
3. THE DYNAMICS OF DISORDER: POWER SHIFTS AND GEOPOLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Since early 2011, when two longstanding Arab rulers were toppled through popular uprisings, the Arab world and the Middle East have entered into what seems to be at least one and more likely two decades of turbulence. None of the region's countries will remain unaffected.

These turbulences may never converge into a perfect regional storm, but rather hit different parts of the region at different moments. They arise from a mixture of domestic and geopolitical contests. On the local levels, we can expect to see continued struggles for power, and shifting alliances between the young demographic majority, the educated middle class and state-bureaucratic elites – as well as between Islamists and non-Islamists and between different schools of politicized Islam. Two protracted geopolitical conflicts – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the struggle for dominance in the Persian Gulf area – remain unresolved and highly explosive. A third flashpoint, the conflict in and over Syria, may actually shake the foundations of the state system in the Arab East. Add to this a renewed ideological struggle over the appropriate domestic order. Today, competition over dominance in the Gulf and in the Levante is enmeshed with competition between different models of political Islam: the Salafi Saudi-Wahhabi model, the more modern approach of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic-democratic model of Turkey's AKP, and the Iranian example of an Islamic Republic.

External Absence

Remarkably, actors in the Middle East seem more interested today than ever before in drawing extra-regional players, particularly the United States and Europe, into regional power games – certainly to an extent that goes well beyond these players' desire to get involved. Syria is very much a case in point. Not only America and Europe are wary of being dragged into a conflict they cannot control: even the Russian Federation and China seem more interested in blocking and undermining Western designs than in getting involved themselves.

US policy-makers will continue to reiterate America's unwavering commitment to the Middle East, but beneath the rhetoric, US power and engagement in the Middle East has clearly peaked. The shale-gas and non-conventional oil revolution make the United States increasingly independent of energy imports from the region. Asia poses higher strategic risks but also offers more opportunities of immediate interest to the United States. The Obama administration's decision to pull out from wars in the Middle East rather than engage in new ones may still be accentuated with regard to Syria or other places, but a new regime-change-and-political-engineering engagement like the one in Iraq is difficult to imagine. By supporting European allies in Libya and Mali rather than initiating or leading these missions, Washington has clearly signalled that it wants Europe to take the lead in the latter's North African neighbourhood. Europe will mainly concentrate on supporting political and economic transformations, but it might indeed step up its security involvement in the Mediterranean region. The United States will in all likelihood remain the ultimate guarantor of Israel's security and also continue to stabilize countries like Egypt and Jordan that have made – and keep – the peace with Israel. Washington will remain concerned with terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and with Iran as long as it is considered a threat. But none of this compels the United States to protect the security of Arab monarchies in the Gulf forever. As defence budgets will remain strained and energy supply interests dwindle, Washington will certainly become less and less willing to spend its money on guaranteeing the free flow of Persian Gulf oil to customers in India or China. It is not so evident that China or India would even want to step into this role in the foresee-

able future – regardless of whether or not the United States would appreciate such a burden shift.

The impression alone that the United States will decrease its engagement or even, at some point, pull out from the region, changes the calculations of regional actors. It can be safely assumed that the main geopolitical issues of the region will not be resolved within the next five years or so. At the very best, domestic upheavals, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Syria and security issues in the Gulf region can be managed, brought closer to a solution, or contained, but they will certainly remain on the global agenda even by the end of the decade.

With external players less willing and able to manipulate or even just influence developments, regional balances of power will gain importance. In the next part of this chapter, recent power gains and losses among regional states are examined. Then a series of still unanswerable questions about the consequences of possible developments that might or might not occur will be raised.

Winners, Losers, Survivors: The Fluid Balance of Hard and Soft Power

It is no great surprise that the distribution of strengths and weaknesses across the region is highly contingent and the regional power balance is fluid. Some states have won since the beginning of the uprisings in 2010/2011, others have lost, and some are just muddling through. Some of the gains visible today may be of a short-term nature, which could lead to complacency and a failure to translate them into sustainable longer-term strength. More astonishing perhaps is that several players seem to find themselves in a much better position than had been expected after almost three years of turbulence.

Today, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey act as the main shapers of regional inter-state dynamics. One small state – Qatar – has made constant efforts to join that club; one of the former major Arab players – Iraq – still tries to recover from a long civil war rather than playing regional politics; and Syria has become the object and focal point of regional geopolitical dynamics.

