

Exploring the Causes of Revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt

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Abstract

The theory put forth by fourth generation of revolutionary theorists is followed in this article to understand the causes of revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011. The study looks into the internal factors and external factors that led to the revolutions. It finds out that the cause was not one but a complex mix of various factors that had been simmering for too long under the rule of authoritarian regimes; they were neither purely economic nor political or social in character. The study tested the fourth generation of revolutionary theory. The findings show that the conceptual framework of the theory is applicable and fully explains the causes of revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt.

Keywords: Tunisia, Egypt, Revolution, Authoritarian regimes

Tunus ve Mısır'daki Devrimlerin Nedenlerini Keşfetmek

Özet

Bu makalede devrimci teorisyenlerin dördüncü kuşağı tarafından geliştirilen teori, 2011 yılında Tunus ve Mısır'da devrimlerin nedenlerini anlamak için kullanılmıştır. Çalışma devrimlere yol açan iç faktörler ve dış etkenlere bakar. Çalışma sebebin bir değil fakat birden fazla karmaşık faktörün bir araya gelmesinden oluştuğu sonucuna varır. Bu faktörler çok uzun süre otoriter rejimlerin egemenliği altında oluşmuştur ve bunlar ne salt siyasi ne salt sosyal içerikli faktörlerdir. Çalışma, devrimci teorinin dördüncü neslini test etmektedir. Bulgular, teorinin kavramsal çerçevesinin uygulanabilir ve Tunus ve

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Mısır'daki devrimlerin nedenlerinin tamamıyla açıklayabilir nitelikte olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tunus, Mısır, Devrim, Otoriter Rejimler.

استكشاف أسباب اندلاع ثورتى تونس ومصر

ملخص

تتبنى هذه المقالة النظرية المطروحة بواسطة الجيل الرابع من مُنظري الثورات لفهم أسباب اندلاع الثورة في كل من تونس، ومصر في العام ٢٠١١. حيث تقوم الدراسة بالنظر الي العوامل الداخلية والخارجية التي أدت إلى قيام هاتين الثورتين. و التي اتضح من خلالها أن ما حدث لم يكن ناجماً عن سبب واحد، بل مزيج معقد من العوامل المختلفة والتي أخذت تنضج ببطيء على مدار أمدٍ طويلٍ جداً تحت حكم الأنظمة الإستبدادية. حيث لم تكن أسبابا اقتصادية أو سياسية أو اجتماعية فقط. قامت الدراسة باختبار فرضيات الجيل الرابع للنظرية الثورية. حيث توضح نتائج الدراسة إلى أن الإطار المفاهيمي لهذه النظرية ملائماً ويفسر بصورة جيدة أسباب قيام الثورة في كل من تونس ومصر.

كلمات مفتاحية: تونس، مصر ، ثورة ، نظرية، أسباب، استبدادى، أنظمة حكم، شعب.

Introduction

The twenty-three year long rule of Tunisia's authoritarian leader President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali came to an end when on January 14, 2011, he fled the country. The success-story of Tunisia sparked region-wide uprisings. The next country that saw successful ouster of dictator was Egypt where President Hosni Mubarak had ruled for thirty years. Their long rule has been mired with hardships for the people. The cause was not one but a complex mix of various factors that had been simmering for too long. They were neither purely economic nor political or social in character. The study is different from the literature produced so far on the subject as it takes into account a theoretical framework in explaining the causes. The study explores the causes of revolutions in light of the fourth generation of revolutionary theory. The aim of the study is to assess the relevance of fourth generation of revolutionary theory in explaining the causes of revolution; whether it holds true in explaining the new revolutions. The study analyses internal and international contexts for bringing a revolution.

Conceptual Framework

Jack A. Goldstone stands out among the fourth generation of revolutionary theorists. Other theorists include John Walton, John Foran, Farideh Farhi, Michael Taylor, and James Scott. Having propounded the classification of revolutionary theorists into four generations, Goldstone specifies why the fourth generation was advanced from earlier theories. The revolutions witnessed after the 1980's beginning with Iranian revolution could not be explained with the previous theoretical frameworks. Nevertheless, he believes in incorporating the strengths of previous three generations. It is pertinent that Goldstone's theoretical propositions are outlined here. The details will be discussed under the relevant headings so as to avoid repetition.

The fourth generation of revolutionary theorists explicates that international environment is significant in spreading the ideologies. Ideas transcend boundaries. The world has seen many waves of revolutions where international influences did not only trigger the revolution but also its eventual outcome.¹ International intervention also influences revolutions. There have been many instances

1 J. Goldstone, "Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory", *Annual Review of Political Science* Vol. 4, June 2001, p.145.

where outside powers have intervened militarily and diplomatically to shape the revolutions. Sometimes the revolutions have been invoked by lack or withdrawal of support for the regime and absence of outside intervention.²

Goldstone believes that international environment will be relevant to revolution only if the internal conditions are favourable. There are many things that need to be focused while exploring the internal conditions of the state that are favourable for a revolution. These are: performance of states vis-à-vis goals set by themselves and according to expectations of the elites and popular groups and the availability of resources to fulfill these goals; the level of unity among elites; opposition elites joining the popular groups for protests.

