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[Who Will Save the Liberal World Order?](#)

The Arab World Struggles for Order

Beyond Autocrats and Islamists –
Is there a Liberal Alternative?

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The old order of the Arab world, which emerged from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War and was influenced for decades by post-colonial autocracies, is disintegrating. State collapse and the restoration of authoritarian regimes, religious radicalisation, and jihadist terror have long since dispelled the hopes for liberty and true participation in government raised by the “Arab Spring”. Do liberal forces still have a chance?

While international structures readjust, the Arab world is struggling to find its own order. Being a theatre of external power projection, and thus of a global competition of governmental systems, Arab countries and societies are first and foremost experiencing severe upheavals, largely characterised by cycles of violence radicalisation. Against this background, this article takes stock of the situation in the region and discusses prospects for development. We will first show how the governance structures in the region have become obsolete, being thus instrumental in bringing about the waves of protest of the “Arab Spring” in 2010/2011. While authoritarianism and Islamism are mutually beneficial to disastrous effect, liberal alternatives struggle to find ground. However, increasing civic awareness and engagement, as well as the presence of reform-oriented young voices – both from the region itself and from the Arab diaspora – mean that positive developments cannot be ruled out, at least in the medium term. The process of forming identities, values, societal models, and forms of government is an obviously protracted one, which we nevertheless believe to still be an open one. This process is complicated by geopolitical friction and rivalries.

From the Weakness of the Internal Order to the Revolutionary Impetus

When, in 2011, on 14 January in Tunis and on 11 February in Cairo, the long-time rulers Ben Ali and Mubarak were overthrown, the contract between the authoritarian rulers – who provided security and social welfare to citizens

who in exchange gave up their political participation – had long since become fragile. While the regimes ossified and enriched themselves ever more shamelessly, a younger generation – better educated and, thanks not least to Al Jazeera and Facebook, internationally better networked – was coming of age. The economies, which were liberal in name only and actually riddled with corruption, were no longer able to offer this generation credible prospects for the future. Monopolies and cronyism, supported by the rulers, had in many places replaced or supplemented the military as pillars of the regime; meanwhile, competition, innovation, market incentives, or a functioning social system were nowhere to be found. The population were largely denied both democratic participation and the protection of the rule of law, as well as the elementary components of basic public services. The core problem of the Arab world has, therefore, been correctly diagnosed as a failure of statehood, which manifests itself through the “blatant neglect and the abuse of the state’s obligation to care for its citizens”.¹

“From a pile of dust full of individuals, from a mix of tribes and sub-tribes, all bent under the yoke of resignation and fatalism, I created a people made up of citizens.”² Habib Bourguiba, champion of independence and Tunisia’s first president and outstanding moderniser left no doubt about who was responsible for his land becoming a nation. This paternalism is typical of the ruling philosophy that developed over the course of independence movements in Arab nations – a philosophy, which stuck. Then, the

