ones, making concrete that cultural trend according to which the process leading to the adoption of new constitutions “enriched the international constitutional debate and the relative constitutional processes affected not only the internal developments of the States, but also the relations between the States and international institutions” (Bartole 2014, 4). Thus, ultimately confirming “that comparative constitutionalism is more than an emerging field of legal inquiry: it is a tool for understanding the political and social condition itself” (Hirschl 2016, 212).

ENDNOTES

¹ Algeria, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Israel, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Korea, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Mexico, Peru, Tunisia and the USA.

² Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, and the Secretary General.

³ Through an electoral majoritarian system with possible second round of ballot.

References

- Abat I Ninet, A. and M. Tushnet (eds) 2015. *The Arab Spring. An Essay on Revolution and Constitutionalism*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Al-Ali, Z. 2011. "Constitutional drafting and external influence." in T. Ginsburg and R. Dixon, *Comparative Constitutional Law*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. 77-95.
- Bartole, S. 2016. "The Experience of the Venice Commission: Sources and Materials of its Elaboration of the International Constitutional Law." Venice Commission CDL-PI(2016)016.
- Bartole, S. 2014, "International Constitutionalism and Conditionality: the Experience of the Venice Commission." *Rivista telematica AIC - Associazione Italiana dei Costituzionalisti* 4.
- Ben Achour, R. 2014. "La Constitution tunisienne du 27 janvier 2014." *Revue française de droit constitutionnel* 4 : 783-801.
- Ben Achour, R. and S. Ben Achour. 2012. "La transition démocratique en Tunisie: ente légalité constitutionnelle et légitimité révolutionnaire." *Revue française de droit constitutionnel* 4: 715-732.
- Buquicchio G. and S. Granata-Menghini. 2013. "The Venice Commission Twenty Years on. Challenge met but Challenges ahead." in M. van Roosmalen, B. Vermeulen, F. van Hoof and M. Oostling (eds) *Fundamental Rights and Principles – Liber amicorum Pieter van Dijk*. Cambridge: Antwerp; Portland: Intersentia. 241-254.
- Chang W.C. and J.R. Yeh. 2012. "Internationalization of Constitutional Law." in M. Rosenfeld and A. Sajò. *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Constitutional Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1165-1184.
- Choudhry, S. and T. Ginsburg. 2016. *Constitution Making*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Choudhry, S. 2013. "Constitutional Transition in the Middle East: Introduction." *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 11: 611-614.
- Craig, P. 2016. "Transnational Constitution-Making: The Contribution of the Venice Commission on Law and Democracy", *UCI Journal of International, Transnational and Comparative Law* (forthcoming).
- De Visser, M. (2015). "A Critical Assessment of the Role of the Venice Commission in Process of Domestic Constitutional Reform, *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 63: 963-1008.
- Duranti, F. 2012. *Ordinamenti costituzionali di matrice anglosassone. Circolazione dei modelli costituzionali e comparazione tra le esperienze di Australia, Canada, Nuova Zelanda e Regno Unito*. Roma: Aracne.
- Frosini, J.O. and F. Biagi (eds). 2015. *Political and Constitutional Transitions in North Africa. Actors and Factors*. London: Routledge.
- Gaddes, C. 2015. "Il processo costituente (2011-14): fasi e protagonisti." in T. Groppi and I. Spigno (eds.) *Tunisia. La primavera della Costituzione*. Roma: Carocci. 50-66.
- Groppi, T. 2015. "La costituzione tunisina del 2014 nel quadro del 'costituzionalismo globale'" *Diritto pubblico comparato ed europeo*. 1: 189-220.
- Groppi, T. and I. Spigno (eds). 2015. *Tunisia. La primavera della Costituzione*. Roma: Carocci.
- Groppi T. and M. C. Ponthoreu (eds). 2013. *The Use of Foreign Precedents by Constitutional Judges* Oxford: Hart Publishing.
- Grote R. and T. Röder (eds) 2016. *Constitutionalism, Human Rights, and Islam after the Arab Spring*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Hirschl, R. 2014. *Comparative Matters. The Renaissance of Comparative Constitutional Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hirschl, R. 2016. "The 'Comparative' in Comparative Constitutional Law: A Response to Dixon and Tushnet." *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 64: 209-218.
- Hoffmann-Riem, W. 2014. "The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe – Standards and Impact." *The European Journal of International Law* 25(2): 579–597.
- Mezzetti, L. (ed.). 2015. *International Constitutional Law*. Torino: Giappichelli.
- Perju, V. 2012. "Constitutional Transplant, Borrowing, and Migrations." in M. Rosenfeld and A. Sajò (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Constitutional Law* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1304-1327.
- Thornhill C. 2016. "The Global Legal System and the Procedural Construction of Constituent Power." *Global Constitutionalism* 5: 405-442.
- Tushnet, M. 2009, "The Inevitable Globalization of Constitutional Law." *Virginia Journal of International Law* 49(4): 985-1006.
- Tuori, K. 2016. "From a European to a Universal Constitutional Heritage?" Venice Commission CDL-PI(2016)015.
- United Nations Development Programme – UNPD 2016. "The Constitution of Tunisia." <https://goo.gl/a6tuP7>
- Zumbansen, P. 2012. "Carving Out Typologies and Accounting for Differences Across Systems: Toward a Methodology of Transnational Constitutionalism." in M. Rosenfeld and A. Sajò (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Constitutional Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 75-97.

