

Rethinking the “Arab Spring”

Winners and Losers

by Hillel Frisch

Assessing outcomes of revolutions is a precarious business, especially with a mere ten years of hindsight. Even more difficult is the assessment of revolutionary waves for the simple reason that there have been so few of them in modern history. Bearing in mind these clear limitations, it can still be assessed that the “Arab Spring” accelerated the plight of regional losers without producing clear winners.

The Sunni Arab states weathered the storm but remain geostrategically weak, whereas Iran has been able to destabilize some Arab states yet has clearly failed to export its revolutionary Islamist ideology. Israel has benefitted from reduced Arab interest in the Palestinian cause and from its intensifying relations with the Sunni states but has been adversely affected by the penetration of these states by Tehran’s proxies. And while ordinary Arabs have benefitted from the growing focus on domestic affairs at the expense of the traditional “pan” ideologies, they have often paid a price in terms of infringement on civil and human rights by the incumbent regimes.



Photo: Lilian Wagdy

Hundreds of thousands demonstrate in Tahrir Square, May 13, 2011. At most, half-a-million Egyptians participated in demonstrations at any one time. This is just a little more than half-a-percent of the total population, representing a fraction of the Egyptian populace.



Photo: DiiDoo Kech

The second round of Arab upheavals in 2019 included Algeria (above, March 1, 2019) where the expulsion of long-reigning autocrat Abdelaziz Boufelflika resulted from grievances over economic malaise and pervasive corruption.

The Limited Scope

Massive popular unrest and uprisings fire the political imagination because of their rarity. Most of the time, political power is wielded by a very small segment of the population in a routine manner. In the relatively few instances where central power breaks down, revolutionary turmoil is commonly limited to a small part of the population though its scope is often wildly overstated by the mass media. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule such as the 1979 Iranian revolution, which attracted millions of protesters to the streets.

The 2011 Egyptian uprisings, especially surrounding Tahrir Square, are an excellent

example of the optic illusion that revolutions are truly “mass” phenomena. Through photos, video, and Google Earth, as well as crowd-control and management literature, it is easy to find the protests’ dimensions and to assess that at most half-a-million Egyptians participated in the demonstrations in the square and the streets feeding into it at any one time.¹ This amounts to just a little more than half-a-percent of the total population and 0.7 percent of its adult population. However large the changeover in participation, the crowds in Tahrir Square, by far the largest demonstration venue in Egypt, could have only represented a fraction of the Egyptian population. This might explain why the July 2013 counterrevolution occurred and triumphed with relative ease, with the military regime bringing millions to the streets to topple the Muslim Brotherhood’s short-lived regime.

Less limited but certainly not ubiquitous is the regional scope of the past decade’s upheavals, which came in two rounds. The first one began in December 2010 and encompassed six of the eighteen Arabic-speaking states: Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain.² The second round started in 2019 and included four states—Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon, and Iraq. In Algeria and Sudan, the expulsion of two long-reigning autocrats, Abdelaziz Boufelflika and Omar Bashir, allowed repressed grievances over economic malaise and pervasive corruption to come to

¹ *BBC News*, [July 16, 2013](#).

² This excludes Djibouti, Somalia, and Mauritania, which are members of the Arab League but socially, geographically, linguistically, and culturally more akin to the African countries south of the Sahara.

the surface in strength similar to the first round. And while Iraq and Lebanon had already been engulfed in internecine strife in the 2000s, the 2019 protest was distinctively less sectarian and more in keeping with the demands for social justice and democracy that characterized the 2011 revolts.

Apart from their shared nature, the two waves were linked in at least two ways:

- The very reality of simultaneous protests in several countries: In preceding decades, mass protest and internecine strife, such as the Lebanese (1975-90) and Algerian civil wars (1991-2002) or the post-Saddam Iraqi uprising (2003-7), were not replicated elsewhere, whereas turbulence that occurred in several countries (e.g., the bread riots of the 1980s) lacked a clear political agenda.
- The ability of much of the “old order,” whether the monarchies and principalities or the authoritarian regimes, to prevail in the face of mass protests and riots: Even in the few cases where the uprisings resulted in the removal of long-reigning autocrats, namely Egypt, Algeria, and the Sudan, the military, which had underpinned their regimes has remained in control. Yemen’s troubles differed in kind, being distinct to a country where central government power is almost always limited.

