Mikael Eriksson

Re-Orient?

FOI

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An overview of the Arab Revolutions and the Balance of Power in the Middle East



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FOI
Swedish Defence Research Agency
SE-164 90 Stockholm

Phone: +46 8 555 030 00
Fax: +46 8 555 031 00

www.foi.se

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Cover Picture: Anonymous demonstrators symbolising the Arab revolutions. Picture used with permission of Istockphoto.com

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Programme manager's remarks

The cascading revolts and protest movements in North Africa and the Middle East have arguably come together to form the most significant strategic event affecting regional and global relations in years. Coupled to other regional challenges, most significantly the Iran controversy, Israel-Palestine and Turkey's re-formation as a regional power, they will shape the future of the Middle East for years to come. During the period since the protests started in early 2011, domestic issues have been the focus in much of the mainstream media reporting and analysis. Less attention has been given to the implications for broader regional interstate relationships in the Middle East. In essence, no country in the Middle East has escaped the political turbulence that has unfolded in the region. As key regional powers such as Egypt transform politically, so arguably will their foreign and defence policies, affecting the balance in the Middle East.

The multitude of foreign policy adjustments currently taking place in the Middle East may well set in motion complex security dynamics. In this report Mikael Eriksson examines the ongoing changes in the Middle East security architecture from a state-centric perspective. While no fundamental geopolitical transformation will immediately follow because of the revolts, uncertainty about policy directions and security dynamics in the region will remain for some time. Such uncertainties may well have substantial long-term implications. The author highlights some of them. The report presented here makes an important contribution to the contemporary debate on the strategic implications of the Arab revolutions currently unfolding, and Mikael Eriksson's conclusions focus attention on key issues of interest that need further examination as the Middle East transforms in the coming years.

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Stockholm, February 2012

John Rydqvist

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Sammanfattning

Befintlig studie undersöker de säkerhetspolitiska implikationerna av revolutionerna i arabvärlden inom ramen för säkerhetskomplexet Mellanöstern. Analysen undersöker huruvida maktförskjutningar har skett i regionen, samt vilken form dessa antagit. Studien är primärt fokuserad kring den säkerhetspolitiska relationen mellan stater, till följd av de arabiska folkens i huvudsak icke-våldsliga uppror mot sittande regimer. Därför sammanfattar och analyserar den respektive lands mest avgörande inrikespolitiska förändringar, kopplade till revolterna, och hur dessa i sin tur kommit att påverka statsmakten och dess utrikespolitik. Studien härleder sedan dessa processer till förekomst av nya regionala maktbalansförhållanden. Studien täcker större delen av Mellanöstern, men avhåller sig från att studera de arabiska revolutionerna i Nordafrika, som finns återgivna i en tidigare FOI-studie (FOI-R--3273--SE).

Huvudslutsatsen i studien är att ingen djupgående geostrategisk förändring ännu har skett i Mellanöstern till följd av de arabiska revolutionerna. Även om de säkerhetspolitiska relationerna mellan staterna förändrats i varierande grad så har revolterna främst kommit att få interna och utrikespolitiska implikationer för respektive utmanad stat. Till exempel har situationen i regionens nyckelstater så som Iran, Israel, Saudiarabien och Turkiet, inte förändrats nämnvärt jämfört med tiden innan upproren bröt ut.

Detta till trots står emellertid stora delar av regionen inför en brytningspunkt (s.k. ”tipping-point”) främst beroende på händelseutvecklingen i Syrien. Syrien är det land och den statsmakt som för närvarande påverkats mest av revolterna. Flera länder har fått anpassa och justera sin politik mot denna stat. Även om så inte ännu är fallet kan även den geostrategiska situationen ändras snabbt. Syriens sönderfall kan t.ex. få hastiga effekter för länder som Turkiet, Iran, Libanon och Israel. Världssamfundet befinner sig i en politisk låsning kring hanteringen av Syrien. Detta gäller inte minst FN:s säkerhetsråd, där västvärlden och majoriteten av arabvärlden ställs mot främst ryska och kinesiska intressen. Nyligen skapades kontaktgruppen Syriens vänner för att öppna upp denna låsning. En viktig faktor

som pekar på ett fortsatt intresse för Syrien från omvärlden, inte minst från USA, är att händelseutvecklingen kommer att påverka Irans ställning i regionen, vilket är en säkerhetspolitisk faktor som sedan länge varit central för hela regionens dynamik.

Vidare kan i sammanhanget konstateras att den amerikanska hegemonin i regionen alltjämt består. Denna hegemoni påverkar hela den politiska, ekonomiska och militära dynamiken i området. USA:s engagemang bygger på politiskt stöd till demokratiska aktörer såväl som stöd till auktoritära och icke-demokratiska regeringar. På den regionala nivån spelar Gulfstaternas samarbetsråd (GCC) och Arabförbundet en allt viktigare roll.

Exempelvis har GCC till följd av de arabiska folkens uppror bjudit in Jordanien och Marocko i syfte att stödja dessa monarkier och organisationens egen stabilitet. I samband med det amerikanska trupptillbakadragandet från Irak finns möjligheter att GCC och dess stående styrka kan komma att spela en större roll på sikt.

Även Arabförbundet har kommit att spela en allt viktigare roll och väntas även göra så under den närmsta tiden. Initialt i den arabiska revolutionsyran var Arabförbundet av betydelse för händelseutvecklingen i Libyen, men senare även genom att positionera sig mot den syriska ledningen. Detta har skett dels genom att utesluta landet, dels genom att anta riktade sanktioner mot den syriska ledningen.

Studien drar slutsatsen att det säkerhetspolitiska landskapet i Mellanöstern kommer att präglas av än mer osäkerhet än tidigare. Nya frågeställningar och aktörer kommer att behöva anpassa sig till tidigare säkerhetspolitiska strukturer. Likaså måste gamla strukturer och nya aktörer anpassa sig till den nyuppkomna miljön. Beroende på det politiska utfallet (t.ex. huruvida gamla regimer består eller upplöses av nya intressen och maktkonstellationer), så kan säkerhetsimplikationerna för angränsande stater bli antingen dramatiska eller ringa. Detta är således beroende på flera parallella processers förlopp. Väl värt att notera är att olika politiska strukturer och maktbaser kan bestå trots att den politiska ledningen i ett land i sig faller.

Trots att inga direkta säkerhetspolitiska förändringar har skett så kvarstår gamla säkerhetsdilemman och konflikter. Vad som emellertid är nytt är att nya normer, ordningar, aktörer och intressen har tillkommit, element som onekligen kommer att förändra säkerhetslandskapet, inte minst på lång sikt.

Särskilt viktiga faktorer som kan komma att påverka säkerhetssituationen i regionen i närstående framtid inbegriper al-Assad-regimens överlevnad i Syrien samt utvecklingen mot ett mer fullskaligt inbördeskrig, Irans hantering av det arabiska fönster som öppnats för utökat regionalt inflytande inklusive upptrappningen med väst, Egyptens fortsatta interna utveckling och relation med Israel och Iran, den saudiarabiska monarkins hantering av turbulensen i dess grannskap (främst Yemen), Turkiets vägval vad avser dess involvering i

Mellanöstern, samt konsekvenserna av en låst situation i Israel-Palestina konflikten. Särskilt den senare faktorn kommer att skapa en fortsatt utmaning för regionen. Ytterligare demokratisering av stater i arabvärlden kommer förmodligen att leda till en mer radikal positionering i regionen vis-à-vis Israel. Denna positionering kommer att skapa en utmaning för regionen då flera tredjelandsaktörer har både politiska och ekonomiska intressen att stödja Israel. Israel synes vara mer isolerad än tidigare även om USA:s stöd består.

Denna studie fokuserar främst på att analysera konsekvenserna av de arabiska revolutionernas för utrikes- och säkerhetspolitik. Fortsatt analys måste lägga större vikt vid att kombinera dessa återverkningar med redan befintliga politiska och militära spänningar och konflikter i regionen, något som gick utanför ramen för denna studie. Trots allt fanns på förhand flertalet osäkra säkerhetspolitiska utvecklingar i regionen innan revolterna tog fart. De arabiska revolutionerna har kommit att påverka dessa i en ny riktning.

Slutligen bör understrykas att regionens säkerhetspolitiska miljö befinner sig i en omorientering, att demokratiska processer vanligen tar tid att rota sig och att stöd till de demokratiska krafterna i regionen behöver långsiktiga engagemang inte minst från Europa. Flera maktvakuum har uppstått och kommer även fortsättningsvis att uppstå. Olika interna och externa aktörer kommer att försöka fylla dessa, inte alla med goda avsikter. Sverige och EU kan spela en viktig roll genom att stödja regionens demokratiska krafter.

Nyckelord: Arabisk vår, arabiska revolutionerna, folklig revolt, fred, geopolitik, icke-våld, konflikt, kriser, maktbalanser, Mellanöstern, säkerhetspolitik, protester, demonstrationer

Summary

This study investigates the security implications of the Arab revolutions by analysing whether any new geostrategic dynamics have developed in the Middle East as a result of the ongoing and predominantly non-violent Arab revolutions. The aim is to analyse if any geopolitical changes have occurred and, if they have, what forms these have taken. The study is mainly confined to interstate relations in the Middle East, not including the Arab Spring events in North Africa (these are covered in a previous FOI report: see Eriksson 2011a). On the basis of empirical records chronicling domestic political developments in each state (provided in the stand-alone Addendum), this study draws a number of conclusions about what regional foreign policy and security implications the revolts have had.

The main conclusion in this study is that no profound geostrategic change *per se* has taken place in the Middle East as a result of the Arab revolutions. Although relations between states have changed to varying degrees, the revolts taking place in the region during 2011 and early 2012 have for now primarily come to have domestic and foreign policy implications in each challenged state. For example, the region's key states – Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey – have not been significantly affected by the revolutions. Their security environment has changed, but this does not mean that the geostrategic situation has altered drastically in comparison with the pre-revolutionary phase. Yet, several states in the region are quickly approaching a "tipping point" as a consequence of the developments inside Syria. The country so far most affected by the revolts in the region is Syria under the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Several countries have also had to adapt and adjust their policy towards the emerging civil war. However, the situation can change rapidly in geostrategic terms as well. A Syria breaking up in violence can, for example, have severe and rapid security implications for key countries like Turkey, Iran, Lebanon, and Israel. Furthermore, the international community, notably the UN Security Council, is increasingly being locked into a

stalemate with regard to Syria. Most Western countries, together with an increasing number of Arab countries, are in disagreement with Russian and Chinese interests. In February nearly 70 states meet in Tunis to establish a contact-group for Syria, the so-called friends-of-Syria group, *inter alia* for the purpose of unlocking the political stalemate. An important factor that suggests that Syria will attract foreign interest in the time to come, not least from the US, is the considerable implications a fall of the al-Assad regime may have for Iran's future role in the region.

Another conclusion is that the US hegemony in the region is still in place. This hegemony has implications for the entire political, economic and military dynamic in the region. The US maintains its support to democratic forces as well as its relations with authoritarian governments.

On the regional level the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League are playing increasingly important roles. The GCC has invited Jordan and Morocco to join the organisation in a bid to support these two monarchies and the stability of the organisation's members. There are indications that GCC forces may continue to play a regional role (especially since the US has shown support of this idea). The Arab League has also come to play an increasingly important role, initially by granting support for the external intervention in Libya, but more recently through its adoption of targeted sanctions against Syria. The League's role is likely to grow as events progress.

Moreover, the contours of the security landscape in the Middle East will continue to be indistinct for some time because the new elements affecting the security dynamics in the region will have to come to terms with the former political structures and existing military interests. Depending on the political outcomes in some states (e.g. the survival of old regimes), the implications for other states could be either dramatic or negligible. This in turn will be shaped by different and parallel processes. However, worth noting in this context is that political structures and power bases can withstand the ousting of political leaders.

Although the study finds that no profound geostrategic changes have occurred, it also recognises that old security dilemmas and armed conflicts persist. What is new is that new norms, orders, actors and interests have emerged due to the regime adjustments (and regime behaviour). These will change the security landscape in the long-term perspective.

Important factors that may influence the security landscape in the region in the near future include: the survival of the al-Assad regime in Syria and the unfolding of the civil war in Syria; Iran's use of the Arab revolutions to further its own influence in the region, including its confrontation with Western governments; the nature of Egypt's orientation towards Israel and Iran; the position of Saudi Arabia vis-à-vis events in the region (e.g. Yemen); the extent of

Turkey's meddling in Middle East turbulence; and the implications of an unresolved conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people.

As this study primarily analyses the implications of the Arab revolutions, future research needs to combine these repercussions with already existing tensions and conflicts in the region. This was beyond the scope of the present study. After all, a number of existing security developments unfolding prior to the Arab revolutions will contribute to shape the region as well as the broader security agenda. The main challenges ahead that will affect the peace, security and stability of the region, including its relations with the international community, include the potential confrontation with Iran, the United States' downsizing of its troops in Iraq, the stability of Saudi Arabia, the presence of terrorists, and the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

In particular, the latter will pose a challenge for the region as several third-party actors have political and economic stakes and interests in supporting Israel. A further democratisation of the Arab world will most likely lead to more radical positions vis-à-vis Israel. Israel is currently more isolated than ever.

Finally, as the regional security environment is being re-oriented, some general observations highlighted in this study suggest that democracy takes time to take root and that support for democratic forces in the region needs long-term engagement not least by neighbouring European states. As power vacuums will have to be filled, there is no room to leave the unfolding political processes to their fate. There are many actors both in the region and outside that want to exercise influence in such volatile situations, not all of them with good intentions. Sweden and the EU can play an important role to support this region's democratic forces.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Arab revolutions, popular revolts, peace, geopolitics, non-violence, conflict, crisis, power balance, Middle East, security policy, protests, demonstrations

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1 Introduction

A major transformation of the Middle East is currently unfolding. Globalisation, as one important factor, has come to challenge not only societal forces and Arab identities but also the modus operandi of Arab governance.[1] The political turbulence that started in North Africa in late 2010 quickly spread across the region into the wider Middle East. The revolts have provided a new template and changed the norms and principles of how politics in the Arab world can be carried out.[2] Not least, the roles of democracy and human rights have resurfaced.[3]

Notably, a number of governments have been overthrown while other governments face strong opposition. A number of Arab communities have set out on a societal journey to root out authoritarianism and to begin a process of transition towards a post-authoritarian era. For example, during the spring and summer of 2011 Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Ben Ali of Tunisia and the late Colonel Muammer Gaddafi of Libya were all removed from office. Whereas some revolts have managed to remove old regimes, others, have for the time being survived by responding with brute force. This has for example been the case with Bashar al-Assad of Syria, Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen and Salman bin Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain. A number of leaders have at times tried to adapt their governance style to popular demands by means of buying off popular grievances without resorting to violence, although sometimes with limited success (e.g. King Abdullah II of Jordan and King Mohammed VI of Morocco).[4]

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[1] In particular, two important aspects have come to challenge or "alert" old traditional forces in a number of Arab countries: 1) the role of female participation in societal affairs (gender); and 2) the younger generation's demands for participation in societal affairs, including their challenges to traditional authorities and hierarchies.

[2] For more on the specific developments in North Africa see Eriksson (2011a).

[3] I use the term "resurface" here because the idea and concept of human rights have a long history of being embedded in Arab intellectual thought. See for instance the introductory chapter by Jayyusi (2009).

[4] *The Economist* reports that Bahrain proposed giving USD 100 million to families, i.e. USD 2 500 for each family; Jordan proposed a salary increase for civil servants and military personnel, tax cuts on fuel and food, and more money for the National Aid Fund for the poor (the US has promised support of nearly USD 1 billion for economic development inside Jordan and provided Jordan with 50 000 tonnes of wheat); Kuwait has promised USD 4 000 for each citizen and free food for 14 months; Oman has offered an increase in the minimum wage and 50 000 new government jobs, as well as a monthly stipend of USD 390 for job-seekers; Saudi Arabia has announced a 15 per cent pay increase for public sector workers, and increases in unemployment benefits and housing subsidies; Syria has cut the consumption tax on coffee and sugar, reduced customs duties on food, provided money for the Social System Fund for the poor and increased wages; and Yemen has increased welfare spending. *The Economist* (2011-03-12): 28.

This study examines the geostrategic security implications of the Arab revolutions in the Middle East. This is done by analysing the main political events unfolding in each state in the region and the subsequent impact these developments may have for the security relations between these states. This examination is made against the background that the region has some intrinsic structural insecurity features – for example, a number of existing non-state and state-based armed conflicts across the region – which popular revolts in this period may have altered.[5]

1.1 Focus of Study

This analysis and overview covers primarily the main political developments of the Arab revolutions in each state of the Middle East during 2011 and early 2012. Primarily, it seeks to understand if the Arab revolutions in themselves have given rise to any altered geostrategic dynamics in comparison to the situation before the Arab revolts. As such, the current study does not deal specifically with already existing conflicts in the region, important as they are, although it does make cross-references to such rifts and tensions.

1.2 Aim and Scope

There are different ways to approach the study of security in the Middle East. Depending on the level of analysis, different understandings and explanations is likely to be provided. A human security-focus will provide different notions than a strict state security. Self-evident as it may be, this is still worth stressing also for the purpose of this study. The analysis in this report climbs the so-called *ladder of abstraction* (a term coined by Giovanni Sartori[6]) by looking into political and security developments domestically and from the point of view of the Middle East as an integrated security complex. More specifically, this analysis takes as its starting point the very nature of the state entity as situated in a regional security complex. The idea of the Middle East used here is what Barry Buzan describes as a security complex, that is, "… a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national security cannot realistically be considered apart from one another".[7]

[5] It goes without saying that the popular revolts unfolding have come as a result and a culmination of historical processes.
[6] Sartori (1970).
[7] Buzan (1991): 190.

1.1.1. The Research Puzzle

In line with the overall aim outlined above, the research puzzle for this study is whether any new geostrategic developments have come about in the Middle East because of the Arab revolutions, and – if so – what form these developments are taking.

1.1.2. Definitions and Delimitations

An important delimitation of the notion of security in this study is that that it is primarily interested in a *softer* form of geostrategy. By geostrategic security, I build here on the combination of geographic and political factors that determine the condition of a state or region (partly building on Zbigniew Brzezinski and others). The study does not examine hard military security (changing military capabilities, strategic, operational, tactical, etc.). Furthermore it assumes that geostrategic concerns are being taken into account among the Arab elites as the political landscape changes.

Within the scope of this study, the idea of changing geopolitical patterns is used to signify new dynamics between states in the region (including non-state actors). These new dynamics should relate primarily to threats to state security based on interstate tensions or a considerable shift of change of power centre(s) in the Middle East because of the emergence into power of new pivotal states which threatens existing interstate power relations.[8] Concrete examples would include: 1) new military alliances, 2) interstate conflicts or interstate conflicts, 3) the birth of new states, 4) the division of territory, or 5) profound changes of hegemonic interest in the region.

This geostrategic outlook ignores many other elements of the broader security concept and may make the analysis somewhat static. After all, security can be defined in many different ways ranging from individual and human security to state security concerns (thus this study does not, for example, include an analysis of *human security* that underlies Arab demonstrations in the region). Other aspects of security, which would make an analysis of this kind more complete, would also include the *economic*, *ecological*, *social*, and *military* sectors, adding here gender, generational and religious security.[9] Not only do these aspects interact, but they also shape the nature of each state's strategic outlook. However, considering all these aspects of security is beyond the scope of this study.

[8] There are different ways to define power theoretically. Power is defined here as an ability to alter another actor's behaviour in favour of one's own interest and needs.

[9] See Buzan (1991): 116.