Conclusion

Turbulence, chaos, stability: the Arab Spring and its legacy

Loretta Dell'Aguzzo and Emidio Diodato

In everyday language, turbulence denotes a confusing or uncontrolled situation, while chaos indicates that everything is out of control or in a mess. Conversely, stability is considered a situation in which 'things happen as they should' and there is no harmful change. Different meanings can be found in systems language. The scientific study of complicated systems show that turbulence and chaos can be strongly affected by minor changes in conditions. At the same time, systems are capable of reproducing and maintaining themselves. In opposition to what seems obvious or natural, turbulence and chaos do not cause compulsive or persisting instability. Self-organization, also called spontaneous order in the social sciences, is a process where some form of overall order arises from micro-interactions between parts of an initially disordered system. Turbulence, chaos, and stability are situations much closer to each other than one normally thinks.

In international relations theory, and generally in the social sciences, analogies and metaphors associated with systems language can support political analysis. At the *end of the Cold War*, systems language appeared to be useful for international studies in order to describe and explain change and *continuity*. James N. Rosenau, for example, described a worldwide state of affairs in which the interconnections that sustained the primary parameters of world politics were marked by extensive complexity and variability, a condition of permanent turbulence which does not necessarily mean chaos.¹ In international relations literature, in general, international stability is considered as the probability that the world system retains all of its essential characteristics: that no single state becomes dominant; that most of the states continue to survive; and that large-scale war does not occur.² As David Easton remarked, scholars of international politics have long understood that the so-called 'balance-of-power' is not a real condition or a *status quo*, but a general tendency of the system towards stability.³

Undoubtedly, the regional turmoil in the wake of the Arab uprisings created a time of 'political turbulence' in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The regional scenario which emerged from the ashes of the turmoil (particularly in Syria and Libya) could even be described as 'political chaos'. US policy in the region since World War II was dictated by three main goals: the protection of Israel, guarante-

ing the supply of oil, and, until 1991, containing Soviet influence. In 2015, Russia took advantage of the confused and uncontrolled situation in Syria, becoming a key actor and expanding its military involvement in the Mediterranean. The situation in Libya dissolved into an even worse chaos. In 2014, according to the *Washington Post*, the conflict turned into something of a proxy war for the Middle East's big powers.⁴ Over the last five years, no single state has become dominant in the region, no large-scale war has occurred, and most of the states continued to survive. But the regional stability has been challenged by several conflicts and actors. In contrast with the general assumption of systems theorists, who see self-organization or spontaneous order as a pattern of interactions that exclude the possibility of systems change, we can ask if the turbulence and chaos have produced a legacy transforming the basic social relations and perception of political and social life.

When the political stability of states is analyzed, as opposed to that of international systems, the very concept of stability assumes a different meaning. It becomes about states capacity to adapt to internal and external shocks, and rests in the 'balance' of legitimacy and coercion, two features that are difficult to translate directly into systems language without losing their significance. While we acknowledge that the complexity of the events and processes that have unfolded since 2011 should not be overlooked and systems theorists were right in outlining the complexity of interactions between different parts, for analytical clarity the point of departure of the analysis of the political stability in the aftermath of the Arab Spring was the state-level dimension. From the analysis of factors which have challenged the domestic stability of pivot states in south-eastern Mediterranean, we have moved to the analysis of the interplay between the domestic, the regional and the international dimensions in order to explain how the degree of stability of pivot states has affected their external environment and how the latter has influenced, in turn, these states' political stability.

