
The events known collectively as the “Arab Spring”—the series of demonstrations, upheavals, and eventually sectarian, ethnic and civil wars in the Middle East—had a variety of causes. While the demands for human dignity and relief from unemployment and low living standards were among the most explicit, the call for the elimination of corruption was equally important and organically linked to the other demands. Thus, it is interesting to note that the very first spark for the uprising occurred with public demonstrations against one of the most notoriously corrupt Arab regimes, the one headed by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia. The unrest quickly spread to the Egyptian, Libyan, and Yemeni hereditary or monarchical republics (terms that in and of themselves indicate almost institutionalized corruption), and culminated in the prolonged Syrian civil war that some critics attribute to the reaction against the “corruption, nepotism and cronyism of 42 years of Assad family rule.”

In dealing with the impact of corruption on the “Arab Awakening,” it is important to remind the reader of what this book understands corruption to be, and how the notion may help us consider some of the political processes which are still at play in the contemporary Arab Middle East. One of the reasons that corruption is a “contested concept,” to use Gal-li’s term, is that it refers to the employment of authority to deviate from behavioral standards that the observer or analyst views as positive and acceptable. It is important to note, however, that the violated behavioral standard itself—the source of the alleged corruption—could be perceived
by the observer or analyst as a religious commandment, a legal provision, a moral imperative, or an ideological norm against which the actual behavior of the person(s) is assessed. It is likewise essential to recognize that different people, states, societies and even civilizations have different standards for what is positive and acceptable, and hence for what qualifies as "corrupt behavior."

However, corruption could also reflect essential disagreements within societies on the nature of the standards and the behavior that they prescribe. In such cases, what is acceptable will hinge on who defines corruption. The answer will depend on the person’s perspective and background. To be sure, shades of opinion are to be found in all societies and especially pluralistic ones. The state of affairs we refer to concerns schisms that are about such disagreements and that typically involve situations of rapid social, economic and political change. Under such conditions, the interpretations offered by the legal or public interest definitions of corruption will only muddy the water. Who defines the purpose and limits of office? Whose law is it? And who defines public opinion is the key.

Following Burke, we posited that regardless of the particular version of the basic standards, all societies are rooted in a basic agreement concerning the boundaries delineating the mutually encroaching and partially overlapping realms of political authority and socioeconomic power. And it is herein that one can identify the dimension of the complex conflicts that underlie the "Arab Spring" on which we focus in this chapter.

A few disclaimers are in order. We realize that the picture we draw is merely general in nature, appreciate that corruption cannot easily be abstracted from existing factors, and are fully aware of the heterogeneity of the publics involved in the Arab Spring. All of those factors and others hinder anyone’s efforts at generalization. At least some of the behaviors denounced by the Arab Spring protestors as corrupt are indeed criminal by whatever yardstick employed; other acts or alleged acts might be more difficult to define. In the present chapter, our primary interest is to shed light on what we believe is the most interesting issue at stake: a clash between different views of the basic principles that underlie social, economic, and political exchanges. In this sense, some of the Arab Spring protest against corruption is a result as well as a symptom of a more basic difference regarding corruption—the difference between Western-influenced or Burkan conception of corruption, on the one hand, and cultural definitions of corruption based on religious, tribal, and political traditions that are decidedly non-Western.

While corruption in the Middle East is widely reported by the Western media and by various political outlets (including human rights organizations and organizations committed to transparency and anticorruption agenda), detailed and specific country information is generally much harder to come by. Indeed, in this chapter we are less interested in
a country-by-country account than we are in giving the reader a general perspective on corruption in the Middle East, particularly as it has been reflected in events known as the Arab Spring.