Finally, this study of the Arab revolutions does not deal specifically with already existing conflicts in the region and their interaction with the revolts that have emerged, unless there is a closer connection between the two. Instead, the study primarily seeks to understand if the Arab revolutions by themselves have given rise to any altered geostrategic dynamics. This is not to ignore the interaction between already existing conflicts and new security issues and actors, as such cross-references are being made, but to place greater emphasis on the geostrategic dynamics alone. At the core here is to get an understanding of how domestic developments have shaped foreign policy positions of each regime. This centre of attention is also important when reading the conclusions of this study, as it does not primarily consider the implications for already existing conflicts and tensions unless they are related to the Arab revolutions. This demarcation is obviously not easy to make, but the study seeks to make it.

1.1.3. Structure and Sources

This study covers some of the main domestic political developments shaping the Arab revolution in the region. This is done by using the classic method of process tracing. The results of this overview are the empirical observations included in the Addendum, which forms the main foundation of this study and can be read as a stand-alone study in its own right.

As the Arab revolutions have developed differently and taken diverse routes, the empirical data laying the ground for this analysis are subdivided into two main categories: those states that are *directly* and *indirectly* affected by the Arab demonstrations taking place in the region.

More specifically, the first category includes Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Syria and Yemen. These countries have experienced an immediate domestic impact of the Arab revolutions.[10] In the second category we find Iran, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Turkey.

The directly affected states are those that during 2011 experienced profound demonstrations and social upheaval. The indirectly affected states are those that did not necessarily experience demonstrations and challenges to governance, but whose elites had to adjust their foreign and security policies to adapt to the changing security landscape affecting their regimes. This is not to say that states in the latter category have not experienced political challenges from within, but

[10] Other countries which have experienced significant domestic challenges are Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. However, because they have recently been treated separately, they have been left outside the scope of this particular study (for a more specific treatment, see Eriksson 2011a).

that these domestic challenges are, as indicated above, better perceived as cases with their own trajectories. For instance, during early autumn 2011 demonstrations raged in Tel Aviv because of perceived social injustices and high costs of living, while in Tehran the so-called democratic *Green Movement* continued its attempts to demand social reforms from the incumbent government under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. These events would most certainly have come about with or without the processes unfolding with the Arab revolutions. On the other hand, these events indirectly affected states and may in the near future also lead to more profound foreign policy changes.

Lastly, there are two important aspects to pay attention to with regard to this distinction. First, it seeks to clarify that the directly affected states are more likely to change their policies more immediately and profoundly vis-à-vis the demonstrators than those not affected. Those states that are directly affected are also expected to change their behaviour towards the region and the wider international community (either as the regime makes significant political changes or because new governments are replacing the former regimes).

Second, it is worth noting that the distinction between directly and indirectly affected governments does not *per se* reflect or denote a change of geopolitical considerations. Even though either directly or indirectly affected regimes may consider changing their foreign relations to maximise their security and legitimacy in the region and beyond, it is the interstate relations between several states in combination that determine whether any profound changes have occurred.

This study builds primarily on the extensive security commentaries made by regional experts following the Arab revolutions. A number of media reports, as well as policy reports, mainly from Western think tanks, have been consulted. *Keesing's Record of World Events* (online version) has further informed the empirical records in this analysis. *Keesing's* was particularly convenient when doing the empirical compilation. Different scholarly books and articles have been used to verify more specific claims and arguments. External readers have also provided much food for thought.

1.1.4. Readers instruction

This study consists of six chapters including a larger Addendum. The report can be read either in its complete form, or as two distinct stand-alone parts. Part one (chapter 1-4) examines current security challenges, including trends, patterns and implications of the Arab revolutions (based on part two). Part two (chapter 5-6) outlines the chain of events taking place in each Arab country in the period late 2010 until early 2012.

2 Challenges from *Within*: Potential Security Implications for the *Outside*

The implications of the Arab revolutions are still very much in their formative stages. A closer look at different perspectives currently being formed among security analysts, different security actors, and Western liberal media suggests that two types of views have developed with regard to the evolving security situation in the Middle East: one positive and one much more pessimistic.

The positive perspective that seems to have developed more than a year into the Arab revolutions is that the revolts have changed the mindset of the region's citizens. Since people in a number of countries have succeeded in tearing down the "wall of fear" in their claim for dignity, no authoritarian regime can henceforth consider itself safe in terms of its style of governance. In this perspective the Arab revolt is unique because citizens from different societal backgrounds, classes, and religious and ethnic identities joined hands for the sole purpose of bringing down undemocratic rulers. Moreover, the demonstrations were mainly non-violent (at least in the initial stages) and the demands were primarily human rights and economically motivated (e.g. improved living conditions, jobs, equal opportunity, etc.).

In this view of the Arab revolutions elements of female participation have been given positive attention by analysts and media. Women's role and participation have contributed to change the Arab identity away from one of only being a male concern. Their participation in the protests has also given women new openings for political participation in a situation of regime change.

The long suppressed political, economic and social grievances now expressed were mainly based on different combinations of class differences, great poverty, a high proportion of young people in the population, high unemployment rates, lack of social services, high levels of corruption and lack of trust in future improvements in general living conditions (see Appendix 1). Most importantly, some of the main popular slogans being chanted concerned greater degrees of democracy and human rights; and, significantly, there was no anti-Western and anti-Israel rhetoric.[11] Primarily because of these elements, the proponents of this perspective argue that the revolts have set new political standards for political activism across the region.

[11] It is worth noting that after regime change particular interest groups have expressed anti-Israel sentiments, as in Egypt. However, this does not necessarily represent the attitude of the broader population engaged in anti-regime demonstrations within the framework of the Arab revolutions.

Though the revolts are encountering a number of obstacles and setbacks (e.g. unfolding violence in post-Mubarak Egypt), a general view in this perspective is that such collisions are expected and that the Arab citizenry seems prepared to deal with them.

The pessimistic perspective, on the other hand, emphasises that several revolts across the region have ended in political and military stalemate. Examples of situations in which rulers and regime opponents have not achieved much, include the case of Syria which is descending into chaos, with the likelihood of continued societal factionalism (see also developments in Yemen). Moreover, there are a number of states in the region where the political situation has not changed at all and where authoritarian rule continues (e.g. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan, Algeria and Morocco).

Even in the case of developments that are claimed to be positive (e.g. Tunisia and Egypt), the more pessimistic perspective of events in the Middle East holds that there are continued signs of popular frustration and grievance (in Egypt the new regime is currently dominated by the interests of the military elite).[12] While ruling families and individual leaders may have been politically challenged by popular demonstrations, critics argue that most of the regimes and their beneficiaries across the region remain in place and therefore that not much has changed. Hence critics arguing along this pessimistic line suggest that the popular revolts have proved unsuccessful (since the old political infrastructure still remains in place) and that furthermore they do not resemble more classic revolutions in scope or achievement. Moreover, although the label "popular protests" may be a correct depiction of some country-specific uprisings it scarcely applies to all. The interests and unique agendas of different interest groups in each individual state are too diverse and differ too much to allow for generalisation.

Finally, pessimists point out that an outspoken aspiration for democracy does not necessarily mean that the states concerned are really striving for democracy per se. After all, although a democratic perspective may exist in public, the post-authoritarian form of governance that has begun to be noted in some Arab countries is by no means near the idea or essence of the liberal democratic form of governance practised by (for example) most European states. Political parties may be elected by democratic means, but the agendas of some parties may not be democratic in a liberal sense (e.g. parties, like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, may want to introduce Sharia law, which would not go hand in hand with liberal democratic norms and traditions). Those new governments that emerge in Egypt or Libya may therefore well have authoritarian inclinations,, arguably making

[12] This point is also made by Traub in an analysis of ongoing paradigms of the Arab revolutions (2011-08-19).

them more fragile than previous ones.[13] Fragile governments can easily fall and bring about renewed societal chaos or even coups which in its turn may lead to unstable geostrategic security relations environment. In the end, all the problems and obstacles that lie ahead do not make for a promising future, either for the Middle East security complex in itself or for its neighbouring regions (e.g. parts of Africa, Persia/western Asia, and Europe), according to this pessimistic perspective.

To summarise, a comparison of these two narratives suggests that there are numerous uncertainties making analysis of the future security implications of the Arab revolutions difficult. In fact, actors, circumstances and coincidences will shape the future of the region, together with profound changes in social and political structures, including ongoing armed conflicts shaped over years. Although some situations may develop in isolation on the national level, others will be deeply interconnected, so the security landscape that emerges is still very uncertain. An important aspect in all of the perspectives above is that the Arab revolutions and the democratisation processes that are now unfolding will take time to root it and will always be a work in progress. The process will be an ongoing one involving setbacks as well as advances. The sudden experience of setbacks should therefore not be seen as a total havoc but more likely temporary stumble blocks on a rocky political road to post authoritarian stability.

2.1 Trends and Triggers

The empirical record of the Arab revolutions included in this study suggests that, despite the political turmoil in most states in the Middle East, the region has so far not been subjected to any profound geostrategic changes. Although there are daily demonstrations and government responses through violence and political reform, several regimes remain largely intact. No country has (yet) ceased to exist, no country has (yet) been born.[14] Similarly, no country has grown militarily dominant or, conversely, lost any significant status vis-à-vis other states. There has so far not been any interstate conflict in the region aside from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) intervention in Bahrain to quell demonstrations – but this intervention was a) made by invitation and b) not based on mutual hostility between the intervening state and the state in which the intervention was made. Lastly, the policy of the US remains much the same (although there have been slight changes in favour of increasing democratic support).[15] Even if one disregards the strategic dynamic in the regional setting,

[13] Friedman (2011-08-19).
[14] The potential birth of a Palestinian state may be the closest exception to this rule, although this will not come because of the Arab revolutions.
[15] See for example *The White House* (2011-05-19).

political changes on the national level are limited. Several Arab presidencies and monarchies with their families remain in power.

In light of the current democratic events unfolding in the Middle East, it is worth recognising that geostrategic changes are often slow-moving processes that accelerate or slacken by unexpected ruptures. Even if new states are born, geostrategic upheavals will not necessarily come about. Recent history tells us that the emergence onto the scene of new states such as East Timor, Kosovo and Southern Sudan has not turned regional security complexes upside down just because they were born. It remains a challenge for anyone following the Middle East at this turbulent stage to identify geostrategic changes that are not only temporary but lasting.

For example, as noted by Valbjörn (2011), there is a more general debate on the sovereignty of post-imperial states in the Middle East. On the one hand, there is a viewpoint suggesting that states in the Middle East pursue a state-building process similar to states in Europe (read the Western liberal world). For states in the Middle East, European state constitutions and their structures are often their ideal (e.g. the welfare state). On the other hand, the debate on Middle East statehood also includes an exceptionalist position, suggesting that the Westphalia state system is incompatible with the state- and nation-building project in the Middle East. Differing social bonds and networks (e.g. among tribes, classes, clans and religions), this argument goes, make state-based democratic orders impossible in Arab states. Finally there is a third, middle ground position, a kind of synthesised viewpoint, suggesting that the political process upon which states in the Middle East have embarked is the same as that previously embarked upon by Western states, although the outcome will be different because the process is occurring in a different era and a different context.[16] These positions need careful consideration for any security analysis attempting to infer conclusions from the turbulence currently unfolding in the region.

The Arab revolutions are an internally driven phenomenon and thus not a primary cause of external hostility. Domestic grievances and demonstrations have been led or supported primarily by internal actors, either democratic forces or social media activists.[17] Yet sometimes governments or particular interests have allegedly supported the demonstrators of another country, as happened with Iran in the case of Syria, or Saudi Arabia in the case of Bahrain. Where foreign actors are involved, domestic turbulence is likely to cause external tensions which in turn may cause more external actors to intervene.

[16] Valbjörn (2011): 222-224.
[17] Hassanpour (2011-08-07).

In some Arab countries, there are many different power groups pursuing their own interests (e.g. Syria), whereas in other states turmoil has become a vehicle for advancing certain policy changes (e.g. Yemen). On the other hand, it is beyond doubt that regional insecurity has grown because regimes have either been overthrown (e.g. Tunisia, Egypt, Libya) or considerably challenged (e.g. Bahrain), making room for new interest groups and new alliances (e.g. the Gulf countries).

Overall, there have been domestic protests in a number of societies which have had implications for neighbouring states. Presidential as well as monarchical systems have been challenged, in some states more than others. As a consequence, governments in the region have closely monitored how the situations have developed in the *Jasmine Revolution* in Tunisia and since the ousting of President Ben Ali; the events in Egypt after the departure of President Mubarak; and the political perseverance of the anti-Gaddafi opposition in Libya (now the *National Transitional Council of Libya*) and later the killing of Gaddafi. All three cases have had regional and international ramifications on multiple levels, especially for other Arab governments.

Tunisia was a test case in terms of how far a popular revolt could go in a country led by a *main-de-fer* Arab dictator. It was also an indirect test case of how far Western democratic governments would be prepared to accept state hostile actions toward non-violent demonstrators before becoming politically engaged. Tunisia therefore had strong symbolic implications for the spreading revolt.

The Egyptian revolt had more direct strategic ramifications. Egypt is a pivotal state with strong armed forces as well as political, military and economic relations with states such as the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia. There were fears among states in the region that the overthrow of the Mubarak regime, if uncontrolled, could have brought the region into political chaos. What did happen was an eruption of serious sectarian violence, a collapse of the treaty with Israel and a partial revoking of US foreign policy in the region. The revolt in Egypt therefore had direct security ramifications for the region although they were less severe than worst-case predictions would have it. The management of power transitions in the country is likely to prove pivotal to future regional stability.

The Libyan civil war had direct strategic implications not only for the region but also for the wider international community. Gaddafi inevitably provoked regional and outside governments to engage militarily to end his authoritarian rule (which happened on 20 October 2011). Although intervention in a manner similar to that of NATO in Libya currently seems unlikely for Syria (although developments are unfolding rapidly), political and military progress there will at the minimum have a significant effect on the security debate in many countries.

Some government leaders and governments in the wider Middle East, such as those of Iran, may have witnessed with delight the way in which popular revolts have been cracked down upon and neutralized by cosmetic reform proposals (e.g. Algeria, Morocco and Jordan), or met with brute force (e.g. Bahrain, Yemen and Syria). So far, a number of countries in the Middle East have been unaffected by street demonstrations in the sense that no popular revolt has broken out (e.g. Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey).[18]

The yet unanswered question with regard to the implications of the Arab revolutions is where the democracy project will take governments and institutions in the region, not least in the security dimension. From a geostrategic point of view, the unrest in the region has already empowered new actors and created challenges.[19] However, the long-term geostrategic implications of these developments remain uncertain. Whereas some states' concerns should not be overstated, other security situations, with potential spill over effects, such as those in Yemen and Syria, are worrisome.

[18] Or at least that existing government challenges did not increase or decrease as a result of the Arab revolutions (e.g. the opposition in Iran seems to have been largely unaffected, while Iraq saw no major increase in popular demonstrations or violence).

[19] An increasing number of studies dealing with the implications of the Arab revolutions have been published: see for example the special issue on the Arab revolutions in *Globalizations*, vol. 8, no. 5, October 2011; and the "New Arab Revolt" special issue of *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, June 2011.

3 Thirteen Months into the Arab Revolts

Whereas the spring/summer of 2011 was turbulent, the uprisings that followed in the Middle East during the autumn were less intense. The major exception to this (aside from the political and security developments in Yemen) was Syria, where the situation deteriorated significantly. During early 2012, Syria increasingly fell into a vicious cycle of violence. Unconfirmed reports suggest that as of early 2012 more than 5,400 people have been killed as a result of the conflict.[20] Discontent and strong social allegiances have resulted in an estimated 20,000 soldiers defecting from the Syrian army (many of these having joined the Free Syrian Army and the Higher Revolutionary Council).[21] This figure seems likely to keep rising as the breakdown of civil society and national fragmentation continues. Syria has become the subject of increasing condemnation by regional and third-party actors. The situation in Syria has also received considerable UN attention, not least at the Security Council, in 2012 (though it was not able to unite behind a clear roadmap vis-à-vis Syria). The political and military situation unfolding in Syria could in a worst-case scenario drag other countries into war. For instance, Turkey may be forced to engage Kurdish separatists within a disintegrating Syria if violence spread and Kurdish groups seize the moment to advance their interests in Turkey; Israel may be forced to act pre-emptively to protect its national interests if the Syrian regime becomes too cornered domestically (as the regime may want to take revenge on Israel). In the event of immediate threats to Israel, it would receive external support by the US and a number of European governments. However, this is currently the extreme scenario. In February 2012 an international contact group was established for Syria (including a UN special envoy). The goal was to build international pressure on Syria in light of the stalemate at the UN Security Council. The demands placed on the Syrian leadership by the so-called friends-of-Syria group included the establishment of a humanitarian corridor to alleviate humanitarian suffering in the country. Such demand could potentially be the first cornerstone for external involvement in the country.

[20] The UN stopped counting deaths in Syria after nearly 5 400 persons were confirmed dead, saying the figures were too difficult to confirm.

[21] This figure remains difficult to verify and is likely to include civilians having taken up arms. It should be compared to the estimated 280 000 soldiers in the Syrian army. See *Reuters* 2012-01-13.

The other fundamental question currently overshadowing many or all of the problems in the Middle East is Israel's continued conflict with the Palestinian Authority (and linked rebel groups). The prospect of a future state of Palestine (the Palestinian Liberation Organization, PLO, being the representative of the Palestinian people) can easily lead to mounting tensions in the region, as Israel and the United States are not yet favourable to the United Nations supporting recognition of Palestine. As long as this conflict exists, the Middle East will continue to be unstable, with the prospect of violence. So far, there are signs that the implications of the Arab revolutions have led to an increase in support for the recognition of Palestine, as some Arab citizenry with popular influence (e.g. in Tunisia and Egypt) may require their new representatives to give such support. The incumbent government in Israel under Binyamin Netanyahu seems not to be prepared to back this bid for the recognition of Palestine, and there will therefore not be any backing from the US government.

For many years, the cornerstone of stability in the Middle East has been Egypt. In the immediate post-Mubarak era, relations between Israel and Egypt have become frosty. Should the overall situation deteriorate, Israel may find itself losing its special relationship with Egypt. A number of domestic challenges in Egypt will partly determine its foreign policy path. The post-election environment will continue to harbour heated rhetoric and pit interest groups against each other, which may lead to new waves of violence and domestic instability. Such turbulence could easily have negative implications for Egypt's foreign policy (e.g. continued protests may lead the incumbent Military Council to garner support by being more hostile to Israel; and domestic turbulence between Muslims and Christians such as was seen in mid-October may invite external actors in to Egypt's political affairs).

In the interim of these contemporary processes, there are more structural and long-standing conflicts and rifts in the region. Pivotal states such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel are clearly some of the most crucial nodes around which the Arab revolutions revolve: Iran because of its current policy of seeking to dominate the region – at least the popular perspective suggests so (mainly through Shia Islamic support to groups favouring this interpretation of Islam and the policies of the incumbent regime in Tehran[22])[23] – and its hard-line attitude towards countries such as the US, Israel and other states in the wider international community (not least regarding its alleged nuclear enrichment programme for military purposes); Saudi Arabia because of its continued control of the world's largest energy reserves, its balancing effect against Iran and its

[22] This is obviously a simplification of the actual events because there exist for instance at least seven different sects within Shia Islam, some of which do not recognise any other.

[23] A number of regional powers (e.g. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Sunni Muslim groups etc.) are resisting Iran's ambition to dominate the region.

support for Islamic Wahhabism in the region; and Israel because of its democratic essence and multiple-level influence across the region and its unresolved relationship with the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Above all, most countries in the region are politically, economically and militarily affected by the involvement of US hegemony, which will almost certainly use the Arab revolutions in its own strategic interest (at least if interpreted in classical realist perspective). This national interest will at times cause political and diplomatic tensions between the US and its allies, since the US may find itself on a collision course with some of them over their attitude on how to respond to the events of the Arab revolutions (e.g. Israel and Saudi Arabia). Such rifts, however, seem negligible in the long run as maintaining the current alliances pattern will be more important than changing the existing power balance in its entirety. Although old and new actors (e.g. Russia and China) are increasingly challenging the US in the international arena, the US will do what it can to shape events so that these fit into a security landscape built on the liberal democratic order. Some commentators suggest that the US has lost influence in the region because of its acceptance of Arab regime change.[24] If one agrees with this view, one also has to tackle the question whether this is a temporary or a more long-term loss of influence. It is, however, difficult to provide any particular empirical evidence that would substantiate and verify such a claim.