Egypt remains in the centre of regional events. Its geographical position, demography and history make it a natural player in regional affairs. Success or failure of its post-Mubarak transformation will not determine – but will influence – the chances of other Arab countries to transform into more pluralistic, inclusive or perhaps even democratic polities. Despite its weight, though, post-Mubarak Egypt has not yet re-emerged as an active shaper of regional developments. Rather, it has become the scene for the power play of others: primarily Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Qatar. Economic indicators point downwards and the military is occupied with political engineering and domestic policing. To put it simply, despite its substantial capabilities, Egypt is tied down. The soft power of its 2011 revolution has been spoiled both by the one-year rule of Muhammad Mursi, and by the way it ended. The regional impact of the coup against Mursi, Egypt's first-ever freely elected president, can hardly be overestimated. Not only did it deal a strong blow to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its sister parties in other countries, but it also reaffirmed Saudi and Emirati influence in regional affairs, showed the limits of Qatar's and Turkey's clout, and even had a direct bearing on the composition of Syria's opposition leadership.

Turkey, despite various policy setbacks, will continue to play a strong role in the Middle Eastern balance of power. While Turkey's awesome military strength is of rather limited use as an instrument of regional politics, Turkey's soft power is substantial. Turkey's attractiveness rests primarily on its economic strength and its economic footprint in neighbouring states, as well as on its deep association with the EU and its membership in NATO. Various actors in the region would want to emulate at least parts of the Turkish experience. But being seen as a role model by different players did not, as parts of Turkey's political elite had tended to assume, translate into direct influence in Syria, Iran, Egypt and other countries. Turkey also had to realize that a rupture with Israel might bring applause from some quarters, but would not increase its diplomatic clout. Turkey seems best served by trying to advance political, economic and security cooperation in the region, but abstaining from whatever could be seen as neo-Ottoman designs. A successful reconciliation and lasting peace with its own Kurdish population would strengthen Turkey's regional position, particularly in combination with its attractiveness as an economically successful and – despite a visible authoritar-

ian streak in its prime minister – democratic country with a moderately Islamist government.

Israel has been worried about the changes in its strategic environment. With the fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt, it has lost an ally of sorts. Even after the overthrow of the Muslim-Brotherhood-led government in Cairo, Israel remains concerned about the stability of its largest neighbour. Israel's hard power has improved though: its economy has become stronger and it has reduced its dependence on energy imports. The Palestinian Authority has gained some diplomatic successes, but the Palestinians do not pose an existential security risk for the short-term future. Moreover, the Arab League is disunited, and Iran will be under heavy sanctions unless it begins to compromise on its nuclear programme. Israel's deterrence, while difficult to measure, has certainly increased. Given its continued occupation of Palestinian lands, Israel's soft power in the region is close to zero. In contrast to hard-power balances, however, this is nothing Israel's leaders prioritize.

For *Iran*, the picture is quite different. While suffering under UN, US and EU sanctions, the country has proven its survivor skills in more than one respect. It has coped with the sanctions and their effects on the national economy, and it has been able to maintain its nuclear programme and a diplomatic process with the "5 plus 1". Tehran has strengthened its influence in Iraq and has helped keep its Syrian ally in power much longer than was widely expected at the outset of the Syrian conflict. It also seems that any managed transition in Damascus, if it is to happen at all, will need to take Iranian influence into consideration. At the same time, Iran's once considerable soft power among the public in Arab states has given way to a reputation of backing a sectarian, murderous regime. And the increasing confessional polarization of regional politics constitutes a real danger for Tehran: the more regional conflicts are constructed as a Sunni-Shiite confrontation, the more difficult it becomes for Iranian leaders to wield any influence or even be accepted among the Sunni majority of the Arab world. These risks and challenges will continue to shape the Iranian agenda, but they may be dealt with differently under Iran's new president, Hassan Rohani. Even though the president plays second fiddle to Ayatollah Khamenei in Iran's political hierarchy, each new president has usually opened a distinct era in Iranian politics. Most likely, we will see at least some serious attempts at détente with the West and, regionally, perhaps with Saudi Arabia. If successful, this would not only strengthen Iran's position but would also have an effect on regional dynamics in general.