The regional dimension has traditionally played a significant role in shaping MENA states political systems, and the Arab Spring is no exception. All the states in the region have been subject to a common external context. From the end of colonialism to the end of the Cold War, they shared the same 'encounter' with the international system. The system of sovereign states did steadily consolidate itself as a consequence of international pressures. However, the pattern of conflict in the region has normally stemmed from factors indigenous to the region. Even though MENA is a region of stable state entities and its national boundaries have been relatively constant in modern times, states are less influential than is conventionally claimed: nationalist movements, religious fundamentalism, and movements of social protest have often taken place across national borders. Furthermore, as Fred Halliday underlined, since the end of the Cold War the regional system flowed into the globalization process. As a result of their interaction with each other, MENA states came "to share common concerns, to participate in the same conflicts and, in certain respects, to share characteristics."⁵ To some extent, the region started to

face the same 'encounter' of its political and social life with modernity. The regional spread of the mass media and all-news satellite channels have played a decisive role to this regard. As a media expert stressed just before the Arab turmoil, "rival discourses of progress, modernity, and identity have a regional (pan-Arab) resonance, even when they take on specific national forms."⁶

In the introduction of this volume we defined the Arab Spring as a critical juncture for the MENA region and – as a consequence – for the south-eastern Mediterranean region. As the 2011 uprisings have produced domestic and external changes in both countries where they took place (e.g. Egypt and Tunisia) and in countries where they did not occur (e.g. Turkey and Israel), they have put the stability of states to the test. The absence, prior to 2011, of major transnational waves of social unrest in the region, on the one side, stresses the suitability of understanding the Arab Spring as a turning point in the history of MENA and, on the other side, introduces a relatively new factor in the academic study of this region, that is the nexus between state and society.

Since the 1980s, the scholarly debate on Middle Eastern politics has devoted much attention to the role of the state. Whereas earlier studies had emphasized that – since the post-colonial states were externally imposed artificial entities⁷ – the Arab states' very survival depended on the will of the Arab or Islamic 'nations'. Indeed, after the stabilization period of the 1970s and 1980s students of the MENA region have highlighted that these states revealed an extraordinary capacity to influence political developments and displayed an increasing autonomy.⁸ By virtue of the skillful use of repression and incorporation, these states were able to marginalize competing transnational and local forces which could challenge their power.⁹ According to previous studies, the autonomy of the Arab states from the influence of society was primarily due to two features of MENA countries, neo-patrimonialism and *rentierism*, which are believed to discourage political contestation. As an example, Halim Barakat argues that Arab elites have so successfully channeled their wealth to serve their own purposes that their polities have become apathetic and demobilized.¹⁰ A related explanation for the lack of mobilization against the authoritarian incumbents in this region focuses on *rentierism*. Rentier state theorists maintain that the state's ability to derive rents from the sale of commodities reduces its need to extract revenues from the population, thus removing what has historically been a determinant of social mobilization in the process of democratization.¹¹ The Arab Spring has challenged these accounts, showing the great potential for mobilization of MENA societies and has stressed the need to 'bring societies back in' both in the study of domestic political stability and in the study of regional-international stability.

As we have seen, the partial neglect of MENA societies in the academic debate has gone hand in hand with a sort of overstatement of the regional states' capacities. The exaggeration of state power in this area is perhaps due to the considerable expansion of the bureaucratic structures and of the pervasiveness of the administrative

and security apparatus of most MENA post-independence states. In the words of Nazih Ayubi, MENA states are 'fierce' states, because "although they have large bureaucracies, mighty armies and harsh prisons, they are lamentably feeble when it comes to collecting taxes, winning wars or forging a really 'hegemonic' power bloc or an ideology that can carry the state beyond the coercive and 'corporative' level and into the moral and intellectual sphere."¹² This implies that the stability of these states, as with many dictatorships, is mostly grounded in the repression pillar and that the rulers do not enjoy wide support among the ruled. These features do not appear to be sufficient conditions for political stability or orderly change. What we have learnt from the Arab Spring is that south-eastern Mediterranean states' capacity to adapt to changes in their domestic and regional-international environments might be better understood if state-society relations are taken into consideration.