The European Union, for its part, is likely to continue to monitor events and play on its soft-power influence, allowing individual European governments to take leadership (e.g. France in the case of Libya). The EU seems to have an excellent opportunity to advance its relationship with its Mediterranean neighbours (i.e. to use the Arab revolutions in its own strategic interest). By supporting democratic forces and isolating particular opponents of peace, security and stability, the EU is likely to continue to seek a secure neighbourhood but also build a new relationship with the region and its governments in the light of the democratic turn. Allowing continued repression and violations of human rights will inevitably undermine stability in the region. This in turn will invite unwanted forces to exploit the potential fragility that may arise, including those of terrorism, organised crime, and support from non-Western and non-democratic governments.

The Arab League (AL) has been revitalised by the important consultative role it had during the prelude to UN Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011) on the military engagement in Libya. The voice of the Arab League was crucial for

[24] For example, Israeli policymakers consider the abandonment of Egypt's Mubarak to be very problematic, as he was a cornerstone in the backing for the Camp David agreement signed in 1979. Saudi Arabia for its part views with great scepticism changes by the US in its support for some authoritarian regimes.

securing international backing for the libertarians challenging the Libyan leadership. Yet the political turmoil in the Middle East will inevitably cause further political rift, and there is thus a great potential for this forum to end up in stalemate. The key reason would likely be that some governments will be more inclined to support the Arab revolutions while others resist and fear them. The Arab League will most likely be an important platform for regional dialogue, given the structural political and economic changes that are occurring. This was further supported as the League positioned itself towards Syria, including the team of observers dispatched to the country.

The trends, developments, and issues mentioned above combine with others not covered within the scope of this study to make up a complicated, multidimensional picture of the situation Middle East. Combined these make the contours of the security landscape indistinct. This is highly problematic not only for the security of the region itself but also because it poses challenges to the international system. After all, instability in the Middle East will inevitably have implications for the world economy (given the major role of the Middle East in energy supply as well as trade to and from the region), international alliances (given the great power interests in the region) and international security (given that the Middle East has been the source of many armed conflicts, the growth of insurgencies, and threats to international peace and security). The question is whether the dynamic in the region is re-orienting itself away from traditional Arab security governance as it have been (e.g. patriarchal, patrimonial, undemocratic, tribal and family, based rule, etc.).

Having outlined the major security developments in the empirical data section in the Addendum, this study finds no immediate evidence that any direct geostrategic changes have taken place. For example, pivotal states such as Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia have not been directly affected by the Arab revolutions. The changes in the security landscape have strengthened some interstate relations but undermined others, notably the influence of Iran over Lebanon and Syria. US hegemony in the region is still maintained. However, new norms, orders, actors and interests have emerged due to the regime adjustments (and regime behaviour) and will indirectly change the security landscape in the long-term perspective (e.g. in terms of changing identities, political influence, etc.). In this regard, most states have been affected. For example, Saudi Arabia is building monarchical alliances and supporting Arab allies with money; and Israel is adapting to a changing environment, not least with regard to Egypt, Syria and Iran (and Turkey because of its criticism of the course of Israeli foreign policy).

Below, in chapter 4, follow a number of observations based the case studies included in the Addendum to this report. The objective is to highlight some of the more important trends relevant to interstate security in the Middle East including a number of implications for Sweden and the European Union.

4 Concluding Remarks and Key Challenges Ahead

The Arab revolts have as yet not brought about any fundamental change of geostrategic significance in the Middle East security complex. No countries have ceased to exist, no new countries have seen light, no major wars have occurred and there have been no major shifts in interstate alliances or conflicts as a result of the revolts. But the security landscape in the wider Middle East has increasingly become indistinct and will continue to be so for some time to come. This is because new elements affecting the security dynamics in the region will have to come to terms with old political structures and military interests (and vice versa). After all, having successful demonstrators disposing authoritarian leaders do not mean that the institutions of government and their culture change as a result. For genuine shifts to occur, more profound societal changes are needed. A number of elections will be held and leaders will be replaced (e.g. as happened in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen). Democracy and human rights will take time to root.

Although relations between states have changed to varying degrees, the revolts taking place in the region during 2011 and early 2012 have for now primarily come to have domestic and foreign policy implications in each challenged state. For example, the region's key states – Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey – have not been significantly affected by the revolutions. Their security environment has changed, but this does not mean that the geostrategic situation has altered drastically in comparison with the pre-revolutionary phase. Yet, several states in the region are quickly approaching a "tipping point" as a consequence of the developments inside Syria. The country so far most affected by the revolts in the region is Syria under the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Several countries have also had to adapt and adjust their policy towards the emerging civil war. However, the situation can change rapidly in geostrategic terms as well. A Syria breaking up in violence can, for example, have severe and rapid security implications for key countries like Turkey, Iran, Lebanon, and Israel.

An important aspect that will determine the continued forms of Arab governance, and thereby the security dynamics in the Middle East, is how the transformation of the states and societies in North Africa turns out. Most likely, Tunisia and Egypt will continue to have important symbolic implications for the success and failure of the Arab revolutions, simply because they were first and because they have already rid themselves of some of the central elements of authoritarianism and begun moving into a post-authoritarian phase. Similarly, the accomplishments or failures following the complexity of rebuilding Libya will attract widespread attention. Failure to embark on democratic paths, given the profoundness of the revolt and the social upheaval in each of these countries,

could fuel the narrative that the Arab world is forever lost and incapable of reforming itself, hence giving little impetus for further international support to reform attempts there. Reports suggest that human rights abuses are continuing in all these countries. Yet, successful transformation of undemocratic practices in this region – which seems very likely given the popular enthusiasm and extensive recognition of the obstacles ahead – could give the much-needed impetus to fuel further optimism and inspiration for popular revolts in the wider Middle East. While the will to change is generally strong among many segments of the Arab citizenries, state structures and economic and political elites' interests are also very strong.

However, for the Arab revolutions to survive, continued international support is likely to be vital for example in terms of hard power pressure (e.g. security support) together with or alongside soft power (e.g. political, economic and social support). A continuation of what might be called a "honey and vinegar" strategy (i.e. a combination of political and military support) is probably what is to be expected of the external actors engaged in the region, such as the EU and the US.[25] Nonetheless, the lasting political and security outcome of the Arab revolutions is yet to be settled. The region itself, as well as actors engaging with states in the region, is orienting itself towards new security circumstances. The question is what this reorientation will consist of and what it will result in.

In terms of changing political dynamics, one implication of the Arab revolutions is that regional tensions will mount between those new states that aspire to practise democratic governance and those states in which no regime change has taken place. Likely, countries in the region with increasing democratic aspirations and demands will have to pursue a democratic and human rights-friendly foreign policy course or risk losing domestic legitimacy. Henceforth, countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya will be hard pressed to respond to events in Algeria and Morocco. Similarly, the potentially increasing democratic voice in countries like Jordan will have to respond to events in its neighbourhood. Diplomatic skirmishes, and possible political crises, will arise in the near future. For example, the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation will face increasing internal tensions among their members. The position of the Arab League as an important regional actor was reinforced in UN Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011) leading up to the military engagement in Libya. In the end, then, regional actors will have to reorient their relations with states and regimes in the region.

[25] In September 2011, G8 members reconfirmed their support for some Arab Spring states, supporting these states with USD 40 billion. Support goes specifically to Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan. *Radio Free Europe* (2011-09-10).

As a result of the revolts, there will be changed international attitudes to regimes in the region. For example, the US has actively monitored events and publicly commented on the Arab revolutions, including its own policies on them. In fact, the turn of events have gone so far that traditional supports of authoritarian regimes have somewhat been wavered by the US (e.g. Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, etc). Moreover, the Arab revolts have also had the Obama administration to support democratic forces operating beyond state control.[26] The support of the United States has three core principles: 1) opposition to the use of violence; 2) support for universal rights; and 3) support for political and economic change. Overall support will also go to the promotion of human rights and democracy in places where transition has not yet taken place. This engagement will reach beyond elites by "cultivating reformist voices" and supporting legitimate and independent groups (as well as groups not recognised by the government).[27] However, such democratic support has its limits because the United States also has a set of important core interests in the region which it will continue to pursue: countering terrorism, stopping the spread of nuclear weapons, securing the free flow of commerce, safeguarding the security of the region, limiting Iranian influence and standing up for Israel's security and the pursuit of Arab-Israeli peace. Above all, no aggression across borders will be accepted.[28] The limits such hard security interests place on democratic support was seen in the Bahrain case where the US did not criticise the regime. An important development that could further drag the US into the region is the potential declaration of an independent state by the Palestinians. This could potentially change US policy in a more profound way. Moreover, a commentator has suggested that the United States in its future strategy could offer a "…reform endowment, i.e. financial incentives for Arab regimes to meet political reform".[29]

4.1 The Future Role for the European Union and Sweden

The Arab world is in the midst of an identity crisis. Not only have old forms of authoritarian governance been questioned by the Arab revolts, but the forces of globalisation have also reached the Arab populace. In this identity crisis between old and new values, different societal interest groups will emerge, some of which will welcome the changes while others will protect the old structures. Inevitably, this will cause friction, but it will also open avenues for renewed dialogue and

[26] Hill (2011-02-15).
[27] Ibid.
[28] *The White House* (2011-05-19).
[29] Hamid (2011-01-25).

cooperation. To this, one could add a generational tension, between new and old values.

Clearly, the Arab revolutions have opened a window of opportunity for both domestic and external actors. Notably, there are good grounds for believing that the Middle East will move further towards the family of democracies (e.g. Tunisia and Egypt). This process can be supported and encouraged by Sweden and the EU. There are also good reasons to allow democratic and human rights processes to take time and be brokered with slow-moving internal societal processes, as opposed to forced and rapid reform programmes implemented from above. Haste could easily undermine the legitimacy and understanding of the democratic process. On the other hand, a balance is needed to move reforms at the speed that the frustrated Arab citizenry feels is appropriate to the freedom efforts.

In general, the avenue for Sweden and the EU to pursue now, when the Arab "window" has opened, is to engage themselves in offering new road maps for peace in the Middle East. Sweden alone, not least through cooperation with other Nordic countries, such as Norway and Finland, may lend some of its existing political integrity and experience as a trustworthy mediator to re-engaging the region.

Sweden has many stakes in the region, not least because of the cultural affinity that segments of its citizens share with societies in the region. Sweden also has a number of business relations with the region with regard to both exports and imports. Above all, Sweden is dependent on a Middle East that is stable in order to allow for secure trade and energy flows. In addition to its cultural and economic relations, Sweden has vested political interests in the region. It has had a long tradition in supporting different human rights and democracy groups. Sweden's engagement to facilitate an ending of the Israel-Palestine conflict goes back to Count Bernadotte's mission to the region on behalf of the UN in 1948. A number of subsequent Swedish governments have also sought to resolve the conflict. These mediation efforts, and other humanitarian efforts, have tied Sweden to the region. Finally, Sweden is dependent on a stable and prosperous Middle East through its membership in the European Union and its enactment of the various Mediterranean initiatives.

With regard to the EU and its engagement with the region, a more politically active EU, that is, one that makes credible and long-standing commitments to support democratic efforts in the region, is of vital importance for the progress of the democratic turn that has begun. An active EU could also offer new avenues that the US has as yet not seen pursued based on its own geopolitical agenda.

So far, the EU has begun a process of reviewing its strategies and political partnerships across the region, including areas of political and economic relations. Given the transformation taking place in the region, it seems to be a

golden opportunity for the EU to rejuvenate its relations with states there. Not only could it enhance its presence and participate in different societal dialogues across the region through its External Action Service; it can also more closely monitor democratic processes and provide the necessary support that these may need.

Hitherto, individual member states have reacted differently to the Arab revolutions, as is seen most visibly in the political and military engagement in Libya. Whereas smaller states have had a tendency to follow the Brussels consensus, some larger states have acted on their own, pursuing their own domestic and foreign policy agenda. France, the UK and Italy stepped up to support the Libyan opposition, whereas Germany stood by passively. With the fall of the Gaddafi regime, the engagement policy – officially for the protection of civilians (the responsibility to protect principle) – may have increased the desire for further military engagements. Syria is clearly on the radar for EU governments, although the situation there is far more complex than that of many other Arab states in the region. Again, the UK and France are taking the lead.

While direct bilateral support for engagements may take place, the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces could be an alternative. However, the UN is currently as divided in its support for involvement in and sanctions on Syria as it initially was on Libya. On the other hand, the establishment of the contact group friends-of-Syria and the demands of cease-fire including the opening of humanitarian corridors may well garner necessary support for active engagement. The military and political outcome in Syria will inevitably come to change power structures in the region.

Meanwhile, the political unrest has also led opposition parties to gain political momentum and in some states to advance their interests. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood has played an important role in the demonstrations in different Arab states, such as Syria and Jordan. The rise of new political actors is likely to change some states foreign policy courses.

The Gulf-states, on their part, regimes remain largely intact, though probably much shaken by the revolts. A number of regimes herein paid a high price not only in the literal sense, by paying off opposition, but also by military risk-taking in intervening regionally under a Gulf Cooperation Council banner to quell demonstrations (i.e. in Bahrain). Beefing up the internal security apparatus and building further regional security infrastructure are likely to have domestic implications in the years to come. Furthermore, it remains to be seen how the Iranian government will respond to the implications of the Arab revolutions. So far its overall response has not been vocal, apart from public reactions to the crackdown in Bahrain and the regime's accusations against Iran. No doubt Iran will act to consolidate its influence in Iraq and keep resisting the West and it will be difficult to discern how revolts are used or played by Tehran as it manoeuvres.

Such activities need also to be seen in the light of Iran's other foreign and military policy agenda.

Thus, ultimately, important factors that may influence the security landscape in the region in the near future, and therefore also relations between the EU and the region, include the survival of the al-Assad regime in Syria; Iran's use of the Arab window to build further regional influence; Egypt's orientation towards Iran and its relations with Israel; Saudi Arabia and the survival of its present political structure; Turkey's involvement in the Middle East turbulence; and the resolution of the Israel–Palestine conflict. To some extent, the future political stability of Lebanon will also have implications for different movements in the region, such as Hezbollah, and implicitly for Iran, Syria and Israel. For the US, support for a secure Israel will, for different reasons, continues to be a key priority (i.e. not only direct national interests as such). Obviously, this will have implications for the entire Middle East. Similarly, the combat against Islamic jihadists and the protection of the energy supply will top the US national security agenda.

For the EU, energy imports, trade, the regulation of migration and neighbourhood stability will be the chief concerns. In this respect, then, the EU could engage itself through different programmes, forums and initiatives. Most importantly it could provide support to democratic aspirations, security sector reform, Internet technology, democratic governance programmes, elections, trade and investment improvements, cultural and research exchanges, and so on. Finally, the EU could work towards establishing forums for discussions on matters relating to conflict prevention and societal reconciliation.

Overall, Sweden could use its presence in the region and its voice in regional and international forums to seek to achieve a broader security paradigm to include not only short-term, "hard" traditional security but also a broader and long-term human security perspective when dealing with the challenges that exist in the Middle East. Providing democratic support (e.g. for the formation of political parties, reforming electoral systems, education on democratic reform etc.) will be essential for security and stability to take root. Sweden could play an important role in fostering democratic reform, not only as a donor country but also as a vocal actor with long experience of democracy building and gender participation. For example, Sweden could offer advice drawn from its own state-building process, among other things, its traditions of transparency, accountability, decentralised government and consensus-based decision making. Moreover, Sweden could seek to draw on the goodwill it has in the region and its neutrality in the perception of most actors. Concretely, new trade relations and military cooperation, as well as cooperation in education and research, could be important sectors to cultivate. Another key issue that will need more attention as it is increasingly having security implications is related to water.

4.2 Future Research

Future research in the area of Middle East security needs a more profound examination of the forms of security that are not covered in this analysis, the nexus of military, economic, societal and ecological security. Without more in-depth studies into all of these issues, a more complete understanding of the overall security dynamics affecting the region will be difficult to obtain. For instance, the Middle East is facing rapidly growing ecological problems, which will lead to potential conflicts in the future, including increasing desertification because of climate change, lack of clean water, pollution etc. In addition, social concerns such as high unemployment, the high proportion of young people, rising criminality, general economic problems, urbanisation and so on will lead to further human insecurity.

Moreover, to support the region and its current transformation, a reinterpretation of the language in which we discuss, identify and understand states and societies in the region is needed. Most external actors looking at the Arab drama import values, perceptions and misperceptions into their analysis, which makes it more difficult to understand and take relevant action.[30] This is in line with what Edward Said argued in his *Orientalism*.[31]

With regard to the purely military capabilities of each Arab state and the connotations for regional security, a complete review of the following factors would ideally be needed: 1) military forces (private and public armies); 2) the strategic goals and visions of Arab military doctrines; 3) trade relations with regard to arms; 4) existing military and defence alliances in the region; 5) US military and intelligence support for Arab governments; 6) new and old forums for conflict resolution and their efficacy; 7) the existence of standby forces; 8) military support by Arab governments for UN peacekeeping missions; 9) other missions (e.g. combating piracy in the Bay of Aden); 10) type of support, training and exchanges with European governments (NATO format, coalition format, an EU format, individual European states, etc.); and 11) the engagement of other international actors with the region, for example, the roles of Russia, China, the African Union and the GCC.

In addition, there is a need for further coupling between the traditional and non-traditional forms of security. After all, the success of viable, secure and democratic state systems builds on domestic engagement and legitimacy created from below.

[30] This is also a point well raised by Dabashi (2011).
[31] See for instance Said (1995).

An important question will also be the role of female participation in the post-authoritarian regimes. After all, many women across the Arab world have participated in demonstrations to oust authoritarian leaders, and their political rewards in any new democratic environment need follow-up (e.g. have women's groups been able to join the political processes? What say do women's groups have in formulating security agendas?).

Increasing transparency and awareness of these areas, which are currently seriously under-researched, will lead to a better understanding of the security challenges confronting regimes in the region.

Addendum. Overview of key political developments in the region since 2010

To identify the security implications of the Arab revolutions in the Middle East, this Addendum analyses existing political developments as they have evolved during 2011. The first part (section 5) examines those states that have been directly affected by the revolts. Thereafter (section 6) follows an examination of the states that have been indirectly affected. The analysis is further subdivided into country-specific developments. For each country the protest movements are described and the potential foreign and security implications are discussed.

5. States Directly Affected by the Arab Revolutions

5.1 Syria

On the eve of the Arab revolutions, in early 2011, few commentators thought that stable countries such as Syria would descend into violent military conflict. Syria has rather been considered a pivotal state for Middle East (in)stability.[32] Its regional influence and far-reaching security service deterred not only foreign governments but also domestic opposition.[33] Yet, in early December 2011, about one year after the protests began, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said Syria was close to a state of civil war.[34] In early 2012, few analysts questioned this. There has been not only one-sided violence but also increasing sectarian violence, and external state involvement is possible. Through the establishment of the contact group friends-of-Syria and the establishment of a UN special envoy, external engagement in Syria is likely to increase.

In recent history, a number of attempts have been made to oppose incumbent leaders, but these have been met by overwhelming government force (e.g. the 'great Islamic uprising' in Syria during the mid-1970s and early 1980s, when members of the Muslim Brotherhood, alongside others, fought members of the

[32] For a background introduction to the politics and foreign policy of Syria, see van Dam (1996) and Hinnebusch (2001).
[33] Ziadeh (2010).
[34] *UN News Centre* (2011-12-01).

