

Paper

Twenty Lessons of the “Arab Spring”

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Introduction

Perhaps the waves of revolution and change in the Arab region, eight years ago, or what was known as the “Arab Spring,” are considered one of the most prominent and noble phenomena in modern and contemporary history. Regardless of the attacks, mutilation, counterfeiting and counter-attacks suffered by these waves, They were distinguished by massive public participation, the broad participation of young people and non-politicized popular groups. They were also distinguished by peaceful start (in general), then the ruling regimes were responsible for their militarization. The “Arab Spring” went beyond the ordinary daily demands of the people and addressed major political issues, achieving impressive results in record time, overthrowing regimes and raising the ceiling of freedoms and political participation in the Arab world. The average Arab person broke the barrier of fear and expressed his demands in a civilized manner. He revealed the ugly side of the regimes that use military and security forces, aided by foreign powers, to preserve their survival. Effective modern media were used, including satellite channels and social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter and others.

These revolutions were pushed back by counter-revolutionary forces, and suffered the interference of foreign powers that supported authoritarianism, corruption and the “deep state,” leading to bloodshed, chaos, and the destruction of the social fabric, the infrastructure and the economy. However, these revolutionary waves gave a glimmer of hope for a real civilized change that would be imposed by a new wave, which has learned the lessons of the past experiences and overrode the pitfalls the former waves fell in.

In this article, we will discuss a number of lessons, by reading and analyzing the revolutions’ experience or what is known as the “Arab Spring.” We may bring your attention that these lessons are not arranged according to importance or a particular classification; and some lessons may seem contradictory or overlapping with other lessons, since the ability to manage complex overlapping issues is problematic, where increasing the weight of some would weaken other issues. This matter has been noted in one of the lessons entitled, “Conflicts, Balances and Priorities Management.” Furthermore, this paper aimed at putting the record straight, with intensive and concise thoughts and observations; and avoided examples and details, so as to remain in the framework of a “Paper”:

¹ Fifteen lessons of these were published in three articles on the site of Arabi21, 1/2/2019, 15/2/2019, and 1/3/2019. Then, five lesson were added to complete this paper.

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First: Half Revolutions are Total Failures/ Defeat:

In some countries, such as Egypt and Tunisia, the momentum of the revolution was so strong and sweeping that had it continued to the end, it would have been able to impose its conditions. However, rushing into compromises that would reap some fruits, made the revolution miss the more important ones; such as getting rid of the dominance of the army and security forces, imposing transitional justice measures that would replace the corrupt judiciary system, and holding a firm grip on power and decision-making positions of the state, such as the military, the security forces, the economy and the media...

All these shortcomings and gaps have enabled the forces of the “deep state” to remain in their positions, and disrupt and thwart the revolutions, which lacked experience and the “coarse” and solid force. Thus, half-revolutions end in total defeats.

Second: Confusion in the Transition From Leading the Community to Leading the State:

It was clear that the forces of revolution and change were not ready to translate their successes in public and social action and their representation of people’s aspirations into successes in managing political conflict and leading the country. There were no clear visions of the transition of the society and the political system from a state of underdevelopment, dependency and vulnerability into a comprehensive revival state that overrides complex societal, economic and political hurdles.

There were also problems in the revolution leadership structures, and in outlining the main paths and effective programs to bypass the first phase into a stable new political system. As much as the Islamists excelled in social, religious *da’wah* and educational activities, and in writing humongous literature about them, we find scarcity and weakness in the literature about change, the transition from social activism to handling state affairs, the implementation of the revival project on the formation of the political system and the state administration, making use of the state’s potentials, economic advancement methods and building foreign relations, etc.

Third: The “Deep State” Dilemma:

The forces of revolution and change didn’t realize the actual size of what is known as the “deep state” and its ability to influence and manufacture events. They depended on their broad popular support and the public’s enthusiasm for change, whereas the pro-overthrown regime had “entrenched” forces, networks of interests, foreign relations, and had wielded significant clout in the military, the security forces, economy, media and judiciary. That’s why, even if they were less popular or even hated by the people after the success of the revolution, they owned



more effective tools. Consequently, they were able to distort the revolution, disrupt its course, empty it of its content, and then obliterate it. Then, when [they deemed it necessary, they spread chaos and bloodshed, asked for the help of external forces, played the religion, sectarian and ethnic cards to rip apart the social fabric...in order to maintain their influence and interests.