This observation leads us to clarify how we studied our selected states. In our understanding, the state is not a unitary entity. In opposition to methodological nationalism, which equates social boundaries and state boundaries,¹³ we do not consider states as mere 'containers of societies', but as 'containers of power', where power lies also within society. The state is understood as an organization among other organizations and the state-society nexus is characterized by a constant struggle for domination and social control, that is the regulation of social relations through the imposition of rules for social behavior and systems of meaning.¹⁴ Hence, our choice to consider regime legitimacy as the main source of political stability is grounded in the fact that citizens are active actors of the regime legitimation process and steadily involved in regional affairs. Contrary to the monopoly of coercion – the second relevant source of stability, which explicitly focuses on the rulers and on regime institutions – the very definition of legitimacy implies a relationship between the rulers and the ruled. Hence, citizens do not constitute the passive objects of political power, but are subjects in the foundation and structuring of power.

It is widely acknowledged that, as with other uprisings, the Arab Spring stemmed from a deep legitimacy crisis of several regimes, resulting in the mobilization of societies which called for the formation of a new social contract, based on more political rights and social justice. However, while in some cases the protesters succeeded in ousting long-ruling dictators, the events that followed the rebellions not only revealed the underestimated weakness of the MENA states, but also showed that the great potential for mobilization of MENA societies has hardly translated into the ability to produce a new social order, through the emergence of alternative ideas and cohesive political elites. As a matter of fact, even in Tunisia, which represents the only success story of the Arab Spring, a formal pact between the soft-liners of the old regime and secular and Islamist opposition parties has favored the installation of a democratic regime, but has left the 'deep state' in place. Most strikingly, in Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood was capable of mobilizing the masses but unable to heal the wounds of decades of authoritarianism and bridge the gap between the secular elite and the Islamist masses. As a result, a military coup in 2013 brought the

old elites back in place. In Turkey, rather than a challenge for the AKP government, the Gezi Park protests which took place between May and June 2013 represented the litmus test of the authoritarian turn of the Turkish regime. In reality, while the government adopted a defiant attitude toward the green demonstrators and did not hesitate to use harshly repressive measures to restore order, political opposition was not able to expand popular support for its political programs. Hence, the old social order has been put under strain, but a new one has so far yet to arise.

Against this background, the many parallels drawn between the Arab Spring in 2011 and the 'Springtime of the Peoples' in 1848 appear justified,¹⁵ especially if we focus on the short-term outcomes of these revolutionary waves. Indeed, both waves of uprisings achieved a low rate of successful advances toward political liberalism and democracy. Thus, does the famous quote from Giuseppe Tomasi di *Lampedusa's The Leopard* – 'everything needs to change, so everything can stay the same' – describe the post 2011 MENA region? In our view, this statement fails to capture the scope of the long-term implications of the Arab Spring just like prominent historians who claimed that '1848 was a turning-point at which modern history failed to turn' missed the relevance of the revolutionary wave of 1848. Indeed, studies of path dependency and critical junctures suggest that even failed challenges to autocratic regimes can make a difference in a country's political evolution.¹⁶

Deep political crises generally have lasting political consequences. As Kurt Weyland puts it, "if a confrontational effort at effecting profound change does not succeed, the result is usually not the status quo ante – it is not as if nothing has happened."¹⁷ Profound contentious processes fundamentally alter the resolve, the power capabilities, the preferred strategies of both winners and losers, thus shaping future political developments. Moreover, though defeated in the short run, failed revolutions unleash ideas that may become part of social life in subsequent decades. In some ways, the very idea of revolution can alter the sense of the possible. Hence, even though the undeniable empirical reality is that – with almost no exception – the 2011 uprisings did not produce the radical social change that citizens wished for, the unexpected collapse of old regimes in several states which were previously considered stable, has changed state-society relations in these countries and in the entire region. If we consider the Arab Spring as a test of stability, the uprisings revealed that many MENA regimes are built on shaky foundations, though the return of authoritarianism in Egypt proves that this regime type is extraordinarily resilient in the region. Put differently, the Arab Spring has put into question the sustainability of the type of state-society nexus in the MENA.

As aforementioned, in 2011 the protesters demanded more political freedoms and social justice. Five years later, with the partial exception of Tunisia, MENA regimes generally failed in guaranteeing basic political rights and economic security. Not only were popular grievances not addressed, but states' response, by and large, has been a reduction of freedoms in the name of security. The neglect of society's demands is generally not inconsequential. The reactionary and in many instances

oppressive response from the MENA states may breed further chaos and instability in the future of the region.