International Context

The international context is important for a revolution to succeed. The international powers can refuse to support the government. Another way international powers can influence is by restricting the government to use force against the revolutionary forces.³ The support international powers provide to the authoritarian regimes is critical for the survival of the regimes.

For long the West had been keen of democratizing the Arab world. The West hoped that with globalization and increase in communication and cultural exchanges, democracy would come to the region. After the third wave of democratization particularly after the revolutions in East Europe, the hope for spreading of democracy in the region was renewed. In 2003 the global democratic movement particularly in Greater Middle East saw a new impetus. President George W. Bush launched his freedom agenda for the Middle East region insisting on regime change, people's rights and freedoms. The invasion of Iraq was based on pretext of democratizing the region. Hence, many believe that these revolutions could not have come without the support of West. Mass protests and uprisings were the chosen tools for removing the despots by the West.

Considering that the West, particularly the United States, was aligned with the most entrenched despots in the Arab world; should the rhetoric of democratization of the Arab region be taken seri-

2 Ibid.

3 J. Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions of 2011", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 3, May/June 2011, p. 8.

ously? For decades, the US has backed these repressive regimes. They favoured status quo over freedom lest instability arises in the region. Egyptian support for the US was critical for so many reasons – Arab-Israeli peace and Iran’s nuclear program etc. These tyrannical rulers were also needed for keeping the Islamist forces at bay. Mubarak was considered indispensable despite the fact that Egyptian people despised him.⁴ The West could never have wished to overthrow them. The Tunisian regime made a good impression to the West of its economic miracle, democratic gradualism and secularism. Ironically, this earned high praise from the US and EU. This impression helped the Tunisian regime in earning international legitimacy and strengthened Ben Ali’s authoritarian rule.⁵

Was the international context permissive of uprisings? The answer to this question is still being debated. Tariq Ramadan’s account is one such narrative, a very obscure one. Ramadan however insists that to outrightly reject western support to these uprisings would be wrong.⁶ The international support can be divided into two sections: one at the regime level from one government to another; and the other at the societal level, between the people or civil society members.

At the societal level, the active support of West has come in the form of logistical support for resistance groups, their training and exerting indirect pressure on the regimes. The social media savvy activists received training from American NGOs. The training was largely imparted between 2006 and 2008 and focused on inculcating democratic values, non-violent methods of confrontation with the regimes through symbols and slogans, influencing mass psychology and use of social media. Some of the most famous American corporations such as Google, Twitter and Yahoo were providing trainings and disseminating information so as to actively help the activists. Center for Applied Non-violent Action and Strategies (CANVAS), a training centre established in Serbia, has trained many people from the Middle East and North Africa region.⁷

4 A. Boukhars, “The Arab Revolutions for Dignity”, *American Foreign Policy Interests: The Journal of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy*, Vol. 33, No. 2, March 2011, pp. 62-64.

5 F. Cavatorta and R. H. Haugbolle, “The End of Authoritarian Rule and the Mythology of Tunisia under Ben Ali”, *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2012, p. 182.

6 T. Ramadan, *The Arab Awakening Islam and the New Middle East*, (London: Penguin Books, 2012), p. 5.

7 Ibid., pp. 6-9.

On the other hand, the revolutionaries insist that revolutions were shaped by local factors. Hadi ben Abbas, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia asserts that “the revolution is indigenous and spontaneous”. There was no foreign hand; and no strings were pulled by foreign powers.⁸

The revolutions originated in Tunisia. The Egyptian revolution took inspiration from Tunisian success. Tunisian revolution proved to be ‘Arab Gdansk’.⁹ The breakdown of the notion of invincibility of the regime was broken down and helped the Egyptians to overcome their fears. From Egypt, the domino effect hit the entire Arab region and even beyond to Spain and the US – Indignados and Occupy Wall Street protest movements respectively. The citizens in the Arab World quickly imitated and took to the streets showing open hostility to the authoritarian regimes and demanding change. The reason Egypt became such an inspiration was due to its geostrategic importance in the region, the most populated Arab country and a major Arab nation. The events in Egypt also got a much better coverage than the Tunisian revolution due to lack of journalists and correspondents and reliance on citizen journalism in the latter.

The Western decision to continue or withdraw their support to the authoritarian regimes came at the last minute and with much reluctance. The international powers did not stand by the regimes of Mubarak and Ben Ali. As both autocrats found themselves standing alone, deserted by their international friends. Tunisia was an important testing ground for the international powers to weigh support of Ben Ali against other options.¹⁰

The decision to withdraw support of the autocrats was not that easy and came out after a lot of debate and divisions amongst the policy makers in the West. In the US two schools of thoughts existed with regard to this. One considered Mubarak as an indispensable ally in the region and a bulwark against the Islamist threat. Israel openly declared Mubarak as its best friend and wanted continuation of policies vis-à-vis Mubarak. The other group was in favour of Mubarak stepping down. It believed that the US would benefit from

8 Talk on “Tunisia and the Arab Spring” by Hadi ben Abbas, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia, at Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, September 20, 2012.