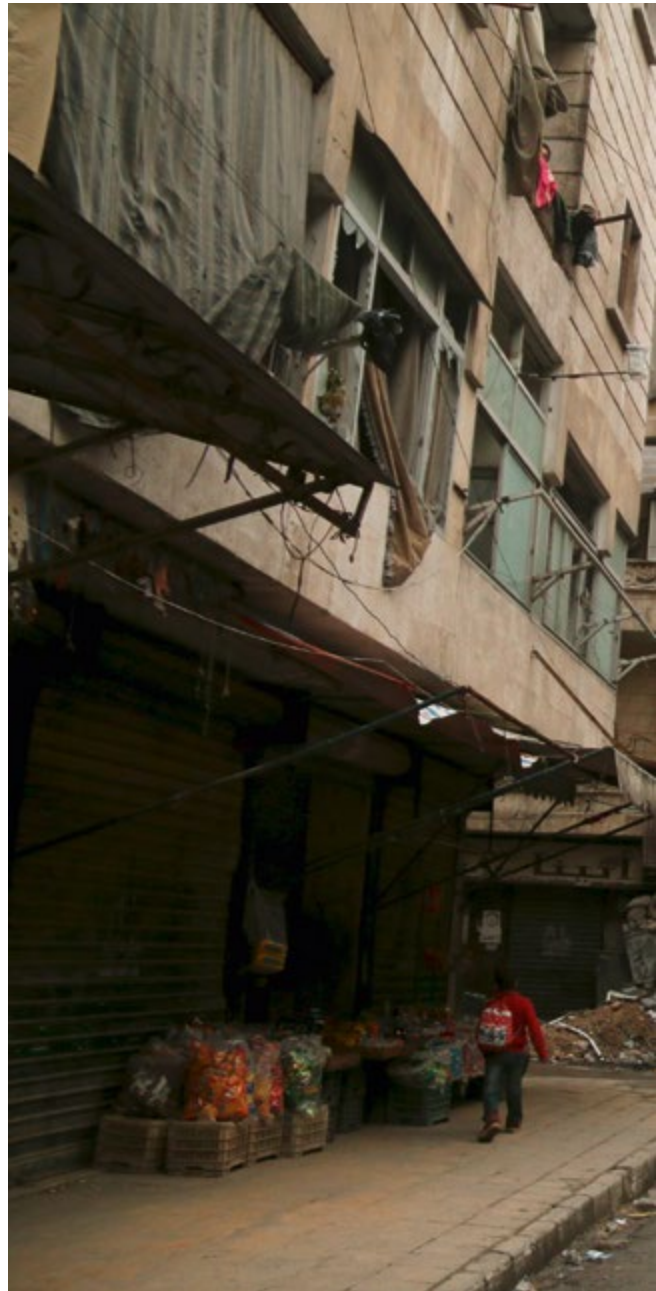
Arab autocrats had nothing more than brutal violence, social favours, and cosmetic reforms in their repertoire when the mass protests erupted in 2010/2011. Their paternalistic leadership style was expressed in their final attempts to sway public opinion. Mohammed Bouazizi, the man whose self-immolation had triggered the protests, was visited by Tunisia's Ben Ali in a staged paternal visit to his sickbed, when the protester was bandaged and in his dying throes. Meanwhile, in his last speech, Egypt's Mubarak addressed the demonstrators in Tahrir Square as "dear citizens, my sons".

to the concept of the "civic state" (*dawla madaniyyaa*), which was supported even by conservative religious forces during the "Arab Spring", which is why he attributes liberal goals to the entire movement.⁴ Others consider the demands for a system change, away from tyranny and dictatorship, towards greater powers of self-determination, already granting the protest movement a liberal character.⁵ This is countered by the social and ideological diversity of the demonstrators who took to the streets to oppose the status quo, and in support of general principles – as is reflected in the phrases and slogans mentioned

But on the streets, people had long been speaking another language – and demonstrating a new, real civic awareness. Besides the cries of "Leave!" hurled at their rulers, and the demands for work, bread, freedom, and dignity, demonstrators in many Arab countries began using the expressive protest slogan, "The people want the regime to fall!" The Israeli political scientist, Uriel Abulof, considered this change in semantics to be indicative of a "sea change in Arab public political thought". He noted that the construction "The people want" (*as-shab yourid*) for the first time founded a positive nationalism based on self-determination and popular sovereignty. It expressed a new form of political legitimacy and was to take the place of pan-Arab nationalism, understood as liberation from colonial foreign rule, territorial nationalism based on national stability and Islamism.³

Whether the 2010/2011 protest movements were really (at least intended) revolutions with an "anarchist method and liberal intention", as American-Egyptian sociologist Mohamed Bamyeh, who himself took part in the Tahrir Square protests in Cairo, characterises them, may, however, be controversial. Bamyeh refers

Dead end: The hope for a positive change that sprouted during the "Arab Spring" has vanished long ago in light of devastating conflicts such as the one in Syria. Source: © Ammar Abdullah, Reuters.



above – but who had no common idea of how the new state should be constitutionally or institutionally organised. It is also for this reason that the revolutionary youth movement, in Tunisia and above all in Egypt, failed to make a lasting contribution to the transformation process, since they did not organise themselves into parties or other types of structured organisations.⁶ Nevertheless, the revolutionary impetus, the self-empowerment of at least parts of the people, and the acceptance of great personal risk on the part of individuals, was a powerful liberal spark in the Arab world. What remains of it eight years later?

