

How and Why the West Reacted to the Arab Spring: An Arab Perspective

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ABSTRACT *For many decades, the Arab despots would serve the Western interests in the region in return for a Western disregard to democracy policies in their countries. By the outbreak of the Arab uprisings in the Middle East, this implicit agreement between the West and the Arab despots was put in jeopardy. This article defines the challenges faced by the Western interests as a result of these revolts. Moreover, it digs deeper into the American and European reactions to the uprisings. Finally, the article contemplates the reasons behind the western behavior towards these revolts. Against this backdrop, this article argues that the implicit agreement is still possible in spite of the Arab uprising, albeit with a diverse formula.*

For nearly six decades, both the United States and Europe had established an implicit accord with the Middle East's authoritarian regimes; to turn a blind eye to dictatorial practices in exchange for achieving, securing and even promoting their strategic interests in the Middle East. So long as the authoritarian regimes fulfilled the West's interests in the Middle East – protecting Israel's security and even promoting friendly relationships with Israel, maintaining the influx of oil and energy supplies to the West, and complying with the Western capitals' demands in fighting against terrorism and containing the rogue states, particularly Iran – the Western nations had 'tolerated' the flagrant suppression of economic and political rights in the Arab region.¹

Europe has always been involved in this accord between the United States and the despotic regimes in the Middle East. Despite its frequent confirmations of its obligation to encourage democracy in its Southern borders, Europe's behavior in practice did not differ from the American stances with regard to the Arab authoritarian regimes. In other words, for more than 20 years Europe has always been rhetorically a champion to democracy and

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So long as the authoritarian regimes fulfilled the West's interests in the Middle East – the Western nations had 'tolerated' the flagrant suppression of economic and political rights in the Arab region

Middle East's promotion of democracy.² This paper argues that this accord is still working, even in the aftermath of the Arab revolts, albeit with a different mechanism.

The United States and Europe's negative response to Hamas' stunning victory in the 2006 parliamentary elections is still fresh in the Arab mind. This undermined the West's preaching for values of democracy and human rights in the Arab world. The clear message that the Arab political pundits and general public received was that the West has nothing to do with democracy when its results go against the grains of the United States and Europe.³ Both the United States and Europe found themselves caught between the anvils of the "march of democracy" in the Arab world and the hammer of their traditional alliance with despotic regimes in the Middle East.⁴ In other words, the collapse of some friendly authoritarian regimes in the Middle East produced more danger than opportunity to the Americans and the Europeans.

The cascade of Arab revolutions that unfolded in the Middle East posed grave challenges to both Europe and the United States. In brief, the main challenges included: the fall of their traditional authoritarian allies; the rise of the prospect of political Islam to take over in those countries; grave threats to Israel's security because of the likelihood of the collapse of the peace agreements; the rising prices of oil and the West's uncertainties about its influx; and the European fear of a sweeping illegal migration from the Middle East to Europe.⁵ Whether the Arab Spring will democratize the Arab world or not, it has already ousted the despots that have been in harmony with Israel. Eventually, this signifies that the public opinion of the Arab regimes will be a crucial factor in their non-tolerant foreign policies against Israel and their further sympathy towards the Palestinians.⁶

If Israel is the prime 'loser,' the United States becomes the second. The United States would no longer be able to control the Middle East. Instead of talking to and ordering only a few authoritarian leaders, the Obama administration

human rights in addressing the region of the Middle East. However, in practice, the EU countries allied with the Middle East despotic regimes and did not lift a finger to the atrocities, so long as their strategic interests were maintained. Europe used the Arab despots to protect its security interests – particularly migration control, fighting against terrorism and suppressing political Islam – in exchange for ignoring the

must now address the Arab public opinion, which has always expressed its deep resentment and bitterness against the American and Western “imperial control” of the region’s destiny.⁷ Israel’s security concerns, in particular, rapidly increased with the Arab awakenings in the Middle East. In other words, Israel’s closest ‘friends’ became potential enemies with the replacement of Mubarak’s regime with the Brotherhood’s regime, led by President Mohamed Mursi, who had always criticized the peace treaty with Israel and always asked for its termination. In addition, the close relationships between the new Islamist Egyptian regime and Hamas meant a potential increase in forthcoming tensions between Egypt and Israel. Moreover, Egypt has already sent signal of rapprochement with Israel’s main rival in the Middle East, Iran.⁸