Saudi Arabia could also be called a survivor. The Kingdom is seized by deep strategic insecurities, but it has once again become one of the poles in the regional field of forces. Its ruling elite is worried about the balance of power in the Gulf, about Iran's nuclear programme and quest for superiority, about the sustainability of the regimes in Bahrain and Jordan, about the force of popular uprisings in the Arab world and about regimes that fail to manage such challenges. The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and its model of election-based Islamic rule have been seen as a threat to the Kingdom's own ideological fundamentals. Domestically, enormous sociopolitical challenges – not so different from the grievances that have fuelled the revolutions in Egypt, Yemen or Syria – as well as a difficult succession process at the top need to be dealt with.

On all these fronts, the Saudi leadership has so far been able to cope, muddling through with limited domestic reforms and flexible regional and international alliances. The Kingdom's main regional efforts have been geared towards stabilizing Arab monarchies (with force if need be as demonstrated in Bahrain), containing or rolling back Iran's reach into the Arab world, and making sure that revolutions and unavoidable change in other countries do not challenge Saudi interests too much. Riyadh has therefore backed a negotiated transfer of power in Yemen. It supports the uprising against the Assad regime, but it would rather see a secular authoritarian or democratic regime emerge in Syria than a Muslim-Brotherhood-led state. And it has clearly underwritten the coup against Egypt's Islamist president Mursi. Given its resources, Saudi Arabia remains a heavyweight in the region. Its support or lack of support for developments such as the ones in Syria, Egypt or Yemen can be decisive. Despite heavy investments into its security apparatus, however, Saudi Arabia's military power remains limited, and the Kingdom's own security depends on US protection. At the same time, adding to their strategic uneasiness, the Saudi leadership and elite have begun to distrust the United States, fearing that Washington may at some point leave them alone.⁹ This insecurity reached

a boiling point in October 2013 when the Saudis declined their seat on the rotating United Nations Security Council, and intelligence chief Prince Bandar bin Sultan announced a “major shift” away from the United States, primarily in response to its disagreeable policies in Iran and Syria. Whether this will eventually lead to domestic structural changes or true structural shifts in Saudi Arabia’s regional or international policies remains to be seen.

At the time of writing, Riyadh along with the largely like-minded United Arab Emirates have been able to reassert traditional leadership among the Gulf monarchies, which for a while seemed to be challenged by the very ambitious and more adventurous policies of *Qatar* – a micro-state that has used various means to put itself on the map for over two decades, particularly its pan-Arab TV network Al Jazeera. In the 2011 to 2013 period, the emirate involved itself directly and vehemently in the conflicts of the region: Qatar supported the Libyan revolution financially, militarily and medially, backed the Mursi government in Egypt as well as the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip, and became the main financier of the Syrian opposition. The Qatari agenda largely overlapped with that of the Muslim Brotherhood. Given its visible and strong involvement, some observers began to portray Qatar as a new regional power; this ignored the fact that Doha was punching far above its weight. Except for its money, the emirate has no hard power: it is heavily dependent on foreign labour and on US protection, and would be extremely vulnerable without the latter. Its regional agenda also brought it into conflict with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. In the summer of 2013, Qatar’s Emir was succeeded by his son who then replaced the activist prime minister with another family member. This orchestrated change at the helm was largely seen as an attempt to repair relations with the other Gulf monarchies and to fall in line with Saudi Arabia’s regional approach.

Two other states in the Arab East, *Iraq* and *Syria*, have both at times tried to dominate their respective neighbourhoods. Today, after years of occupation and civil war, Iraq has slowly regained economic strength, but it has not been able to translate the withdrawal of US troops and its retrieval of effective sovereignty into a stronger position in the regional system. Rather, given its apparent inability to establish a viable non-sectarian political system and a workable relationship between Baghdad and the autonomous Kurdish region, the current territorial form of the Iraqi state may actually be at risk.