In Egypt, the 2013 military coup restored authoritarian rule. Yet, the new President al-Sisi is encountering the same challenges as his predecessors and the reliance on coercion may jeopardize the stability of the country in the years to come. Al-Sisi rose to power in a time when the Islamists' fear soared and his legitimacy was largely based on the promise to restore security in the country. However, the brutality against political opponents, be they Islamists or secular, has alienated his electoral support. Moreover, the government has lost the backing of the business elite, which has been marginalized to the advantage of military enterprises. Finally, the socio-economic situation in Egypt is deteriorating by the day. Thus, on the one side, socio-economic grievances that prompted the 2011 uprising against Mubarak remain largely unaddressed, whereas, on the other side, the harsh police brutality following the military coup has put an enormous strain on the population. This mix of factors may pave the way for new episodes of contention.

A different situation has emerged in Tunisia after the Jasmine Revolution, which ousted former dictator Ben Ali and led to the installation of democracy after decades of authoritarian rule. The victory of the Islamist party Ennahda at the founding elections of the new regime has granted the inclusion of the conservative middle class. Yet, disenfranchised lower classes, especially those living in the least developed regions of the country, are not represented in the new Parliament. As in Egypt, the new regime has been unable to successfully fight the unemployment crisis and increasing poverty. Thus, the socio-economic grievances that ignited the 2011 revolution are still in place and episodes of protest cyclically erupt in Tunisian interior regions. Moreover, the most marginalized social classes are coming increasingly closer to the radical Salafi groups, which represent the main challengers of the newly established democratic regime. In this case, too, the exclusion of the lower classes may jeopardize both democracy and political stability in Tunisia.

The stability of Turkey and, especially, of Israel was only partially hit by the Arab Spring, but it cannot be ignored that the latter affected political developments in these countries as well. In Turkey, the already mentioned sustained protests during the Spring in 2013 in the Gezi Park suggested decreasing support for the AKP. The relative loss of legitimacy of the Turkish government after 2011 was mainly due to setbacks in the economy and in foreign policy. The decline of popular backing for the incumbents is also due to the increasing restrictions of political freedoms which has reached maximum levels after the unsuccessful coup attempt staged in July 2016. The authoritarian turn of the Turkish regime implies a loss of procedural legitimacy and an increase in the levels of repression. This state of affairs could, in turn, challenge political stability, given that the Turkish population is accustomed to democratic politics and to the respect of basic human rights and would not acquiesce easily to a return to authoritarianism.

Among the selected pivot states, for obvious reasons, Israel is the one that has

been less affected by the Arab Spring. However, during the summer of 2011, thousands of Israelis gathered in the largest and most sustained social protest in the history of the country. The protesters explicitly framed the demonstrations within the context of the Arab uprisings and demanded an improvement in social justice. The main grievances concerned the expensive cost of living, the depreciation of wages with citizens calling for a return to the old welfare state. That being said, the protesters did not demand the capitulation of the regime, but called for the government itself to solve the country's social and economic issues. Hence, mass mobilization did not put into question the legitimacy of the regime and in some ways reinforced the sense of belonging to the state, since it aimed at overcoming the rooted social cleavages that divide the country.

To summarize, whereas in the short-term the stability of neither of these countries has been fundamentally threatened and the states – through democratic or undemocratic means – have been able to maintain social order, the long-term effects of the 2011 uprisings may be much more relevant, especially for Egypt and Turkey, where social order is frequently maintained through the use of coercion.

To this regard, another challenge to the political stability of these states results from the interplay between the domestic and the regional/international dimensions. In terms of population size, history and geography, Turkey and Egypt could have played a pivotal role in the region after the Arab Spring. What emerged from our analysis is that regional instability favored domestic instability and, in turn, the latter contributed to the first. The regional and foreign policy of post-revolutionary Egypt, as an example, has been largely driven by its domestic economic and security problems, in particular its huge dependence on foreign aid (provided especially by the US and the Gulf states) and the Islamist threat. In the first case, the widespread human rights abuses and the overall indiscriminate use of coercion, which has been characterizing the al-Sisi regime since its rise to power represent a matter of concern for Western donors. We expect that foreign actors will continue to support al-Sisi's regime hoping that this provision will stabilize the region. However we wonder if an authoritarian Egypt is still a guarantee of regional stability. In the second case, the Islamic threat has increased the contrasts between Egypt and other regional powers, since the war against the Muslim Brotherhood and against all the Islamist galaxy has induced al-Sisi to side with Assad in Syria. This move sharply contrasted with the positions of US and several Sunni powers. In addition, in this case the current unstable regional environment might increase the prospects for authoritarian survival in Egypt. Both Arab and Western powers consider Egyptian stability as a fundamental requisite for regional peace and Cairo is a precious ally in the fight against Islamic terrorist organizations. However, currently Egypt appears like a fading star, due to the worsening of state-society relations, which affect its regional and foreign policy.