The danger of Islamic fundamentalism has always been the very reason for the West to pay no attention to the atrocities and violations of human rights committed by their friendly authoritarian regimes. The Arabs have always condemned the American and European policies not only because of their flagrant bias towards Israel, but also for claiming that Israel is the icon of democracy, while at the same time not punishing the Arab regimes’ violations of human rights.⁹ Europe was also surprised by the unfolding uprisings in the Middle East, as the price and the influx of oil became more certain, the migration from the Mediterranean increased, and its creditability as a democratic model of governance was put at stake at the very beginning of the Arab Spring.¹⁰ To conclude, both the United States and Europe metaphorically bet on the wrong horse when they championed the despotic regimes in the Middle East, because the substitute – either chaos or Islamism – was not in their favor.¹¹

The West’s Tactical Reactions

Tactically, the United States resorted to the ‘case-by-case’ approach and Europe chose the ‘wait and see’ approach, albeit with different, fragmented and heterogeneous reactions in addressing the Arab Spring.¹² As for the Tunisian revolution, Europe – France in particular – was supportive to Ben Ali’s regime until it was toppled. France’s Foreign Minister Michelle-Alliot-Marie was the first prominent European official to react to the Tunisian revolution, by expressing her worries about the regime and suggesting sending Special Forces to restore order in Tunis. Later, Catherine Ashton (the HR-CFSP) talked about a peaceful transition to democracy. Nevertheless, there was no concrete European support to the will of the Tunisian protesters in the first two weeks of the revolution. The Obama administration was more courageous than the Europeans, albeit with no crucial decisions, when it declared that the Tunisians have the ultimate right of self-determination – but this only came after two weeks of the revolution that lasted for 30 days. Therefore, it can be concluded that both Europe and the United States dealt cautiously with the uprisings until they

realized it was a revolution; then they supported the yearning of the Tunisian people for liberty and democracy.¹³

The January 25 revolution in Egypt was another subsequent and even bigger earthquake to the transatlantic relations. The Western reaction was very confused because neither the American nor the European intelligence agencies expected the collapse of Mubarak's regime, even after Ben Ali's regime was ousted. The American reaction swung between supporting Mubarak's regime at the beginning of the revolution and supporting the Egyptian protesters at the end of the crisis. At the very beginning of the crisis, Hillary Clinton claimed that the Egyptian regime was "stable"¹⁴ and that there was a chance for the Egyptian government to respond to the legitimate demands of its people, and that the United States encouraged dialogue between the government and the opposition in order to reach a settlement. However, when demon-

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strations spilled over the entire country, the American position changed its stance, asking Mubarak for "a peaceful and orderly transition of power" to his Vice President Omer Suleiman. Obama later asked for an "orderly, meaningful, peaceful, and immediate transition of power,"¹⁵ as did Congress by issuing a common announcement asking Mubarak to step down. The United States aimed for a peaceful transition of power to its most trusted ally, Omer Suleiman.¹⁶

But once the United States realized that the protesters no longer accepted Suleiman, they intensified talks with the Egyptian Army, and a transition of power has finally taken place in favor of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF). It was noticeable that the United States started to hold meetings with the Egyptian opposition, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, to secure its interest in post-Mubarak era. Therefore, it was unsurprising that the Obama administration referred to its endorsement of the Brotherhood in any next Egyptian government when the state department's spokesman described it as "a fact of life in Egypt."¹⁷ In other words, the Obama administration made it clear that it was willing to accept the Islamists who took over the political power in the post-Mubarak era because it realized that the Mubarak's era became obsolete – whether Washington liked or not.¹⁸

Therefore, it can be argued that the Obama administration first bet on the Egyptian army to manage the transitional period in Egypt. However, with the increasing public pressure on the army to hand over power to civilians, the Obama administration changed its bet to the Muslim Brotherhood. It put

pressure on the SCAF to stick to the results of the presidential elections and declare Mohamed Mursi, the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate, as the first elected president in the post-Mubarak era.¹⁹ Once Mursi came to power, the Obama administration vigorously supported him as the first democratically elected president in Egypt and even capitalized on his commitment to make peace with Israel and to preserve the Western interests in the Middle East. Later on, the United States used Mursi's close connections with Hamas to hold a cease-fire in the aftermath of the Israeli attack against Gaza in 2012-13. This was based on a simple strategy put forth by both the United States and Europe, which meant to develop a good relationship with the Islamists in the Arab Spring countries because they were expected to replace the obsolete regimes due to their mobilization ability and sweeping popularity, compared to the liberalists, combined with a willingness to turn a blind eye to the abuses of human rights and democracy whenever their vital interests are at stake²⁰.