Any revolution that wants to succeed, has to provide all the mechanisms and alternatives, in order to systematically and decisively deal with the “deep state” forces. The latter term includes the corrupt and unjust, who should be punished or excluded, and the stakeholders who are worried about their interests. Among these, those who should be included, and those who should be reassured, and those who should be excluded.

Fourth: International and Regional Influence:

The “Arab Spring” experience has proven how much impact the regional and international environment has on revolutions and change movements. As a matter of fact, it has become a major player and even the major player, in manufacturing events in a number of countries that have witnessed revolutions. Consequently, this has reflected dramatically on the courses of revolutions, achievements and outputs.

As for Israel, if the regional environment changes into a hostile revival one, this would pose an existential threat to it. Hence, it rushed to mobilize its forces and global influence to confront these revolutions, however, it did so covertly, so as not to provoke the revolutionary forces and embarrass those forces, the survival and the return of which Israel supports.

The US and its allies rushed to intervene covertly, and overtly when necessary, in order to control the unfolding events and provide the political, financial, security, media and even military support to their allies; placing the Israeli interests on top of their priority list, and also making the “political Islam” and pro-resistance forces fail. The US has also played a key role in placing hurdles in the way of revolutionary forces that engaged in military conflicts, by preventing the acquiring of sophisticated weapons and preventing them from resolving the conflict in their favor. It has also played a key role in prolonging the conflict between the conflicting parties. And by supporting certain parties, it has moved the Arab revolutions’ compass toward ethnic and sectarian tensions. The Russians have had a major and very well known role in Syria, whereas they tried to be majors players in a number of other arenas, too.

As for the regional forces, including the Gulf states, Iran and Turkey, each has interfered according to its own agenda and interests... and they have played major roles in defining the course of events, supporting the regimes or overthrowing them...

As a result, the revolution and change forces that, in the beginning, expressed the masses' aspirations found out that their political and actual clout is diminishing, and that they are no longer the major players in their country, and not even a major play, after they were replaced by the international and regional powers, that imposed their will through local "agents"—regardless of the latter's actual political weight and popularity. Examples of such cases are in the dozens, if not in the hundreds, in Egypt, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Tunisia, etc.

Fifth: The Transitional Justice:

Any revolution that wants to succeed has to establish transitional justice, that would deal with the legacy of the previous era from a fair, revolutionary and effective perspective. It would uproot the elements of political, military, security, economic and media corruption... in the country, blocking their return and the chance to overthrow the new budding regime. It was wrong to assign the legal measures to the judicial system of the former regime, entrust the pursuit of the corrupt to the previous security apparatus, and ask the military leaders (the former regime allies) to protect the new regime. For example, Egypt has paid a heavy price for not establishing a transitional justice mechanism... Consequently, the courts either dismissed charges against the officials of the former regime or acquitted them..., and the Constitutional Court disrupted the course of the new state and gave the coup forces the cover they need.

Sixth: Symbols and Leaderships:

Perhaps one of the advantages of the revolutions is that they were an expression of the broad public, transcending parties and people. However, they lacked the existence of great leaders and symbols, who represent a state of consensus or near-national consensus, who may quickly become the masses' inspirational symbols. Those who have special leadership skills that enable them to act wisely and firmly, and make people bear with them, while crossing the difficult phase that includes security unrest, economic problems and societal changes, whereas their image and status wouldn't be harmed.

Unfortunately, change movements lacked such a role model either for objective reasons, or for subjective ones, including the fact that the revolutions did not achieve decisive victories, and that the rival or hostile forces had vast media capabilities capable of distorting symbols and thwarting the projects and plans of the change forces and their leaders, which could have made tangible progress that the masses would have felt.

In addition, the alliances and the governments, which were formed while the president or the prime minister has weak or limited powers, did not provide better environments to help in forming role models. Actually, such environments were



not highly desired by the change forces, for the sake of democracy, and out of fear that new dictators would emerge, a worthy point of view. However, and in any case, the leader had to have the powers to implement his programs, impose the revolution's path, get rid of the obstructing forces, decisively walk a number of tracks whose delay would thwart and disrupt the revolution. These powers must not be subject to quotas and the appeasement of some anti-revolution forces, at a time where the media and those impatient harshly criticize the leader and the nascent/ budding political regime.