The exploration of these different standards in the context of the current Middle East is one of the focal points of this chapter. Our argument could be succinctly summarized by a set of several propositions:

1. For a long time and throughout the Arab world, there has been a widespread, public perception of large-scale and long-term corruption associated with state institutions and especially with top state leaders and governmental organizations. This corruption has been viewed by large segments of the population of Middle East countries and by numerous analysts in and out of the region as permanent, multidimensional, pervasive and extensive. Practically all countries that have experienced the Arab Spring, regardless of their regime type, “suffered decades of endemic corruption.” This phenomenon has been extensively documented in regard to Egypt by Ann M. Lesch and Anna Nadgrodkiewicz, in regard to Saudi Arabia by Daryl Champion and in regard to Syria by Nader Hasheni and Danny Postel (as well as Alan George) and so forth.5

2. The prevalent perception has been that corruption had both political components—reflected in such forms of behavior as stealing elections by falsifying their results, the arrest of political opponents on trump charges, or the imposition of state control over the mass media—and economic components—for instance, the extortion of bribes, allocation of licenses to relatives (nepotism) and friends, or the secret transfer of funds to banks abroad. Moreover, as the definition of corruption we use here suggests, there has been direct and even organic linkage between those two types of corruption—the “political” and the “socioeconomic.”

3. The perception of corruption in the Middle East has been a great contributor to what could be described as a full-blown crisis of legitimacy of most Arab regimes. This “perceptual crisis” eventually led to, or at least contributed to the uprisings in several countries where the rulers fell (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen), uprisings where rulers have survived despite significant challenges (Bahrain, Syria), and overall regional disquiet. A strong causal link, thus, connects perceived corruption, loss of legitimacy, and mass upheaval. This causal link, we would argue, is likely to prevail in years to come and it might produce more unrest and even full-blown revolutions in the future.

4. Corruption in the Arab world has been rooted not merely in state or governmental institutions (such as the typically vast bureaucracy, the special status of the armed forces, and the systematic abuse by internal security agencies, the Mukhabarat) but also in deeply held social and cultural norms. Most important in this context is the deep-seated factionalism of Arab society, a factor that has taken various forms—tribal, clannish, religious (e.g., Sunni versus Shia), regional (dominant in countries such as Libya and Saudi Arabia), or even sectoral. Ziad Hafez, the
managing editor of the *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, observed the importance of this factor in a clearer manner than most analysts when he stated in his “Factionalism and Corruption in the Arab World,” that “factionalism controls almost all facets of Arab society, whether at the political, economic, social or even cultural level.”

Values rooted in this factor have dominated, superseded, and had taken priority over all other factors, thus creating the gap between the special treatments afforded to regime related groups and other citizens that “do not belong.” Such behavior, viewed by Western standards as institutionalized corruption, is a key characteristic of most Middle Eastern regimes.

5. The preeminence of Islam in many Arab societies has also influenced corruption, particularly as this phenomenon has been defined by the West. As noted in the Introduction to this book, in the Western tradition the fundamental distinction between the public good and the individual’s benefit (and even sectoral benefits) serves to produce a broad common understanding of corruption. Unlike the modern West, Islam is not about the freedom of the individual and its enhancement; it is about the establishment of a righteous, pious society. However, Islam places great emphasis on justice. Accordingly a ruler can be perceived as illegitimate if he is not seen as being just. Thus, rulers might be perceived as corrupt, but in a different way than in the West.

6. A comprehensive analysis of corruption in the contemporary Arab Middle East must be based on the realization of the deep contradictions in regard to corruption, contradictions that have produced hybridity in most Arab societies. On the one hand, in the Muslim world there is “a traditional vision of the ideal political leader” whose rule is God given and totally pure; on the other, there is a reality where “the good of the group takes precedence over the good of the whole,” thus facilitating not merely individual-centered corruption but also corruption on behalf of social groups, sects, tribes, ethnic and religious denominations. Recognition of these deep contradictions is a key for more profound understanding of corruption in the Arab Middle East.