The case of Turkey is to some extent similar. Regional turbulence did not push the country towards the European Union. On the contrary, discussions about the

Turkish role in the region became arguments for mass mobilization within the civilizational framework of Islam as opposed to the Western world. In light of this, the key issue for the regional stability is the repositioning of Turkey and that depends on the hostile international environment generated by the resurgence of the irredentist Kurdish minority in Syria. Economic and military links with the European Union and the United States are still considerable. However, after the failed coup on July 2016, Russia and China can provide alternative sources of legitimacy and assistance, weakening the incentive for the AKP elite to maintain formal democratic institutions. Mobilization of activists and Erdoğan's populist postures in foreign affairs could bolster the seduction for authoritarianism. The relentless repression of opponents to government can lead to a regime change and this would be a source of regional instability.

Tunisian regional and foreign policy after the Jasmine Revolution has been shaped by external factors as well. As in the case of Egypt, domestic security and the need to attract foreign investments in order to relieve the country's economic issues have been important drivers of Tunisian external action. The need for economic assistance has induced the Tunisian governments to align with great powers in foreign policy. However, the country has proved able to retain a certain degree of autonomy. What is most surprising in the case of Tunisia, is that the Islamist moderation at home stands in stark contrast with the dramatic numbers of foreign fighters that have left the country to join the Islamic State. This state of affairs might have been influenced by domestic economic instability, rising poverty and youth unemployment. However, political developments in the internal and external dimensions have affected each other. It is worth noting that the international recognition of the Tunisian democracy and its value for the region, also testified by the Venice Commission, on the one side could help the country to become a political 'start-up', but, on the other, it could also become a burden in the open-ended tale of a fragile democratization.

As for Israel, the domestic and international dimensions – due to the Palestinian conflict and its geopolitical position – are even more intertwined. Both the Israeli state and society perceived the post-2011 shifting balance of power in MENA as a threat to its national security. In particular, the country feared the potential rise to power of Islamist groups. This perceived external threat induced the government to adopt a political agenda based almost exclusively on security. As a consequence, since 2011 the country's electorate has moved increasingly rightward and the subsequent security-informed policy choices have exacerbated the Palestinian conflict, which in turn intensified Israel's international isolation. Although Israel has not been dramatically affected by the Arab Spring, and the Palestinian conflict has not undergone major changes, the protection of Israel – one of the main goals of US policy in the region – has become more complicated than before.

To conclude, turbulence and chaos have transformed perceptions on the way in which 'things happen as they should'. The south-eastern Mediterranean is now per-