Syria, after more than two years of civil war, has not only lost its regional power status, it risks being lost entirely. This is so regardless of the balance of forces between the regime and the opposition. While neither the regime nor the rebels seem able to win militarily, Syrian society is unravelling. At some point, a broad-based government may be established in Damascus and Syrians may form a new social contract, but this will take many years. The best-case future scenario is a decentralized or federal state; the worst case is the Somalization of the country. Syria is unlikely to re-emerge as a strong, centralized state for decades. Its territorial integrity may well be threatened by secession or fragmentation. Instead of projecting power into neighbouring countries, Syria has become a proxy within which other regional forces can let their geopolitical struggles play out. In a way, all the socio- and geopolitical factors of turbulence in today’s Middle East seem to concentrate here like in a burning glass – popular revolts against corrupt, authoritarian regimes; transnational ethnic and confessional solidarities; minority fears; the polarization between Sunnis and Shiites; political Islam and the question of its compatibility with democratic governance; the conflict over the reach of Iran into the Levante, over Lebanon and, generally, over regional dominance. Syria thereby also stands in the centre of most “What ifs?” of regional politics, a host of intriguing questions that pertain to the future shape of the region. These questions are often unpopular and they cannot be answered today. But they need to be raised if only to increase the risk awareness of regional and international actors.

The What-ifs of Middle Eastern Geopolitics

Not only the geopolitical, but also the political-cultural features of the Middle East will to some extent depend on the dynamics and outcome of the Syrian war. The scenario of a fragmentation or Somalization of the country doesn’t need to become the reality, but is not implausible. What if, temporarily at least, an Alawi entity in the coastal region, a Kurdish administration in the North, and various warlord emirates were to emerge? If such a division of Syria on ethnic, confessional

and politico-religious grounds were to happen, would this destroy the very idea of multi-ethnic or multi-confessional states in the Middle East? And, as a disintegration of Syria would likely not be containable, would this call the “Sykes-Picot borders” into question that have defined the post-Ottoman Middle Eastern state system?

Today it is already clear that the territorial contours of Lebanon have begun to evaporate under the pressure of the Syrian conflict. A zone of de-facto common Hezbollah and Syrian regime-militia control has emerged between Baalbek and Homs, East and West of the Lebanese-Syrian border. Lebanon’s political cohesion is threatened by the spill-over of the war in Syria. Or could Lebanon’s weakness for once become its strength if (and this is a big if indeed) local political forces begin to realize that all their respective regional patrons – Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iran – will most likely not be able to sustain and protect them in the long run?

A highly fluid geopolitical situation has to be expected in the Kurdish-majority areas of Iraq and Syria. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq has effectively invested into its de-facto autonomy. So what if Erbil were to declare formal independence? With its own oil income, acceptable investment conditions and good neighbourly relations (especially with Turkey), such a state could be viable. Would a new Kurdish state attempt to and succeed in extending its power, formally or informally, into the North of Syria, and thereby become a significant regional power player which eventually would be harder to ignore than Baghdad? Regional acceptability of a Kurdish state would depend, among other things, on the way it seceded from Iraq and on the reach of its territorial ambitions. From a Turkish perspective, a confederation of Syria’s North East with the KRG may actually be preferable to either enduring unrest or PKK-rule in the Kurdish belt along the Syrian-Turkish border. In contrast, any attempt by Erbil to establish a Kurdish corridor through to the Mediterranean would certainly meet resistance, not only from Turkey, but also from otherwise warring factions in Syria. To maintain its own territorial integrity, Ankara would at any rate have to continue domestic reform processes that in due course allow Turkey’s Kurdish population to enjoy both equal citizenship and their national identity, rather than either the one or the other.

What, however, would Kurdish independence mean for the rest of Iraq? This is not only a question of territory, borders and oil, but also one of domestic balances. A Kurdish exit from the state of Iraq would also remove the Kurds as the third constituent element – besides Shiites and Sunni Arabs – of Iraqi politics. Would this further increase the political-confessional polarization in Baghdad? Would it encourage demands for autonomy in the Sunni-majority provinces bordering Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia? Or could it even lead to the emergence of tribal, jihadist or organized-crime emirates in these provinces whose de-facto authorities, given a multitude of transnational ties, would probably pay little respect to the borders with neighbouring countries? Would the border region emerge as a safe haven for jihadist terrorism?

Jordan could be threatened in its very existence. Pressures are rising from the civil war in Syria and its regional spill-over, from unfulfilled domestic reform demands and from the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The monarchy doesn’t seem to have too many options aside from tying the country as closely as possible to both the United States and Saudi Arabia and trying to re-establish a social contract that offers better governance and a certain amount of welfare in exchange for the silent acceptance of policies that may not always be in line with widely shared ideological convictions. But what if such reforms do not come about? And what if Jordan’s fragile domestic balance were threatened by a definite failure of Israeli-Palestinian peace processes?