**CORRUPTION AND THE ARAB UPRISING**

The timing of the actual outbreak known as the “Arab Spring” was by and large random, and the widespread upheavals could have erupted in a different time and under different circumstances. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that like the Arab awakening of the nineteenth century, analyzed brilliantly by such authors as George Antonius, the recent Arab awakening had a unique character. This unique character is highly relevant for analyzing the issue of corruption. Most importantly, the Arab Spring, especially in its early stages, could be called the “the rebellion of the intellectuals” or, at least, “the uprising of the well-educated.”
In other words, the uprising, and its link to corruption, reflected the political convictions of a relatively narrow segment of the Arab populations in the various Middle East countries rather than the political convictions of all or even most Arabs.

The uprising began in mid-December 2010, following the self-immolation of a young man in Tunisia. It quickly spread to other parts of the Arab world, most notably to Tahrir Square in central Cairo. The Tahrir crowd was, for the most part, well-educated and relatively liberal. Most of the active demonstrators believed that the Mubarak regime was fundamentally corrupt both politically (e.g., by the President and his ruling party manipulating elections and by Mubarak eventually designating his son as his successor) and economically (by the ruler and his associates enriching themselves at the expense of the “people”). Indeed, the accusation was that the two spheres of social activity, the political and the economic, were intrinsically and intimately intertwined. Hosni Mubarak, his family, and his closest friends and associates used their political influence to make massive sums of money through kickbacks, receiving free or low cost stocks, and conducting illegal land deals. In short, it could be argued that the “average” demonstrator at Tahrir Square had adopted, at least in general terms, the Western notion of corruption—based on clear distinction between the public and private spheres (and more particularly the Burkean notion of corruption as the undue influence of political power on the socioeconomic power). The Tahrir Square demonstrator tended to view the Mubarak regime as responsible for blatantly violating that notion of corruption, and that view laid at the heart of his or her discontent.

But while many at Tahrir adopted this Western notion of corruption—particularly through their higher level of education and, even more so, direct exposure to Western values via TV channels and electronic social networks—there is no reason to believe that most other members of the Arab society, in Egypt and in other Arab countries, were ever exposed to the same forces or that they had any inclination to adopt the perception of corruption that typified the Tahrir demonstrators. So what might be called “the Al-Jazeera/Facebook effect” on the evolvement of the Arab Spring, introducing Western concepts and expectations in regard to corruption into the public discourse in the Arab world, has impacted different parts of the Egyptian and the Middle Eastern society in different ways and with differentiated levels of intensity.

Moreover, the individuals who started the rebellion, and who led it in its early and crucial stages, were disproportionately affected by the worldwide economic crisis that swept most Arab societies, particularly the non-oil producers among them. In short, both the timing of the explosion and its substance (or content) were determined by a combination of educational exposure, globalizing impact, and economic distress. Accumulation of a critical mass of resentment, caused by the confluence of
several factors, required a release in the political arena. The nature of the explosion and its focus on institutionalized governmental corruption and its impact on economic activity, however, reflected the character of the demonstrators and their rather atypical background within their own societies.

It is important to note that despite the authentic force of the rebellion against the existing order and the corruption that it has entailed, a series of countervailing forces in the Arab world have been aligned against the democracy-promoting, corruption-opposing forces. At least five of these forces ought to be identified:

1. Tribal forces that have traditionally enjoyed the favors of the ruler. These were clearly evident in the more tribal societies in the Arab world such as Libya, where Colonel Qadaffi dispensed favors to his own tribesmen and tribes supportive of his regime. While there was a regional aspect to the Qadaffi regime—the West was preferred to the East, or Tripoli was held above Benghazi—and Qadaffi himself often behaved in a rather arbitrary manner, in effect the corruption of his regime had consistent logic to it by preferring some tribal groups to other tribal groups and some regions over other regions.