Europe's position on Egypt's revolution was in fact just an echo of the American stance. Only when the Obama administration made it clear that Mubarak should step down immediately was a common statement issued by France, Germany, Britain, Italy and Spain, who called for an immediate and peaceful transition of power in Egypt. It should be noted that prior to Egypt's revolution, both Europe and the United States considered Mubarak a very close ally, and even claimed that he was a wise and brave man.²¹ However, in the aftermath of the revolution, the Europeans, in parallel with the Americans, have already shifted their bet to the Islamists in Egypt.

As for Libya's revolution, the initial American response was to avoid any "heavy American military" engagement and to push the other allies to share the big part of the burden. Therefore, with the approval of the UNSC and the Arab league to enforce a no-fly zone on Libya, the Obama administration made it clear that it would lead from behind.²² Obama realized the danger of "overextending the U.S. military," and the increasing likelihood of the Arab opinion turning against the American strikes. Therefore, his administration decided to take the helm at the very beginning of the operations and then to transfer the leadership to NATO. Nevertheless, both the United States and some big European countries, particularly Britain and France, announced that Qaddafi should be removed from power – and without their assistance to the Libyan opposition, Qaddafi would not have been ousted.²³ The transatlantic intervention in Libya was motivated by a combination of "national prestige" by both France and Britain and the minimal engagement (and slightest cost) of the United States.²⁴

The Obama administration did not ask the Yemeni President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to step down as it did with both Ben Ali and Mubarak, although his regime committed the same atrocities that Gaddafi's regime did. The United

States Defense Secretary Robert Gates explicitly expressed concerns for an al Qaeda organization in Yemen. However, with the increasing popular unrest, it endorsed the Gulf's solution through a compromise anchored on Saleh stepping down for his vice-president. Nevertheless, the Yemen's regime was not fully overthrown. This case illustrates that what really matters to the West was maintaining their strategic interests in Yemen, particularly fighting against al Qaeda.

The Bahrain revolution is the most flagrant case of the American and European double standards when it comes to supporting democracy. Due to its interests in the Gulf countries, the Obama administration did nothing when the forces of al-Gazera Shield, led by Saudi Arabia, intervened and cracked down on the opposition that had embraced the same rights and slogans of their Arab counterparts in Tunisia, Egypt and the other Arab Spring countries.²⁵ On March 12, 2011, at the climax of the Bahraini uprising, Gates paid a visit to Manama and expressed his administration's support to King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa. Simultaneously, Gates urged the king to resolve his domestic disorder. The next day, the Saudi king contacted Obama to inform him that Saudi Arabia would send thousands of troops to Bahrain, anchored in a Bahraini request, to restore order, and Obama acquiesced. When the Saudi-Emirati forces were sent, under the sponsorship of the Gulf Cooperation Council, they cracked down on the demonstrations.²⁶

At the beginning of the Syrian revolution, the Obama administration calculated that the risks of toppling Bashar al-Assad's regime weighed more than the advantages. Therefore, the Western powers came up with one solution: saying "no" to military intervention because it would be dangerous and costly, but agreeing to fight a war against the Syrian regime through other means. These other means ranged from diplomatic support of the Syrian military opposition to providing them with intelligence information in their fight against the al-Assad regime. In other words, they calculated that it would only be a matter of time before al-Assad was ousted from power, and it could turn into a Sunni-Shia conflict. Syria has become a battlefield of both regional and international scope: Turkish versus Iranian regimes, the West against Russia and China. And from my point of view, this is the real reason for prolonging the conflict until this moment.²⁷

The EU has taken some steps to address the Syrian crisis. Their first actions materialized in the forms of freezing the Association Agreement that has not been ratified (yet), which led to 'suspending' any cooperation built on a bilateral basis with the Syrian government, and preventing any assistance offered by the European Investment Bank (EIB) – whether in the form of loans or 'technical assistance.' In December 2012, the EU stressed the legitimacy of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as

the representative for Syrian citizens. On February 28, 2013, the EU approved providing this coalition with “non-lethal military equipment.”²⁸ By the end of May 2013, the EU lifted the arms embargo on the Syrian opposition, and the United States publicly supported the European decision.²⁹