9 Gdansk was where the Polish Solidarity Movement began and from where the chain of falling of communist regimes in Eastern Europe began.

10 E. Stein, “Revolution or Coup? Egypt’s Fraught Transition”, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 54, No. 4, August 2012, p. 49.

a friendly regime in Egypt that is supported by the people.¹¹ But the final decision came in favour of the people as President Barack Obama stated that the US wanted to stand at the right side of the history. The withdrawal of the US support for Mubarak was critical in downfall of the regime. Had the US and Western countries continued to support the regimes and intervened, the revolutions would have turned messy and may not have succeeded. The withdrawal of the US support for Mubarak was significant in the downfall of the regime.

Internal Conditions

The ripeness of internal condition, as noted above, depends upon a number of factors: performance of state; level of unity among elites; and opposition elites joining the popular groups for protests. The internal conditions of the state are much more critical than the external environment. They are analyzed in detail below:

Performance of State

According to Goldstone, states may run into trouble if they are unable to meet the desired goals either because the goals are too ambitious or because of decline in state resources. The reduction in state resources can be attributed to many reasons: reduced revenue generation; failure to adjust revenue to inflation and growing population; excess borrowing by state; corruption draining funds for constructive purposes; change in prices of key commodities affecting economic growth and state revenues.¹²

Writing recently, Goldstone adds stability of state is linked to two aspects – effectiveness and legitimacy.¹³ Effectiveness entails that state is carrying out state function i.e., providing security, promoting economic growth, delivering social services etc. Legitimacy on the other hand refers to whether Despite being ineffective, states may gain elite support if they are considered “just”, according to prevalent social norms, by the elites and population. If the states are ineffective but they may gain elite support if they are considered just. The states that are unjust will not be challenged as long

11 Ibid., p. 50.

12 Goldstone, “Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory”, pp. 147-148.

13 J. Goldstone, “Pathways to State Failure”, *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 25, No. 4, September 2008, p. 285.

as they are perceived effective in carrying out its goals. States that either possess effectiveness or legitimacy are unstable and will fail after circumstances become favourable. States that have lost both effectiveness and legitimacy will be failed. The states may survive as long as it is perceived too strong.¹⁴

Legitimacy

The legitimacy crisis in Tunisia and Egypt was generated by a number of factors – authoritarian regimes, repression, state predation and growing alienation of the people. The legitimacy of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt was very low.¹⁵ Both regimes suffered from a pervasive legitimacy crisis: the decades-long authoritarian rule; politics solely dominated by ruling parties; abusive powers of the security forces; corruption and inequalities.

“A government can said to be legitimate not only when it derives its authority and powers from the people, but when it is also accountable to them in all aspects, including the effective protection of lives and properties, respect for the rule of law, as well as the human security needs of the people.”¹⁶ Any government who does not meet these requirements does not have a broad support base.

a. Authoritarianism

The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions were the result of political legitimacy crisis. The one-man shows run by the autocracies and the possible father-to-son transfer of power only added to the resentment of these regimes by the people.

In Tunisia, when Ben Ali took power he made false promises of taking political reforms, ensuring law and order, and enhancing public liberties. He also made a bargain with the people that he would gradually make liberal reforms if the people did not try to destabilize the regime. A change in leadership gave hope to people. As he succeeded in securing his rule, he adopted dictatorial policies and stringent crackdowns on opposition.¹⁷

14 Goldstone, “Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory”, p. 148.

15 J. S. Omotola, “Legitimacy Crisis and ‘Popular Uprisings’ in North Africa”, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 36, No. 5, September 2012, p. 714.

16 Ibid.

17 Cavatorta and Haugbolle, “The End of Authoritarian Rule and the Mythology of Ben Ali”,

Since coming into power in 1987, Ben Ali had won five presidential elections, and the last one in 2009 with almost ninety percent of the vote. He also eliminated the clause that forbid rule for three terms through a referendum. The ruling party -- the Democratic Constitutional Assembly (RCD) -- and his deputies were strictly under Presidential control. The activities of opposition parties were also under strict surveillance, their expression curtailed and their independence from the regime highly skeptical. They just played the role of 'loyal opposition'.¹⁸

In Egypt, the two pillars of authoritarian resilience were National Democratic Party (NDP) and the People's Assembly. The NDP was to ensure harmony among the supporters of the regime. NDP was made up of political and economic elites, as well as neoliberal businessmen and academics. These elites ran for elections as they knew that entry to People's Assembly meant access to state resources. There were seven elections held in the Mubarak's era that brought the ruling party repeatedly to the parliament.¹⁹ The elections that were held in 2010 in Egypt saw a voter turnout of twenty-five percent. This low turnout was indicative of Egyptians' lack of faith in the political process. The elections were highly rigged and played a part in augmenting opposition to the regime.²⁰

Civil society organizations were state-managed in Egypt. Some of the prominent civil society leaders were co-opted to have a client relationship with them. The strategy of the regime was to promote as many civil society organizations as possible so that there are thousands of them fighting each other for funds rather than a few strong organizations that could threaten the regime. The regime prohibited foreign funding for these organizations. The state monitored their activities and legal status.²¹

In Tunisia, the civil society organizations were prohibited to indulge into political activities. The civil society organizations came under

pp. 187-188.