Hence, one can hardly overlook the persistence of the formidable obstacles to future regional reform and/or democratization in the

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form of well entrenched militaries, backed by oil money, as in the case of Algeria, or by oil-rich states such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), or, in the case of Iraq and

Lebanon, the violent sectarian Iranian proxies that have brutally suppressed protestors to maintain the sectarian status quo.

Why Some States and Not Others?

Why some states were swept into the whirlpool while others ducked the storm is not easy to explain. To begin, the upheavals were sparked by the self-immolation of a young fruit vendor on December 17, 2010, in a peripheral Tunisian town. Yet, there were numerous self-immolations in the region—62 in Tunisia in 2020 alone (long after the wave)—that did not trigger any response.³

Nor does the attribution of the upheavals to social heterogeneity (which often breeds political instability) withstand the fact that the states that experienced mass protests run the gamut from two highly homogenous states—Egypt and Tunisia (especially the latter, which is 99 percent Arabic-speaking, Sunni Muslim)—to the highly heterogeneous Syria, Yemen, and Sudan.

Another popular thesis ascribed the mass protests in the stable Arab autocracies to the growing influence of the “new media.”⁴ Yet while the penetration of new media (Internet and Facebook) in Tunisia might seem to confirm this thesis, it is belied by Morocco and Jordan with relatively high penetration

³ Associated Press, [Dec. 17, 2020](#).

⁴ Gadi Wolfsfeld, Elad Segev, and Tamir Sheafer, “Social Media and the ‘Arab Spring’: Politics Comes First,” *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, Jan. 16, 2013, p. 118.

rates, which did not undergo widespread protest compared to Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen with far lower penetration rates than either Morocco or Jordan.

Other explanations, especially those grounded in economic factors (e.g., gross domestic product [GDP] growth rates, income inequality, unemployment rates) similarly fail to explain the variation of the phenomena across the Arab states. Intuition would have it that poor governance would produce protest rather than stability and that good governance would act as a prophylactic against waves of protest. Yet Tunisia and Egypt—among the best performing Arab states and excellent performers even by international standards—were the first to succumb to the mass protests. According to the U.N.-run Human Development Index (HDI), aggregating GDP per capita, average life expectancy, and educational attainment in 1980-2010, Tunisia and Egypt’s rate of improvement in those years (roughly corresponding to Bin Ali and Mubarak’s reigns) was seventh and eighth highest in the world out of 169 countries, way ahead of Jordan, a country not unduly troubled by the wave of uprisings but whose HDI improvement rate ranked far behind.⁵

It thus seems that political rather than economic factors explain the Arab upheavals. On the eve of these eruptions, the Arab world

The Social Media Revolution?

State	Internet Penetration Rate	Facebook Penetration Rate	Type of Events
Tunisia	34.0	15.8	Leader removed
Egypt	21.2	5.1	Leader removed
Libya	5.5	2.8	Leader removed
Yemen	1.7	0.5	Civil War Leader wounded
Syria	17.1	0.1	Deaths and firefights
Bahrain	88.0	31.9	Demonstrations and deaths
Morocco	33.4	6.6	Minor demonstrations
Jordan	27.2	16.6	Minor demonstrations

Source: [Our World in Data](#)

was ruled by autocratic one-party states and more inclusive monarchies. The former championed, for many years, social homogeneity—the creation of a “new Arab man”—and strove through a ruling party to achieve such homogeneity; the latter, by contrast, emphasized heterogeneity. Jordan is an excellent example, having rendered enhanced representation to the Circassians, Christians, and the rural and peripheral Bedouin at the expense of the major (and more Palestinian) urban centers.⁶

During the upheavals, it was the republics that proved brittle and breakable and the

⁵ “[Human Development Report 2010](#), Table 2: Human Development Index trends, 1980-2010,” United Nations Development Program, New York.