Ba'ath party, and when an estimated 40 000 people were killed).[35] The regime has continuously proved itself unafraid of dealing with opposition in a brutal way. An explanation for this self-assuredness goes back to its support in the region. For example, Syria's close ties with the Shia-run government of Iran, in combination with its traditional influence over Lebanon (and backing of Hezbollah) have given it great deal of political self-confidence.

In particular the cooperation between Iran and Syria, here signifying interactions mainly among the elites, has been, and is currently, mostly of an instrumental character (i.e. not on a religious level, apart from cooperation over pilgrimages). Cooperation includes political, cultural, religious, and economic relations, including military agreements.[36]

How then did protests in Syria evolve, for what reasons, and what have been the main implications of the demonstrations for the country and its regional relations?

Throughout the first half of 2011, the government in Damascus under the incumbent leader, Bashar al-Assad, was increasingly challenged by domestic demonstrations.[37] These early protests did not (re-)move al-Assad's regime: on the contrary, al-Assad remained firm in his position. Yet, like other Arab leaders, al-Assad and the Syrian government were seemingly taken by surprise by the events across the region and apparently adopted a policy of defeating any challenges before the demonstrations grew to significant proportions. This is somewhat surprising, as the regime could have learnt how to respond to the demonstrators by looking at Tunisia and Egypt, that is, it could have decided not to exacerbate the situation further than necessary. However, throughout the rest of the year the regime pursued the option of using violence, confronting the demonstrations on an increasing scale.[38]

Besides the general social unrest due to high living costs, corruption and human rights abuses, the contemporary revolt is largely directed against the Alawite Shia minority rule of the government. A factor that may have intensified the

[35] Syria has a history of armed resurrection not least dating back to what is called the 'Great Syrian Revolution' against the French government in the early 1920s. For more on this, see Batatu (1999).

[36] As Professor Eric Hooglund, a specialist on Middle-East politics and culture, has pointed out, the Alawis of Syria's political elite are not accepted, as is usually thought, as Shia Islamic by Iran or most other Shias, mainly because of their religious beliefs (e.g. the use of wine for religious ceremonial purposes and the veneration of several Christian saints in addition to Ali). Thus, the Alawis cannot be considered fundamentally loyal to Shia religious leaders, nor to Sunni Muslim leaders, but are rather a force on their own.

[37] The dynamics of the demonstrations are well covered in the *International Crisis Group* reports nos 108 and 109 (2011a and 2011b).

[38] See the analysis in Al-Rashid (2011).

revolt is the political structure of Syrian society. Unlike a number of Arab countries in the region, the Syrian Republic is a composite society in which the Alawite Shia minority has governed the mainly Sunni Muslim majority (58 per cent of the population) alongside other Shia Muslim and Christian communities.[39] The recent demonstrations arose within many different sectors and ethnic communities, such as the Kurds and Sunni Muslims.[40]

The revolt in Syria started in mainly Sunni Muslim-dominated areas with increasing non-violent street demonstrations.[41] In mid-March 2011, demonstrations were held across a number of cities, including Damascus, Dara Homs and Hama. By this time hundreds of opposition forces had been killed with hundreds more either wounded or jailed. A characteristic of the protests was that they seemed to peak every Friday after prayers (as the public gatherings on a Friday are generally difficult for the government to control).

Although most demonstrations involve particular segments of the populations, there seems to be a consensus that a vast opposition to the government exists, though many citizens who share this view are afraid of encountering government violence. Early on in the conflict, protesters represented 10 to 20 per cent of the population, and had sympathy from another 10 to 20 per cent (a figure that is likely to rise as the conflict continues).

The protesters' demands were mainly about human rights, social justice, government accountability and an end to the national emergency law that has been in place since 1963 (for social indicators see Appendix 1). There were also specific demands for the government to step down from power and for the ousting from politics and economic sectors of key figures such as al-Assad's influential cousin Rami Makhlouf (who became a symbol for government corruption).[42] The government of al-Assad initially responded to these demands with promises of reform, trying to convince demonstrators as well as foreign diplomats that it was prepared to listen to the protesters.[43] However, despite domestic and foreign assurances, these promises were not kept. On the contrary, the Syrian government continued to quell the demonstrations. As the revolt spread and got out of hand, the Syrian government increasingly responded to

[39] Statistics from this region are often very contested and need therefore to be treated carefully.
[40] *CIA World Fact Book*/Syria (20101) and Europa, *Regional Surveys of the World* (2009).
[41] Figures regarding the number of deaths may be adjusted after further investigations have been completed. A number was reported by the UN in late August (see *United Nations News Center* 2011-08-18).
[42] Shadid, *The New York Times* (2011-06-16), and Coutts, *The Guardian* (2011-05-18).
[43] Worth noting in this context is that the Syrian government has been suggesting various reform proposals for the last 10 years or so.

demonstrators with military force. By mid-December 2011, more than 4000 persons were estimated to being killed and the figure is expected to rise.[44]

With regard to street demonstrations, the revolt in Syria proceeded for many weeks without clear political leaders or party affiliations. Still, there are plenty of opposition movements operating both inside and outside Syria. For example, in an attempt to unite, nearly 350 opposition members met in Istanbul in mid-July to put forward a political alternative to Bashar al-Assad. However, the opposition is a chequered and in some respects an economically vulnerable group, ranging from Islamists to secular Kurdish groups. The meeting did not succeed in forming an opposition as different groups had their own different interests and security agendas. Because the opposition is fragmented, the issue of how to resolve the situation inside Syria could easily lead to political deadlock.[45]

As domestic turbulence increased, the international press increasingly drew parallels to the great Syrian revolt and the 1982 actions in the city of Hama, where al-Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad, allegedly killed tens of thousands of regime opponents.[46]

A number of key events led to further government de-legitimisation. Besides increasing government brutality in dealing with the opposition, in late March President al-Assad called upon the Syrian Cabinet to leave office.[47] Although this was a positive step in itself, such actions only gave further fuel to demonstrations as they proved that the government was not capable of handling the situation in the country, or of handling the demonstrations justly. Moreover, on 21 April 2011 the government annulled the emergency law that had been in place since 1963. As the violence increased, the more overt policies to meet demonstrations with military force led thousands of Syrians to flee to Turkey. In turn, the spread of refugees into Turkey inevitably forced the government in Ankara to reconsider its relationship with Syria (see below).[48] One element behind the general rhetoric between Syria and Turkey is the role of the Kurdish minorities. During the violence in Syria, Kurdish groups initially acted in a low-key way (mostly engaging in protests in north-eastern Syria). One explanation is that they would not necessarily be better off with a Sunni-run Arab government in Damascus.

Unconfirmed reports suggest that Iran has been sending Al-Quds soldiers to help the Syrian government deal with the opposition. Besides regular participation in the military manoeuvres to quell demonstrations, this support has also included

[44] *UN News Centre* (2011-12-01).
[45] See for instance *The Economist* (2011-09-03): 35, and *The Guardian* (2011-07-17).
[46] Hama has a long history of opposition to the Syrian regime, one reason for this being the Sunni Muslim presence.
[47] *BBC World News* (2011-03-29).
[48] *International Business Times* (2011-06-13).

technical military support.[49] In February 2011, two Iranian warships travelled through the Suez Canal and docked in Syria, allegedly providing the Syrian government with material to suppress protesters.[50] Indirectly support also came through Hezbollah's alleged involvement in the military campaigns (partly augmented by public rallies led by Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Lebanese Hezbollah).[51] It is worth noting that some estimates suggest that Iran provides Hezbollah with supplies and weaponry worth nearly 100 million US dollars (USD) per year.[52]

In the midst of the demonstrations, on 9 May 2011 the EU imposed targeted sanctions on the Syrian leadership.[53] The EU also issued a statement calling on al-Assad to step down from power.[54] For example, in late November, sectorial sanctions were implemented (e.g. bans on the import or export of oil and on currency transfers). In addition, the US unilaterally imposed and continuously expanded its set of sanctions.

The further strengthening of sanctions and the adoption of an oil embargo may increase hostility between Syria on the one hand and the EU and the US on the other. For example, the EU is Syria's main trading partner. A blunt enforcement of a general ban on Syria's oil imports and exports may well have negative or unintended consequences for the broader Syrian population, and could increase support for the incumbent regime and reduce the EU member states' credibility.[55]

The policy of targeted sanctions were increasingly strengthened over the year, aiming to further signal to the regime that EU and US rejected the way al-Assad was handling the revolt. The sanctions also brought a number of other governments into a more upfront conflict with the Syrian regime. For example, also the Arab League adopted targeted sanctions aside from suspending it from the organisation. Sanctions in late November 2011 included the freezing of ties with the Syrian Central Bank, and a stop on trade exchange with the Syrian government, including a travel ban on Syrian officials. The aim of these measures was inter alia to force the Syrian government to withdraw from violent engagements with unarmed civilians and allow human rights monitors into the country (19 of 22 states in the Arab League supported the measures, although not Iraq or Lebanon).[56]

[49] *Haaretz* (2011-06-22).
50 *The New York Times* (2011-02-24).
[51] *Haaretz* (2011-06-22).
[52] Abdo (2011).
[53] *EU, Council of the European Union* (2011-05-09).
[54] *EU, Council of the European Union* (2011-10-10).
[55] See op-ed piece in *Foreign Affairs Magazine* by Eriksson and Giumelli (2011).
[56] *Al-Jazeera online* (2011-01-28).

Economic coercion, in the form of sanctions, is considered by some scholars to be the prelude to other, tougher measures.[57] The impact of targeted sanctions has yet to be fully examined before any conclusions as to their implications can be drawn. Usually such evaluations take time as the information needed to determine such effectiveness is difficult to acquire. What may increase hostility between Syria and the EU is the implementation of an oil embargo against the country. The EU area (i.e. EU member states) is Syria's main trading partner. A blunt enforcement of a general ban on Syria's oil imports and exports – with negative consequences for the general Syrian citizens – may easily have negative or unintended consequences for the broader Syrian population, and could increase support for the incumbent regime and reduce the EU member states' credibility.[58]

As the violence is likely to continue during the winter there is a strong chance that further political pressure will have to be backed with other legal and military threats. The *Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria* found for example in late 2011 that Syria's army and security forces had committed crimes against humanity.[59] The level of violence has prompted the UN General Assembly to declare a need for responsibility to protect civilians by a vote of 122 in favour and 13 against, with 41 abstentions (no Arab government voting against).[60]

Thirteen months into the Arab revolts, the level of violence continues to increase. However, the lack of mass participation and spread of the uprising imply that the al-Assad regime is still in firm control, and will probably continue to hold such control in the months to come. International attention, not least increasing demands for complete isolation of Syria is unfolding.

Syria's opposition forces joined together as early as late August 2011 under the Syrian National Council (SNC). The Council was set up inter alia after several meetings had been held in Turkey. The SNC builds on representation of a vast number of opposition forces, though it is far from representing all opposition groups inside and outside Syria.

On 10 October 2011, the EU welcomed the formation of the SNC as a positive step forward and by mid-December at least four states, (France, Spain, Bulgaria and Libya) had recognised the SNC. On 6 December, the US Secretary of State held a public meeting with the SNC which gave it further legitimacy. This suggests that Western governments are becoming increasingly determined to see

[57] See Eriksson (2011b), Hufbauer et al. (2007), and Baldwin (1971).
[58] See op-ed piece in *Foreign Affairs Magazine* by Eriksson and Giumelli (2011).
[59] See Press Conference by the *Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria* (2011-11-28).
[60] UN General Assembly. GA/SHC/4033 (2011-11-22).

a regime change. A no-fly zone seems politically difficult to establish as Russia and China are against it, but military analysts in the region (and outside) have begun to discuss the idea of setting up a humanitarian zone in Syria.

In November 2011, the Arab League (AL) adopted targeted and sector-specific sanctions on Syria and its leadership.[61] These included cutting off transactions with the Syrian central bank; stopping the progress of funding for projects in Syria; a travel ban on senior Syrian officials; an assets freeze on President Bashar al-Assad and his government; the monitoring of financial transfers to Syria; and a proposal to impose a ban on commercial flights between Syria and member states.[62] Further to mounting pressure, Syria invited AL observers. The observer mission was initially in the country on a one-month mission, which was extended another month. It has been heavily criticised for not working effectively or independently, as well as because of the choice of Sudanese general Mustafa al-Dabi as mission leader (he is himself suspected by some of crimes against humanity in Darfur). The observers' report was not made publicly available partly because it included accounts of human rights violations not only by the government but also by the opposition side.

On 28 January 2012, Syria was expelled from the AL, having failed to fulfil a proposed AL peace plan. This expulsion came just a few days after the AL had publicly called on al-Assad to step down from power. In February 2012 further pressure mounted on Syria when a concerted effort was made to agree a United Nations Security Council resolution. However, as noted, the resolution was blocked by Russia and China. In mid-February 2012, a large number of embassies in Damascus were closed (including the US embassy and other Arab government representations). To break the UN stalemate, the UN in late February presented former Secretary General Kofi Annan as a special envoy to end violence in Syria. Both China and Russia welcomed this move.

5.1.1 Regional implications following domestic events in Syria

The geostrategic significance of the revolt in Syria has clear implications for a number of governments in the region, not least the continuing relationship of Damascus with the governments in Tehran and Beirut. The key question is whether the revolt will strengthen, change or relax these existing ties. Clearly, the political response of the regime in Damascus will be an important factor in shaping other governments' decisions on how to react to the developments in Syria. In late October, al-Assad warned foreign governments against meddling in

[61] Lebanon and Iraq argued against it.
[62] *BBC World News* (2011-11-27).

Syrian affairs as this could set the entire region on fire and turn it into another Afghanistan.[63]

The events in Syria and the potential fall of the Alawite regime under al-Assad could bring a new dynamic to the Middle East. It would change the geopolitical balance between Iran–Syria–Lebanon and Israel and thus cause a shift in the balance of power. If al-Assad fell and his regime were replaced by a Sunni Islamic regime, this would pose a major challenge for Iran. Moreover, this would mean a reduction in the influence of Syria (and Iran) over Lebanon (i.e. through Hezbollah) and a reduction in the indirect influence of Hezbollah over Israel (influence here being the ability not to allow Israel to feel completely secure).[64]

Tehran for its part will continue to push instrumentally for influence over Shia Muslim groups in the region (e.g. in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, etc.). With regard to current events in Syria, it is not unthinkable that in the event of infrastructural routes being blocked (e.g. for the transfer of weapons and equipment, military training, etc.), further *political* and *economic* support could be put in place by the incumbent regime in Tehran. This support, however, would

[63] In this context, it is relevant to put into perspective the Taif peace agreement which ended the civil war in Lebanon in 1991 (which is a cornerstone of Syria's Lebanon policy). The Taif agreement was the basis for the process to end Syria's military presence. More explicitly, the agreement stipulated that Syria would withdraw from major cities across Lebanon. However, the agreement, which is viewed differently by the parties involved in the conflict (mainly Lebanon and Syria, as well as different groups therein), had not been fully implemented by 2011 (as noted in various UN Security Council resolutions). Nonetheless, a major breakthrough relating to the implementation of the accord followed as a consequence of the assassination of Lebanon's former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on 14 February 2005. Together with the Cedar Revolution (in which demonstrators called for the suspension of Syrian involvement in Lebanese affairs), and subsequent UN investigations into the alleged killing (coupled with the threat of UN targeted sanctions and the involvement of the International Criminal Court), Syria began to withdraw its troops from Lebanon in 2005 (the so-called Mehlis report suggested that a number of high-ranking members of the Syrian and Lebanese governments were involved in the killing of Hariri). In late 2009, Hariri's successor, the former Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri, visited Syria in an attempt to improve relations). External actors such as the US welcomed the departure of the Syrian presence, although the US and other international actors were slow in supporting the much-needed Lebanese security sector reform (see Sayigh 2009: 9). When the withdrawal was completed, nearly 15 000 troops had returned to Syria. Despite a profound process of withdrawal and reduced influence, some Syrian influence still persists, notably through Hezbollah. Overall, the continued violent turbulence, including domestic and international criticism of Iranian involvement in Syria and, via Syria, in Lebanese affairs, makes it more difficult for al-Assad's regime to maintain its links (at least for the immediate future) with these states. On the other hand, Iran and Lebanon are al-Assad's only safety lines.

[64] On the other hand, it is also worth noting that Hezbollah itself was partly formed as a movement to represent Shia groups of southern Lebanon, not least following the war with Israel in 1982. However, Tehran retains some ability to pursue such influence in this regard.

be given not for ideological reasons but because of plain power interest. Support will be provided as long as it generates influence.[65]

Thus, it is very likely that Syria's ability to support Hezbollah will remain, despite the Arab revolutions. Similarly, Hezbollah's support for Syria is likely to grow (also confirmed by large rallies held by the movement in late 2011 in which such support was voiced). This in itself will have implications for Hezbollah as regards posing a challenge in northern Israel (though from southern Lebanon's perspective this would probably be a very pale challenge given the military superiority of Israel), and will have implications for Hamas (as Hezbollah allegedly provides Hamas with moral support vis-à-vis Israel). However, since Hezbollah not only constitutes a strategic threat to Israel (as noted in the recent Lebanon war of July 2006) but also has influence over different Shia Muslim militia groups, the southern border of Lebanon will continue to be politically uncontrolled for some time to come, regardless of events in Syria (though currently control is exercised by three fronts: by Hezbollah, the Lebanese army and deployed UN forces). On the other hand, with Sunni politicians exercising greater influence in Syrian politics in the event of domestic political change brought about by military confrontation of al-Assad, support to Hezbollah could be further undermined.[66] Similarly, a long-term process of de-ethnification of the Lebanese political system (i.e. a complete rebuilding of the system) could further undermine Syria's influence. The question is how different groups will respond to the turbulence in Syria and how they will adapt to a new security environment.

Although neighbouring Arab countries may be supportive of Syria's pressure on Israel, and therefore may not be keen to see Syria collapse, a change in government/leadership may be well received by a number of Arab governments in the region, not least Sunni-led governments,[67] or those with close ties to Western governments. Unlike Sunni-led Arab states, Syria has been close to Iran and supportive of Tehran's regional Shia Muslim ideological ambition to dominate the wider Middle East. This support extends far back in contemporary history (and may perhaps best be understood in a Ba'athist political framework rather than a strict geopolitical context), and has manifested itself in armed conflicts such as the Iran–Iraq war of 1980–88, in which Syria backed Iran (though it can be questioned whether Syria has ever backed Iran's regional

[65] I am indebted for this point to Professor Leif Stenblad.

[66] It is recognised here that Sunni Muslims are themselves torn between different sects and political views, not least if groups such as more secular Sunnis, Sufi Sunnis, members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafi (al-Qaeda) Sunnis, etc., are considered.

[67] By Sunni-led governments here I mean governments with a Sunni Arab identity, or sympathetic to Sunni Islamic values (as opposed to Persian- or Shia-based views). This is a generalisation that in itself would not hold if the idea of a Sunni identity is deconstructed. For instance, a number of Sunni politicians may de facto be more secular than actually religious.

ambition). Sunni governments would hence see a fall of the Shia government in Syria as being likely to benefit their interests.

For Israel's part, the Arab revolutions also have clear political implications (more below). The Golan Heights, captured from Syria in 1967 and later annexed by Israel in 1981, continue to be a symbolic and strategic zone for both countries. Events during 2011 also suggest that Golan can be a point for confrontations, as when demonstrators hauled down fences in the area.[68] Worth nothing here is that nearly 20 000 members of the Syrian Druze community live on the Golan Heights under various forms of restrictions imposed by Israel. The Druze community is an important minority in Syria and has been closely allied with the Ba'ath since 1970, and the fate of its co-religionists in the Golan is very important for Syria (these co-religionists belong to the same ethnic group/religion, clan and family).[69] Although both countries regard the Golan Heights as strategically important, this idea nowadays builds on conventional thinking. Modern technology, not least advanced radar systems and long-range missiles, make the Golan Heights more of a symbolic than a strategic military site (e.g. for some Jews who form part of Eretz Israel).