Seventh: A Revolution with Teeth and Nails:

Perhaps some of the most prominent features of the revolutions are a peaceful beginning, an enormous ability to mobilize the public, and realizing significant achievements with minimal human losses, as was the case in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen. However, as the head of the regime fell and the opposition stepped forward to lead, the revolutions were soft and lacked the tools of power to protect themselves and traverse this stage... They did not proceed with their “revolutionary” tasks of cleansing the army and the security forces... and did not hold key positions in them. At the same time, the revolution didn't form for itself a temporary ad-hoc force to protect it until the loyalty and effectiveness of the army and the security forces were secured. These matters are not difficult to handle when the revolutionary wave is strong and overwhelming, and at the peak of its momentum—The Iranians, for example, have formed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and so did other revolutions. Whereas when people return to their homes, and the revolutionary momentum wane, those who possess “hard power” would play well their cards, having the ability to disrupt the revolution and make it fail, then they would stage a coup. They may even plunge the country into a blood bath. Foreign powers would find in them the chance to interfere and bring down the experience, as was the case in Egypt, Yemen and Libya.

For sure, each country has its own criteria, but the peoples who achieve regime change and win, must protect themselves and impose the game's conditions, whose first exigency is to own the power. It is not just a matter of a ballot box, because if it is not protected by a “bullet box” [pun intended], it can be forged, bought, replaced or destroyed.

Eighth: Women:

I hesitated a lot in putting a special title for women, for they are genuine partners and active in all other lessons. However, some opine that they must have their own title, in order to shed light on their role, which may be disregarded by many in our societies. Hence, we emphasize here the central role of women in revolutions and

the change process, whether activists, leaders, inspirational figures, mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, martyrs, wounded or prisoners. A role that emerged in the regions that witnessed the “Arab Spring,” and whose details cannot be counted in this paper. However, it should be noticed that some change movements do not give women the attention, care, awareness, training, rehabilitation and partnership they deserve, so that they would perform all their roles alongside men efficiently and powerfully. Furthermore, when the revolution succeeds, they are not given the roles and tasks they deserve, as active partners in the change process, and in the cultural construction of the new political system.

Ninth: Youth:

One of the most prominent features of the “Arab Spring” was the wide participation of youth, especially in the demonstrations that led to the fall of a number of regimes and the destabilization of others. What we would like to point out here, is the tremendous speed with which the revolutionary spirit moved to the youth and widely spread among them. For the regimes have thought that, after dozens of years of security repression, making people ignorant, media control, and political, social and economic corruption, the result would be isolating political movements from society, and preventing the transition of their ideas to younger generations. The spread of the revolutionary spirit among the youth was astonishing, compelling and a crucial element in the success of the revolutions. In addition, the creativity and the readiness for self-sacrifice of young people were also essential in that success.

This phenomenon must be studied and understood by those who want to go ahead with a new revolutionary wave, so they can deal with it properly and give it the magnitude it deserves.

As for the youth, they were frustrated with the outcome of the “Spring,” for several reasons. The results were contrary to their expectations; their sacrifices were not reflected on the ground; the leaderships, who reaped the fruit of the revolutions, were disappointing, and the youth factor was missing; the ballot boxes did not echo the size of the youths’ participation and sacrifice, as much as the weight of parties, their symbols, calculations and political alliances have.

May be some youth lacked experience, others were not realistic and had ideal dreams, and some others were maybe ill-tempered and hasty. However, the truth remains that they have a pivotal role in the revolution and change, and that the parties and political forces that led that phase, have failed to include them in their leadership frameworks and active cadres. Consequently, these parties were deprived of making a qualitative leap in their organizational structures, executive potentials and creative capabilities. They lacked the boldness and initiative the youth have.



Tenth: The Inspirational Thought:

If the masses had participated in the million man protests, and were willing to sacrifice and take risks, it is because they were driven by the “inspirational thought,” which transition them from a state of helplessness and frustration to a state of movement, initiative, hope and the feeling that success and fulfilling goals are feasible.