2. A second force supportive of the existing regimes, despite or maybe even because of their proven corruption, has been sectarian elements linked to those regimes. While evident in several Arab countries, in none other has it been more evident than in Syria under the Assad regime and its preferential treatment of the Alewites. The Alewites have constituted a clear minority in Syria and yet they formed a clear majority of cabinet ministers, leading civil servants, internal security personnel, and top ranking army officers. As in the case of Egypt, the results spanned both the economic and political sectors. Article 8 of the old Syrian constitution (written in 1973 by the Baathists) describes the Baath party, whose top officials have been disproportionally drawn from among the Alewites and whose membership constitutes a minority of the population as the party of Syria, and it was designated as the only legal party in the country. When one adds to this Syrian mixture a Parliament “whose main task is to rubber stamp presidential decisions,” and a judiciary that “remains in thrall to the authorities” one can understand why Alewites and smaller minorities rallied around a regime that was accused by Western analysts of extensive corruption.

3. The third force opposing both democratization and the elimination of the deep, systemic corruption in the various Arab countries has been the armed forces. In practically all of these counties, the military has enjoyed a privileged position for decades, a position sustained by both its ability to physically crush forces opposing the regime and by its special, preferential position within the country’s economy. In Egypt, for example, the armed forces have sustained the regime since the July 1952 revolution that brought to power Colonel Gamal Abdul Nasser. Following the
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uprising of early 2011, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has been in the forefront of opposing changes in the country, strongly protecting their uniquely advantageous position within the Egyptian society. The status of the military has constituted, in and of itself, an overwhelmingly corrupting force that has sustained the gross inequalities within the Egyptian society; it had, inter alia, enormous economic consequences for the entire Egyptian society.

4. Practically all the traditional Arab monarchies have also been in opposition to the demands for democratization and to the creation of a more corruption-free societies and polities. Leading the charge in this regard has been Saudi Arabia, who has been working toward the establishment of a confederation of like-minded monarchies in the Arabian Peninsula, has supported direct military intervention in neighboring Bahrain (as well as in Syria), and has propped up other monarchies such as Jordan and Morocco. The Saudis have also supported the Mubarak regime. Although in some situations the Saudis supported reformers, as in Syria, this has been the exception.

5. A political force that may evolve as an opposition to the efforts to uproot corruption and democracy in general, are the radical Islamic elements (of which there are many types in the Middle East). There are several reasons for concern. As a theology, Islam has historically opposed the separation between State and Religion, a governmental principle that had proven critical in the emergence of the democratic state in the West, as well as for the evolvement of the notion that the public sphere and the private sphere ought to be separate. While in the Muslim tradition, authority must be rightfully acquired and then exercised on behalf of the whole community (and the government bear responsibility before God, and thus be limited)), an interventionist policy in the life of the citizens by a state that cannot be challenged by those individuals or the public at large, creates abundant room for corruption. It blurs the boundaries between the private and the public and between the political and the socioeconomic.

None of these countervailing forces need come alone and any combination simply renders the mixture more potent. Nor would law, limits to office, or even public opinion, guarantee the promotion of democracy and continued opposition to corruption.

CORRUPTION AND DEMOCRATIZATION

Corruption in general and in the Arab world in particular, is intimately linked to the larger sociopolitical milieu within which such corruption is alleged to occur. Put differently, the issue of corruption in most Middle Eastern countries is not merely or primarily about the establishment of "good governance" but rather about the creation of a political regime that
will facilitate the emergence of institutions that undermine corruption. Such a conclusion works on both sides of the corruption debate, sharpening the fundamental distinctions in regard to what constitutes corruption.

Good governance is about “institutional performance, efficiency, and responsiveness to basic public services,” goals on which all sides may agree. But efficiency or public services relate to the question of “how,” rather than “what.” It is precisely at the point that disagreements are evident, where questions of what is to be served efficiently, what are the basic needs of the public, and what (and whose) needs are to be preferred are raised. For those who claim that the undermining of traditional orders, threats to Islamic traditions, and glorification of individual caprice constitute corruption, what is required is a regime that will reinstall order and overcome the fragmentation that springs from excessive individualism. But what is required for the creation of Burkian, Western, corruption-free society, is a different and deeper form of democratization. That means the erection of a political system in which the power of the ruler(s) is limited, checked, or balanced in a systematic and sustainable manner. In either case, it ought to be recognized that while good governance might deal with the symptoms of corruption, what is needed is a fundamental and sustained effort to tend to the root causes of corruption.