⁶ Hillel Frisch, “Explaining Third World Security Structures,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Sept. 2002, pp. 166.

monarchies that remained flexible, pliant, and better able to absorb the small shockwaves of protest before they mushroomed into large ones. None of the eight monarchies saw regime change compared

to five of the nine autocratic republics that saw such change, and only Bahrain experienced mass demonstrations due to its unique position as the only monarchy where a small Sunni minority rules over a purported Shiite majority. The monarchies' success in weathering the storm was a surprising twist to the historic world trajectory of disappearing monarchies whose monarchs actually rule rather than merely reign. Suddenly, the "reactionary" regimes of the past held out, and many of the socialist states of the future were overthrown.⁷

Explaining Revolutionary Outcomes

The considerable variation in the upheavals' effects points to the difficulty of finding law-like relationships in what seems to be the art of politics and the tempest of its flow over time. While two states, Egypt and Tunisia, achieved relative stability, they did so in radically different ways. Egypt underwent a counterrevolution and the restoration of a deep state reminiscent of the 60-year-long military regime. A former senior officer, Abdel Fattah Sisi, like his forbears since the 1952 coup—Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak—is yet again at the helm, supported by the army, the top echelons of the bureaucracy, especially the judicial branch, and a liberal minority that preferred the counterrevolution to the ousted, imprisoned, and tortured

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Muslim Brotherhood president Mohamed Morsi. The only new twist is the implicit support Sisi receives from some liberals. Tunisia, by contrast, is a fledgling democracy that promulgated a new

constitution, held three free elections in which the Islamist an-Nahda party—the largest Tunisian party—and its coalition, gave up power in the fray of parliamentary politics. Democratic governance, however, is not necessarily a panacea to economic woes. By early 2021, Tunisia was witnessing daily violent protests, mostly by young people seeking work in an economy that was stagnant long before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸

Neither of these two outcomes resembles the remaining eight cases (with the partial exception of Algeria and Sudan). Nor does the outcome in Bahrain reflect that in the remaining seven. Bahrain, a Saudi client state in which a Sunni minority rules over a Shiite majority, was saved from regime change by Riyadh's armed intervention to subdue the Shiite revolt.

Only in three other cases can one see a common denominator. All three of these highly heterogeneous states—Syria, Libya, and Yemen—have succumbed to civil war and extremely high levels of foreign intervention, both regional and international. Yet even here, one can see considerable variation in terms of stability patterns in the aftermath of mass protests and violence. In Syria, the state rules over most of the population and most of the economy with the Sunni rebels controlling only a small rural area while the

⁷ Owen H. Kirby, "[Want Democracy? Get a King.](#)" *Middle East Quarterly*, Dec. 2000, pp. 3-12.

⁸ Julbeir al-Ashqar, "Fi Tunis ... Burkan ath-Thawra fi Itiqad," *al-Quds al-Arabi* (London), Jan. 20, 2021.

Kurds control a more considerable but peripheral swath of northeastern Syria. In Libya, instability is far greater with effective partition prevailing between a government in Tobruk and a rival government in Tripoli. But the partition is continuously contested by both sides, and there is a vast array of other actors, which aggravates the situation. Least stable is Yemen with at least three rival power centers: the Iran-backed Houthis (officially, Ansar al-Islam) who control San'a, the capital; the "official" government backed by Saudi Arabia; and the UAE-backed forces controlling southern Yemen outside of Aden, who have long sought to recreate South Yemen, which existed until the unification of the two Yemens in 1990.⁹

There is also some variation in the form and intensity of regional and international intervention. Syria is clearly a complex conflict characterized by intensive three-tier involvement of local, regional, and international forces with strong linkages between actors on all three tiers. The incumbent Assad regime is backed militarily and politically by Russia in an uneasy alliance with Iran, the support of both being critical for the regime to face the threat of ISIS and other rebel movements. From the point of view of the Syrian regime, Russian and Iranian support involves a division of labor with Moscow providing air support against the rebels while Tehran and its proxy Shiite



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militias, most notably the Lebanese-based Hezbollah, deliver financial and ground support. The uneasiness of the alliance is best reflected by Russia's tacit acquiescence in Israel's purported air strikes against the Iranian military buildup in Syria. Syria also suffers considerable Turkish intervention in Ankara's bid to weaken the Kurdish forces, which are in turn backed by U.S. elite forces deployed in the area with the ostensible aim of fighting the remnants of ISIS. For its part, Saudi Arabia reportedly backs many rebel groups in the last enclave in the city of Idlib and the surrounding areas in the central-north part of the country.¹⁰

In Libya, international involvement is slightly less complex with Russia being the only great power actively backing Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army linked to the Tobruk government. By contrast, regional intervention is as intensive as in Syria if not

⁹ ["Mapping and Explaining Middle Eastern Conflict,"](#) Esri, Redlands, Calif.