This “thought” does not need philosophy books or complex ideological language or a large cultural material; in fact the core of its success and splendor is the ability to present it in a way that reflects its depth, but in a simple and easy method understandable by the public. Secondly, much of the masses may gather around it, when it proposes a consensus cause, and this wouldn’t be the case unless it is a rightful and just cause. Thirdly, it must be a thought that carries hope and a yearning for change. Fourthly, it must be worth the sacrifice. Fifthly, this thought must be led by a group of symbols and leaders, who can rally the crowds and spread out the spirit of change among them. This group must be on the front lines, willing to fight and pay the price. Sixthly, the thought must be realistic and feasible, motivating people to “invest” their souls, money and time in it.

Perhaps it’s not easy for one thought to include all the above features, however, they must at least be present in the case of revolutions and political change.

In the “Arab Spring,” the most famous slogan or thought was, “The people want to bring down the regime.” In Islamic history, for example, the core thought of the Abbasids revolution against the Umayyads was “*al-rida min Al Muhammad*,” meaning that the caliph who the Muslims will agree on, must be one from the family of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). As for the French revolution, its motto was “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” while the Communist revolution concentrated on justice and socialism. As for the revolutions of peoples against colonialism, they carried the notions of “liberation” and “independence” on national, nationalistic or religious bases. The Iranian revolution was based on two thoughts; the “Islamic Republic,” and the “Governance of the Jurist” (*Wilayat al-Faqih*), hence, there was a consensus on the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. In the Arab countries, a number of the military coups had the slogans of fighting corruption and liberating Palestine.

However, “inspirational thoughts” may be stolen or emptied of their contents, or circumvented by anti-revolution forces or the “deep state”; they may even get damaged by some of their leaders, when they—after the success of their revolution—become tempted with authority, power, wealth and the love of monopoly.

Therefore, inspirational thoughts are a must for change, and an essential bridge for the transition from one era to another. However, if it’s not embodied in a strong leadership, or an alternate vision of change, it will be susceptible to fall and be lost.

Therefore, it wasn't enough just to talk about "bringing down the regime," for there were no uniting thought after its fall or a strong leadership that maintains mass mobilization, all of that made room for it to be harmed by its adversaries and enemies.

Eleventh: What Rectifies This *Ummah* (Nation):

This title is originally a statement by Imam Malik who says, "The latter part of this *Ummah* will not be rectified except by what rectified its earlier part." Regardless the differences among the people of this area, there is a wide acceptance among them that what rectifies this nation in the Arab and Islamic world, is "Islam," which is its identity, a consensus issue, the base of its civilizational, cultural and social structure, and its common history. However, we cannot give this core issue its due credit in few lines, and in a paper such this one, therefore we will concisely discuss it by focusing on a number of points.

First, regardless of sects or denominations, the issue that brings together the people in the Arab world the most is Islam. The Muslims in the Gulf countries (six), Yemen, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Mauritania, Somalia and the Comoros are almost 100% of the total population (98–100%). They are 93–96% of the population in Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Sudan and Djibouti; and more than 90% in Palestine. Despite the inter-sectarian situation in Syria and Lebanon, those who belong to Islamic "sects" are more than 92% in Syria and 65% in Lebanon.

Second, the differences between Muslims should not be used as a pretext to "cancel" or to ignore the authority of Islam and the fact that it is an overarching base of unity. Muslims still have basic rules that unite them, and a lot of elements of common understanding, whether concerning life, or populating the earth and enriching it socially, economically and politically. These differences apply also to other ideologies, for secularism has its schools and doctrines, as well as democracy and its applications, and similarly for socialism, communism, liberalism, nationalism and patriotism... each has tens of schools and applications.

Other ideologues argue, disagree and fight according to their interests and visions. For example, Gamal 'Abdul Nasser's nationalism and socialism was different from the nationalism of the Ba'ath party and its socialism; also, the Syrian and Iraqi regimes were adversaries despite being both Ba'athists. In addition, secularism (National and nationalistic; republican, monarchy and coup; and their capitalist and socialist applications) that dominated in the last seventy years, did not introduce a single successful paradigm in the Arab world. Furthermore, the application of "secular" projects (that go against religion) failed, its reform and revival projects failed, its unity projects failed, and it produced corrupt, tyrannical, dependent and distorted political systems.