In a somewhat ironic twist of history, Israel could increasingly be accepted as a Jewish state the more other states and entities in the region define themselves on the basis of religio-ethnic and confessional identities. One precondition for such an acceptance would doubtless be an Israeli-Palestinian agreement on a two-state solution. What if, however, elements from the Israeli Right, who advocate an annexation of the West Bank and the establishment of a Palestinian state on the other bank of the river Jordan, get their way? Would such a scenario only put Jordan’s political system at risk, or would it dismantle the Jordanian state altogether?

Developments in the Gulf area are less directly connected to conflict dynamics in the Levante. Saudi Arabia is itself likely to undergo a process of change within the next 10 or 15 years, which may at times become turbulent. Given, among other things, Saudi Arabia's socio-demographic development, its current political and socio-economic structures will not do for the future. It is quite possible that Saudi Arabia will embark on a gradual but steady reform process that broadens participation, allows for more individual freedom and makes the national economy less dependent on oil exports. Partial reforms of this sort have been tried, more or less wholeheartedly, in the smaller Gulf monarchies; if Saudi Arabia were to take the lead on reform, it would likely draw the others along.

But what if Saudi Arabia and the others fail to make their own systems more future-proof? What if, under such a scenario, OPEC countries and the Russian Federation were to enter into a devastating price war under the pressure of unconventional energy exports from the United States, and oil prices were suddenly to fall precipitously? Saudi oil would still be exported, particularly to Asia, but the Kingdom would likely run into serious budget constraints that could make it extremely difficult to respond to the wishes of a growing, ever more demanding population. Would this lead to protests and uprisings, to a "Saudi Spring" as some would probably call it, and a break-up of the unwritten social contract that so far ties the House of Saud, the religious establishment and society together? Would the armed forces intervene? And whose side would they take? Could individual provinces such as the oil-rich East with its largely Shiite population or the traditionally more liberal Hijaz seek autonomy or independence? Would warlord or jihadist emirates emerge in parts of the country and would similar events take place in other monarchies? Or could the armed forces, major tribes and the middle class (in whichever combination) depose the ruling family while maintaining a unitary state on a new basis – as a republic perhaps, a military dictatorship or a caliphate?

How would the United States, other main importers of Saudi oil or the neighbours react to any such development? It seems rather unlikely today that Washington would send an expeditionary force to quell a revolution or a series of revolutions on the Arabian Peninsula. Neither would India, China or Iran. But neither could India and China cope without imports of oil from the Gulf Arab states.¹⁰ India, in particular, would also find itself under domestic pressure to secure the physical well-being of its diaspora in the Gulf states. The two Asian powers could thus feel impelled to assume a direct security role in the Persian Gulf. What would that involve aside from a strong naval presence? How would they react if oil exports from Saudi Arabia, the Emirates or Kuwait were suddenly disrupted? Would they go as far as to militarily secure oil fields and terminals? Would India and China meet the resistance of Iran, or be able to cooperate with Tehran and other regional and international players in establishing a maritime regime for the Persian Gulf that would guarantee the free flow of oil and other goods? Would either of them go even farther and effectively become the protector of one or more of today's smaller oil-producing states or any new entity that may emerge, establishing, as it were, a new form of Trucial-State relationships? Would that include a political involvement of resident Indian and South Asian communities in one or several of these states where they might actually form a demographic plurality?

Iran will, at almost any rate, remain an influential player in the Persian Gulf region. The most frequently discussed "What if?" pertains to a possible escalation of the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme: What if Israel or the United States were to attack Iran? Would that lead to the fall of the Islamic regime or, on the contrary, make it more rigid and drive its nuclear programme underground? Would the regional consequences – a destabilization of both Iran and Israel's neighbourhood – possibly be more severe than those for Iran itself? What if, in contrast, Iran were to develop a military nuclear capability without any prior military confrontation? Would a new balance arise, based on mutual deterrence? Would that reverse Washington's gradual pullout from the region and keep it more strongly involved? Would it force the Gulf Arab monarchies to build more resilient, inclusive political systems and make more serious efforts towards economic as well as political integration?