As previously argued in this chapter (as well as in the Introduction), corruption is always about ideal behavior versus real behavior; it is invariably linked to the “moral order” that societies and people strive for and their belief system of creating an improved desired state that undermines or reduces corrupt behavior. Yet, by its very nature, corruption is defined differently in different societies, and it is changing over time. There is no stable, unchanging, universally accepted definition of corruption, a fact that is obvious when we examine the Middle East today.

Since many (although by no means all) challenges to established Arab regimes were launched by those demanding the democratization, we will devote the rest of the chapter to the efforts by both internal and international forces to overcome corruption by the democratization of the Arab regimes. Our argument is that the anticorruption struggle has been tied to the larger efforts by some forces to democratize the Arab societies and that, in fact, what is considered as corrupt behavior is often at the very center of the political effort carried out by those forces. Moreover, if those efforts to genuinely democratize the Arab societies prove successful, we might witness significant decline in the level and severity of what in Western terms will be regarded as corruption; but should these efforts fail, such corruption will be sustained and may even escalate. For purposes of parsimony we shall henceforth restrict the term “corruption” to its meaning by nontraditionalist forces as well as forms of behavior that are seen by both sides in the debate as corrupt (such as, for example, the abuse of police power to extort money or other favors from civilians).
Corruption in this sense has been deeply rooted in the nondemocratic structures of practically all contemporary Arab societies, regardless of their particular regime type or economic condition. Kamel Touati has recognized that corruption in most Arab countries is related to their "democracy defect" where public power is used for personal interests, a part and parcel of "a systematic State policy." Interestingly, despite the variety of regime forms in the Arab world, corruption has been rampant throughout the region. Thus, for example, one can find highly corrupt practices in a number of traditional Arab monarchies whether their legitimacy is based on religious claims (e.g., Jordan, Morocco, or Saudi Arabia) or not, as well as in all republican regimes (e.g., Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Syria). Also, the economic status of the regime is not a cardinal cause for the existence or absence of corruption; thus, one can find corruption in what has become known as "rentier" states, as well as in other states. Furthermore, corruption is present both in sectarian societies and regimes (such as Syria or Bahrain), as well as in more homogeneous countries (such as Tunisia under Ben Ali).

The prevalence of corruption across the region, and the fact that it is so heavily present in a variety of regime types, might indicate that there are deeper cultural factors at play in the Middle East. Some of these cultural factors might be a result of the long despotic history of the region or, possibly, with the dominance of religious institutions in general and Islam in particular.

In several Arab states—particularly the "republican" regimes in countries such as Egypt and Syria, Libya and Tunisia—we have seen through the years (and sometimes for decades) the evolvement of "the unprecedented level of corruption and monopoly of both power and wealth." The core problem became the totally arbitrary "personalization of power" by the leader, his family and his associates. The state thus became the personal province of the leader, bringing corruption to a new high. Most importantly from the theoretical perspective of this chapter, has been the intimate, pervasive link between political power and economic power, where typically the former facilitating the latter.

CORRUPTION AFTER THE ONSET OF THE ARAB SPRING: DECEMBER 2010 TO THE PRESENT

While it is too early to fully assess where the Arab world is going in dealing with its long-term corruption problem, there are several alternative ways of beginning such an assessment: a) there are several reports of organizations that specialize in closely evaluating corruption and transparency, in the Middle East and beyond; b) journalists and other visitors to the Arab world have given some attention to the corruption issue and their reports give at least a general (if somewhat anecdotal) picture of
the overall trend in Middle East countries; c) we could, and should, ex­amine the constitutional developments in the Middle East in order to identify the legal trends in all areas of public policy, including that of corruption.