¹⁰ Eyal Zisser, "The End of the Syrian Civil War," *Middle East Quarterly*, [Summer 2019](#).

more so. Whereas Turkey provides considerable political and military support to the Government of National Accord in Tripoli, an array of Sunni states, principally the UAE and Egypt, back the Tobruk government against what they perceive to be the Muslim Brotherhood-led government in Tripoli. Regional involvement is also fueled by competition over gas resources in the eastern Mediterranean, pitting a loose alliance of Israel, Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus against energy-hungry but militarily powerful Turkey. Nor should one overlook the ideological enmity between the Egyptian state elite that ousted a civilian Muslim Brotherhood president and the Islamist Turkish regime, which quelled a military coup and which identifies broadly with the goals of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹¹

In Yemen, international involvement is more limited than either of the previous cases, directed principally against a minor actor in the Yemeni conflict. Washington, with decreasing frequency over the years, has been involved in direct air and drone strikes against al-Qaeda and ISIS terrorists in its war against terror. By contrast, Yemen is probably the scene of the most intense forms of regional military intervention with the Saudi and UAE air forces pounding Houthi strongholds on an almost daily basis and the Houthis, massively aided by Iran, launching numerous drone and missile strikes against airports and other infrastructure in Saudi Arabia as well as against their domestic opponents.¹²

¹¹ Nicholas Saidel, “The Middle East Conflict You Haven’t Heard About,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 9, 2020.

¹² “[Yemen Crisis](#): Why Is There a War?” BBC, [June 19, 2020](#).

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No Clear Winners

There is little doubt that the citizens of the states ravaged by the Arab upheavals were the major losers of these momentous events. This is hardly unusual: Even

in the most benign revolutionary wave that culminated in the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, it took most east and central European states a decade to reach the economic levels that prevailed at the end of communist rule despite the lavish support of the European community.¹³ The citizens of Syria, Libya, and Yemen are all worse off economically than they were before the revolts. Tunisia registered from 2012 to 2019 only a modest growth of 2.5 percent compared to a far more robust economic recovery of nearly 4 percent per annum for Egypt.¹⁴ Bahrain, throughout this period, registered a modest growth rate. In none of these states, with the possible exception of Egypt, did economic growth in the years attending the wave match their performance in the period preceding the upheavals.

The geostrategic implications of the “Arab Spring” were no less adverse as it accelerated the longstanding relative decline of the Arab world as compared to the non-Arab regional powers: Iran, Turkey, and Israel. This decline dates back to the mid-1970s when Egypt, drained and exhausted by several wars with Israel and its failed quest for pan-Arab

¹³ Elena G. Stark, “When the Iron Curtain Falls and Crisis Sets In: Understanding Reactions to Economic Shocks in the Eastern European Economies in Transition,” honor thesis, New York University, [May 2011](#), p. 4.

¹⁴ “[GDP growth: 2011-2019](#),” World Bank, Washington, D.C. and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Paris; “[GDP growth: Tunisia](#): 1966-2019, World Bank and OECD.

hegemony, reverted to an inward-looking effort to feed its burgeoning population. This led to an immediate Syrian decline by depriving Damascus of its foremost anti-Israel war ally, and the process gained considerable momentum in 1991 with the collapse of Syria's great-power patron, the Soviet Union. Damascus's growing alliance with Tehran—by now one of the most enduring partnerships in the Middle East despite the radical differences between the two regimes—provided only partial compensation for the loss of these two pillars of Syria's geostrategic edifice and implicated it in the intensifying Iranian-Israeli conflict as Jerusalem sought to prevent Tehran's military entrenchment on Syrian soil.

Similarly, the decline of Iraq's geostrategic position began with the devastating 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war; continued with Baghdad's forceful eviction from Kuwait in 1991 and the attendant decade of international sanctions; and culminated in the 2003 U.S.-led international invasion of Iraq, the overthrow of the Saddam regime and the disbanding of the Iraqi army. Thus, a state that had long aspired to pan-Arab leadership and had taken an active part in fighting against Israel as early as the 1948 war had effectively come under Tehran's sway with sizeable parts of its territory lost for some time to the nascent Islamic State.