Running from the authority of Islam, under the pretext that Muslims belong to “sects,” may place the area in front of more complex and difficult problems. For example, Arab nationalism in Iraq would put the Kurds out, who form around one quarter of the population. The nationalism conflict is also present in north Africa (The Maghreb) between the Arabs and Amazighs, and in Sudan between the Arabs and the blacks. Therefore, Islam remains the widest common point for the people of the region.

Third, over the past 1400 years, the region’s identity was stamped by the Islamic civilization identity, which is a gathering identity that not only included all nationalities, but also those of other religions who participated in building the civilization in all its aspects. It happened within an environment that is considered the best, in comparison to other civilizations and countries, whether in the acceptance of the other, tolerance or partnership. Most of the contemporary problems we witness, sectarian or religious, falls back to the colonial phenomenon in our region, which sought to fuel disagreements in our cultural and societal environment.

Fourth, experience has shown that Islam is the best able to mobilize this nation and its potentials, and that Islamic movements (or at least those that have religious references, or those that do not show animosity towards religion in public) were the most successful in gaining the confidence of the people. They have been the most distinguished in facing colonialism and occupation, and fighting corruption and tyranny. Experience has also proven that no movement, person or symbol who has shown animosity towards this religion still found a real place among the people of this *Ummah* or region. Therefore, the main lever for real change of this nation and region is Islam. And here, we don’t mean by Islam a mere “tool,” but rather a case of genuine quest by the members of *Ummah* to please their God, and a case of real harmony and accord between them and their religion, identity, heritage and civilization. This way their potentials would be best actualized, in a way that expresses their dignity, honor and independence, and their pioneer civilizational role among nations.

Fifth, the free and fair elections in the Arab world have demonstrated the precedence of Islamic movements and the confidence that the masses have placed in them, despite all what they had suffered and still suffer, whether the campaigns of organized suppression, or those of distortion and external interference, or a “veto” on their political leadership of the state. However—and as we indicated in other lessons—Islamists are not excused from various weaknesses and shortcomings, but in most cases, they didn’t have a “fair” chance of political leadership as others did.

Sixth, the fear of “activist Islam” or “political Islam” was huge for Israel, the global western powers, and the corrupt and authoritarian Arab regimes. They did their utmost to distort, thwart and bring it down. Their “black propaganda” have worked day and night to highlight the malpractices of some marginal extreme

movements in the Islamic arena (ISIS and others), inflating them and making them seem as if they were a general case. These regimes did not answer the questions about the backgrounds of such cases, why did they grow and spread? Who stands behind them? And who is their main beneficiary?! As for the Islamic movements which express Islam as a moderate, balanced and civilized religion, they are being fought and besieged, or they have a ceiling imposed on their work so that they would stay marginal in political life or part of the “décors” of the political regime. The main reason for this Western powers and Arab regimes fear of “political Islam” is that moderate Islamic movements are characterized by their wide popularity, active youth bases, and their various human capabilities in the political, economic, social and educational fields. The civilizational project of these movements makes them a serious alternative to current regimes. They have also a strict vision to confront Israel and liberate Palestine (Regardless of how some movements estimate the size of their contribution to the cause at some point).

In our current circumstances, some may find it embarrassing to put such a lesson among the others, as it may raise the sensitivities of some national and nationalistic forces... of various ideological schools, which have had their roles in the revolutions and in changing rogue regimes (knowing that there is no contradiction between national feelings and nationalistic feelings, on one hand, and between Islam, on the other, which are positively accepted by the latter, considering service and defense of the state a religious duty...). We say that when the “Islamists” clarify their visions, objectives and programs, they do not contradict their quest for common grounds, forging alliances, and building “safety nets” with other loyal forces. When these latter forces talk about the region’s future, and when they try to draw lessons from the “Arab Spring,” they confidently introduce their ideologies, consequently, it becomes the duty of Islamists to strongly, confidently, responsibly and with openness introduce what they have.

Therefore, the “Islamists” must not be “ashamed” of their “religion,” or from their civilizational project. They must not apologize for it, or hide behind vague statements. Rather a main aspect of others respecting them is when they “respect” themselves, believe in their project, defend it and call for its implementation in a civilized manner. This, of course, does not mean that they must not search for the “common grounds” with other forces, movements and figures. It does not mean that they must not take into account the jurisprudence of gradualism, interest and priorities. It does not mean that they must not comprehend and deal positively and realistically with the facts on the ground and various power balances of power.