The implications of the Arab revolutions in Syria for Israel also need to be viewed from the perspective of recent hostilities between the two. During the past decade, Syria and Israel have been in armed conflict on several occasions, for example in October 2003 when Israel launched a military attack on a (former) Palestinian military training camp inside Syria, and in 2007 when Israel targeted an alleged nuclear facility in Syria. Moreover, in this conflict, Hezbollah play an important role as it enjoys the support of the al-Assad regime (a relationship that as a result of the Arab revolutions is increasingly falling apart). Another important element is of course what will happen once the al-Assad regime falls. After all, Israel is well acquainted with the Syrian regime and its limitations. A new regime would lead to greater insecurity (at least in the short term before a new relationship has been established).

Furthermore, a number of governments have publicly called for al-Assad to step down from power. International pressure on Syria by the EU and the US is mounting. Similarly, the UN Security Council has been closely examining the behaviour of the regime for a number of years. Hence the international call for the regime to step down is inevitably a difficult public commitment to back away from, because significant improvements in the regime's behaviour are needed for the international community to re-engage with the current regime. If the al-Assad regime does not want to leave power, then a military option is one of the few ways left to back up such public commitment.

[68] Bronner, *The New York Times* (2011-05-15).
[69] See for instance article in Kershner, *The New York Times* (2011-05-21).

Another element suggesting that the situation in Syria has got out of hand is incidents of military defection. It is worth noting here that Syria's elite army officers are mostly dominated by Alawis (as is the regime). They have neither disintegrated nor turned on al-Assad. Defectors mostly come from among the Sunni soldiers. Defectors include both officers and younger conscripts.

5.1.2 In sum

The Syrian uprising in its early days in 2011 was not much different from other revolts across the region if we take into consideration the surprise element with which it came, as well as the uncompromising response of the regime against non-violent protesters. Yet on a number of points the Syrian revolution is quite different from other revolutions in the region. First, the demonstrations were not a mass movement like those in Tunisia and Egypt. On the contrary, they are concentrated both geographically and ethnically. Second, they did not cut across class or sectarian segments of Syrian society, as was the case in Egypt.[70] Third, the reactions by neighbouring countries and key actors such the US and European governments were prompt and critical (though sometimes cautious). For example, the US and the EU called for political pressure on the regime and liberal Western media seized the moment to call for isolation of the regime. Although harsh words and policies were issued in other circumstances where revolts took place, such as Bahrain, the pressure on Syria was not as intense at the outset of the government brutality as it was for similar situations in other Arab countries. This suggests that there were a number of other realpolitik factors – notably siding with Israel and confronting Iran – which played in to a number of governments' reluctant responses. After all, rapid isolation of the al-Assad regime at a time when no analyst knew where the domestic violence in Syria was heading could have been counterproductive.

In the end, the violence in Syria is likely to continue for many months to come. The conflict, which at one time seemed to have fallen into stalemate, was re-energized by the overthrow and death of Libya's Gaddafi in late October – developments that gave demonstrators further confidence.

In early 2012, it is clear that a wide range of actors are organising themselves in the current uprising. The main actors, aside from members of the general citizenry, include loyal government forces, loyal Alawite paramilitary groups, and alleged Iranian support. In the pro-democracy camp, the actors include local coordination committees, the Free Syrian Army, etc. Most probably, regional (e.g. the Arab League) and international pressure (e.g. further involvement of the UN and the International Criminal Court) on al-Assad's regime will increase.

[70] These points were highlighted to me by Professor Eric Hooglund.

5.2 Lebanon

Like a number of other Arab states, Lebanon has a composite ethnic societal make-up (ethnicity is here considered as both religious and cultural affinity).[71] The blend of identities and the interests and political influence of the respective groups determine every government's ability to pursue a particular policy. As a consequence, the Arab revolutions have not been reflected in demonstrations in Lebanon. Lebanese society and politics are based on religion, not necessarily strictly ethnicity (though there is some overlap), and every person, at birth, is registered in one of the 18 officially recognised religions, based on what the officially recognised religion of his or her father is. Thus, in order to comprehend the situation in Lebanon, a number of different interests need to be taken into account, not only domestically but also regionally, notably vis-à-vis Syria and Iran but also vis-à-vis a number of Sunni-dominated governments.[72]

A feature of particular importance is that, besides domestic intra-political rivalries between different ethnic (e.g. religious) identities, Hezbollah has come to play an important role in domestic and regional affairs. Since its appearance in the early 1980s, Hezbollah and its military branch – called the *Islamic Resistance* – have gained a great deal of influence.[73] Following the Lebanese civil war and the emergence of the March 8 Alliance (a group established in 2005 in gratitude for Syria's support), Hezbollah was able to establish itself as an important political actor in Lebanon's political circles. Its role was amplified in early 2011 following a government crisis that occurred when the Special Tribunal for Lebanon voiced its aspiration to indict members of Hezbollah for allegedly having taken part in the killing of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. The political crisis led the March 8 Alliance to nominate pro-Syrian Najib Mikati as Lebanon's Prime Minister. Mikati was later asked to form a new government.[74]

Hence, thanks to political and military support from Iran and Syria, Hezbollah has grown from being a non-state actor with links to a number of armed militia groups across Lebanon to being officially represented in the Lebanese government. Hezbollah was officially made part of the government on 13 June 2011. In this context there is a potential risk that the situation in Lebanon will become increasingly politically unstable, potentially increasing turmoil on its southern border with Israel. Such potential instability and increase of tension could in a worst-case scenario pave the way for a military escalation between the two states. For example, in late 2011, the leader of Hezbollah in Lebanon rallied

[71] Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Fact Book/* Lebanon (2011-11-10I).
[72] See Hirst (2010).
[73] Ibid.
[74] Shadid (2011-01-26).

several thousand supporters in support of al-Assad and against the Syrian National Council.

In the immediate term, the violence in Syria has already had implications for Lebanon. Allegedly, more than 1000 refugees spread into Lebanon in April 2011 alone following ongoing fighting (in early October 2011 there were 4000 registered refugees in Lebanon). A prolonged conflict in Syria could potentially re-balance the ethnic composition of Lebanon, thereby changing local political dynamics.[75] This, however, would only be result of a larger humanitarian crisis in Syria with a great number of refugees fleeing Syria for an indeterminate period.

Repeatedly over the years, the UN force currently deployed in southern Lebanon, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), has been targeted by bombs and snipers. One security commentator suggests that there could be regional interests in so doing. Not least, Syria wants to demonstrate that it still has certain control over events in the region. First, attacks on the UN troops may change the focus of media interest, and, second, an unstable environment in southern Lebanon may increase the chances of military conflict between Israel and Hezbollah.[76] This latter factor is closely linked to the evolving relationship between Hamas and Hezbollah and the indirect support of these groups by Iran, Syria, etc.[77]

In sum, the uprising in Lebanon has not been as profound as those seen in other countries in the Middle East. The developments occurring here during 2011 build on the complex social and ethnic setting and history of Lebanese society. Lebanese society is more heterogeneous than those in many other Arab countries. While social conditions remain much the same as throughout the region, with high unemployment levels, a high proportion of young people in the population and undemocratic political practices, a revolt could well take place (see Appendix 1). It is most likely that the impact of the Arab revolutions for Lebanon will spread to its frontier from abroad rather than from popular revolt internally. Prominent leaders inside Lebanon have also proposed that a key foreign policy course for Lebanon in the time to come is to avoid spill over from Syria.[78] In early 2012, there were signs that such spill over violence had begun to take place.

[75] Yacoubian (2011-05-09).
[76] Arasli (2011-08-18).
[77] In February 2012 Hamas and Hezbollah stepped up their reconciliation process.
[78] *The Daily Star: Lebanon News* (2012-01-19).

5.3 Jordan

Jordan has not been as intensely affected by the Arab uprisings as other Arab countries. Demonstrations erupted in mid-January and were ongoing at least ten months later, although the immediate tensions of the popular protests lessened over time (erupting in October after few demonstrations in August). As in a number of other countries, political, economic and social factors triggered demonstrations in Jordan. In particular, a large population of young people in combination with high food prices and high unemployment conditioned different actors to demand a change of politics-as-usual. The demonstrators included Islamists (e.g. the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front), trade unions, leftist parties, previous members of the military, students and tribal representatives. The Muslim Brotherhood seems to have posed the greatest threat to the monarch, King Abdullah II.[79] Overall, however, few experts believe that there will be sufficient support for a complete removal of the monarchy, at least in comparison with other Arab regimes where the head of state has had to leave.[80]

At an initial stage, the protests in Jordan, which began on 14 January 2011, mainly targeted the incumbent government's economic policies. This was followed by spreading demonstrations in various cities, as well as calls on the Prime Minister to step down from power.[81] In response, on 2 February Abdullah II forced the incumbent Prime Minister to resign. A new government was put in place under Marouf al-Bakhit and this was accompanied by an economic reform proposal amounting to nearly USD 600 million to calm the demonstrators. However, the demonstrators were not satisfied and increasingly called for further political reforms, and in particular for the suspension of the Jordanian parliament. While the government was busy trying to respond to street protests, King Abdullah invited the Muslim Brotherhood for talks on how to move the political process forward.

In February, the demonstrations grew by the day and posed an increasing challenge for the King as well. Demonstrators, sometimes numbering tens of thousands on the streets of Amman, insisted that extensive political reforms had to be made. Protests in Jordan saw demonstrators putting forward a number of demands for political change. These included a constitutional monarchy; a demand to vote on the choice of Prime Minister; the need to dissolve parliament; and a change in government economic policies. In response to these demands, the government and King Abdullah put forward a number of proposals and reform packages, including the reversal of a controversial fuel price increase; the

[79] Leigh (2011-04-11).
[80] Leigh (2011-06-17).
[81] *Al Jazeera* (2011-01-28).

sacking of the government and the establishment of a new Cabinet; revision of the electoral code; salary increases for workers in the public sector (including the military); food price cuts; and immediate revision of some laws relating to human rights, including public freedoms, freedom of expression and freedom of demonstrations.

On 15 March, King Abdullah formed a 53-member committee composed of government and opposition members to present revised laws for parliamentary elections and political parties. This was followed in mid-June 2011 by an announcement that King Abdullah intended to renounce his right to appoint prime ministers and cabinets in favour of having an elected parliamentary majority do so. The proposal from the committee has caused great debate in Jordan on the implications of the reforms.

Although many of the protests had been non-violent, late March brought clashes between demonstrators and government security forces (especially in central Amman), leading to hundreds being injured and several people being killed. Clashes between street protesters and monarchy loyalists continued during April and May.

Overall, the Arab revolutions have shaken the domestic political landscape in Jordan. Notably, Muslim organisations and leftist groups have formed a domestic opposition. Tribes and Bedouins traditionally loyal to the government have also made calls for reform (some Bedouins blocked roads leading to Amman calling for economic support, not least through land concessions). The monarchy has been weakened, having faced public protests on a daily basis for many months. The parliament has been strengthened at its expense. Similarly, the Jordanian military courts are having their powers reduced because of popular protests (e.g. they are now only able to try terrorism and spy charges and not general corruption charges as before).[82] As noted by one analyst, the King is facing an increasingly difficult political landscape as the recurrent dismissals of ministers and senior government officials make long-term political visions impossible.[83]

Moreover, despite the killing of demonstrators, support from the US and other Western allies will continue unchanged. For instance, in 2011 alone, the US is expected to provide Jordan with USD 12.47 billion in foreign aid.[84] No persistent calls have yet been made by European leaders to investigate alleged killings of civilians in the midst of the demonstrations. Jordan has been, and will continue to be, a close ally of the US, not least in terms of intelligence sharing. With regard to Jordan's relationship with the EU, steps on further cooperation were initiated prior to the Arab revolutions, and are likely to continue. In terms of stabilising

[82] *BBC World News* (2011-08-16).
[83] See op-ed by Sebastian in *The New York Times* (2011-12-09).
[84] Sharp (2011): 21.

Jordan's economy in the face of popular demonstrations, the Gulf Cooperation Council provided Jordan with USD 400 million in cash grants.[85]

With regard to Israel, Jordan is likely to continue its support (being one of only three countries in the Middle East that recognise Israel's existence). It is noteworthy here that nearly 70 per cent of Jordanians are of Palestinian origin, while about 30 per cent are considered native (original) Jordanians. However, if elections become increasingly free, criticism of Israel may grow. This may potentially strain cooperation. The incumbent regime has repeatedly interfered in the media to prevent them from stirring up the flames against Israel.

In conclusion, then, Jordan is not likely to change its political or military course in the region dramatically (though the dynamics can change quickly). Jordan's role towards the region will partly be dependent on how a more democratically oriented government responds to demands made by a parliament with increasing power. The Muslim Brotherhood may have gained further influence (especially gaining increasing legitimacy) because of the Arab Spring in Jordan, but any profound changes are yet to be seen. Few implications are to be seen for the strategic setting with the region. One could assume that an already Western-friendly Jordanian regime will align itself further with new democracies like Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, though seeking protection with other non-democratic monarchies in the region.

Whereas the demonstrations in Jordan have changed the political course towards increasing democratic participation, the next country to be analysed – Yemen – has had a completely different experience.

5.4 Yemen

Like Syria, Yemen has been severely affected by a popular revolt. Yet, unlike the national and spontaneous demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt, where the nation came together to oust the President, the Arab revolutions in Yemen have been based on a long-term process of increasing societal tensions.[86] Different groups and actors have for years voiced their grievances with the incumbent Shia Muslim President Ali Abdullah Saleh.[87] On the one side there is the central government (with all its internal rifts), and on the other side separatists in the south of Yemen seeking a secession from northern Yemen; a Houthi minority in

[85] Ibid.: 2.
[86] See Atarodi (2010).
[87] Opposition groups include general party opposition, opposition within the Yemen national army, opposition among members of the Islamic communities in Yemen, opposition to the regime among different tribes and clans, and marginalised communities around Yemen. For an overview of contemporary security threats in Yemen, see Terrill (2011).

northern Yemen seeking to advance their interests politically and militarily (allegedly with the backing of the incumbent Iranian regime); and al-Qaeda groups fighting not only the government but also government loyalists and Shia Islamic forces. Moreover different groups trading in drugs and small arms are challenging the government in Yemen. Some of these groups have also at times joined forces, creating different political and military allegiances during the course of Saleh's 32-year rule.

There have been a number of armed conflicts in Yemen's contemporary history and the country has been struck by attacks by Islamic radicals.[88] Despite the strong opposition to Saleh and the profound way in which Yemen was affected by the Arab revolutions, few commentators believe that the patrimonial system will change quickly.[89] A more likely prospect is a subdivision of Yemen into different states (e.g. federations of different states under Shia- and Sunni-led governments mainly based on various tribal constellations). However, such prospects are mainly determined by the regime in Riyadh.

Following the spread of the Arab revolt – not least on the basis of economic and political grievances, poverty, corruption, attempts by the government to change Yemen's constitution (prolonging Saleh's stay in power), a large population of young people, high unemployment and coordination through social media – a number of social tensions existing prior to 2011 came to the surface. The unifying feature among the demonstrators was a call for political representation and the removal from office of President Saleh. External actors, namely countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Somalia, allegedly also supported actors in this opposition. As in the case of Libya, tribal dynamics and tribal allegiances seem to have played an important role in the popular revolt (and its outcome).

The popular uprising adopted a similar pattern in Sana'a to those in Tunis and Cairo. Demonstrators called for the government to introduce political, economic and social reforms. These demonstrations were non-violent, but government retribution came with violence. Demonstrations concentrating in the capital, Sana'a, quickly spread to major cities.[90] In early January nearly 10 000 youths demonstrated in the capital, partly organised by students at Sana'a University. Ta'izz Square became a symbolic place for daily rallies. Following large demonstrations on 27 January, there were increasing numbers of defections from senior government posts, notably by military and government officials. As the demonstrations grew in scale, these defections turned into outright mass desertions.

[88] Radicals have also used Yemen as a safe haven from which to plan attacks on foreigners.
[89] Phillips (2011a): 12.
[90] Shadid, Bakri and Kareem (2011-01-28).

A breakthrough in the demonstrations came with by Saleh's announcement that he would not contend elections in 2013. Like Ben Ali of Tunisia and Mubarak of Egypt, Saleh seems to have been taken by surprise by the intensity and size of the demonstrations. Interestingly, his response – to cling on to power for the time being but not to seek a further term of office – was likely to have been perceived, it seems at least, by layers of the Arab protesters as astoundingly ignorant. After all, those in power seem not to have understood that they never had the people's support.

5.4.1 Key developments

In early February 2011, increasing societal polarisation could be witnessed around different locations in Yemen. Increasing tension between Saleh loyalists (the General People's Congress) and different opposition groups led at times to violent encounters. The main opposition party was Islah (the Yemeni Congregation for Reform), an organisation with representation in the national parliament. Islah is in turn an assembly made up of different fractions, notably the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists and powerful tribes. Another main opposition group was the Al Haq party. Later, these joined forces within the preparation committee for national dialogue.

On 18 February, a Friday of Anger was announced in Yemen. Tens of thousands of demonstrators joined protests in central Sana'a, while the protests also spread to other parts of the country. In late February an estimated 100 000 protesters were voicing their calls for political reform. By this time, a number of influential tribes had pledged their allegiance to the anti-government protesters.

Saleh sought to meet the protests with promises of reform and national dialogue. However, tensions led to an increase in the violence between government loyalists and the opposition, claiming an increasing number of lives.

One of the more important attempts to reconcile government and opposition was made by the GCC, which has generally tended to avoid active engagement in countries other than its members (or for the well-being of its members).[91] However, the GCC has increasingly come to gain political leverage vis-à-vis Yemen, not only because it is dominated by Saudi Arabia but also because of Sana'a's attempt to gain membership. The GCC talks concentrated primarily on a power transition in Yemen, in which President Saleh would transfer power and stand aside in favour of the incumbent Vice-President. The second main issue was the need to form a national unity government, a transitional government that would seek to lay the ground for democratic elections. Third, the GCC would itself contribute to a major economic support plan for Yemen, packages that

[91] It has, however, formed its own national military force, called the Al-Jazeera Shield Force.

would tackle some profound economic obstacles in the country. A fourth and final main element was a concession to Saleh to grant him legal immunity from future prosecution. Although both parties more or less accepted the political outcome of the talks, Saleh eventually refused to sign the agreement.

The incomplete political transition process led to a significant increase in the violence. In different parts of Yemen, there were reports of violent encounters with the regime (e.g. Islamists, defecting military, general mobs, tribes, etc.). Fighting erupted between government forces and different interest groups. One of the most serious challenges was that posed by the influential Hashid tribe, which on 23 May officially denounced President Saleh. This declaration was soon to be followed by direct violent engagement with pro-government forces. Several days of violent encounters in Sana'a led to heavy loss of life and numerous injuries. Government buildings were taken over by demonstrators. Violence erupted in many parts of Yemen for nearly 10 days, only marked by brief interruptions, but ceased when Saleh was seriously injured as the result of an explosion. Thus on 4 June Saleh left Sana'a for Riyadh, where he underwent surgery.

On the same day, Vice-President Abd al-Rab Mansur al-Hadi was appointed temporary President. Although direct violence declined in the following days, large-scale demonstrations continued in support of rapid government reform. One major point raised by demonstrators, not least the Youth for Change, was the complete sealing of Saleh's political future, that is that he would not be allowed back from Riyadh. Moreover, demonstrators called for Saleh and his family to be tried promptly and for speedy political reform processes in the shape of the appointment of a transition council.

On 23 September, it was reported that Saleh had returned to Yemen. His presence led to an increase in the violence. A few weeks later, Saleh also gave a media speech in Yemen stating that he would step down under a GCC framework initiative that would bring democracy to the country. He repeated his intention to step down in a media appearance on 9 October, but it would take until 23 November for Saleh to publicly step down under an arranged GCC framework in which power was given to the incumbent Vice-President. Under this framework the new President is meant to prepare the way for national elections within 90 days. A transitional unity government combining various opposition groups has been formed and a military commission is to be set up to reform the security forces.