These geostrategic setbacks notwithstanding, the gains of the non-Arab states should not be overstated. Consider for example the case of Iran, widely considered the foremost beneficiary of the "Arab Spring." To be sure, the upheavals enabled Tehran to penetrate and weaken a string of Arab states from Iraq to Yemen; it also transformed its association with Damascus from a bilateral alliance into a

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straightforward patron-client relationship due to the Assad regime's dependence on Iran for its survival. In the bargain, Iran has increased the threat to Israel by estab-

lishing a significant military presence in Syria and substantially enhancing Hezbollah's armament and military capabilities, not only turning it into Lebanon's effective ruler, but also making the organization's 100,000-strong rocket and missile arsenal a Damocles Sword hanging over Israel.¹⁵

Yet, these strategic gains have not been cost-free. For one thing, Saudi Arabia and the UAE reacted to the Iranian penetration of Yemen with a sustained air campaign against the Houthis while Tehran's growing regional aggressiveness drove the UAE and Bahrain (with Riyadh's blessing) to sign peace accords with Israel as did Sudan and Morocco soon afterward. For another thing, the Syrian civil war drove the Gulf states and Turkey to support various rebel groups and, far more significantly, triggered the first Russian military intervention on behalf of a local client since the December 1979 invasion of Afghanistan. And despite the common Russian-Iranian goal of securing Assad's survival, the two states have diametrically opposed visions regarding the kind of regime they would like to see: Moscow is interested in restoring the regime's power to prewar levels while Tehran strives to "Lebanonize" Syria by keeping a severely weakened regime in place to ensure the presence of proxy Shiite militias and to direct an Iranian military buildup on Syrian soil. This is why Russia

¹⁵ See for example, Jilbert Ashqar, "Iran wa-Imbraturiat al-Khirab," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, [Jan. 5, 2021](#).

has implicitly sanctioned the years-long Israeli air campaign to prevent both the Iranian military entrenchment in Syria and the use of Syrian territory to transfer advanced Iranian weaponry to Hezbollah.

Then there are the economic costs of Tehran's regional aggressiveness. These ranged from the severe international sanctions (especially during the Trump presidency) that brought the Iranian economy to the verge of collapse to the economic costs of its interventions in Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, among other places, which drained Iranian resources and triggered mass protests over the diversion of scarce resources to foreign adventures at a time of deep economic plight. Even Iraq, which was made to pay for its effective subordination by becoming a captive economic market in which much of the electricity, refined oil and gas, agricultural produce and many produced goods were provided by Iran,¹⁶ witnessed mass protest in the overwhelmingly Shiite southern part of the country in which Iranian consulates were frequently attacked. As within Iran, public anger was largely triggered by the diversion of economic resources from the needy, local population to imperialist goals, this time from Iraqi job creation and provision of public services to Tehran's proxy militias, which were in turn busy suppressing the demonstrations and murdering their leaders.

Israel's trajectory might be wholly different in the wake of the Abraham Accords. Though it is certainly premature to talk of Israeli soft power in the region, the normalization of relations between Israel, the



An important signpost in the decline of political Islam was the relative ease with which the deep-state-liberal alliance in 2013 deposed Egyptian president and Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohamed Morsi (above).

UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco has elicited only faint protests and almost no demonstrations within either these states or the Arab world more generally.

There was, of course, a din of voices castigating the UAE for this move, but they emanated mostly from anachronistic institutions that have long dominated the Arab landscape, such as organizations linked to the Arab League, professional unions, and fossilized political movements against which there are frequent popular demonstrations.¹⁷ Even among ordinary Palestinians, protests were miniscule. In photos taken in both the Palestinian Authority-dominated West Bank and Hamas-ruled Gaza, only a dozen or so

¹⁶ “[Iran Economic Monitor: Mitigation and Adaptation to Sanctions, and the Pandemic](#),” World Bank, [Spring 2020](#), pp. 4-5; *Iraq-Business News* (Shrewsbury), [Apr. 24, 2019](#); “[Iraq Exports by Country](#),” Trading Economics, New York.

¹⁷ Hillel Frisch, “Three Months after the Abraham Accords, the [Palestinians Have Lost the Arab Street](#),” BESA Center Perspectives, Jan. 7, 2021.

demonstrators are shown burning effigies of Netanyahu, Trump, and the UAE's Sheikh bin Zayed. The demonstrators were not only paltry in number but mostly members of the older generation. And if the lack of protest may have gone largely unnoticed by the general public, it was certainly reassuring for those regional leaders seeking to establish relations with Israel by lowering the sense of danger emanating from the "Arab street" regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The revolts focused on domestic issues at the expense of international and ideological affairs.