Twelfth: Palestine as a Leverage:

Palestine is the main issue of the Arab and Islamic nations, their bleeding wound, their honor and dignity. From an Arab and Islamic perspective, the Zionist project does not target only Palestine, but lies in the heart of the nation, and the



heart of the region that mediates the two wings of the Arab and Muslim worlds, separating Asia from Africa. Consequently, the prerequisite of this project's sustainability and strength is the weakness of this nation, its division and backwardness. Conversely, the revival and unity of this nation is linked to getting rid of the Zionist nation and liberating Palestine.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Arab coup leaders used to justify a regime overthrow by mentioning its negligence of Palestine. Thus, a speech about mobilization and liberation—Regardless of its credibility—used to address the masses' concerns and weak spot, who would respond to it. Then, the new regime would use the Palestine issue as a leverage, and sometimes as an excuse for its shortcomings, and even as an excuse for its security and arbitrary measures.

Remarkably, the revolutionary forces in the “Arab Spring,” which were led by the Islamists, have been the most prominent ones in supporting Palestine. They even made huge sacrifices, and were imprisoned and chased as a result of their support to Palestine. They used to deal with the issue as a message and a duty, and not just as a tool. However, when they rose to power, they did not deal with the Palestine issue to the degree hoped for, which really reflects their popular position... in which it would provide them with real leverage and wide popular support. Rather some were hesitant in having clear or decisive positions, under the pretext of not provoking enemies and foes, whereas the enemies were dancing with joy for not giving Palestine its deserved status. It is a status that plays a fundamental and inspiring factor in the consolidation of the nation's identity, the reorientation of its interests and the regaining of its dignity; and even fortifying the revolution and proving its credibility... for the notion of revolution in itself is linked to freedom, liberation and dignity. Also, one of the conditions of revival and unity, and consequently the success of revolutions, is to emancipate from Zionist and Western domination...which is a message well understood by the ordinary citizen.

The Palestine-related rhetoric of some revolutions was substandard, or gray, confused and shy... Hence, one of the most important motivation and power components of the revolution was lost. This has given the opponents, who lack credibility, the chance to attack the revolutions themselves, on the pretext of their negligence where Palestine was concerned.

Thirteenth: A National Safety Net:

Every revolution needs a national safety net, which includes a popular majority and political forces on the ground, all of which meet on basic common principles. This net would provide suitable protection to the revolution, especially during the transition period, and must be composed of forces capable of imposing their will

on the course of events, blocking the way of military coups and the attempts to disrupt and break up the revolutionary forces, and facing foreign intervention.

No matter how much the mainstream is strong, it must broaden its alliances and grant its partners—who agree with it on the general tracks—genuine roles. This way, the revolution would succeed in gaining regional and international recognition; and become resistant to external blockade, the main stream would not be singled out, rival forces would not strike one other, and some would become a “Trojan horse” used for foreign intervention.

Fourteenth: A Regional Safety Net:

The revolutions became preoccupied with their national issues retreated onto itself to assert that it is not “trans boundary.” They tried to reassure some local forces with their national identity, and reassure Western forces that they have no Arab “nationalistic” or “Islamic *Ummatic*” ambitions. However, several anti-Arab Spring regional forces coordinated with each other and with foreign forces to overthrow the revolutions, while their media were viciously attacking the revolutionary forces, accusing them of non-patriotism and cross-border ambitions (As if being part of the *Ummah* and expressing its causes is not a source of pride, rather it is demeaning and a source of shame). Hence, the revolution took a defensive position and some members became convinced that retracting inward is a proof of their patriotism.

Rather, revolutionary forces should have searched for regional partners, and sought “mutual support” so that they would reinforce each other, without being ashamed of their identity or of being part of the Muslim and Arab *Ummah*, in addition to their mutual interests. Were this method effectively used at the beginning of the revolution between Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, in addition to Sudan which was in line with them, it would have been difficult for the anti-revolution forces to single them out one by one.