ceived as much more unstable than before. The region has been afflicted by war and upheaval for much of the past century. Particularly in the Middle East, external intervention, inter-state war, money, oil, religion, and economic paralysis have strongly influenced regional stability. By focusing on the political stability of pivot states, rather than on regional civil wars, our task was to consider the Arab Spring and its legacy. In this regard, two main points can be underlined: first, the Arab Spring and its aftermath have been a general test on political stability of states and, as consequence, of the entire regional states-system; secondly, though states have shown to be resilient, most political systems have undergone transformations or faced new social challenges. Turbulence and chaos are situations much closer to stability than one normally thinks, and systems are capable of reproducing and maintaining themselves. In the last five years, no single state became dominant, no large-scale war occurred, and most of the states continued to survive in the region. But since turbulence and chaos produced transformations in state-society relations, the regional stability has been challenged and 'not everything changed to stay the same'. If the harassment of a street vendor in Tunisia led to civil wars in Syria and Libya, then the famous claim about systems outcomes that are more complex than the sum of the system's parts is correct. In the south-eastern Mediterranean, micro-interactions between parts are now more relevant than external powers, which cannot (even if heavily involved) stabilize the region from outside.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ J. N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1990.
- ² K. W. Deutsch and J. D. Singer, "Multipolar Power Systems and International Stability" *World Politics*, 16, 3, 1964, pp. 390-406.
- ³ D. Easton, *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science*, New York, NY, Knopf, 1953, 1971.
- ⁴ I. Tharoor and A. Taylor, "Here are the key players fighting the war for Libya, all over again," *The Washington Post*, August 27, 2014, <https://goo.gl/2MVbBg>
- ⁵ F. Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations. Power, Politics, Ideology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 38-39.
- ⁶ M. M. Kraidy, *Reality Television and Arab Politics. Contention in Public Life*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 27.
- ⁷ M. Hudson, *Arab Politics: the Search for Legitimacy*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1977.
- ⁸ L. Anderson, "The State in the Middle East and North Africa," *Comparative Politics*, 1987, 20, 1, pp. 1-8.
- ⁹ R. Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Middle East*, London, Routledge, 2000.
- ¹⁰ H. Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture and the State*, Berkeley, CA, California University Press, 1993.
- ¹¹ G. Luciani, "Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework," in G. Luciani (ed.) *The Arab State*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1990; M. Ross, "Does oil hinder democracy?" *World Politics*, 53, 3, 2001, pp. 325-61.
- ¹² N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, London, I. B.Tauris, 1995, p. xi.
- ¹³ D. Chernilo, "The critique of methodological nationalism: Theory and history," *Thesis Eleven*, 106, 1, pp. 98-117.
- ¹⁴ J. Migdal, *State in Society. Studying how States and Society Transform and Constitute one Another*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- ¹⁵ A. Whitehead, "Eric Hobsbawm on 2011," *BBC News Magazine*, 22 December 2011; R. Springborg,

"Whither the Arab Spring? 1989 or 1848?" *The International Spectator*, 2011, 46, 3, pp. 5-12; K. Weyland, "The Arab Spring: Why the Surprising Similarities with the Revolutionary Wave of 1848?" *Perspective on Politics*, 2012, 10, 4, pp. 917-934.

¹⁶ R. Collier and D. Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*, Princeton, MT, Princeton University Press, 1991.

¹⁷ K. Weyland, *Making Waves: Democratic Contention in Europe and Latin America since the Revolutions of 1848*, New York, NY, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p.121.

About the authors

Loretta Dell'Aguzzo is a Research Fellow at the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Florence. She received her PhD in Political Science from the Italian Institute of Human Sciences in Florence in 2013. Her research interests are in the areas of transitions from authoritarian rule, state-society relations, state building and ethnic conflicts.

Emidio Diodato is Associate Professor of Political Science and International Politics at the Department of Humanities and Social Science of the University 'Stranieri' of Perugia. He received his PhD in International Relations from the University of Milan. He is currently working on international geopolitics, Italian foreign policy and Euro-Mediterranean studies.

Francesco Duranti is Associate Professor of Comparative Constitutional Law at the Department of Humanities and Social Science of the University 'Stranieri' of Perugia. He received his PhD in Public Law from the University of Perugia. He is currently working on Multilevel Constitutionalism in Europe, Constitutional Dialogues between the Courts and Commonwealth Constitutionalism.

Giulia Giordano is the Coordinator of International Affairs at EcoPeace Middle East, an NGO based in Israel, Jordan and Palestine, and formerly a fellow lecturer at Al-Quds University in East Jerusalem. She received her PhD in Cooperation for Peace and Development from the University 'Stranieri' of Perugia. Her research interests are Middle Eastern studies, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and environmental diplomacy.

Ester Sigillò is a PhD candidate in Political Science at the Institute of Human and Social Sciences of Scuola Normale Superiore in Florence and PhD fellow at the *Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb Contemporain* based in Tunis. Her main research interests concern Middle East and North African studies, Islamic activism, and civic engagement in the Arab world.

The aim of the book is to examine the “state of pivot states” in the south-eastern Mediterranean region after the Arab Spring. Due to historical, geographic, strategic and cultural factors, we consider Turkey, Egypt, Israel and Tunisia as decisive to the fate of this region. Since the Arab Spring, the south-eastern Mediterranean has entered into a period of changing power configurations, and developments prompted by the 2011 mass uprisings influenced both the internal and external stability. Our thesis is that domestic, and especially, regime stability is the main factor accounting for the ‘pivotness’ of a given state and that changes in this dimension influence foreign policy decisions. However, also the international context feeds into the domestic politics in a never-ending process. Thus, internal and external dimensions are in a dialectic relationship. For this reason, the chapters included in this volume analyze political changes and challenges in three key dimensions, namely the domestic, regional and international arenas.