One organization that has been involved in the systematic and comparative assessment of corruption has been the Berlin-based Transparen­cy International (TI). Reporting in December 2012 on the findings of TI in regard to “Arab Spring nations,” Aljazeera has critically noted that “the Arab Spring revolutions have yet to produce serious anti-corruption ac­tion across the region.” 24 In assessing the corruption level of different nations, TI ranked Egypt as 118th among 176 countries (down 6 places from its previous report) and Syria as 144th (down 15 spots). Monarchies such as Jordan (58th place) and Saudi Arabia (66th) have done signifi­cantly better than those Arab republics. Also the Maghreb countries per­formed better (Tunisia at 75th and Morocco at 88th places), although even they slipped from higher rankings in past years. The Corruption Perceptions Index of TI for 2011 gave Egypt a score of 2.9 and Jordan 4.5 in terms of corruption (on a scale between 10, very clean, and 0, highly corrupt).

An even more interesting perspective on corruption is an attempt to evaluate the corruption trends over time. 25 The uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa were accompanied by widespread reports on the systematic stealing of large sums of money by des­tops, their family mem­bers and their personal friends, as well as numerous other forms of cor­ruption. The removal of those des­tops—Mubarak, Ben Ali, Qadaffi—has generated hopes that as part of the overall regional democratization, cor­ruption could be seriously addressed or at least somewhat reduced.

As of the time of writing (May 2014), however, we would summarize the trends toward the creation of noncorrupt polities in the Middle East as inconclusive at best and as utterly unpromising at worst. The reason for our overall pessimism is multifaceted: (a) corruption is deeply en­trenched in the Middle East, reflecting fundamental cultural and institutional conditions, not merely the lack of “good governance” procedures; (b) the leadership in the various countries is either the old elite of past generations (e.g., Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia), an increasingly author­itarian group (e.g., Syria), or people with little experience, capabilities or even desire to take on existing social ills such as corruption and lack of transparency (former president Morsi of Egypt and the new president, General al-Sissi, are but two good examples).

CORRUPTION AND THE MIDDLE EAST FUTURE

In general, it could be argued that the future of corruption in the Middle East is tightly linked to the overall political future of this rather undemo-
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cratic, unstable, and volatile region. This preliminary research into the fundamental causes of Middle Eastern corruption indicates that there are at least three alternative approaches to this phenomenon, approaches that might help us in systematically studying corruption in the region:

The cultural approach would argue that Middle Eastern corruption is rooted in the deeply ingrained cultural traditions of the area, including cronyism and nepotism (based on the centrality of family obligations), as well as a long history of despotism and the centrality of religion, and particularly Islam. Those forces have more or less permanent impact in practically all Middle Eastern societies, and they are exceedingly difficult to change, especially in the short run.

The institutional approach would dwell on the way in which a variety of social institutions in the Middle East might contribute to corruption in that region. For example, the so-called “rentier state” has been seen by many analysts as a fundamentally corrupt polity and often oppressive toward its citizens. Other institutional characteristics in the Arab world include a traditionally very large public sector (that is, a bloated bureaucracy) that is controlled from above by powerful political elites but inhabited, on the mid- and low-level strata by bribery-prone, low-paid personnel (in other words, an ideal “arrangement” for systematic and pervasive corruption).

The political approach would emphasize that the root of corruption in the Arab Middle East is to be found primarily in the benefit derived by the ruling class from the existing corruption and the fact that the institutionalization of transparency would be against the inherent interest of this class in every respect (economically, politically, and socially).

Looking at the future of the Arab world from these three different, albeit related perspectives, it seems that the future of corruption-free regimes in the Middle East is rather bleak. The foundational conditions for seriously reducing corruption in the Middle East are not promising.