Furthermore, open dialogues with a number of important regional forces should have taken place, so that mutual interests would be tackled and unnecessary fears and doubts removed. For the information sources of these countries were western media, western intelligence and western diplomatic corps, consequently their stance became hostile from the start. Interestingly, it wasn’t necessary for the revolutions to convince regional countries to support them, rather, it was possible to ease their hostility, discourage them from lining up against the revolution, and highlight the positive aspects of change (Perhaps in the economic context, revival aspect or in preserving national and regional security and facing common risks...). Maybe even it was better to warn those who were trying to interfere in the revolutions’ internal affairs of the risks and implications of this on the regional environment, whether it was western and Zionist anti-*Ummah* interference, economic setback or some kind of sectarian and ethnic strife.



Surely, this matter is not easy, perhaps elusive, but it was worth trying, considering it one of the tools for the success and continuation of the revolution.

Fifteenth: International Safety Net:

The revolutions could have developed a better international network of relations, if they had benefited effectively from many international forces, which look for partnerships and political, economic and military cooperation with the countries of revolutions, for their own interests and in light of their rivalry with US and western anti-revolution forces. Among those are Russia, China and to a lesser degree India, South Africa, Brazil and even some European countries, but this matter was not sufficiently considered by the revolution forces.

The prevailing climate tended toward reassuring the Americans who were decisive, albeit softly, in their support of anti-revolution forces, or in their attempt to redirect the revolutions to the directions that would serve them. More efforts should have been made to develop a network of interests with the forces competing with the US, so that it would become intime a kind of safety net. This net is not necessarily the basis of the revolutions' success, but at least it represents a required international minimum, an attribution and steadfastness factor to overcome the absence of revolution states from the international scene. It would prevent the US (and those in its orbit) from singlehandedly managing the political game in the region.

Sixteenth: The Economy of the Revolution... and the Revolution of the Economy:

When revolutions erupt, they initially call for freedom and dignity, and at the same time come out against corruption and injustice. The economy domain is one of the domains that are sensitive and vital, and during transitional stages, which are usually characterized by increased burdens and sufferings, the public must not be deluded by promises of “milk and honey,” so that the revolution wouldn't be held accountable for what it does not have and cannot do. Basically, a revolution must have, from the start, an economic vision commensurate with its aspirations. It must make the public feel that some difference occurred at least concerning the fight against corruption, ending the manifestations of waste, lavishness and extravagance, introducing clean role models, redressing grievances, and restoring people's rights. A revolution must be able to categorize its measures and phases: those that need decisive revolutionary decisions, those that need emergency treatments, and some that need short, medium or long-term plans. It must free itself from the “classical” frame of economic plans, without being exposed to uncalculated risks that make it lose fortunes or lead to capital outflows. It is an extremely difficult formula. At the same time, it must benefit from national talents,

regain emigrant brains and capitals, and innovate solutions other than those offered by the World Bank and others.

In all revolutions, disorders occur during the replacement process, for the growth of many capitals was linked to the former corrupt regime, which also sponsored many foreign investments that exploited the country by imposing unfair conditions. Some of these capitals are “politicized ones” and serve the agendas of regional or global powers. Therefore, for the new regime’s conditions to settle down, there must be a revolutionary economic vision, basically able to rely on the public to fill the vacuum and pass the phase... However, delay, confusion or weak performance, will lead to a state of public frustration through which hostile forces break to overthrow the revolutions.

Seventeenth: The Freedom of the Media... and the Media of Freedom:

Revolutions launch media freedoms, since media suppression is one of the characteristics of authoritarian regimes, and because the freedom of the media is a shield that protects the revolution, raises public awareness, detects corruption, and provides access to creativity. It is an effective tool of social, cultural, educational and economic change, and an effective means to highlight the symbols and programs of the revolution.

There were serious disruptions in a number of revolution countries, after the popular wave of change had calmed down. The media did not effectively develop in a way to deliver the revolution’s message and concerns, to effectively communicate with the masses, or to keep alive the cause for which the revolution erupted. The new regime did not provide a strong media environment that would protect the revolution and defend it, nor did it set limits or red lines for the media of the revolution opponents and enemies. Thus, the latter, which has money, expertise, institutions and external funding, took advantage of the media’s freedom to destroy the revolution, distort its symbols, dwarf its achievements, and prepare for counter-coups, and this has clearly happened in Egypt and other countries. The coup in Egypt did not hesitate for one second to close the satellite channels and other media outlets in the first hours of the coup, in order to control the media rhetoric in the country. It was more appropriate that the revolution forces—which were witnessing how they were demonized and incited against—not stand silent under the pretext of media freedom, and to protect itself by the media long before it found itself isolated and besieged.