18 Ibid.

19 T. Masoud, "The Road to (and from) Liberation Square", *Journal Of Democracy*, Vol. 22, No. 3, July 2011, p. 22.

20 Ibid., p. 24.

21 B. Zguric, "Challenges for democracy in countries affected by the 'Arab Spring'", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol 23, No. 4, September 2012, p. 429.

the Ministry of Interior; had to get registered with it and seek its approval for public assemblies. Intimidation and harassment of families of human rights activists was commonplace.

Both authoritarian leaders considered themselves above law; above any political system, party organizations, military establishments or any other institution. “These regimes were exhilarated, even intoxicated by their own ‘cult of personality’”.²² The legitimacy of the authoritarian rulers was widely questioned. There was a strong desire for ‘just’ rule; the people yearned for political and civil rights and wanted accountability of the regime. The rubber-stamp legislatures carrying out executive orders frustrated the people.

b. Repression

The rule of these authoritarian regimes was made possible through a large security and intelligence structure. Ben Ali depended on his RCD party; a Ministry of Communication that suppressed any voices of dissent; and security services that bypassed the army and kept the opposition forces at bay. Ben Ali put in place a large and strong security structure.²³ Tunisia’s police was as large as of France. Even amongst the authoritarian regimes of the MENA region, the Ben Ali regime was exceptionally repressive. Any kind of opposition by the civil society, foreign or Arab press and even internet was banned. Tunisia was considered as one of the most dangerous places for journalists and also “most hostile Arab regime to internet freedom”.²⁴

The regimes in Tunisia and in Egypt successfully instilled fear amongst the public. The regime was considered vital for holding the society and nation together; and in absence of regime the society would fall to sectarianism and communal strife. Secondly, the regimes made sure that each citizen was under surveillance and any word uttered against the regime could reach them. Thus, citizens avoided talking about regime to each other and remained aloof. Lastly, the regimes portrayed themselves as indispensable against the Zionist and Western threat. Allegedly, the Arab identity and honour was at stake that needed a strong repressive government for

22 F. Khusrokhavar, *The New Arab Revolutions that shook the World* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2012), p. 36.

23 Tunisia’s security structure: Military force personnel 35,000; Security forces 130,000; Presidential guard 8,000; the National Guard, 20,000. The security structure also comprised of political police, tourism police, and university police. P. J. Schraeder and H. Redissi, “Ben Ali’s Fall”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 22, No. 3, July 2011, p. 6.

24 Khusrokhavar, *The New Arab Revolutions that shook the World*, p. 33.

its defense. These fears deeply entrenched in citizens provided the much needed mechanism of repression to the regimes.

Borna Zguric explains how this coercive mechanism operated. Through promoting patrimonial structure i.e., employing relatives and loyalists on significant posts the coercive mechanism worked smoothly. The regimes had imposed emergency that helped legalize use of force and coercive apparatus. In Egypt, the state of emergency lasted from 1967 to 2011.²⁵

As part of economic modernization, the regimes promoted internet and telecommunications. Yet, the regimes were well-aware of its implications and kept a close track of developments there. They closed down internet for any length of time whenever they wanted and arrested bloggers. The lack of political freedom – right to express, protest, and fair parliamentary elections – alienated the people.

c. State Predation

The economic miseries of the people were accentuated by endemic corruption of the regime. In Tunisia, the corruption of the regime grew incessantly. The ruling family, including the extended family of hundred and forty people, was involved in corruption. As revealed by wikileaks, half of the businessmen were related to Ben Ali and his family. This network was referred as ‘the family’ in Tunisia.²⁶ Tunisians were particularly weary of Ben Ali’s second wife, her family and her lavish spendings. She and her siblings controlled a major chunk of business in Tunisia and owned as many as 180 companies.²⁷

The predatory behavior of Ben Ali and his clan, exploiting political contacts and security structure badly destroyed the economy and traditional business class. The mismanagement of the privatization scheme, giving import licenses on selective basis and general predation by Ben Ali clan in numerous sectors of the economy created resentment against the regime.

Corruption in Egypt was so brazen that it had become deeply en-

25 Zguric, “Challenges for democracy in countries affected by the ‘Arab Spring’”, p. 422.

26 L. Anderson, “Demystifying the Arab Spring”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 90, No. 3, May/June 2011 <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67693/lisa-anderson/demystifying-the-arab-spring> (accessed April 7, 2013)

27 Schraeder and Redissi, “Ben Ali’s Fall”, p. 9.

trenched in the structure creating a wide imbalance in the society and also undermining the economy. Corruption had become institutionalized; contracts for tourism and construction were allotted on favouritism to large asset holders. As much as 95 percent of the population was unable to be part of the growing economy.²⁸ The discontentment among the people was aggravated by sight of a certain group having access to a better life. The wealth of certain elites only added to the frustration of masses.

d. Dignity

Abuse and violence suffered at the hands of security forces made the people feel powerless. This feeling of alienation and powerlessness resulted in calls for 'dignity' and 'pride'.²⁹ "Political repression and social and economic inequality was not enough to trigger a revolution. Tunisians wanted more", it was dignity. For this reason, the Tunisians prefer to call their revolution as 'Dignity Revolution'.³⁰