Theoretically speaking, however, there are several ways in which corruption could be reduced in the region:

Establish real democracy in which all citizens participate equally in periodic elections and in which elected representatives, as well as bureaucrats, feel responsible to the citizenry and are, in fact, accountable to it.26 Democratization is, in effect, a “holistic approach” to corruption reduction.27 Civil society in all Arab countries needs to be strengthened.

Establish transparency of all or at least most transactions, economic and political alike, by adopting the kind of rules developed in the liberal West over the last fifty to sixty years. Examples of necessary reforms include wider access to public information (including freedom of information legislation), the extension of whistleblower protections to all government employees, and enhanced freedom of the press in Arab countries.
Create governmental checks and balances in order to limit and reduce the unrestrained power of the rulers, the executive branch, the armed forces, the police, and above all the all-powerful internal security forces. In all Arab countries corruption has been enhanced by the unusual and unbalanced strong power of the executive branch; this excessive power ought to be balanced by a stronger and more independent legislative and judicial branches.

It is clear, however, that even if there is a serious intent to introduce such changes, fully or partially, their implementation would take a rather long time. Further research is also needed in regard to the effect of the government type on economic growth specifically in the Middle East and North Africa. This would give us a better understanding of how different governments would make the Middle East more economically productive and therefore help alleviate the factors which constituted, in part, causes of the Arab Awakening.

There are, indeed, several alternative ways to bring about change in the Arab world, in the hope of creating a more democratic and less corrupt regime. One way is to introduce gradual reform from above, the type of change sometimes supported by (or at least announced by) the Jordanian regime and even by the Saudi regime. While such an approach might have the advantage of avoiding the unpredictability of a popular uprising of the type we have seen in Tunisia in late 2010 and in Egypt in early 2011, it is doubtful that many or even any of the Arab regimes will seriously reform itself.

An alternative approach to change would be that of conducting free, regular elections that would allow the people to install the leadership they can identify with, and in turn hold it accountable. Again, while this mode of “Western” change is theoretically preferable to the uncontrollable pressure from below, so far it has not established any serious track record in the Middle East. Elections have been rigged, manipulated or ignored as a method of sociopolitical change in this region.

A third method might be called the constitutional route. It is based on the idea of introducing in a more or less systematic manner the type of constitutional changes that favor democracy and, by implication, reduce corruption. But constitutional changes require the type of political maturity that we have not seen to date in the Arab world to date. Constitutional reform requires a fertile ground, not merely an intellectual and organizational effort.

The fourth method of introducing sociopolitical change is the revolutionary one, essentially the method used by the masses in the Arab world since late 2010 in order to remove their leaders and/or change some of the fundamentals of their countries’ regime. At this time, it is somewhat too early to judge the effectiveness of this method in creating a long-term change in the region. One of the inherent problems in any revolution is that it brings about a counterrevolution. This essay identified several
counterrevolutionary forces already aligned in the Middle East to reverse the achievements, however limited, of the masses. In the final analysis, as it was argued before, this is a struggle over democratization and corruption.

As the so-called “Arab Spring” continues, and as it has many military implications—civil war in Syria and other states (with outside intervention), arms races between the Saudis and the Iranians, and so on—one particularly important aspect of corrupt behavior is its link to the defense/military activity of the various Middle East countries. Transparency International UK and others have given serious attention to corruption in the defense area. The findings are not encouraging. While over two-thirds of the eighty-two countries examined in terms of corruption in the defense area have been found by TI researcher to have inadequate safeguards in their defense sectors, the Middle East countries have been found to be among the worst. In the seven categories defined by TI (A, B, C, D+, D-, E, and F), Category F includes four Arab Spring nations—Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Yemen; their corruption risk was defined as “critical” (note that all four are Arab republics). Category E (defined by TI as very high corruption risk) included most other Arab nations, including Bahrain, Iraq, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia. Only Jordan was placed by TI in the D- Category, while Kuwait, Lebanon, and United Arab Emirates were placed in the D+ Category (the D category signifies “high corruption risk”).