Despite positive developments like these, pockets of violence continued throughout Yemen in mid-December 2011. Protests continued in early 2012, partly because of opposition groups' anger over the deal made, which would

grant Saleh immunity and mean that he was likely to be future head of the General People's Congress party.[92] Saleh left Yemen on 22 January, initially for medical treatment in the US. Meanwhile violence continued in the divided Yemen, notably with continued opposition in the south by al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). In the midst of the continued protests and pockets of violence, UN's reports reflected widespread and noticeable malnourishment among children.

5.4.2 Yemen's geostrategic role in the region

Why then is Yemen important for the region and the continuation of the so-called Arab Spring? Several geostrategic reasons make the revolts in Yemen important. The first is Yemen's vicinity and strategic geographical position as a neighbour to Saudi Arabia, the site of vast oil resources. Saudi Arabia is by far the most influential actor in Yemen's political sphere.[93] A destabilisation of Saudi Arabia, with Yemen as a springboard, could easily bring about fundamental economic turbulence in the world economy which is very sensitive to threats to energy flows. Saudi Arabia is pursuing many different strategies towards Yemen, of which the primary objective is containment.[94] It is currently hard to envision that anything significant will happen in Yemen without the decision of the political leaders in Saudi Arabia.

Because of historical ties, Yemen is also strategically important for events on the Horn of Africa. Given the close social and cultural networks that exist, instability could easily spill over. Some groups obviously make money from the regional instability. Thus, a deteriorating security situation in Yemen could easily invite further spoilers to the Horn (and vice versa).

For Iran, Yemen is crucial to its aim to further control and expand its influence in its neighbourhood. Although it may not envisage military control over other Gulf countries, building trustworthy alliances or using countries as bargaining chips in other power games are very important. A destabilised Yemen could easily be such a chip. On the other hand, a too unstable Yemen could easily invite the US and European states right onto Iran's doorstep – a reality it may not want.

Lastly, Yemen is also important because of the potential congregation of jihadist groups operating in and out of its territory. While some terrorist attacks are planned and carried out against Saudi Arabia, others are allegedly carried out against entities outside the Gulf, for example in the US (e.g. the plot to explode cargo on an aeroplane destined for the US in early 2010), the Horn of Africa (e.g.

[92] *The Guardian* (2012-01-22).
[93] Phillips (2011b): 75.
[94] Ibid. p. 76.

Somalia), Afghanistan, and so on. In addition to potential terrorism, there are a host of domestic security challenges, which, as noted above, have been unleashed by the revolts. All these domestic security elements have attracted conspicuous foreign attention, some have attracted political and economic support, and others have attracted military support. This foreign attention builds on different strategic needs and concerns, direct national interests (e.g. establishing or preserving access to oil and key infrastructure), political and ideological advancement and preservation, a desire for a springboard to further influence and so on. The question here is how these dynamics are affected by the Arab revolutions. Before examining this, a brief discussion follows on some of the immediate threats to Yemen and the region.

A number of the above-mentioned factors motivate the hegemonic influence of the US in the Gulf. Following the so-called war on terror, the US has cooperated with Saleh to conduct a number of counterterrorist operations against alleged al-Qaeda camps. However, some experts have argued that counterterrorism in the absence of the rule of law can complicate internal security matters and even make things worse than they are (e.g. efforts to promote the rule of law).[95] Increasing democratic governance could potentially make counterterrorism more effective and legitimate. One of the most visible groups in recent years is AQAP. AQAP consists of foreign fighters combined with local radical groups. Claims are also made that AQAP may enjoy some cooperation with the South Yemen secessionist movement. This is said to have followed the insurgency that started with the 1994 civil war in Yemen, when army units in support of socialist groups engaged in a revolt against President Saleh. Saleh on his part fought the southern secessionist group by supporting Sunni groups. The southern secessionist group would later shift its alliance to the Sunni Muslim fighters in Sudan. AQAP has engaged in direct fights with the Yemen military, in addition to killing members of the Yemen security forces and government officials. The overthrow of Saleh may now lead to a change of objective for AQAP in Yemen.

Another example of internationalising security dynamics in Yemen is the uprising by the Houthi community in the north (described by some as a tribe consisting of several thousand members and many more followers).[96] The Houthi community is actively rebelling against the government in Sana'a over grievances shaped by perceived marginalisation and discrimination. Being a Shia minority, it also allegedly enjoys support from Iran, an issue that has consequently drawn the attention of Riyadh and other regional Sunni-dominated Arab governments. The Houthi conflict has at times spilled over onto Saudi

[95] Sayigh (2009): 17.
[96] *The Economist* (2009-11-19).

Arabian territory, for example in 2009, prompting attention from a number of Western governments.

Iran's interest in the region seems to be to promote its own regional political, economic and ideological (religious) dominance.[97]

A different reason for the externalisation of the security dynamics in Yemen is, as noted above, the link to the Horn of Africa. There is widespread support for the claim that arms, fighters and money are transferred back and forth between the Horn of Africa and Yemen. The civil war in Somalia provides an opportunity for men and women wanting to engage in armed struggles and organised crime. For example, a number of associates of jihadist groups active in Somalia travel to Yemen for refuge and rest (and vice versa). There is also an indirect link to the piracy going on in the region (which in turn sparks attention from countries across the world, such as China, which does not want to see its trade flows interrupted). It is worth noting here that the ties between Yemen and Somalia are generally considered good, not least because of historical links and cultural and social ties.

Finally, tribal politics in Yemen is very important if we are to understand the logic by which domestic politics are being shaped. Tribal leaders contribute to balance power inside Yemen. Importantly, though, tribal politics also attract external actors, making tribes pieces on the board on a strategic playground for regional powers' interests. The Saudi government over certain periods has paid nearly USD 5 million to different tribes (Phillips, a Yemen expert, notes that Saudi Arabia also pays a great deal of money to tribes in Jordan and Iraq).[98]

In conclusion, then, it seems fairly clear from the examples above that during his several decades in power, President Saleh was able to form long-term and short-term alliances, both domestically and internationally. In fact, Saleh has made himself an integral part of Yemen's stability and a safeguard of national security. Few political alternatives are able to deal with the many societal conflicts that seem to exist. The ability of Saleh and his associates to outmanoeuvre different opposition groups made him a node around which power dynamics revolved. With his departure and then his return to power in October, Saleh's profound control seems to have declined, at least for the time being. When a potential power vacuum occurs, it needs to be filled. Interest groups are again to be found both inside and outside Yemen, so the future does not look bright for that country unless national reconciliation and a massive economic Marshall Plan for the

[97] In this context it is worth noting that President Saleh, himself a Zaidi Shia Muslim, enjoyed long-term support from Tehran, with a number of official visits over the years and political, economic and strategic support. The government of Yemen has also expressed support for different sensitive geostrategic positions of Iran, e.g. its right to conduct a nuclear programme.

[98] Phillips (2011b): 79.

development of Yemen are put in place. The more immediate security dynamics should also be considered in the light of the structural threats to Yemen's future stability, which any caretaker government will have to deal with. These include the acute need for access to fresh water, desertification and the expected oil depletion scenario.

The political direction of Yemen is still to be laid out. Most likely, any new regime in Sana'a will have to be accepted by the Saudi Arabian monarchy, because the latter cannot tolerate a hostile government in Yemen. This in turn will require consensus with the US. What is clear is that the situation has given rise to further insecurity, not only for the state itself, but also for its neighbours.

5.5 Oman

The usually quiet Oman has also been affected by the Arab revolutions. However, whereas in most Arab countries citizens have called for the ousting of their leaders, the Sultan of Oman, Qaboos bin Said Al Said, who has reigned since the early 1970s, has not been the main target of popular protest. Instead, demonstrations, starting in mid-February 2011, mostly proclaimed their loyalty to the Sultan. Rather than seeking an explicit overturning of the sultanate in order to bring in democratic governance, the focus of the protests has been on economic distress, corruption and unemployment.

Oman is generally not considered a pivotal country, despite being located in the centre of the Gulf region, bordering both Saudi Arabia and Yemen and being geographically close to Iran. However, popular upheaval could potentially still have implications for the future of the country and its political and military relations with other governments in the region.[99] Over the years, the Sultan has managed to become a bridge for Arab–Persian–Western relations. Despite being an Arab country, Oman under the Sultan has been able to maintain, and improve, its relations with Iran. In fact, there is cooperation in a number of areas, including joint projects on energy and trade. Qaboos bin Said Al Said has also been indirectly supportive of Iran's energy policy, despite international criticism of Tehran. What is also interesting is that Oman has been able to maintain close bonds with a number of Western and Asian governments. Following historical and more contemporary political ties, Oman could be considered a close ally of the US and the UK, notably in areas such as military, trade and political cooperation. Meanwhile the Sultan has been supportive of Middle East peace processes (and indirectly Israel), while including support for the Palestinian cause. In sum, Oman is power balancing well across the region.

[99] It is noteworthy that the Sultan is without a natural heir apparent.

Domestically, Oman is clearly not a democracy. Yet, as noted above, demonstrations there during the Arab revolutions have not concentrated on regime change, but have sought to force Muscat to improve the sultanate's form of governance. Demonstrators have also called for improvements in some human rights provisions. Overall, the demands made by protesters included: 1) more jobs; 2) a higher minimum wage; 3) less media censorship by the government; 4) the removal of corrupt ministers; 5) the removal of inefficient government institutions; 6) more power for the legislative council; 7) greater freedom of expression; 8) a reduction in the number of foreign workers (to allow more jobs for Omani citizens; and 9) in general, a lower cost of living.[100]

Taken as a whole, the demonstrations were rather short-lived, lasting mainly from February to April (sparking from week to week). They were also small, involving from a few hundred to a few thousand protesters. However, although the demonstrations were small, they were regarded as rather large from a regime perspective. Another feature of the demonstrations is that they were largely non-violent (though becoming increasingly violent as the army and protesters clashed).

Demonstrations occurred in several provinces of Oman, while certain places in Oman became symbolic sites for anti-government protests. For instance, the area outside the national parliament and the Globe Roundabout became assembly points for months of disobedience protests. On 30 March, the army was ordered to clear these areas. A number of opposition members were injured or imprisoned. This in turn prompted further demonstrations.

Despite the government's vicious handling of the protesters demanding freedom, the Sultan sought to accommodate the demonstrators by acceding to a number of their demands. His response included orders/promises, for example, to create 50 000 jobs; to provide monthly benefits to the unemployed; to raise the minimum wage of 150 000 private-sector workers; and financial benefits for students. There were also a number of government changes. Notably, some government institutions were closed and reshaped, and ministers were sacked or reshuffled. Most importantly, perhaps, the Sultan set up a committee to draft new proposals on ways to increase the power of the national parliament and thus give it legislative powers.

Given the costs of meeting the demands of the protesters for economic reforms, the Gulf Cooperation Council promised the Sultan its support. Thus, a Marshall plan for Oman has been discussed.

To summarise, there is no reason to believe that any major foreign policy shifts will follow in Oman because of the Arab revolutions. Oman will potentially

[100] This builds on a compilation by the author of different reporting in public media.

increase its regional cooperation, notably with Gulf countries, in order to make sure that if it experiences any similar protests, the sultanate will enjoy the protection of GCC members. Domestically, there are grounds to believe that the security services will be strengthened.

5.6 Bahrain

The geostrategic position of the constitutional monarchy of Bahrain in the Middle East is central for the dynamics in the region, not least in the Gulf area. Bahrain provides the home of the US fifth fleet (and is thus key for guarding the Strait of Hormuz near Iran). Its religious blend of Sunni and Shia Islam has made it the object of great power and regional power interest over the years. In particular, Iranian and Saudi Arabian interests have had implications for the country's stability and for the political dynamics there.

Following the Arab uprising in North Africa, events in Bahrain came to symbolise how bad and unpredictable the political situation can become in Arab countries facing an Arab revolution. In the face of increasing domestic opposition, in a matter of days Bahrain experienced brutal government violence, when the regime put a definite end to popular demonstrations. There were several reasons why the government chose this path. Most notably, it seemed to enjoy foreign support for its actions. In contrast to other Arab states, where presidents fell, the fall of a monarchy could send shock waves through other Arab regimes. Hence, the fall of a monarchy could have opened up new avenues for the Arab revolt.[101]

The Arab revolt in Bahrain was rooted in previous political protests against the ruling elite. Hence, contemporary popular protests have had different elements, notably human rights concerns and a Shia–Sunni Islam divide. For instance, there was a violent uprising in Bahrain during the 1990s. During these popular protests, actors from different political ideologies and religious practices came together in a bid for the restoration of parliament and a constitution. This bid subsequently led to the 2001 National Charter for Bahrain, where constitutional reforms were proposed. The revolt that took place in Bahrain in the early 1980s, following the revolution in Iran, was considered by Bahrain's rulers to be an Iranian-backed coup attempt, a situation that has not been forgotten.[102]

[101] In this context it should be remembered that initial analysis by commentators suggested that the Arab revolt was only likely to succeed against mafia-like presidential families, and not long-standing monarchies.

[102] Iran's alleged backing of the coup came under umbrella of what was called the *Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain*.

The Shia Muslim majority community mainly conducted the protest in Bahrain in 2011. The rulers in Bahrain, mostly Sunni Muslim (with the exceptions of some Shia officials), believed the revolt to be indirectly stirred up by Iran.[103] This is at least the official claim being made to justify a regime clampdown on protesters (further inflaming existing sectarian violence). However, the relationship seems to be far more complex, as commentators suggest: although ties do exist, Shia believers in Bahrain are Arabs and therefore the relationship may not be so straightforward. Shia Muslim grievances include perceived discrimination in terms of representation in political and security affairs and the government's alleged policy of ethnic re-balancing in the country (i.e. by naturalising Sunni immigrants and general "de-Iranisation"). Similarly, there are considerable economic ties between Shia and Sunni groups inside Bahrain and with those in Iran. A symptom of the political situation in Bahrain has thus been the question of ethnic loyalty (whether to Iran, Bahrain, the state or religion). The demands of the protesters have so far been an appeal not directly for Iranian engagement, nor for further institutionalisation of Shia Islamic rights, but for improved human rights. On the other hand, it is difficult to ignore the fact that affiliated Shia-led governments would be more likely to exploiting such a situation in order to advance their own interests. These elements constituted the basis for the protests that took place in Bahrain during spring 2011.

The Arab revolt came to Bahrain in mid-February 2011. Noting the spread of popular revolts in other Arab countries, a number of human rights associations formally demanded that King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa take serious measures to end alleged human rights abuses in Bahrain. Meanwhile, calls were made for the release of hundreds of detained human rights activists, leaders of outspoken non-governmental organisations and religious figures.

On 14 February 2011, segments of the Shia community in Bahrain arranged street protests against perceived discrimination and prosecution. Demands were made for further political representation, an end to discrimination against Shia communities and better living standards. A bid was also made to have the ruling monarchy give up its powers to parliament. The Al Wafaq National Islamic Society, the main political opposition party in Bahrain (Shia-dominated), soon supported these protests. Al Wafaq, with a large representation in the Bahrain parliament, officially boycotted the national parliament in protest at the immediate brutal government crackdown on demonstrators. In response to the boycott, the government threatened to ban Al Wafaq from any future political participation. On the same day as the popular protests were launched, the

[103] It is worth noting here that the Sunni-led government has been keen to invite non-Shia Muslim workers to Bahrain to balance Shia influence.

immediate response by government forces resulted in at least one person being killed and hundreds injured.

Like Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo, the Pearl Roundabout in Manama became the scene of popular protests. However, the Bahrain government made a forced entry into the assembly in an attempt to clear the streets of anti-government (and anti-royalist) protesters. Following further violence, including the killing of civilians, government forces were withdrawn and the King initiated a forum for dialogue. He sacked a number of government ministers and ordered the release of a number of prisoners. Moreover, in a bid to mollify protestors, he proposed giving 1000 Bahraini dinar (BD) to each family in Bahrain to ease living conditions.

However, the street protests continued. In early March, the spiral of violence reached new levels, with increasing pro- and anti-government/monarchy demonstrations. Increasing sectarian violence flared between Shia and Sunni Muslim followers. Protesting demonstrators called for further democratic participation and the ousting of the government (notably the Prime Minister).

On 14 March, the Gulf Cooperation Council, mainly dominated by Saudi Arabia, deployed the *Peninsula Shield Force* in a bid to support the Bahrain government and clear the capital of protesters.[104] Nearly 1000 troops were provided by Saudi Arabia and 500 police officers from the UAE took part in the confrontation, which led to many civilian casualties. Although the streets were cleared of demonstrations, anti-government (and anti-monarchy) protests did not stop. On the contrary, the protests continued throughout much of the summer. The GCC continued its presence for months. Pockets of violent conflict between demonstrators and the state security services continued, albeit on a small scale. A state of emergency was also declared until 1 June in a bid to restore calm.

On 31 May, the King proposed to initiate a national dialogue. However, opposition groups and demonstrators were deeply sceptical and considered the proposal purely cosmetic. The national dialogue continued until 24 July, when it was considered terminated. Experts on Bahraini politics hold that the uprising in the end has led to nothing but a "…return to martial law and the possible end of the participative experiment".[105] During the autumn, demonstrations and violence declined. Towards the end of 2011, sporadic protests and the police response perpetuated violence (e.g. following an attempt to retake the Pearl Roundabout). Human rights abuses have prompted the US to criticise its Bahrain ally.[106] Overall, continued anti-government opposition followed alleged cosmetic reform proposals.

[104] See Kinninmont (2011-05-16).
[105] Louër (2011): 2.
[106] *BBC World News* (2012-01-07).

It seems that the Arab revolt in Bahrain was well rooted in both historical and contemporary state identity-building processes, including economic inequality among different groups in the country.[107] Ethnic identities and perceived grievances, including national ethnic security dilemmas fed by regional and international interests, had implications for the dynamics that unfolded. The Arab revolt in Bahrain has led to closer cooperation with the GCC countries. In particular, the support provided by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates will create closer ties. It is worth noting in this context that the GCC members have agreed to offer Bahrain an economic stimulus package amounting to nearly USD 10 billion, assigned to improve living conditions. At the same time, relations with Iran have become increasingly tense. For example, Iran officially commented on the demonstrations, urging a stop to the killing of protesters during the spring. Following this, a diplomatic rift unfolded between Bahrain and Iran, with the authorities in Bahrain expelling alleged Iranian spies. From Iran's point of view, the Shia Muslim uprising proved valuable because it revealed the loyalty of Bahrain's Shia citizens. The uprising also gave Iran a further reason to capitalise on a situation where a societal conflict seemed to have existed, and to use the situation as a platform for its own regional ambitions.

Lastly, although the US and the UK have officially stated that the Bahrain government should listen to demonstrators and begin to introduce reforms, their ties to these governments will remain solid. Bahrain remains an important partner for the US. The US has a far-reaching military agreement with Bahrain, notably the agreement from the early 1990s whereby the US is allowed to place its *United States Naval Forces Central Command* in Bahrain. Bahrain has also been participating in different military coalitions, for example, in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as elsewhere.

In conclusion, the uprising in Bahrain has shown how different actors in the region have made use of the Arab revolutions to position themselves politically. Bahrain may not directly have had significant implications for security in the region, but on a symbolic level it seems to have had a strong impact for a number of governments. It showed clearly how far certain Gulf governments – notably the monarchy in Saudi Arabia – were willing to allow domestic violence to take root before it became a regional concern and a threat to their national interests. In particular in this context, the GCC, an organisation that is traditionally fairly dormant, flexed its muscles considerably. Security analysts suggest that the GCC force could come to play an increasing role in the future (especially as the US seems willing to support the capabilities of the GCC).[108]

[107] Niethammer (2010).
[108] See *The Middle East* Magazine, December 2011: 16.