The dictators in Tunisia and Egypt openly showed contempt for public and did not care how public felt for their arbitrary rule. They failed to recognize that the new generation was not ready to continue with subservience. They yearned to live a dignified life, a life free of fears. Educated and connected to the world through communication networks – this youth was well-aware of their rights and was not as quiescent as their parents to the autocrats' rule. "Dignity and freedom ... are the values that ordinary citizens hold dear".³¹

The dignity was also craved for at the international level. The alliance between the West and the regimes in the Arab world was widely questioned by the Arab masses in the aftermath of 9/11 and Iraq War. The outcome of war in Iraq and the lingering Israel-Palestine issue and policies of the US and West generated anti-Western feelings and opposition to the alliance. The people demanded foreign policy depicting of national aspirations particularly independence from the West.³²

28 B. MacQueen, "The Political Economy of Transition in Egypt", *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, Vol. 4, No. 1, July 2012, p. 18.

29 T. Behr and M. Aaltola, "The Arab Uprising Causes, Prospects and Implication", *FIIA Briefing Paper* 76, March 2011, www.fiaa.fi/assets/publications/bp76.pdf (accessed April 11, 2013)

30 Talk on "Tunisia and the Arab Spring" by Hadi ben Abbas.

31 M. Pace and F. Cavatorta, "The Arab Uprisings in Theoretical Perspective – An Introduction", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 2, July 2012, p. 132.

32 R. Aliboni, "The International Dimension of the Arab Spring", *The International Spectator*:

The Egyptian protestors complained about loss of pride at the international level. The Egyptians had taken pride as a leader of Arab world under Jamal Abdul Nasser. Under Mubarak Egypt toed American line and had no independent foreign policy of its own. Economic and security ties with Israel were also increasingly questioned by the Egyptians who considered these shameful. Hence “reclaiming Egypt’s lost dignity in the international arena” was also a motive for Egyptians.³³

Effectiveness

Goldstone believes states may run into trouble if they are unable to meet the desired goals either because the goals are too ambitious or because of decline in state resources. The reduction in state resources can be attributed to many reasons: fall in revenues; failure to adjust revenue with inflation and growing population; excess borrowing by state; corruption draining funds for constructive purposes; change in prices of key commodities affecting economic growth and state revenues.³⁴ Tunisia and Egypt had grave socioeconomic problems that contributed towards revolution.

The socialist wave of the 1960’s in the Arab world resulted in comprehensive economic and political reforms. These reforms made the state a sole provider of welfare services and economic opportunities in return for people giving up their political rights. However a number of factors, predominantly decreasing oil prices, corruption and growing population, curtailed state’s ability to provide welfare services. This shook foundations of the ‘democratic bargain’.³⁵

The economic growth of these two countries was satisfactory. Egypt and Tunisia were particularly appreciated by the international institutions such as IMF and World Bank for their neo-liberal policies and achievements.³⁶ The economic performance of Tunisia under Ben Ali’s entire rule was not that poor. During the late 1990’s there was sufficient macro-economic growth at 5.6 percent. The growth rate dropped to 3.7 percent in 2010. The neo-liberal economic poli-

Italian Journal of International Affairs, Vol 46, No. 4, January 2012, pp. 6-8.

33 Behr and Aaltola, “The Arab Uprising Causes, Prospects and Implications”.

34 Goldstone, “Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory”, pp. 147- 148.

35 H. Khashan, “The Eclipse of Arab Authoritarianism and the Challenge of Popular Sovereignty”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 5, June 2012, pp. 920-921.

36 M. Altunisik, “Understanding Arab Uprisings-1”, *ORSAM Foreign Policy Analysis* <http://www.orsam.org.tr/en/showArticle.aspx?ID=1955> (accessed April 20, 2013)

cies invited Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the country. Improvements in infrastructure made Tunisia a tourist destination. The revenue earned was significantly diverted towards literacy drive; literacy rate increased manifold to 78 percent in 2008, also for women.³⁷ These figures are contested by some.

Extensive economic reforms were undertaken by the Mubarak regime during 2004 and 2008. FDI was welcomed in tourism sector and medium-scale industries. The reforms failed to bring meaningful results due to lack of transparency in the reform process. Due to insufficient job creation and rising inflation, the neoliberal economic reforms did not ease out people's difficulties. The global economic crisis resulted in sharp decline in demand for manufactured and agricultural goods from Egypt. The decline in revenues and increasing pressure from international financial institutions led to cut down in food subsidies. The food inflation triggered a sharp rise in general inflation.

The impact of reforms was miscalculated by the regimes; such as impact on the society – income disparity, weakening or strengthening of certain social groups, and participation or alienation from political process. The people had more expectations from the regimes. They expected a higher standard of living and political freedom.

The economic miracle would have been true for global investors or trade partners but for Tunisians it made no difference. Extreme regional disparity existed with central-west Tunisia having a poverty level of 30 percent. The development projects were never launched and social services were almost non-existent in certain areas such as Gafsa and Sidi Bouzidi where protests began. This was while the coastal regions and the northeast areas where tourism and industries was concentrated were affluent. In Tunisia, the poorer and under-developed parts of south and the center were the first to mobilize and as the movement advanced, it was joined by the developed parts.