Modern and contemporary history has not seen such a malevolent “black propaganda” as the anti-change one, spreading fraud, perversion and systematic malice, especially against Islamic movements. It is a media on which local, regional and international powers have spent millions of dollars, and into which they pumped floods of deception... which were converted—with presentation



skills and after repetition—into “facts” and “postulates” for most of the public, and even the educated class. The “black propaganda” experience deserves to be studied as a phenomenon associated with anti-revolution waves, and as one of the most prominent fraud and deception operations in history.

Eighteenth: Civil Society Institutions and People’s Organization:

The people’s movement and the pulse of the masses could have conserved their momentum through popular grass-roots organizations and civil society institutions, which can play an important role in the transition of the new “revolutionary” regime towards stability. However, this movement was not up to the challenge. What’s more dangerous is that some anti-revolution forces tried to benefit from the cover of such institutions (External parties have also benefited from Western institutions branches), for they offered some of them money, experience and media coverage in order to enter into the “core” of the revolution and crush it from inside... They amplified the people’s demands in such a way that they would be beyond the revolution’s capability so as to spread frustration. They tried also to concentrate on the negative aspects of the revolution, or deviate its path in order to exhaust it with untimely social problems and issues...

Nineteenth: The Social Media:

Social media has made a quantum leap in the environment of revolutions that accompanied the “Arab Spring.” The masses were able to break up the government monopoly of the media, by widely using social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, etc), hence they were an alternative media and a key means of mobilization and incitement, to organize demonstrations and gatherings, respond to the regimes and their tools, and uncover their secrets and scandals.

Undoubtedly, these platforms have become distinct marks of the “Arab Spring.” Although the regimes have resorted to closure and news blackout, spending money on “electronic flies,” satellite channels and pro-regime journalism, bribing media personalities, artists and actors, the social media platforms remained basic in mobilization and rallying. They are still making the regimes watchful or are considered a potential source of explosion.

Since these platforms include the true and the fake; true information, lies and rumors; and correct and forged images and data; the change movement leaders should give high priority to these platforms, while maintaining maximum credibility. The leaders must communicate with youth sectors and motivate them to use these platforms best, activate in them the role of symbols and main figures, and expose the websites supporting the corrupt and authoritarian regimes, besieging them politically and in the media.

Twentieth: Conflicts, Balances and Priorities Management:

Most probably the biggest challenge was in finding the “Magic Mix” that deals with the various push and pull forces (mentioned previously), and manage them with wisdom, firmness and competence. For not everyone can be satisfied, and not all people’s needs can be met, what satisfies some may make others angry, rushing some conflicts may exhaust the revolution, and delaying some others may strengthen the foes. When resources and potentials are less than the needs, requirements and challenges, then making balances and choosing priorities become a must; however, they must be done in a smart, wise and courageous manner. This applies to when forging and unwinding interim alliances, managing regional and international relations, and when there are political, administrative, judicial, social, military and security reform priorities. In addition, the standards between people’s will and concerns, on the one hand, and the antagonizing forces that see this expression as a threat, leading up to its intervention, on the other, must be adjusted. In addition, what must be managed is the transition from one phase to another, when the burdens and costs of such transition could be borne. This applies to, for example, the policy of dealing with the deep state powers, influential people and capitalists, and regional and international powers that fear the revolution repercussions in their own countries.

There are still other lessons to discuss, however, we will settle for these twenty in this concise paper, so that it may contribute to the reviews of this “Spring’s” experience. The Spring has triggered a powerful earthquake in the region; however, it came at great and painful costs, when the counter-revolution wave destroyed many of its acquisitions. It is important to assert that the region is still in a liquidity and boiling state, indicative of an upcoming sweeping revolutionary wave, more powerful and successful than its predecessors, hoping that it will benefit from the past experiences.



عشرون درساً من "الربيع العربي"

د. محسن محمد صالح