The Revolution Fails, Civic Engagement Remains – to the Possible Extent

The balance sheet of the “Arab Spring” is devastating. Three states, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, have threatened their very existence and become the scene of civil and proxy wars. Regimes like that of Damascus have ruthlessly crushed protests, and the opposition has splintered and militarised. One generation full of hope has now disappeared into exile, into torture chambers, or has been forced onto battlefields; the next is growing up amongst ruins and



hatred. In the lee of the protests, taking advantage of the weaknesses of the states, extremist ideologies and terror organisations, such as “Islamic State” (IS), have spread. There is a growing longing for security and stability – at any cost. Since 2013, Egypt has again been ruled by a General, one with an even harder hand than his predecessors.

Even in Tunisia, the only country to have embarked upon a significant democratic transition in the wake of the 2010/2011 unrest, surveys show that around half of the population have come to view the revolution as a failure. Goals such as the reduction of unemployment and the development of the hinterland have not been achieved; instead, purchasing power and standards of living have fallen. Even though 57 per cent of those polled view the freedom of speech now enjoyed in the country as a clear success, 80 per cent of respondents think that the overall situation in the country is worse than before 2011.⁷

But what the upheavals of the “Arab Spring” have shown is that existing conditions are not set in stone. Tunisian political scientist, Hatem M’rad, considers the “revolutions, revolts, and demonstrations” in the region to have led to the “birth of a truly independent civil society” which was able to shake established political, military, and religious authorities.⁸ This blossoming of civil society was most clearly shown in Tunisia, where it was given the most scope; immediately following the overthrow of the *ancien régime*, thousands of new clubs and societies were formed there. Local involvement – from recycling plastic bottles and renovating the neighbourhood school, to publicly denouncing grievances with the local administration – can be observed, as can the political lobbying of nationwide non-governmental organisations. These organisations played a key role in establishing civil liberties and women’s rights in the new constitution of 2014.

But elsewhere, too, citizens have taken their fate and that of the public, in the widest sense, much more firmly in their own hands. This civic

engagement expresses itself in each country very differently and is context-specific in its scope and quality. The spectrum ranges from complete self-government, as practised for a time by local councils in Syria’s “liberated areas”, to the recurring protests for regional development in the Berber region of Rif, to separate issue-oriented movements. An example is Beirut’s “You stink!” protests during the rubbish crisis of 2015. These protests even gave rise to a new party, supported by independent citizens (but which, also tellingly, failed to achieve sustained electoral success). In the same year, the citizens of In Salah, a provincial town in the Algerian Sahara, protested against test drilling for the production of shale gas because they feared negative environmental effects of fracking. As a result, the Energy Minister was dismissed, and the government announced that Algeria would refrain from extracting shale gas. Recently, in the summer of 2018, the Jordanians forced a change of government following increasingly politicised demonstrations triggered by the announcement of tax increases and subsidy reductions.⁹

These protest movements ultimately replicate a tendency that was visible over the course of the “Arab Spring”: They are spontaneous, issue-oriented, often without prominent leading figures, and less embedded in formal structures than a classical understanding of civil society would generally lead one to expect. It has therefore been correctly pointed out that international players and supporters of democracy should pay much more attention to these new social movements in the search for potential partners.¹⁰

The individual concessions that the “Arab street” was able to secure from its rulers, and the efforts of citizens to compensate for the shortcomings of state service structures, must not, however, obscure the fact that in most Arab countries (Tunisia again excepted), the leeway for civic engagement has declined significantly in recent years. Legal improvements, partially implemented during the course of the 2011 “Arab Spring”, are being counteracted by obstructive

administrative practices, for example with regard to the registration of non-governmental organisations. At the same time, in view of the growth in strength of “Islamic State”, anti-terror legislation has also been tightened. The provisions concerning what constitutes support of terrorism, most of them quite flexible, suggest an a priori intention to abuse such new laws in the interest of retaining power, and have increased the risks of publicly expressing unpopular opinions. The Arab world has not yet found a way to break the escalating spiral of authoritarian rule and Islamist radicalisation.