A large youth population with high level of education facing just as high level of unemployment was a major factor for rebellion by the youth in Tunisia.³⁸ Unemployment level for youth was 30percent in

37 Cavatorta and Haugbolle, "The End of Authoritarian Rule and the Mythology of Ben Ali", p. 184.

38 M. Syed, "Prospects of Arab Spring in Pakistan", *IPRI Journal*, Vol. XII, No. 2, Summer

2009 and for university graduates it was 45 percent.³⁹ The university graduates were not accommodated by the economy as tourism required low-skill manpower. This naturally frustrated the youth with high expectations. General unemployment level was at 14 percent. Between 2008 and 2010, economic conditions became stringent for people in Tunisia. Remittances from Tunisians dropped considerably due to austerity measures in Europe. Food inflation was high, as much as 36 per cent of the house budget was spent on basic food.⁴⁰

In Egypt too, socioeconomic miseries of the people were mounting. Inflation was high, wages were sluggish, more than 40 percent Egyptians lived below \$2 per day. Cost of living was also high. Economic liberalization reforms resulted in labour strikes particularly in 2010. Continued reduction of subsidies on essential goods led to protests by the middle class. The currency had been devaluing for a long time. As a result prices of imported goods increased such as basic food items. The UN Food Agency announced in February 2011 that world food prices have hit an all time high record. Due to the high world food prices the food prices in the Arab world also rose. The MENA region imports 20-25 per cent of its total food consumption. Egyptians consumed as much as 40 percent of their income on food.⁴¹ The income disparity also increased over the years. Egypt became the 90th country in the world for income disparity.⁴²

These economic difficulties – such as high unemployment levels, poor governance, and poor socioeconomic development – compelled the people to stand up against the regimes. However, Dr. Omneia Helmy, at Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, believes, “this is not only a bread riot. This is about justice, democracy, equality, political freedom.”⁴³

The Arab revolutions were driven by a desire for economic, so-

2012, p. 155.

39 Cavatorta and Haugbolle, “The End of Authoritarian Rule and the Mythology of Ben Ali”, p. 185.

40 Schraeder and Redissi, “Ben Ali’s Fall”, pp. 7- 8.

41 “Bread and Protests: the return of high food prices”, *IJSS Strategic Comments*, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 1.

42 MacQueen, “The Political Economy of Transition in Egypt”, p. 18.

43 “Bread and Protests: the return of high food prices”, p. 1.

cial, and legal justice. As the regimes enriched themselves and the elites, the masses became more miserable. The contrast of the masses to the elite became stark over time as economic opportunities decreased for the former. The high level of income disparity and lack of opportunities made a lot of difference to the Tunisian and Egyptian people. A large middle and lower middle class saw no window of opportunity for fulfilling their dreams.

The yearning for justice by the people had resulted in show of resistance earlier too in form of protests and demonstrations. Protests and demonstrations were carried out for quite a long time in both these countries. Altunışık believes that Egypt had seen highest level of mobilization. Protests were carried out in Tunisia too prior to the revolution.⁴⁴ From 1998 to 2004, Egypt alone saw 1000 incidents of strikes and labour sit-ins. In 2004, there were 250 episodes of protests took place. The momentum of protests accelerated even further after 2005 elections and Kifaya movement.⁴⁵

The Anti-Terrorism Law introduced by the Tunisian regime in 2003 strengthened the iron hand of the regime. Some of the opposition forces launched a hunger strike against this law. Leftists, liberalists and Islamists parties came together and formed a political alliance opposing this law. The movement is called as 18 October Movement for Rights and Freedoms. Opposing Ben Ali's political party RCD, the alliance made four major demands: legalization of all political parties; release of political prisoners; freedom of media; and general amnesty. But the regime did not fulfill these demands.⁴⁶

In 2008, Tunisia's intelligence-based police Mukhabarat turned down a resistance in town of Redeyef, in governorate of Gafsa, southwest Tunisia. After two decades of job cuts by a state-owned company, 350 political hirings with links to Ben Ali and his regime were made. The poverty-ridden area with few jobs exploded with riots. The regime responded ruthlessly and quelled the riots. The notable feature of this incident was that the whole town protested. Fresh graduates who were unemployed staged a sit-in in front of trade union's office – *Union Generale Tunisienne du Travail* (UGTT). They were joined by low-salaried workers, widowed women and

44 Altunışık, "Understanding Arab Uprisings-1".

45 Zguric, "Challenges for democracy in countries affected by the 'Arab Spring'", p. 422.

46 Khusrokhavar, *The New Arab Revolutions that shook the World*, p. 31.

other poor people joined gradually along with their families. The movement lasted for six months; due to lack of leadership and prominent activist figures the authorities were unable to suppress it immediately. The Gafsa movement set a new pattern of protests – new actors acting in a loosely-concerted action.