The categorization of the Arab states on the corruption index indicates that the vast majority of them have very weak or even no activity whatsoever to seriously address corruption issues in the defense field, that the defense area is controlled by a small elite which benefits politically and economically from its control, and that there is no societal or civilian control—or even influence—over this activity. The procurement of military equipment in the Middle East is extremely large and those who gain from dominating this field are unlikely to give it up on their own. Illegitimate commissions on arms sales have been a particularly serious problem.

NOTES

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1. By “hereditary or monarchical republics” we mean those regimes that while declaring themselves “republics,” have practically institutionalized succession from father to son. This phenomenon has been evidenced in Egypt, Syria, Libya, and several other Arab countries.


5. For full references to publications by these authors and others, please consult the bibliography to this chapter.

6. This overwhelming critique, in the case of the Egyptian regime, has been adopted by analysts representing a wide variety of ideological positions. For a review of the nationalist, Islamist, leftist, and liberal critiques of Egyptian political life see, for example, Manar Shorbagy, “Egyptian Views on the Politics of Egypt Today,” International Political Science Review 30 (November 2009): 519–34.


11. This has been documented in some detail in Ann M. Lesch, “Egypt’s Spring: Causes of the Revolution,” Middle East Policy 18 (Fall 2011): 35–48.


13. Estimate by George is that at the beginning of the century the Baath membership reached 18 percent of the population. See Alan George, Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom (London: Zed Books, 2003), 71.

14. George, Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom, 2.

15. For a description of the economic privilege of the Egyptian armed forces, see Wendell Stevenson, “Who Owns the Revolution? The Army or the People?” The New Yorker, August 1, 2011, 38–57.

16. Saudi Arabia itself has been one of the few countries not to experience serious protest since the Arab Awakening began in early 2011. Among the reasons that are relevant here one should mention the vast resources at the disposal of the Saudi regime. This enables it to appease the population with promises of better standards of living and more jobs. Perhaps even more important is the religious legitimacy of the regime. This, of course, is not the place for any particulars of what is after all well known, but our comments about the Islamic tradition are very relevant here. See, among others, Daryl Champion, “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Elements of Instability Within Stability,” Middle East Review of International Affairs 3 (December 1999): 49–73.


20. Rentier states are states that derive their revenues from “renting” their natural resources, typically oil, to external powers. While the concept of “rentier capitalism” was developed by Karl Marx, Hazem Beblawi has used it to describe modern states, particularly the oil-rich countries of the Middle East. Rentier oil states are thought to be particularly corrupt, based on radically unproductive economies and politics. Some
analysts believe that rentier states influence non-rentier states to behave like them, often buying them off, thus sharing with them, in effect, their oil revenues as well as their corruption.

21. It is useful to describe such polities as "deeply divided societies." See, for example, the recently published Adrian Guelke, Politics in Deeply Divided Societies (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), as well as Ilan Peleg, Democratizing the Hegemonic State: Political Transformation in the Age of Identity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).


23. Among the better known, accessible anti-corruption indexes are the following: Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, the Bertelsmann Foundation’s Transformation Index, Global Integrity’s Report, Freedom House’s Freedom in the World Survey, and the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators. All five organizations show high level of corruption in most Middle Eastern countries compared to global averages. These data tend to be compatible, thus verifying the findings regarding corruption.


26. Electoral democracy is, of course, insufficient in establishing a "clean," corrupt government; it needs to be complemented by rules and regulations that are actually followed, and by appropriate political culture.

27. See Johnson and Martini, “Corruption Trends,” 2.


29. One method of signaling “change” by the Hashemite kings has been to replace the prime minister or even the entire cabinet; this method, however, loses its effectiveness the more it is used.

30. Freedom House’s evaluates countries such as Egypt & Jordan as “Not Free” and as low ranking in terms of political rights and civil liberties.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