The Vicious Cycle of Authoritarianism and Islamism

“Me or chaos. Me or the Islamists.” Now that the hopes for rapid democratic development of the Arab world, which were also widespread in the West in 2011, have been dashed, and Europe sees itself more than ever threatened by migration and Islamist terror, this favourite narrative of Arab potentates is regaining prominence. “It is also important to understand that we must strike a balance between human rights and the security and unity of the country. We are a country of 93 million inhabitants, and when the country disintegrates, you will see that people will flee to anywhere they can,” Egypt’s President al-Sisi told the German public during his visit to Berlin in June 2016.¹¹ Syria’s ruler Assad, meanwhile, appears in Western media offering himself as a partner in the fight against terrorism (“You can’t fight terrorism without ground troops”¹²). He also asserts his role as guarantor of stability in the region. These declarations, however, can safely be dismissed as cynical propaganda manoeuvres. But as soon as the Syrian regime has secured victory, with Russian and Iranian help, the West and Germany in particular will face hard questions concerning the reconstruction of the Assad-controlled territory, and the handling of Syrian refugees.

“Arab autocrats appear self-confident today, but nobody should be fooled. They are really completely overwhelmed, hypernationalistic, repressive, paralysed, and facing growing crises,”¹³

summarises political scientist, Marc Lynch. The increasing violence of the Arab regimes toward their own peoples, and their oftentimes activist foreign policy, are signs of their weakness and nervousness. Lynch predicts a new insurgency, which will then be significantly more radical. Middle East expert and former French diplomat, Jean-Pierre Filiu, also believes that “despots” in this region cannot be part of the solution, because they are the core of the problem. Their “deep state” contributed to the emergence of an “Islamic State” through anti-democratic sabotage manoeuvres. Unable to control it, they would now leave it to the rest of the world to deal with.¹⁴

Extremist ideologies flourish in the Arab world, where regimes work sometimes with and sometimes against Islamist groups.

It is undisputed that the continued poor governance in the Arab world has created fertile terrain for the blossoming of extremist ideologies. The political, economic, and socio-cultural marginalisation of young people has made them susceptible to the promises of salvation and heroism that the “Islamic State”, and other jihadist groups, use so skilfully as propaganda.¹⁵ The violent spiral of repression and radicalisation has become apparent with particular severity in the Syrian civil war, but also in Egypt in recent years: The regime’s violent measures taken against an Islamist opposition – sometimes real, sometimes imagined – strengthen extremist elements and drive them to form armed underground groups. At the same time, Arab autocrats have, at times and selectively, cooperated with forces of political Islam, and this, too, has driven the authoritarianism-Islamism spiral. Their aim was to counterbalance the left-leaning secular opposition, and to win the support of conservative population groups. It is worth remembering that Sharia Law was constitutionally enshrined

as the main source of justice in Egypt as early as 1980, under the actually pro-Western President, Anwar el-Sadat.

After what were widely thought to be “moderate” Islamists won election victories in Tunisia and Egypt, and also gained ground in other countries, such as Morocco and Libya in 2011 and 2012, many in Washington and in European capitals hoped that moderate political Islam could ensure stable, democratic development in the Arab world; the time of military-backed and supposedly secular autocracies seemed to have run out. The responsibilities of government, they hoped, would finally domesticate the Islamists. And even though the coup d'état in Cairo on 3 July 2013 removed the Muslim Brotherhood from power, and the group is on the retreat elsewhere in the region, this idea remains. Journalist Rainer Hermann recently described the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as a “firewall against jihad” that was torn down when the Brotherhood were forcibly deposed. Unfortunately, he affirms this development taught young Islamists that democracy does not pay.¹⁶

On the other hand, the Islamists' brief stint in power in Tunis and Cairo revealed a relationship to liberal democracy and pluralistic society that is, to put it mildly, ambivalent. Egypt's President Morsi expressly did not involve progressive elements of society, instead imposing presidential decrees with which he attempted to cement the power of the Muslim Brotherhood. Tunisia's Ennahda Party, meanwhile, refrained from dismantling the country's progressive acquis, such as women's rights, only after fierce resistance on the part of civil society. The Ennahda Party subsequently presented itself in an increasingly conciliatory fashion, and since 2015 has governed in a “grand coalition” along with secular bourgeois forces in a spirit of compromise; however, observers debate the extent to which it has genuinely changed. For instance, Ivesa Lübben, observing the Ennahda's “party reform congress” in May 2016, reported a continued “holistic understanding of Islam” and a canon of Islamic values as the basis for the party programme, but identifies “in the party's

symbology and new use of language a farewell to political Islam in favour of muslim democracy.”¹⁷ According to Sigrid Faath, however, religious law remains an Ennahda priority, which makes its stance incompatible with that of a “modern civil state”. Referring to developments in the region as a whole, Faath rightly points out that even when Salafist-Jihadist organisations distance themselves from violence as a political tool and take the legal political route, such efforts do not necessarily mean a departure from their radical fundamentalist religious positions and social agenda.¹⁸