Lessons learned by the social activists in Gafsa were applied [later on] in the Jasmine Revolution: a leaderless social movement, spontaneous riots, a leading role played by the “jobless graduates,” strong backing by young people (high school students among others). This type of social activism was integrated into the Jasmine Revolution two years later. The Jasmine Revolution undoubtedly had an improvised character.⁴⁷

Famous for its unofficial name ‘*Kifaya*’, Enough, was established in 2004 in Egypt. Kifaya was formed in opposition to the re-election of Mubarak and his nomination of Gamal, his son, as his successor. This organization set the tone for resistance against Mubarak. Public criticism of Mubarak which was hitherto a hush-hush affair was initiated by Kifaya. It also succeeded in bringing together various opposition groups together. The founder of April 6th Youth Movement, Ahmed Maher was a member of Kifaya in 2005.

Next came the April 6th Movement founded by web-based activists. The April 6th movement was formed in reaction to a brutal crackdown of security forces on the workers that went on strike in *Mahalla al-Kubra*. Initially textile workers were involved in riots against the regime; later on they were joined by the youth. This resistance was an intricate combination of social media and street protests.

All these movements demonstrated that resistance against the regimes existed and the people resented the regimes. However, earlier the resistance was scattered; they were local upheavals. They had never reached the strength as they did in 2011. The regimes were able to quell the previous movements through a little concession and a lot of repression. But this time, the regimes were unable to suppress the voice of the people.

47 Ibid.

Level of Unity among Elites

Goldstone believes that the relationship among state, elites and popular groups – peasants, workers and ethnic, regional or religious minorities – is critical for bringing revolutions. Elites can be both ruling elites and opposition elites. Financially and militarily strong states that also enjoy the backing of elites are immune to resistance of popular groups. If the fissures in elite unity are becoming visible, there are chances that unity of elites will crumble.

George Joffe explains how the regimes were able to gain compliance of opposition elites through restricted political liberalization in Egypt and Tunisia. This political liberalization was designed in such a way that it could not challenge the regime. For this reason he terms them as ‘liberalized autocracies’.⁴⁸ He quotes Daniel Brumberg who states, “in Arab World, a set of interdependent institutional, economic, ideological, social, and geostrategic factors has created an adaptable ecology of repression, control and partial openness.”⁴⁹ The regimes had reasons for creating alliance with the elites.

The opposition groups were accommodating to the regimes as they also benefitted from the tolerance showed by the regimes towards them. Various political parties, civil society organizations and individuals were given restricted freedoms conditioned to subservience of the regime. Threat of repression was always there in case of noncompliance. In Tunisia, the regime outlawed political expression that went outside the ambit of freedom granted by the regime. Opposition elites, on their part, had interest in continuation of their power no matter how much circumscribed it was.

These elites comprised of state institutions such as Egyptian army that could secure Mubarak regime. The Mubarak and Ben Ali regimes also made alliances with the private sector. However, due to attempts of appropriation by the ruling family, the private sector became disgruntled of the Tunisian regime. The central administration of UGTT in Tunisia was also under the wings of the regime. The Tunisian regime also earned support of traditional conservative allies in rural nobility and urban merchant class. These allies and elites ensured security of the regime against any potential disobedience.

48 G. Joffe, “The Arab Spring in North Africa: origins and prospects”, *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4, December 2011, p. 511.

49 Ibid., 512.

Both Mubarak and Ben Ali tried to create an Islamic threat and brought secular opposition groups under regime's fold. There was convergence of interests of the regimes and the elites on fear of Islamists, instability and chaos if the regimes destabilized. However, as the level of repression grew, regimes became more isolated and sidelined the opposition completely. The Islamists meanwhile approached the opposition and made a rapprochement with them.⁵⁰ This Islamists-secular alliance was earlier seen during the Kifaya in Egypt in 2005 and in 18-October Organization in Tunisia in 2005.

Hosni Mubarak's health has been deteriorating for quite some time and gave rise to speculations. He was most likely to be succeeded by his second son Gamal, an international banker. Gamal was neither liked by the masses nor the military. The prospects of Mubarak's succession raised the possibility of political change in Egypt; Egyptians knew they had to avail this window of opportunity. Military was against replacing Mubarak with Gamal. They speculated that the new Egyptian leader would come from a political background in contrast to the military credentials of the past many Egyptian leaders. They were particularly not fond of Gamal succeeding Mubarak. The decision of the military to desert the regime was shaped by "the urge for continued preeminence".⁵¹ The Egyptian military was not happy to see the rise of NDP in the political sphere and the simultaneous decline of military's influence.

Opposition Elites Joining the Popular Group for Protests

According to Goldstone, the difficulty of state is compounded by the reluctance of the elites to support the regime. The elites may not support either because they are themselves going through financial crunch or that they perceive that states are too weak and needy. They may also have resentment against the state for keeping them out of power.

Military

Revolution cannot succeed without the support or acquiescence of military. The Sultanistic leaderships in Tunisia and Egypt needed the support of its security apparatus all the more because of con-

50 A. El-Affendi, "Constituting liberty, Healing the Nation : revolutionary identity creation in the Arab World's delayed 1989", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No.7, September 2011, pp. 1263- 1264.