Because the American administration and the EU realized that the fall of al- Assad would lead to the materialization of an unknown regime – which could be extremist or against their interests – both remained reluctant to give substantial military support to the Syrian opposition. Later on, when the Western intelligence agencies gathered evidence in April 2013 of the use of chemical weapons in Syria both the American administration and the French government in the lead of the EU seriously considered the possibility of providing the Syrian military opposition with weapons, as well as the likelihood of a military intervention; this is because the rules of the game would have been changed if chemical weapons were used. A great menace came to the fore, because chemical weapons of the already-devastated Syrian regime might “fall into the hands of al-Qaeda or Hezbollah” or al-Nusra Front, or any other unfriendly forces.³⁰



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The West’s Strategic Reactions

Strategically, it has been argued by some scholars that the Arab Spring was a direct result of the West’s failure to address the Middle East’s issues. Following the Oslo accords and the Euro-Mediterranean partnerships in the mid-1990s, the West and the moderate Arab regimes were working closely together, anchored in a Western promise to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, once George W. Bush came to power in 2001, he adopted the hands-off policy with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and used the September 11 attacks to pursue his unilateral approach to invade Iraq in 2003. This inevitably led to the rise of the Iranian regional power and created a new dichotomy in the Middle East, labeled as the “resistance” camp versus the “moderate” camp by the end of 2008. Whereas the resistance camp included Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas, the moderate camp was composed of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.³¹

The American and the European policies of neglecting the peace process, invading two Islamic countries with atrocities revealed in Iraq and Afghanistan, and supporting Israeli crimes against the Palestinians all gave the upper hand

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi meets with Former U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton at the presidential palace in Cairo on November 21, 2012.
AFP / Khaled Desouki



to the resistance camp and debilitated the legitimacy of the regimes of the moderate camp allied with the West. It even prompted the Arab public to accuse those regimes of being pro-Israel and pro-West and against the Arab and Islamic interests. Therefore, it can be argued that the decline of the regional and domestic legitimacy of the moderate Arab regimes, combined with the worsening of the public's "social and economic conditions," were the straws that broke the camel's back and ushered in revolutions in the Middle East.³²

The Arab Spring erupted partially due to the malfunction of the European policies toward the Middle Eastern region. For more than 20 years the Europeans promised the Arabs a 'shared prosperity'; however Arabs remained stuck in dire poverty and in an rising unemployment. The Europeans publicly supported human rights and democracy; however in practice they tolerated the Arab despotic regimes. Therefore, instead of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership bringing prosperity to the Arabs and the Mediterranean, it was nothing but a tool to stop illegal emigration from the Southern-Mediterranean.³³ The European Neighborhood policy and the Union for the Mediterranean were in fact a European confession of the failure of their EMP policies. Despite the fact that the Europeans increased the terms of conditionality with the Arab regimes in their neighborhood policy, they remained willing to accept the autocratic rule of these regimes and even planned to upgrade their relationship with them – especially with the Tunisian regime. In other words, the European Union intended to give Bin Ali's regime in Tunisia an "advanced status" right before the revolution, as it had done with Morocco in 2008 and Jordan 2010.³⁴

The initial European strategic reaction to the Arab Spring came to the fore in March 2011 when it adopted a new initiative known as “Partnership for Democracy and Stability with the Southern Mediterranean.” It was anchored mainly on the ‘more-for-more’ approach; which meant the more a country is committed to democratic reform, the more assistance it could expect from the Europeans; and the less a country obliges with the European conditionality, the less support it would expect.³⁵

Thus, the European Union developed a strategy composed of three “pillars.” The first supports a deep-rooted democracy in the Arab Spring countries anchored not only in the results of the ballot-box, but also in the other requirements for establishing a well-consolidated democracy – such as the “freedom of association and expression, the rule of law, the fight against corruption and democratic control over security forces.”³⁶ The second was to reinforce the people-to-people ‘partnerships’ through developing and sustaining the NGOs in the Arab Spring countries. The third was to develop the socio-economic prosperity of the Arab countries through a meaningful reduction in the ‘unemployment and inequality’ that had been the major motivation behind the Arab awakenings.³⁷ Later

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on, the European Union took further steps to put its strategic goals into practice through Catherine Ashton’s catchy slogans, the “Three Ms” – money, market access and mobility” – as the most appropriate tools through which Europeans would make a difference in the post-Arab Spring era.³⁸