Can the current phase of upheaval ultimately give rise to the redevelopment and reestablishment of a tolerant, moderate “civil Islam”¹⁹ akin to the one Hermann describes as having characterised urban centres in the Arab world until the mid-20th century? As long as this question remains unanswered, the dilemma that has confronted liberals in the Arab world and their supporters in the West for thirty years will remain.

The Liberal Dilemma – Which Values Can Command a Majority?

The term “Algers syndrome”²⁰ is sometimes used to describe the phenomenon of democratic elections putting undemocratic Islamists into power. When Algeria tentatively opened politically at the end of the 1980s, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) won the first round of parliamentary elections in December 1991. The military organised a coup, and a bloody civil war followed. In the Palestinian Territories, the radical Islamist Hamas organisation, which was listed as a terror organisation by the EU and the US, won the majority of seats in the Palestinian National Authority's Legislative Council in 2006.

During the course of the “Arab Spring”, as new democratic prospects opened up, this dilemma returned to the agenda with increasing importance. How difficult this dilemma remains for liberals was shown in particularly vivid and tragic fashion in Egypt. Among the millions who, in the spring of 2013, took to the

streets in opposition to the first democratically elected, civilian president of the country, Muslim Brotherhood member Mohamed Morsi, were revolutionary youth movements that had also mobilised against Mubarak and actually advocated a more liberal society. Just like liberal intellectuals, they now denied the competence and legitimacy of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose style of government was increasingly authoritarian and exclusive. They said that the Brotherhood was trying to shape the state according to its ideas. The problem of the “tyranny of the majority” – already identified by Alexis de Tocqueville, and receiving increasing attention today under the buzzword “illiberal democracies” – is particularly striking in the Arab world.

“The Army defended the will of the people,” author and long-time opposition figure Alaa al-Aswani said, in justification of Morsi’s forcible deposition. “As a result, the revolution has the opportunity, for the first time, to achieve its democratic goals.”²¹ Al-Aswani has since been banned from public appearances, and nobody was willing to publish his most recent novel in Egypt. The prisons of the al-Sisi regime house not only tens of thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members, but also representatives of the liberal opposition. Human rights organisations estimate that there are a total of 60,000 political prisoners (the number under Mubarak was estimated at 5,000-10,000); they also raise serious allegations of torture.²² At the same time, Al-Azhar University – which is under the supervision of the Egyptian government, and revered throughout the Sunni-Arab area – defends a rigid interpretation of religion, for instance with regard to women’s rights.

After the troubled years of upheaval, and in view of the collapse of order in the Arab world, many consider a strongman who can ensure a minimum of stability to be the lesser evil. But, given the dedication and suffering endured in hopes of democracy over the last few years, it would be cynical to therefore claim that the people of the region do not want freedom. Surveys continue to indicate broad (although by no means

unanimous) support for democracy as the system of government desired for the respondents’ own countries.²³ But when it comes to spelling out how such a democracy ought to be implemented, there are major differences, which are also country-specific. For instance, while almost 80 per cent of respondents in Libya agree with the statement that Sharia, i.e. Islamic law, should be the only “source of inspiration” for legislation, only one in four respondents in neighbouring Tunisia agree.²⁴

Islam provides security for societies that are undergoing upheaval and is increasingly important in the individual lives of citizens.

The question of how the preference for values will develop in the Arab world remains open. The decline of the more secular pan-Arabism and Nasserism, and the growing disappointment resulting from the misdevelopments that followed independence, have led to the spread of conservative Islamic ideas since the 1970s. In the current state of upheaval, religion may give special support to insecure societies searching for an identity. In their struggles for power, both domestic and external players exploit confessionalism, and thereby foment it. Empirical studies show that religion is today playing an increasingly important role in the everyday practices of young people. Rachid Ouissa, a Middle East expert from Marburg, notes that there has been a decline in political religiosity and an increase in social religiosity; the degree of piety is rising fastest at the individual level, and no longer as a collective social utopia.²⁵

Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd already argued more than ten years ago that the declining birth rates and increasing levels of education in the Muslim-Arab world would inexorably drive modernisation.²⁶ In his most recent book, “The Islamic Enlightenment”, Christopher de

Bellaigue attempts to show that “ideas such as the value of the individual and the advantages of law, science, and a representative form of government ... today are all authentic elements of Islamic thought and Islamic society” – even though they have not yet been able to be translated into political practice.²⁷

Even if one considers such theses to be reductionist, it has been possible over the last few years – especially by means of and due to social media – to identify “progressive” lifestyle niches of a youth increasingly connected to the global information community. Women such as the Franco-Moroccan writer Leila Slimani, or the British-Egyptian science journalist Shereen El Feki, are pushing for a more open approach towards long-taboo topics, such as sexual oppression and sexual self-determination, and are aggressively denouncing the patriarchal structures in the Arab world.²⁸ Moroccan journalist Ahmed Benchemsi observes a “creeping but radical socio-cultural shift” in the region. Liberals could use this shift to push back the established conservative, religious forces. To do so, however, they would have to leave the cities, reach beyond the middle and upper classes, and develop more sustainable, grass-roots-based organisational structures.²⁹

In any case, this background seems to indicate that political Islam – proceeding from the Arab world and on the advance globally, and most particularly as seen in its more extreme and violent manifestations – is not at all a serious alternative to a liberal order; it is, instead, a crisis symptom of a conventional understanding of Islam, that is largely ossified and overtaxed by the challenges of the modern world.

The Middle East as a Battleground for Competing Systems

The internal upheavals and transformation processes in the Middle East and North Africa coincide with – and exacerbate – a power vacuum in the region, which thus increasingly moves into the focus of external powers, making the region a theatre for the global competition of systems.

From a geopolitical point of view, in the struggle for a liberal world order, the region is thus more of a playing field for foreign players, than a place of origin for independent ones. At the regional level, three traditional centres of power in the Arab world have swiftly lost their status as international players: Iraq and Syria, which have been torn apart in civil wars, and Egypt, which is primarily concerned with its own affairs after all the back and forth of revolution and restoration. There remains only Saudi Arabia which, led by the young, aspiring Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, views itself as the protector of all Sunnis and indeed of all Arab Muslims. The Saudis are entangled in a hegemonic conflict with Iran, which has in recent years been able to expand its position by supporting Shiite militias in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. But neither Saudi Arabia nor Iran – nor Turkey – play in the world league of power politics. Even the Iranian nuclear programme is aimed more towards regional hegemony than global power projection. No country in the Middle East and North Africa is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, none a member of the G8, and only Saudi Arabia and Turkey are members of the G20.

Russia and China are increasingly presenting themselves as alternative political and economic partners in the region.

At the same time, the United States, which is becoming increasingly independent of Middle East resources, is gradually withdrawing from the region and becoming less and less willing to invest funds and military power there. This constant survived the transition from Obama to Trump, and will continue. More than 80 per cent of oil exports from the Gulf go to Asia, primarily to China, Japan, and South Korea. Why then, so runs the domestic logic in the US, should the American taxpayer continue to guarantee raw





Visible protest: Young people seek and find ways to make their voices heard in the Arab world as well.
Source: © Muhammad Hamed, Reuters.

materials security for America's rival, China? It remains unclear who will fill the vacuum that the US will leave behind.

With its regime-supporting intervention in Syria, which has been openly military since September 2015, Russia skilfully outmanoeuvred the hesitant West and established itself as an indispensable player. It is pursuing manifold interests in the Middle East. First of all, there is the centuries-old geopolitical desire for access to the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has had no ally in the region except Assad's Syria. Russia is now presenting itself not only as Assad's defender, but also an alternative partner for many other regimes in the region, from the United Arab Emirates to Saudi Arabia, through Egypt, which was a Soviet ally under the still well-respected President Nasser, all the way to Turkey. There are also domestic policy motives: After the portent of Ukraine,

President Putin is determined to prevent any "colour revolution" in his sphere of influence and in any country allied with Moscow, making an alliance with Moscow a sort of guarantee of continued power for autocrats. Nevertheless, Russia's influence is limited. Beyond Syria, it has scarcely any military presence. Theatres of conflict associated with Syria, such as Iraq, remain largely untouched. Deliveries of modern weapons systems, most prominently to Iran and Turkey, have so far been mainly announcements. It is possible that further geographical expansion of military activities might lead to an overstretch of Russian power projection.