Localism Trumps Palestinianism and Political Islam

Growing popular opposition to Iranian regional aggressiveness and the lack of popular protest against normalization with Israel stem from the same source: the greater focus on domestic issues at the expense of international and ideological affairs.¹⁸ Though localism is a process that has long predated the Arab unrest,¹⁹ it was reinforced by this wave of revolts. Even where the revolts elicited greater regional and international involvement—in the three states riven by civil war—they reinforced an aversion to interference while strengthening an ideological frame of mind that championed solving the ills of society at home at the expense of external involvement.

This was vividly illustrated by the 2019 protests in Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, and

Algeria. Unlike the upheavals at the beginning of the decade, which stirred sentiments of regional affinity, these protests focused almost exclusively on the domestic scene to the exclusion of

other arenas of protest. These outcries were characterized by scathing criticism of and protest against foreign actors: Iran in Lebanon, Iran and the United States in Iraq, and the Gulf states' support of the military in Sudan. The opposition to foreign intervention was principally based on its adverse effects on local national politics and social welfare.²⁰

Bearing the brunt of this long-term trajectory of localism are two prominent ideologies and the political actors championing them: political Islam and Palestinianism. The first and most important signpost in the decline of political Islam since the onset of the Arab uprisings was the relative ease with which, in the summer of 2013, the deep-state-liberal alliance in Egypt deposed the only (semi-)freely-elected president. If there were those who believed that this victory was achieved by chance, the lack of reaction to the dramatic death six years later of the deposed president amidst his public, live-broadcast trial, laid such speculation to rest. The routing of ISIS in late 2015-early 2016 was another milestone in the decline of political Islam. Other less dramatic landmarks included: the waning of the Islamist an-Nahda in Tunisia, which in the first elections secured 89 seats, in the second in 2014 secured 77 seats, and only 52 seats five years later; and the extremely poor

¹⁸ See, for example, Marc Lynch, Deen Freelon, and Sean Aday, "[Syria in the Arab Spring: The integration of Syria's conflict with the Arab uprisings, 2011-2013.](#)" *Research & Politics*, Nov. 2014.

¹⁹ Fouad Ajami, "The End of Pan-Arabism," *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1978/9.

²⁰ Peter Bartu, "[The New Arab Uprisings: How the 2019 Trajectory Differs from the 2011 Legacy? \(Part 2\)](#)," Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, Doha, [Jan. 13, 2020](#).

electoral performance of Jordan's Islamic Action party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, in the 2020 parliamentary elections in which it won only five of 130 parliamentary seats.²¹

As for the ideology of Palestinianism—predicated as it is on the belief in the centrality of the Palestinian issue for inter-Arab affairs²²—the lack of popular reaction to the normalization between Israel and four Arab states was both a blow and an indication of how weak this core belief is. It contrasted sharply with the growing level of protest in Lebanon and Iraq about Tehran's meddling in their internal affairs to the detriment of the native populations. The young Arabs taking to the streets today do not believe the Palestinian cause is more deserving of their efforts and attention than their own struggle for a better future at home. The same applies to Iran where ordinary people are less and less willing to remain subservient to the regime's policy of endless foreign expansion and dissipation of national resources at their expense.

Conclusion

In today's Middle East, populations are no longer clamoring for pan-Arab or pan-Islamic unity, the world caliphate, or, in the case of Iran and Turkey, imperialist aggrandizement. They want better social welfare, greater economic opportunity, good education, innovation, the rule of law, and equality before the law at home. Achieving these goals might be a far longer process than envisioned by the protestors or romantic commentators at the beginning of the "Arab Spring." The good news is that these unsettling events reinforced a focus on domestic concerns and mechanisms that are essential to the development of states and political institutions that serve their citizenry rather than subordinating them.

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²¹ Hillel Frisch, "[Political Islam Is Declining](#) in the Middle East," BESA Perspectives, [Oct. 18, 2019](#).

²² Efraim Karsh, "[The Myth of Palestinian Centrality](#)," Bar-Ilan University, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Mideast Security and Policy Studies, no. 108, 2014.