The Arab awakening emerged almost one-and-a-half years after the Obama administration released its new National Security strategy in May 2010. One major facet of this new strategy was its recognition of the limits of American power and resources.³⁹ Anchored in this acknowledgment, the Obama administration realized that it could not control the results of these revolutions, therefore it sought to make sure that whichever new regimes came to power, they should be consistent with American interests.⁴⁰ Hence, the Obama administration developed an implicit strategy based on four elements to address the Arab awakenings. First, it worked closely with the military circles in the Middle East and even capitalized on their long-lasting investment in the Arab armies, especially with the Egyptian army. Second, it opened a new chapter with the moderate Islamists who were prepared to consider the American interests in the region. Third, it chose to assist the devastated economies of the Arab Spring countries. And finally, it preached support for the democratic transition in some of these countries; albeit with a willingness to accept autocratic practices so long as the American interests were maintained, and even

turned a blind eye on the dictatorships of other countries, especially in the Gulf, depending on the American interests.⁴¹

Rationales Behind the West's Behavior Toward the Arab Spring

In the Egyptian revolution, once the Obama administration realized that Mubarak's era is about to end, it bet on the Egyptian Army. In other words, the Obama administration endeavored to capitalize on its long investment in the Egyptian Army through making it a 'midwife' of the transitional period in Egypt's post-Mubarak era, as well as a defense against anything that might endanger the "Israeli-Egyptian peace" accord.⁴² As for Europe, inaction and hesitation was the landmark in its handling of the revolution because most of the European countries considered Mubarak's regime as a "bulwark against Islamic extremism." Only when Obama made it clear that Mubarak should step down, did the European capitals follow in suit.⁴³

This European impotence to swiftly act and its adoption of the 'wait and see' approach in the Egyptian and other Arab revolutions is also due to the fact that each European member state had its different and sometimes divergent interests toward the Southern Mediterranean countries. Although the mainstream European approach was to wait, different, fragmented and heterogeneous reactions came from some countries that had attempted to be pro-active and assertive. This explains the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's appraisal to Mubarak seven days before he stepped down, and the French minister's strong support to Ben Ali at the very beginning of the Tunisian revolution.⁴⁴

In the Libyan revolution, the Obama administration chose to lead from behind and adopted a multilateral approach. This can be explained by the fact that Obama endeavored to force his European allies to share the burden of any military operation in an issue labeled in the American interests as a "second-tier issue."⁴⁵ In addition, it was an easy job because the Arab League and the United Nations authorized the 'no fly zone' and Saudi Arabia welcomed the ousting of a long-lasting antagonistic regime. In other words, the Arabs' and the United Nations' approval had given the United States the required regional and international legitimacy to strike the Libyan regime.⁴⁶

Unlike its timid response in the Tunisian and the Egyptian revolutions, France took the helm in the military strike against the Gadhafi regime, and it even became the first country to recognize the "Transitional National Council" as the legal representative of the post-Gadhafi Libya. This can be explained by the French yearning for 'regional leadership' and assertiveness, as well as its eagerness for 'beneficial economic contracts' with the new Libyan regime. One crucial piece of evidence proves that the French assertiveness in the Libyan case

had nothing to do with promoting democracy or protecting human rights; it almost ignored the Algerian, Morocco, Yemen and Bahrain uprisings due to its close relationships with the Algerian and Moroccan regimes and Saudi Arabia's sway in Yemen and Bahrain.⁴⁷ Unlike France, Germany preferred to support the Arab transformation while simultaneously opposing intervention. This proves the inconsistency of the EU in addressing the Arab Spring.⁴⁸

The Obama administration was practically silent for the first half year of the Syrian revolution. After almost six months, Obama asked al-Assad to step down. Despite the attractive idea of sidelining the al-Assad regime from the anti-Western Syrian-Iranian alliance, it was still difficult to repeat the Libyan sculpt in Syria due to numerous reasons. First, the Syrian regime had already been put under tightened sanctions by the West due to its alleged championing of terrorism and its constant meddling in Lebanon's internal affairs. Therefore, more sanctions would not force Bashar al-Assad to step down because he used to live with them. Second, a military strike against al-Assad was not a serious alternative at that time due to the considerable military potentials of the Syrian Army and the solid likelihood of assistance from Hezbollah and Iran. Third, Russia and China made it clear that they would never allow the Libyan experience to be repeated once more.⁴⁹

Therefore, it can be argued that the issue of the Syrian crisis was postponed because al-Assad's military was a power to be reckoned with, the military and political opposition remained weak and divided, and the regional and international consensus over Syria was unlikely to take place in the near future.⁵⁰ Only after two-and-a-half years of the Syrian revolution did both the United States and some European member states consider providing the Free Syrian Army (the military opposition) with weapons and munitions, as well as the possibility of a military strike against the al-Asaad regime, due to the intelligence information that chemical weapons were being used in the ongoing conflict. Moreover, by the end of May 2013, the EU lifted the arms embargo on the Syrian opposition with America's blessing. The likelihood of the collapse of al-Asaad's regime and the control of some extremist groups in the Syrian opposition, such as al-Nusra Front, over the power and the chemical weapons in Syria posed a grave threat to Israel's national security and to the Western interests in the Middle East⁵¹.