Finally, the revolt in Bahrain also contributed to shaping the policies towards the Arab revolutions of other neighbouring and concerned actors such as the EU and the US.

6 States *Indirectly* Affected by the Arab Revolutions

Besides a number of Arab countries being directly affected by revolutions and revolts, other states in the Middle East security complex have also felt an impact, though to a lesser extent. One relevant question concerns the extent to which the Arab revolutions have altered these countries' foreign policy behaviour in order to defend their national interests. An analysis of the countries indirectly affected and the implications for security dynamics in the region is provided below.

6.1 Iran

During 2011, the Iranian regime attracted increasing attention from regional and international leaders because of its nuclear enrichment programme, allegedly intended for military purposes.[109] This attention did not so much concern the general anti-government demonstrations occurring in the region. Instead, both the US and the EU adopted targeted sanctions to undermine the policies of the government.[110] Actions to further isolate the Iranian regime came as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) found indications that Iran's enrichment programme had military dimensions to it.[111] The confrontation has steadily increased, peaking in 2012 when close military confrontation was nearing in the Strait of Hormuz and the EU adopted strong sanctions measures (to be implemented in June 2012).

International anxiety about Iran's potential use of its nuclear energy programme builds in part on the notion that a nuclear- (military-) capable Iranian government would significantly alter the geopolitical dynamic in the region. Such an alteration will not be accepted by any liberal democratic government, or by any Arab government.[112] Besides garnering political influence, a militarily powerful Iran could also get better access to the energy flow from the region. The conflict

[109] In this context it is worth underlining that a debate has been going on among the intelligence community and segments of the political establishment in Washington over Iran and its potential nuclear capability as well as ways to deal with such a situation. See in particular Leverett (2006).

[110] For more on the "West's relations strategic engagement with Iran", see Parsi and Rydqvist (2011).

[111] IAEA staff report 2011-11-18.

[112] US Congress Hearing (2011): 12. Note also John Bolton's remarks on the next steps regarding Iran's nuclear programme: "No one likes to contemplate this possibility, but there are only two options that currently exist in my view. One is that Iran gets nuclear weapons. The other is the preemptive use of force against them" (ibid.).

with Iran on this issue obviously predates the Arab revolutions. The question, though, is what implications the Arab revolts have had for Iran per se.

The protests that unfolded in Iran in 2011 build to a certain extent on the protests under the *Green Movement* set in motion during the presidential election in Iran in 2009 (and earlier). However, the majority of the groups that are now labelled as the Green Movement have never asked for complete regime change, arguing instead for reform strictly within the basic framework of the Islamic revolution. Yet, the domestic political situation has logic of its own. About 20 per cent of the opposition is secular. Estimations suggest that this group aims to ask for social justice more than democracy, whereas another 20 per cent of the population is supportive of the incumbent regime.[113] The vast majority of the population is against government intrusion in the daily lives of the people and seems to have a relaxed attitude to Islamic principles.[114] However, the great majority of the population did not participate in the 2011 protests because they are distrustful of the reformist opposition.[115] Despite ongoing democratic challenges to the regime in the form of public demonstrations and covert work to challenge the government of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, there is not much to suggest that the Arab revolutions have opened a window of opportunity for a Persian Spring.[116] A number of commentators have suggested that the Persian Spring is yet to come and that the democratic opposition in Iran has lost some of the momentum it had prior to the 2009 elections.[117] One argument aligned to this view is that the government of Iran and its secret services has become increasingly forceful and effective in dealing with the opposition (arrests, cutting mobile phone connections, slowing down Internet speeds, etc.). On the other hand, there are suggestions that democratic forces in Iran may now be able to seize a new momentum and put domestic pressure on the government of Iran because of the Arab revolutions.

The Green Movement has continuously staged protests around Iran, but on 9 February 2011, in an effort to show solidarity with ongoing protests around the Arab world, its members sent a request to the Ministry of the Interior for permission to hold demonstrations.[118] Permission for such gatherings was refused, but pockets of demonstrations around the country have continued. Calls for human rights, free elections and the overthrow of the Islamic Republic were

[113] I am indebted for this point to Professor Eric Hooglund.
[114] For a good account on the role played by the Green Movement, see Posch (2010).
[115] Ibid.
[116] There is also a growing discourse in the Iranian press that considers Arab protesters as Western "puppets".
[117] Another element is that the regime in Tehran has pursued an economic policy that has been very beneficial for the countryside, thus gaining support.
[118] Dehghan, in *The Guardian* (2011-02-11).

some of the key demands chanted by protesters. Following actions by the Green Movement, the Iranian regime arrested (and later released) its key leaders, notably Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi.

The Arab revolutions may have given some impetus to continued anti-government protests, but it is more likely that the dynamics in Iran have to be analysed in their own terms. After all, although demonstrations took place across Iran during spring 2011 (mainly in Tehran), no major changes have (yet) taken place in terms of the ability of the Green Movement to stage any significant anti-government revolt. The demonstrations currently going on in Iran represent more an ideological struggle between different corners of the Iranian political establishment than a struggle between a government and its opposition.[119] Another factor is that there is no united opposition with a clear leadership, something that seems to be an important factor for a successful revolution.[120]

Obviously, the policy of the Iranian government has implications for the directions events in neighbouring Arab countries will take. This is further elaborated upon below. In particular, Iranians in exile are able to relate to and learn from the Arab revolts when seeking to determine their own domestic actions to challenge their incumbent leaders.

Unlike a number of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, Iran has to be tackled not only from the perspective of domestic developments, but also from the perspective of its setting in the regional and international domain. After all, Iran is one of the strongest actors in the region in both political and military terms. The turn events take within Iran will have far-reaching implications for the region.[121]

Other pivotal states in the region, such as Israel and Saudi Arabia, have traditionally expressed great opposition to Iran's regional ambition. The resistance of these countries, with the protection of the US, to a potential Iranian nuclear capability gives the policies of the Iranian government further significance. Pressure on Iran hence comes both from within the region and from other communities such as the European Union and the United Nations (e.g. the Security Council).

Similarly, Egypt's loyalties are endangered by Iranian dominance. However, following the Arab revolutions, there are increasing signs of a change in the patterns of relations between Egypt and Iran. Iran for its part seems to be seizing the opportunity to form new ties with interests in Egypt, whereas Egypt is most

[119] Hooglund (2011-06-19).
[120] For instance, the leadership of the Green Movement has been part of Iran's political elite, whereas the main body of the Green Movement has not been part of the elite.
[121] For more on Iran and Gulf security, see Potter, chapter 2 in (eds.) Parsi and Rydqvist (2011).

probably hampered by the power vacuum that in some sense will exist until democratic elections have been held. After all, the military elite in Egypt remains much the same as it was under President Mubarak, so it is not impossible for it to consider relaxing the ties with Iran as a means to secure other national security interests, notably with regard to Israel and the Palestinian Authority. However, in retrospect, the Iranian government has made various efforts to re-establish normal diplomatic relations with Egypt, not least the efforts made by former Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati.[122]

Turkey is another pivotal state in the region. Turkey's "zero problems" policy has led to some cooperation with Iran. Iran has noted Turkey's good intentions. However, following the Arab revolutions, Iran's views of Turkey has soured as Turkey has increasingly turned its back on Syria, a key instrumental ally for Iran.

Syria presents one of the most pressing security issues for Iran. The regime in Syria is probably Iran's only loyal helper, albeit mostly on an instrumental level. Both states have much use of each other politically. Through Syria, Tehran can influence different actors in the region, such as Shia Islamic communities – especially in southern Lebanon – to extend its political influence, and not least to balance against Israel. (Iranian involvement in the military events in Syria is therefore understandable, be it through alleged support from Al-Quds soldiers, or technical support to disturb the functioning of social media networks and satellite transmissions.) The support for the independent Shia Islamic groups in the region, not least in southern Lebanon, has deep roots in history because of elements of long-standing religious affinity. This also partly explains why Iran is sympathetic towards these groups in the wake of the conflicts between Hezbollah and Israel. As noted earlier, Hezbollah vowed, in early December, to give its support to Syria's al-Assad.

Commentators have said there are also other reasons for Iranian engagement in Syria. For example, a former US ambassador to the UN stated that other goals may be "…safeguarding Iran's own nuclear weapons program and whatever weapons-related activities in addition to the reactor might be underway in Syria".[123] This view is not necessarily representative of US foreign policy, at least not under the incumbent Obama administration; yet these views exist. An

[122] On the other hand there are likely to be different interests in Tehran working both against and in favour of reconciliation with Egypt, for example for contemporary political reasons (e.g. accusations of Iranian involvement in assassination attempts on Mubarak) as well as many other different historical factors working for and against reconciliation. For example, as noted by Karim Sadjadpour at the US *Council on Foreign Relations*: "Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei sees it as his duty to remain loyal to the policies and ideals of Ayatollah Khomenei, and the breaking of ties with Egypt…" (i.e. given the late President Anwar Sadat's friendship with the Shah of Iran): see Sadjadpour (2011b).

[123] US Congress Hearing (2011): 28.

important question for the future is what will happen if the Syrian government falls? Most likely, Iran will seek to regain its influence by contacting the new regime (regardless of the fact that it may be a Sunni-dominated government). The goal would be to maintain links with the Syrian establishment and to convince it to help balance against Israel.

In conclusion, then, evidently, the Arab revolutions have not directly come to change the dynamics in the region when it comes to Iran's immediate security. On the other hand, they have complicated its national security agenda, notably because of the challenges to the regime in Iran's closest ally, Syria.

Moreover, the Middle East will remain insecure simply because of other structural insecurities, partly caused by the incumbent Iranian government's pursuit of a regional hegemonic role (allegedly maintained by a prospective nuclear capability). This role of dominating the region is a shared narrative of certain political corners among actors such as the US, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. One part of understanding Iran's regional activity is appreciating Iran's political ambition to seek increasing respect of the US. The energy issue remains an important incompatibility that will shape the security agenda for the region in the months and years to come. The question is not easily solved, as there are many parties that have particular stakes on this matter.

Thus, old conflicts and security dilemmas in combination with the political implications of the Arab revolutions will add more uncertainty.

6.2 Iraq

Iraq has just begun recovering from Operation Iraqi Freedom, which toppled the government of Saddam Hussein in 2003. There is a great deal of grievance and upheaval across Iraq because of the general political, economic and social situation. In particular, there are complaints about the dire (human) security situation in parts of the country. This should also be read in the light of the US troop withdrawal from Iraq in late December 2011. A question is what implications this will have not only for the incumbent regime, but also for the human security of its people (and the region). One pointer is that sectarian violence increased between Shia and Sunni groups in early 2012 (Prime Minister al-Maliki issued a warrant for the arrest of Vice-President al-Hashemi on charges of terrorism).

As for the time before the Arab revolutions, Iraq has been the scene for proxy conflicts (e.g. Iran and Saudi Arabia have allegedly sponsored sectarian violence and paramilitary forces).[124] What role then have the Arab revolts played for Iraq?

Inspired by the revolutions unfolding in other parts of the Arab world, loose groupings of people gathered in Iraq for protests in mid-February 2011. They protested against the government headed by Nouri al-Maliki. Similar protests, although seemingly uncoordinated, took place across different towns in Iraq during spring 2011. Demonstrators called for: 1) a more effective approach to handle national security issues; 2) an end to government corruption; and 3) improvement of social conditions and public services. Moreover, military officials who had resigned from duty following perceived corruption joined them at an early stage, and several officials from the Ministry of the Interior joined the crowds of demonstrators. Later in the spring, demonstrations were held by members of Iraq's Shia communities in support of those demonstrators disobeying the government and monarchy of Bahrain. Some minor demonstrations were also held against Saudi Arabia for its decision under the Gulf Cooperation Council umbrella to launch an invasion of Bahrain in support of the monarchy and the state. In this context, it should be noted that Saudi Arabia and Iran have at times used Iraq as a proxy for regional tensions: Bahrain is also such a proxy.

The demonstrations were unique in that they were aimed against the provisional government and led for example to the storming of provisional government-held buildings, demands for better job opportunities and the resignation of provisional leaders. However, perhaps the most violent turn took place during the spring of 2011 in Iraqi Kurdistan, where several people were killed. It is unclear whether the Arab uprisings in Iraqi Kurdistan were sparked by other protests in the Arab world or whether they were merely a continuation of the ongoing conflict between local Kurdish groups in Iraq and the government. What is clear, however, is that the members of the Kurdish communities seized some of the momentum in order to advance their cause.[125]

While provincial leaders tackled their own immediate problems with some government backing, on a national level Prime Minister al-Maliki officially responded to the demonstrators by declaring at an early stage that he did not intend to stand for re-election. Further reactions came later during the spring, when he sacked government officials.

In the end, then, the rather few and small events taking place in Iraq have not contributed to any major geostrategic shifts in the region, nor have they had any

[124] See *The Middle East* Magazine, October 2011: 18-20.
[125] International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Comment*, no. 11 (2011b).

direct implications for a shift in the balance of power. On the other hand, the processes of consolidating relations between Iran and Iraq are continuing. The potential fall of al-Assad in Syria may cause some problems in the relations between the three countries. Iraq has a Shia-led government and is increasingly getting close to Iran. A potential Sunni-led regime in Damascus might strain relations with Iraq; not least, it could contribute in steering ethnic and sectarian violence among Sunni Muslim groups.

Finally, the US with its continued hegemonic presence is continuously watching developments throughout this process and will support or seek to undermine any actions that do not run in its interest. How the government in Baghdad will handle security as the US departs is still an open question.

Besides Iraq and Iran, developments in the region are heavily dependent on the perception of the Arab revolutions of the incumbent government in Israel.

6.3 Israel

Israel is still the sole democracy in the Middle East. It receives profound support from most Western governments, notably military support from the US.[126] From the point of view of Israel, the popular revolts taking place in the Arab world have altered some of its security relations in the region, though they have not fundamentally shifted its geostrategic concerns. Iran remains one of the main threats, and the fall of the al-Assad regime will be a game-changer for anti-Israel policies in the near region.

Domestically, the incumbent government of Benjamin Netanyahu is facing demonstrations, mainly relating to the cost of living. Clearly, those demonstrations are of an entirely different nature from those in the Arab states. Yet they are worth mentioning because internal grievances in Israel may coincide with other political developments in the region which, taking place at the same time, could have geostrategic implications (e.g. in the light of a Palestinian statehood, a Syria in turmoil, a threatening Iran, etc.).

First, Israel has been directly affected by the instability originally caused by the toppling of Egypt's President Mubarak, but it is perhaps more profoundly affected by the implications of a disintegrating Syria and the anti-Israel policies of the Iranian regime. Syria continues to pose a profound challenge to Israel and the revolt in Syria seems to have given impetus to increased anti-Iranian activity in Lebanon (and against Iran's support of Hezbollah). On the other hand,

[126] European governments are increasingly questioning elements of Israeli policies in the region. Some European governments are more favourable, some less (see e.g. which European governments are backing Palestinian membership of the UN).

Hezbollah has strengthened its political position in Lebanon. Moreover, the Arab revolt in Syria has contributed to alter the geostrategic balance in the region. As one security commentator notes, Syria is one of Israel's most consistent opponents. Increasing violence in Syria that threatens to spill over in the region, in combination with the turbulence in Egypt, the uncertainties of Iran and so on, may force Israel to ponder the possibility of managing a multi-front war should things deteriorate.[127] Overall, however, Israel remains unchallenged, notably because of the support from the US and other Western allies.

The regime change in Egypt with the ousting of Mubarak and the installing of a Supreme Military Council has probably had the most implications for Israel so far. Whereas the Supreme Military Council has declared its intention to uphold the Peace Treaty with Israel signed in Camp David in 1979, it has also been favouring an easing of the Gaza blockade, and Cairo has been approached by Hamas to increase Egyptian support for its cause. It should be noted that during the revolution in Egypt, Israeli and Egyptian military officials were in close contact. Because of the Arab revolutions and the change of leaders in Cairo, Israel has witnessed Egypt becoming increasingly active vis-à-vis Palestinian groups. For example, in late August Egypt was able to broker ceasefire agreements between rebel groups in Gaza and Israel. One reason for this is that Egypt can thereby gain more influence over the Palestinian security situation. This in turn has several underlying motives, one being to further engage in the Middle East peace process, and another that Egypt has increasingly been invited by Hamas to engage. For example, Hamas has plans to move its offices from Damascus to Cairo.

During late summer 2011, the power vacuum in Egypt prompted different non-democratic groups to advance their interests, leading to instances of armed conflicts and rebellion with implications for Israel.[128] For example, in mid-August 2011, a number of Egyptians allegedly crossed into southern Israel and killed eight people in Sinai (according to Israel it was a group called the Popular Resistance Committees). In the turmoil that followed, Israel accidentally killed three Egyptian police officers; it later officially apologised for this event. Around that time, Egypt embarked on military operations (including thousands of troops) in Sinai in order to pursue alleged al-Qaeda operatives.[129] Moreover, a number of tribes whose members work in the Sinai region on a commercial basis have sought to advance their interests in the midst of the Egyptian power vacuum.

As noted earlier, besides its relations with Egypt, the prime concern for Israel is the threat posed by the Iranian government. Iran poses not only a direct

[127] International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Comment*, no. 19 (2011a).
[128] *Haaretz* (2011-08-21).
[129] *Associated Press* (2011-08-20).

conventional threat (and possible near-future nuclear threat), but also an immediate indirect threat via regional groups loyal to Tehran (e.g. linked to Hezbollah and, indirectly, Hamas). However, Israel has a deterrent capability through its policy of nuclear ambiguity. In addition, Israel does not deny having both biological and chemical weapons programmes, strategic means that will always be used to balance politically unpredictable Arab governments.[130]

Finally, though perhaps most importantly, the Palestinians have re-energised their own uprising in the context of the Arab revolutions. This process fitted in well with the long-planned goal of the PLO to unilaterally declare independence at the UN (the Palestinians are seeking membership according to the UN Charter, as opposed to only seeking legal recognition by the UN). This process in itself is outside the process of the Arab revolutions, yet governments that are keen to recognise a Palestinian state may have more motivation now to support an Arab turn to democracy. Until recently, Israel has gained some comfort from Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia's (there are also other states) policies of calming the Palestinians through different kinds of support. Such policies mostly enhance stability, not least with benefits for Israel. With Mubarak overthrown, such policies may now recede, with resulting problems for both Israel and the Palestinians.

Following the initial plans to take the Palestinian cause to the UN, the US congress in late June 2011 agreed on a bill which called on the US President to veto such a petition and called for a threat of the withdrawal of aid to the West Bank if these plans were pursued.[131] The US Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, also early on indicated that the US would withdraw its financial support for the UN should such a declaration be made. In response, Palestinian Authority representative Mahmoud Abbas proposed that the Authority be granted observer status, similar to the Vatican, or non-member state status. Allegedly, 127 states around the world have recognised the State of Palestine, with Syria being the last Arab state to give such recognition on 18 July 2011 (thereby changing a decades-long policy). In mid-September, the Arab League restated its support for a state of Palestine, while the European Union had not yet reached a unified position.[132]

On 23 September, Mahmoud Abbas, Chair of the PLO, delivered to the UN the official application for recognition of a Palestinian state by the UN. On 26 September, the UN Security Council began negotiations on the matter. In order to make it easier to support the Palestinian bid, the idea was later

[130] In this context, it should also be noted that, following the use of grenades and rockets launched from Gaza and southern Lebanon, Israel has developed the Iron Dome protection programme to minimise the lethal impact on its citizens. However, this defence system is very expensive to use.
[131] *United States Congress* (2011-05-13).
[132] *Al Jazeera* (2011-09-13) and *EU observer* (2011-09-02).

formulated of voting Palestine in with observer status. As the process of negotiations at the UN began, the EU a few days later adopted a six-point principle on the need for further negotiations in line with the timelines indicated in the Quartet Statement of 23 September 2011.[133] A US Congress legislator had already, in August, blocked a transfer of USD 200 million for Gaza and the West Bank if the bid at the UN went ahead.