In addition to Russia, China, traditionally an advocate of the principle of non-intervention, is increasingly developing into a system-stabilising player in the region. Although China's relevance there is still much lower there than it is for the development of Africa and Asia, Beijing's

growing global political ambitions have also brought the Middle East and North Africa into the country's focus. At the beginning of 2016, China's leadership published its first strategy document on the Arab world. The Mediterranean region plays a key role in the New Silk Road project (One Belt, One Road Initiative, or BRI) launched in 2013.³⁰ An example here is Algeria, where in 2013, China replaced former colonial power France as the country's most important importer (although the EU as a whole remains by far its most important trading partner). Egypt has also been trying to diversify its international relationships more strongly since al-Sisi took power, and is looking to the East. The Egyptian and Chinese presidents have met three times so far, and China is a key partner in Egyptian megaprojects, such as the construction of a new administrative capital.

Europe's southern neighbourhood is thus confronted with a changed and dynamic constellation of players. The European Union member states continue to struggle with the challenge of better coordinating their national policy approaches – and those of Brussels. So far, they have been unable to establish a sustained European community of interests, or even of action. This will make leveraging individual regimes difficult as long as European countries remain primarily competitors in the struggle for economic contracts. Moreover, the Syrian civil war has shown, as Roderich Kiesewetter and Stefan Scheller point out, how the “inability of the European states to pull together on issues of diplomacy and development and security policy” contributed to the EU's failure to achieve a political solution to the conflict.³¹ Nevertheless, Europe still has enormous potential in the region with which it is linked in so many ways. Despite all its internal crises, Europe remains a source of inspiration and, for many young people in the Arab world, a real place of longing.

Outlook

“Struggles for freedom deserve respect not only when they are successful, but whenever they are waged,” said then-Bundestag President Norbert

Lammert in 2012, commemorating the revolutionary events of March 1848 also referring to the current protest movements in the Arab world.³² Although, after eight painful years of upheaval, the “Arab Spring” must be considered a failure, long-term effects like those of the “Spring of Nations” of 1848/1849 may perhaps be hoped for. Authoritarianism and Islamism have, in any case, sufficiently exposed their inability to govern in the Arab world and are destined to fail as long-term models of order.

Restoration that grants only apparent stability may, as European history also teaches us, end in even more violent outbreaks. The rulers of the Arab world – whether oriented towards political Islam or secular authoritarianism – would therefore be well-advised to focus on incremental reforms of the state, economy, and society, rather than on their old methods. Germany, Europe, and the West as a whole must repeatedly demand this of them. To this end, the various foreign policy fields and instruments, such as development cooperation and foreign trade policy, must become even more closely linked. Only then can a sufficient leverage effect of German and European foreign policy be achieved.

The fact that Germany is directly affected by the refugee crisis should spur it to active support of liberal democratic development in Arab countries.

In any case, the aim of German and European Middle East policy must be the promotion of development geared towards more elements of a liberal order, even if this process is slow and gradual. The goal is not to export a specific European governmental or societal model. Nevertheless, Europe can and should see itself – self-confidently and transparently – as a normative actor. It is important to pursue a broad approach that does not start with democratic

elections, but long before: an independent, vibrant civil society; a diverse media landscape; political parties and educational institutions; an economy based on the market and competition and thus creating incentives for innovation and entrepreneurship; social security systems that liberate people from dependence on patronage; and an independent judiciary that sees itself as such – these are all institutions that must be promoted. The foundations for all this can be laid even under difficult conditions, whether in cooperation or competition with existing ruling systems. To this end, incentives must be offered, for instance in the form of increased economic cooperation. In return, however, Western powers must not shy away from negative reinforcement of conditions.

What happens to Europe’s southern neighbourhood directly affects both Germany and Europe. The refugee crisis of 2015 drove this long-neglected fact deep into the everyday reality of German society and into the German political landscape. Putting up walls will not protect us in the long run. Germany, together with its European partners, must accompany and support the protracted transformation of the Arab world, maintaining a sense of proportion, but remaining courageous and committed.

–translated from German–

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