Both the United States and Europe endeavored to strike a balance between preserving their interests and promoting the values of democracy and human rights during the Arab Spring

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The Obama and Europe administrations looked at the Yemen revolution from the terrorism angle and at the Bahrain revolution from the Iranian angle. In other words, a revolution in Yemen would mean giving more space and freedom to an al Qaeda organization. Therefore, the West coordinated with Saudi Arabia to remove the head of the system, Ali Abdullah Saleh, while keeping the system itself with only cosmetic changes to alleviate the people's anger. On the other hand, a revolution in Bahrain would eventually mean increasing the Iranian sway in the region and endangering the U.S. Fifth Fleet.⁵² The United States had invested in a long and stable relationship with Bahrain for more than two decades. It even constructed its biggest naval base in the Gulf at the Juffair (near Manama) and counted on Bahrain to counter terrorism in the aftermath of September 11. If a revolution succeeded in Bahrain, the new re-

gime would be dominated by Shia groups which already had close connections with Tehran.⁵³ This clarifies why neither the United States nor the European states criticized the Saudi's military interference to suppress the Bahraini protesters, whom had the same aspirations of the other Arab protesters.

The West was pragmatic in its reaction to the Arab Spring. It prompted the Obama administration to adopt a case-by-case approach anchored in strict calculations of potential challenges and opportunities in each case, and also caused the Europeans to embrace the 'wait and see' approach, albeit with some hasty reactions from the southern European countries such as Italy and France.⁵⁴ The climax of the American and European pragmatism materialized in the Bahraini case; where the Obama cabinet took into consideration the Saudi king's concerns and turned a blind eye on the suppression of the Bahraini people by the Saudi forces.⁵⁵

On the European level, division, and inconsistency remained the central landmarks of the European response to the Arab Spring. Initially, France championed Bin Ali's regime while the other European countries remained silent. Even after most of Europe took the side of the Tunisian people, differences remained over addressing the illegal emigration from the southern Mediterranean. France and Britain were eager to get involved in any forthcoming military action in Libya, while Germany refused to be engaged, and other countries remained 'cautious' in the beginning due to their close ties with the Libyan regime.⁵⁶

Generally speaking, both the United States and Europe endeavored to strike a balance between preserving their interests and promoting the values of de-

mocracy and human rights during the Arab Spring. I contend that they failed to fulfill this objective because they gave mixed signals to the people of the Middle East as well as to the regimes. While the Obama administration rhetorically supported the Arab aspirations for freedom and democracy in Tunisia and Egypt, it remained silent in Bahrain and delayed addressing the Syrian crisis despite the continue atrocities against human rights in Syria. The Libyan crisis was the only case that represented a consistency between the West's interests in toppling Qaddafi with protecting civilians.⁵⁷ Europe also gave mixed signals when it remained silent at the very beginning of the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt, and later when it took the helm in Libya under the pretense of protecting the civilians from the brutal regime. Later on, it ignored the Bahraini, Yemen and Syrian violations of human rights.⁵⁸

Conclusion

The Western alliance supports democracy only when it serves its interests. Therefore, when democracy brings together individuals or groups inconsistent with the Western aims, it is considered undesirable. This is evident in the French reaction toward the Tunisian revolution and the American reaction toward the Egyptian and Yemen revolutions. On January 25, 2006, the Western alliance rejected the results of democracy in Palestine when Hamas won a free and fair parliamentary election, because it went against their wishes and instead isolated Hamas and reinforced Fatah. Paradoxically, the Gaza War from 2008-09 and the Israeli attacks against Gaza in November 2012 are still fresh in the minds of Arabs: why didn't the Western alliance swiftly interfere in the Gaza War, as it did in Libya, to protect the civilians? To conclude, I assume that the accords between the West and the Arab regimes are still working, albeit with a different formula. In other words, the Americans and the Europeans have chosen to align with the Islamist regimes, which have high levels of support among the Arab public and that come to power through the ballot box. In return, the new Islamist regimes have chosen not to interfere with the Western interests in the region. ■

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