As stated above, we should not expect Iran to remain politically stagnant. Iran finds itself under political, demographic and socio-cultural pressures that aren't so different from the ones that account for the uprisings in the Arab world. Iran's 2013 presidential elections have underlined the demands for domestic change. In a very positive scenario, the Arab monarchies in the Gulf would embark

on successful reform processes and cooperate with a more open, pragmatic and status-quo oriented Iran in establishing a sustainable regional security architecture that also would involve major international players. Any such trajectory would only be possible on the basis of a rapprochement between Tehran and Washington. So what if Western powers and Iran were to begin by cooperating on post-2014 Afghanistan and on Syria, if Tehran were to accept limitations on its nuclear programme, and sanctions were lifted? Would Washington eventually, as in pre-revolutionary times, come to rely on Iran as a pillar of regional security? Would that make Tehran the regional power, or would it even enable it to mend fences with its neighbours and act as a catalyst of regional economic integration?

Disorder, Transformation, People's Power

Given the ongoing and largely unpredicted domestic, transnational and regional turbulences that have been shaking the Middle East since the beginning of 2011, it is not astonishing that regional observers have begun to mull over an impending end of the "Sykes-Picot-order". More astonishing is how many of them expect, warn against, or hope for a "new Sykes-Picot", i.e. the establishment of a new regional order in the Middle East by today's great powers.¹¹ These expectations are hardly realistic. Rather, Europeans and Americans have learned, and China, the Russian Federation and others have witnessed from Western experiences, that external powers cannot successfully engineer the domestic and regional conditions in the Middle East. Even a Dayton-type conference on Syria or a UN peacekeeping force would likely only come about if local and regional forces strongly demand and support it.

Rather than speculating over the contours of a new Sykes-Picot, the question to ask is what happens if no regional order is re-established for a long time. Would the region be torn by a series of wars and civil wars? Would a few garrison states and islands of political tranquillity be able to co-exist with a number of failed states and warlord emirates? Would, in World Bank lingo, the regional continue to be called MENA (Middle East and North Africa)? Or would the international community increasingly distinguish between a zone of disorder that reaches from the Levante to the Persian Gulf, and a North African zone of transformation stretching from, despite all difficulties, Egypt to Morocco?

The answer, in this author's judgement, depends not solely, but largely on regional actors. International players can help, assist in transformation processes, mediate and even support stabilization efforts. But they cannot and should not try to pick winners in local power conflicts, or organize regional relations.

This brings up a final set of questions about political Islam, revolutions and people's power. For the first two-and-half years after the outbreak of the Arab revolutions, mainstream political Islam, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood and its sister parties, seemed to be the biggest winner among the region's political forces. With the ouster of President Mursi in Egypt, it suddenly seemed to be the biggest loser. Both images, clearly, are snapshots. Mainstream Islamic currents have a strong social basis across the region that will not simply disappear. At the same time, and in most countries of the region, any attempt to impose an Islamic state will meet the resistance of relevant societal forces. Regimes that already rule in the name of Islam have to meet their own challenges. The question is therefore not whether the Muslim Brotherhood and similar groups will still be present in a couple of years, but rather what they will have learned from both their successes and their failures. Will a major part of their cadres draw the conclusion that democracy is not for them and revert either to political abstinence or to violent jihad? Or will new reformed parties, closer to the pragmatic-conservative type represented by Turkey's AKP, emerge from within the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and similar movements in other Arab countries? Would such parties, if they again win majorities or pluralities, pose a challenge to the monarchies, or would they find ways to co-exist? More importantly, would they be able to cooperate with their domestic, non-Islamic contenders, establish viable social contracts and pursue inclusive political and economic transformation processes? Would the military gradually be driven out of domestic politics, akin to the trajectories of Chile or Turkey, or would regional states rather follow the path of Pakistan?

As evident from the Egyptian and the Tunisian experiences so far, post-revolutionary electoral victories may be a mixed blessing for political forces whose main experiences come from illegality, jail or exile. Not only are they expected to manage all the socio-economic problems that have caused the downfall of their predecessors, people also expect them to build democratic institutions and do not, at the same time, have much trust in their commitment to democratic rules. Ironically, therefore, they may only be able to prove their credentials and claim success in building a better state when they lose elections for the first time, and accept defeat. While the ouster of Mursi clearly was a coup, it was indeed supported by an enormous part of the Egyptian people. The interesting lesson here is that a highly mobilized population that has tasted the flavour of people's power by overthrowing the old regimes will likely continue to challenge both elected and non-elected leaders. This in itself will make sure that the regional winds of change will not die down too soon.