The process towards an independent Palestinian state is likely to continue for some time to come. For example, on 31 October 2011 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) voted in favour of admitting Palestine as a member state in its organisation. Key states in Europe and the Middle East are prepared to allow further negotiations to continue for some time to come before a final decision can be made with regard to full sovereignty and recognition. The conflict with Palestine will shape not only Israel's security identity but also other governments' attitude towards Israel as long as it remains unresolved. Yet, the Arab revolutions have changed some foreign policy priorities and these priorities may be used in the complicated game of settling the Israel–Palestine conflict.

6.4 Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar

Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar are all important states for understanding the security dynamics in the Middle East and the Arab world. All three countries have vast oil resources and are host to financial interests for many governments in the region and the wider international community. However, to a great extent these countries have experienced no direct effects of what has happened in the region as a consequence of the Arab revolutions.

The state of Kuwait is important because of its closeness to a number of Western and Arab states, notably the US, the UK, France and Saudi Arabia. Kuwait's support for regional governments is currently primarily based on good relations with those countries that supported the international coalition in the liberation of Kuwait in the early 1990s. Good relations exist with governments such as those of Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Jordan and Egypt. Meanwhile relations with Iraq (partly because of its economic debts to Kuwait), Iran (because of religious and ideological differences) and Israel are at a low point.

[133] EU Council Conclusions on the Middle East Process (2011-10-10).

The Arab revolutions did not reach Kuwait in any serious sense.[134] However, although the country is highly undemocratic, no major structural social grievances among the Kuwaiti citizenry are visible. Thus, social unrest inside Kuwait and in the region prompted the Emir of Kuwait, Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber-Al, in early 2011 to offer every citizen a stipend of nearly USD 4 000 and a period of free food. Commentators relate this policy to the events in Bahrain, and hence see it as a political measure to ward off potential violence inside Kuwait. In late November, the Emir decided to dissolve the parliament and called for elections. The move came as protestors had stormed the parliament in on 16 November following corruption charges against leading decision-makers. The regime was not challenged and there were no direct implications for the domestic political system that have contributed to any shift in regional power relations. The dissolution of the parliament seems to have caused some stumbling blocks for the US plans for its troops following their redeployment from Iraq.

There were no signs of any profound anti-government protests in the UAE or Qatar. Aspects of this absence of demonstrations may in themselves have inspired other oil-rich states in the region to examine the possibility of diversifying their economies to secure broadly-based popular support for their regimes in the absence of democratic representation. Both countries are loyal allies to Western powers, such as the US (as manifested by defence agreements, military cooperation, political support, etc.[135]), and will continue to be so for some years to come. The UAE in particular plays a significant role for Iran's regional ambitions (besides the fact that nearly 450 000 Iranians live in the UAE). Dubai for example is the home of many Iranian business interests that also significantly feed into the Iranian economy. Hence, as one security commentator noted:

> A closer look, however, reveals that the UAE is often torn between the interests of the security-focused emirate of Abu Dhabi and the business-oriented emirate of Dubai. The UAE, furthermore, is not the only party with divided interests. Iran is often pulled in one direction by the ideological ambitions of its regime and in another by the pragmatic aspirations of its private merchants.[136]

This makes the UAE important for the US Gulf strategy (and that of its allies), not least for the implementation of targeted as well as sector-specific UN and US

[134] A diplomatic row did, however, ensued between Kuwait and Iran, the former accusing the latter of stirring up violence, leading to claims of espionage and the expulsion of diplomats. See Katzman (2011): 13.

[135] For example, Qatar hosts the US Central Command's Forward Headquarters and the Combined Air Operations Center). For two media accounts of this see Alami (2011-03-17) and Lustig (2011-04-20).

[136] Sadjadpour (2011a): 3.

sanctions seeking to contain Iran. Unless the UAE is part of the UN and US sanctions scheme, the impact of sanctions for the Iranian leadership is likely to be less palpable.[137] In the short term, the UAE will continue to have strong economic interests in maintaining cooperation with Iran (a problem for a number of Western actors, e.g. the US and the EU). On the other hand, the UAE and other Gulf countries have more long-term concerns about Iran's nuclear programme and the nature of the Iranian regime, namely "…about the size and 'imperial' tenor of the ambitions of the Iranian nation".[138] Because of this, the UAE's role is likely to continue to be important for different actors seeking a stable Gulf region.

Another example of Gulf countries' engagement in the region to maintain stability is Qatar's role in providing military support to the Free Libya forces at the time, with that country increasingly descending into a state of civil war. Allegedly, Qatar provided support to particular groups fighting Gaddafi.[139]

In sum, the small yet influential Gulf countries have important stakes and advantages in the Arab revolutions. However, the political events in the region during 2011 are particularly dependent on developments in Saudi Arabia because of its political, economic, military (and religious) influence in the region.

6.5 Saudi Arabia

The rigid political system in Saudi Arabia, led by King Abdullah, has not met any significant demonstrations because of the Arab revolutions sweeping across the region. However, this does not mean that the government has been immune to opposition. On the contrary, there are a number of tensions inside Saudi society that could have regional implications. In terms of domestic opposition, demonstrators have been drawn from a number of organisations such as Sunni Muslim groups, women's groups, Shia Muslim groups, labour unions and the general population. It is worth noting, however, that a number of these groups were active prior to the Arab revolutions, in particular the Islamic groups seeking to improve their standing vis-à-vis the government. Although demonstrations against the ruling family are not permitted, some scenes of organised protests were reported at different locations across the country. Women's groups staged symbolic acts of defiance to demand improvements to their situation, Shia groups protested about the government's sending troops to Bahrain, and more loose

[137] Sadjadpour (2011a): 3-4.
[138] Ibid: 29.
[139] Estimates suggests that Qatar provided anti- Gaddafi forces with "tens of millions of dollars in aid, military training and more than 20,000 tons of weapons" (see Dagher, Levinson and Coker, 2011-10-17).

groups demanded better social conditions (e.g. labour rights) and infrastructure. The demonstrations have not affected the government in any deeper sense. Those demonstrations that have occurred have been contained.

However, the Saudi government has been affected in the sense that it has provided military and political support for other regimes in the Arab world, notably other Arab monarchies. Riyadh is engaging different Arab countries to counter any revolutionary attempts that will threaten regional security and implicitly its own security. Some of this support came through the Gulf Cooperation Council. Besides military support, economic support has also been provided to a number of states, e.g. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. However, as indicated, money has also been provided to Jordan and Morocco.[140]

One implication of the Arab revolutions has almost certainly been a reconsideration of the implications of US hegemonic interest in the region. The unperturbed relations Saudi Arabia enjoys with the US were at least temporarily strained by the US administration shifting its allegiance towards democratic opposition movements in North Africa and thereby turning its back on traditional Arab regime partners (notably Egypt and Tunisia).[141] This builds on an already growing fatigue among some senior US politicians at Saudi Arabia's export of radical groups, which they consider threaten US national interests.

Saudi Arabia has also come to play an important political and security role in the Arab revolutions by hosting ousted Arab leaders such as Tunisia's Ben Ali, granting him refuge instead of having him extradited. In the case of Yemen as well, the monarchy in Riyadh is likely to have determined Yemen's political fate by receiving President Saleh when he was temporarily ousted from power.

Finally, Saudi Arabia has in all probability gained further justification for its suspicious view of Iran's regional ambition to dominate its neighbours by supporting loyal groups across the Middle East following perceived Iranian involvement in supporting some demonstrations in the region. Saudi Arabia's future engagement in the Gulf region will probably continue to rest on this distrust.

6.6 Turkey

Turkey has increasingly become a pivotal actor in the Middle East and is going through a major shift in its domestic and foreign policy outlook. In particular, it

[140] Riedel (2011-08-24).
[141] Washington was, however, in close contact with Riyadh during the peak of the turbulence in the region.

has had to change its foreign relations with Syria. On the other hand, the Arab Spring has not yet given rise to a geostrategic alteration that led to a challenge to Turkey's sovereignty.

Turkey's policy of regional engagement has been ongoing since the early 1990s and has intensified since 2002, when the incumbent Justice and Development Party came to power. Turkey's regional engagement can be noted on different levels, both economic and military. For example, with regard to military engagements, Turkey signed a military cooperation agreement with Kuwait; a military cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia (including training, scientific research, technological development and the modernisation of armoured personnel carriers); agreements on increasing military cooperation with Syria; military contracts with the Jordanian air force; and more.[142] Its cooperation with the Gulf countries, notably Saudi Arabia, has been improved to counter Iranian influence. What is clear is that Turkey, as part of this transformation, is paying much more attention to its neighbourhood, including the Arabian Peninsula. One example is the way in which Turkey views Yemen and its political development, which is in line with the GCC's view. Turkey is active in the Bay of Aden and is supporting the government of Yemen in handling its domestic difficulties and maintaining the territorial integrity of the country. On the economic side, Turkey is eager to develop new trade routes with GCC countries. It has competitive advantages in areas such as construction, agriculture and manufacturing. Thus, Turkey is advocating major investment in infrastructure, connecting GCC countries to Turkey by rail. A closer relationship with the GCC is a new Turkish policy. Turkey entered into a strategic partnership with the GCC in 2002. Four rounds of negotiations have so far been completed. However, the GCC has stopped the fifth round because of its temporary halt in discussions with all states and organisations. Within the framework of the new Turkish foreign policy (the so-called "zero problems policy"), Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia are at their highest point ever. There is political and military cooperation with Riyadh on various issues.

With regard to the Arab revolutions, Turkey got itself involved as part of its ambition to be a responsible regional actor. With its attempt to be an unbiased actor, at a time when an increasing number of governments officially claimed that Libya's Gaddafi had lost his legitimacy, Turkey saw its role as facilitating contacts with Tripoli. However, this foreign policy strategy was met with doubt among a number of Western governments in particular, as it was difficult to overlook the spiral of violence unfolding across Libya – developments that required pressure on and isolation of Libya instead of an unbiased position. In

[142] Nerguizian (2010).

retrospect, Turkey's negotiation efforts proved not to lead anywhere, inevitably leading Turkey to pursue a harder line than it did early on.

As the revolt spread into the wider Middle East and its own domestic situation began to receive increasing attention, Turkey soon had to face the Arab revolutions close to its own borders. As with its policy on Libya, Turkey initially responded in low-key fashion towards Syria in order not to strain relations. Turkey and Syria after all have a number of economic relationships, including energy cooperation (the exploration, production and processing of Syria's gas and oil field, in addition to the Arab Natural Gas Pipeline project going from the Middle East to Europe); and the Prevention of Double Taxation and Reciprocal Stimulus and Protection of Investments programmes. The value of trade between the two countries in 2010 amounted to USD 1.84 billion and expectations were that that would increase to USD 5 billion in 2012.[143] The endorsement of sanctions would clearly have severe implications for both countries.

Following mounting government violence in Syria, nearly 1000 refugees crossed the border from Syria into Turkey (in early October 2011 there were 7600 Syrian refugees in Turkey). In order not to disrupt relations with Syria, the immediate response of the Turkish government, led by the incumbent Prime Minster Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was to officially define the Syrian refugees coming to Turkey as guests as opposed to refugees. In this way, the Turkish government could maintain the position that those Syrian citizens who were fleeing were doing so on a voluntary basis and would return after their home situation had improved. The most obvious reason for such a standpoint was the great uncertainty at the time about where the protests in Syria would lead, and the consequences they would have for Turkey in the end. Turkey apparently took the view that it was better to act cautiously. Another reason for the initially low-key profile vis-à-vis the events in Syria presumably relates to Turkey's geographical proximity to and historical ties with Syria. Unfriendly relations with Syria could easily have several repercussions. Turkey has experienced strained relations with Damascus at times, for example, over territorial disputes such as that relating to Hatay Province. Turkey also has a structural natural resource conflict with Syria over water (in connection with the Anatolia project) and general political differences (e.g. ideological as well as foreign policy orientations). Clearly, Turkey's Western orientation has alienated Syria from Ankara and injected some political distrust between the two. In an effort not to make the turbulence greater and to isolate, contain or play down the events in Syria, Turkey adopted a cautious attitude. That is not to say that Prime Minister Erdogan neglected the events. Over the spring of 2011, he repeatedly and increasingly came to voice criticism of incumbent Syrian leader al-Assad's handling of protesters.

[143] The figures are taken from from Kanbolat (2011-10-03).

Despite Turkey's initial interest in containing the violence in Syria but walking the line of non-interference, relations with al-Assad became increasingly sour. Following high-level contacts and initial agreements on ways to stop the Syrian government's offensive against various cities across Syria, Turkish officials came to the conclusion that Syria was not following up on its promises with action (e.g. the government of Turkey in early June accused the al-Assad regime of savagery).[144] In fact, souring relations later in the Arab revolutions halted most official contacts. On a number of occasions, in late August for example, Turkey allowed Syrian opposition groups (e.g. the Muslim Brotherhood and Syrian liberals) to hold meetings to set up an alternative Transitional Council that would provide a government following the removal of al-Assad.[145] Turkey for its part also held close and high-level contacts with the US government on ways to handle Syria. The change in the attitude of Turkey towards Syria also changed Iran's mindset towards Turkey from a positive to a more negative one (and vice versa). This in turn will influence the general security dynamics in the region, where Shia-led governments are increasingly being isolated in other pivotal states in the region.

Besides Syria, the Arab revolutions may potentially have implications for the Turkish Kurds. The Kurdish question is still one of Turkey's most important issues.[146] Over several decades, Ankara has been pursuing a low-intensity conflict with Kurdish separatists. The question became very visible in 2011 when a number of parliamentarians with a Kurdish background refrained from taking part in legislative work. Over the summer and early autumn of 2011, Turkey repeatedly claimed to have launched successful campaigns against separatists.

However, the implications of the Arab revolutions are likely to be limited for Turkey, although they do have a several implications for the direction of its foreign policy (i.e. to shape the region so that it can exert different kinds of political, economic and military influence).[147] Turkey remains politically and economically stable in comparison with its Arab (and *some* European)

[144] Longbottom, in *The Daily Mail* (2011-06-10).

[145] Meetings by the opposition were increasingly held following US and EU calls for al-Assad to step aside. See also *Sunday's Zaman* (2011-08-21).

[146] Although operating mostly in a domestic setting, the fight against Kurdish separatists has taken on regional dimensions. For instance, in 2008, the Turkish government invaded northern Iraq to pursue Kurdish organisations calling for self-determination.

[147] Turkey is not an Arab state. It is a secular state with a large community identifying itself with Sunni Islam (in addition to 20 per cent Alevi who trace their roots to Shia Islam, and another 20 per cent who are secular). However, segments of the society do share a Muslim identity with many other societies in the region. This could move the Arab revolutions in the direction of Turkey. Turkey has a completely different societal structure (politically and economically), so there are no grounds for such a process. Nonetheless, geostrategic proximity will shape Turkey's responses.

neighbours. It is an important actor not least because of its economic engagement with states in the region. Although its military over the years has been an unpredictable actor domestically, Turkey has generally been a steadfast member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, both by sending troops to places like the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan (the International Security Assistance Force) and, notably, by being an integral part of NATO's nuclear sharing policy initiative. Moreover, Turkey has actively provided support to various UN peacekeeping missions, for instance by deploying a peacekeeping force in 2006 as part of UNIFIL in the wake of the Israeli-Lebanon conflict.

Turkey and Israel have traditionally formed an important axis in the Middle East, although elements of this axis are now being questioned following Erdogan's critique of Israel's dealings with its Palestinian neighbours. Close bilateral relations on large-scale critical infrastructure projects, as well as on a military level, suggest that Turkey will continue to play an important role as a stabiliser in the Middle East security complex, despite the turmoil that emerges. However, the critique against Israel seems mostly to be being kept on the symbolic level without significant concrete implications. The critique of Israel obviously strengthens Turkey's image in many corners of the Arab world.

Indirectly, its support for Israel also gives Turkey the hegemonic protection of the US. This support is of both a political and a financial nature (the latter in the form of military aid). Similarly, Turkey receives some support from individual European governments (although this is conditioned by the Turkish diaspora in Europe, fear of Muslim influence in Europe, and active Kurdish criticism of the government of Turkey). It is unlikely that Turkey will be greatly affected in the short-term perspective by the events in the Middle East from the sovereignty and national interest point of view. Most likely it will enjoy full political support from European governments, not least because it is a NATO member, but also because it has a political goal that has been apparent ever since its application to become a member of the European project in the late 1950s. This generates the argument that Turkey cannot allow itself to become strategically embroiled in regional instability, because that would not advance its political position and interest's vis-à-vis the EU.[148] However, given the obstacles and difficulties involved in achieving full EU membership (notably through the accession negotiations to which it has been a party since 1995), Turkey seems nowadays to

[148] On the other hand, it will be impossible for Turkey to avoid being incrementally forced into responding to the dynamics threatening its interests and territorial sovereignty.

be less eager than it was to join the European Union, instead turning southbound in seeking to improve its relations.[149]

Finally, Turkey is considered to play a pivotal role for the stability of the Middle East, alongside states such as Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia. Examples of Turkish policies to improve relations and engage with the wider Middle East include a 2009 confidence-building military exercise with Syria; a tougher political rhetoric vis-à-vis Israel, peaking with the Gaza conflict in 2008 (albeit kept at a level that will not endanger more profound cooperation); increased cooperation and exchange with the Gulf countries (especially in economic terms); and an energy pact (for natural gas supply) and improved military relations with Egypt. Another noteworthy development is that Turkey has sought to improve its relations with Tehran.[150] This political strategy builds on trying to gain a more secure and stable neighbourhood.

The main challenge for Turkey in the months to come will be the potential negative implications of a more violent Syria. A Syria in a civil war-like situation will ultimately call for international engagement. Security commentators suggest that humanitarian corridors or humanitarian safe heavens could be established inside Syria either voluntarily or by outside external force. Turkey will inevitably play an important role in such situation. All these aspects combined are important to keep in mind when trying to understand the potential implications of the Arab revolutions for Turkey.

[149] Another factor dragging Turkey away from Europe may be the financial crisis among eurozone members, notably the events in Greece (with particular regard to Greece, Turkey has become an increasingly active and important investor in the Greek economy).

[150] Iran provides Turkey with natural gas.

Appendix 1. Key Social Indicators in the Middle East

	Country													
	Bahrain	**Iran**	**Iraq**	**Israel**	**Jordan**	**Kuwait**	**Lebanon**	**Oman**	**Qatar**	**Saudi Arabia**	**Syria**	**Turkey**	**United Arab Emirates**	**Yemen**
Population[151] (millions)	1.3	74	31,7	7.4	6.2	2.7	4.4	2.8	1.8	27.4	20.4	72.8	7.5	24.0
Median Age[152] (years)	30	27	18	30	21	28	29	25	32	26	21	28	30	17
Unemployment[153] (%)	15	15	15	6	12	2	9[154]	15	0.4	11[155]	8	10	2	35
Poor[156] (% of Population)	NA	19	25	24	14	NA	28	NA	NA	NA	12	17	20	45
Government[157]	Constitutional monarchy	Theocratic republic	Parliamentary democracy	Parliamentary democracy	Constitutional monarchy	Constitutional emirate	Republic	Monarchy	Emirate	Monarchy	Republic under an authoritarian regime	Republican parliamentary democracy	Federation with specified powers delegated to the UAE federal government and other powers reserved to member emirates	Republic

[151] Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*, http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm, 2012-02-02.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Central Intelligence Agency (2011). *The World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html, accessed 2012-02-02
[154] The figure is from 2007, The World Bank, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS/countries/LB?display=graph, accessed 2011-07-15.
[155] This figure refers to the male population.
[156] Central Intelligence Agency (2011). *The World Factbook*, located at https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html, accessed 2011-07-15.
[157] Ibid., accessed 2012-02-02.

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