51 Masoud, "The Road to (and from) Liberation Square", pp. 22- 23.

stant threat to them. In both these countries, the army sided with the revolutionaries and deserted the regimes. The Egyptian military decision to refuse to stand by the regime was much significant and duly hailed.

In Tunisia, army had always been deliberately excluded from politics even under three-decade long rule of Habib Bourguiba. Ben Ali followed his predecessor's policy and kept the military out of politics. Army was scarcely funded. Its sole task was defense of the border. The army had also been highly professional and never interfered in political and economic affairs. Simultaneously, the regime had given more power to other security agencies under the Interior Ministry. They were much larger in number, abundantly funded and given much more powers than the army. Therefore, army had no interest in the survival of the regime. So when the regime was unable to suppress the protestors, General Rachid Ammar was asked to deploy the troops which he refused and placed troops between the protestors and the security agencies. This act proved decisive and resulted in Ben Ali's ouster.

The role of Egyptian army was not that positive in the beginning, although eventually, they backed the revolutionaries. For the first two and a half weeks, the military weighed its options. But the military neither fired on the protestors nor stopped them from occupying the Tahrir Square. When the level of violence inflicted by the regime intensified, the army joined hands with the revolutionaries. On February 10th, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) assumed the control of Egypt and convinced Mubarak to resign.

The Egyptian army was not like its Tunisian counterpart; it had stakes in the survival of the regime. The military was part of the support base of the regime. It was involved in many economic ventures and earned profit from these businesses. It also enjoyed higher salaries. The Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi headed the SCAF, Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Military Production. The annual aid military received from the US made quite a hefty amount – three billion dollars.

The decision to back the protestors came for various reasons. Firstly, the military did not want Mubarak's son to succeed. The growing rise of Gamal Mubarak and his cliques' agenda posed a threat to military's economic interests though they had largely been spared by the privatization drive. Secondly, the army also resented the

growing clout of other security agencies. Thirdly, the army was concerned about the security of the people and did not want to harm them. Lastly, the army did not want its legitimacy to be challenged by the people.

Political Elites

The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) in Egypt came crumbling down as soon as the protests began, the party members, amongst them the heavily mandated ones too, deserted. The party's executive committee resigned within ten days of beginning of protests.⁵²

In Tunisia, the junior members of RCD party at the grass-root level participated in the demonstrations not only against the regime but also against the leadership of the party. At first, the protestors in Tunisia wanted the removal of the President and his family. The RCD which was actually the backbone of the regime was overlooked. On seeing this, the RCD party tried to distance itself from the president and its associates in order to preserve its own power and let the president suffer the wrath of the people. Later on, the people took notice of RCD holding on to the power and turned against RCD. There were protests made against the RCD. On February 6, 2011, RCD was dissolved through a court ruling.⁵³

Thus, once the protests and demonstrations broke out, the regimes were deserted by their compatriots. The elites knew that the regime's time was up and their continued alliance with the regimes would be a mistake. They realized that the center of power had shifted to the people. Without the support of these elites, the regimes were weakened and could not continue their rule.

Conclusion

International and national factors were both significant for the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. Goldstone's assertion on a favourable international context was reaffirmed. However, initially the international powers were unwilling to go against their allies – Mubarak and Ben Ali. It was only when the international powers realized the strength and resolve of the people that they withdrew their sup-

52 Ibid.

53 Joffe, "The Arab Spring in North Africa: origins and prospects", p. 519.

port for the regimes. Nevertheless, the last-minute, reluctant international support extended to the revolutionaries was important in facilitating the revolutions.

In line with Goldstone's theory, the internal conditions were ripe for revolution: poor performance of the regime; disunity of the elites; and opposition elites joining the masses in protests. The variety of demands made through slogans highlighted the fact that the causes were neither purely economic nor political in character. There was a convergence of factors. In Egypt slogans varied from 'bread', to 'freedom' and 'human dignity'. The regimes lacked legitimacy. The political structure that is parliaments were a façade with no real powers. The people had no part in decision-making. Repression was rife. Mistreatment meted out at hands of police and security forces added to the insult of the people.

Ben Ali regime had united the nation in opposition by assaulting the dignity of people. The story in Egypt was similar. With the passage of time, the repression had reached new heights coupled with rampant corruption. This added to the woes of the public that was in economic distress and found no ventilation for their frustrations through political process or media. The poor performance of the regimes has resulted in loss of effectiveness and legitimacy of the regimes.

There have been earlier instances of show of resistances against the regimes. The resentment had been piling up for decades but the scale of resistance and opposition only reached the desired level, or the tipping point, just then and hence the revolutions came.

The relationship among masses and regimes is critical but at the same time, elite disunity was also a reason for revolution. In Tunisia, it was the growing disenchantment of the private business class with 'the family'; while in Egypt, the army increasingly felt sidelined by the growing power and influence of the NDP.

Given these multiple internal factors, diminishing legitimacy and effectiveness of the state and people's growing frustration with the regime; and inter-elite disunity, a revolution was inevitable. It was a tinderbox ready to explode. It just needed a spark that was provided by a lone person – Bouazizi. The desertion of the regimes by the militaries proved a decisive factor once the protests began. Conse-

quently, within a few weeks of the onset of protests and demonstrations the regimes fell.

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