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Christopher Barton
Editor-in-Chief
Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution, International Intervention, and Popular Sovereignty

by Peter J. Schraeder

Jasmine, which comes from the Persian word *jasmin* (Gift from God), is a flower that grows in Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. The small petals of the flower remain closed during the day, and begin to open between 5:00 and 8:00 pm in the cool of evening. It is therefore appropriate that Tunisia's dictator of twenty-three years, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, was forced to leave the country at 5:45 pm on Friday, January 14, 2011, as the petals of what has become known as the "Jasmine Revolution" fully bloomed and revealed the strength of the civil society intent on securing the Arab world's first democracy. This revolution sparked the imagination of the Arab world and produced a domino effect, as pro-democracy demonstrators confronted dictatorships across the Middle East and North Africa, including toppling the thirty-year dictatorship of Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011, and the forty-two year dictatorship of Libyan leader Muammar el-Qaddafi on October 21, 2011. The remainder of this article is divided into three sections, devoted to answering three questions: What factors motivated the Tunisian protests? What enabled these protests to be successful? And what are the implications for future international interventions to support popular sovereignty?

**WHAT FACTORS MOTIVATED THE TUNISIAN PROTESTS?**

In retrospect, three sets of factors suggested that Tunisia was ripe for revolutionary change. The first factor was an intensifying socio-economic crisis during the five years preceding the revolution, from 2006 to 2010, as measured by a number of economic indicators. Overall unemployment had risen to 14 percent in 2010, with the figure for youth aged 15-24 years of age exceeding 30 percent. Those with higher education were especially affected; over 45 percent of college graduates could not find work. As of 2008, the average Tunisian spent nearly 36 percent of household spending on basic foodstuffs consumed at home. To put this in comparative context, the average American in 2008 spent just under 7 percent of

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household spending on the same foodstuffs. It is for this reason that the percentage of the Tunisian population that considered itself to be “thriving” dropped from 24 percent (2.52 million people) in 2008, to only 14 percent (1.47 million people) in 2010, meaning that at least 1 million citizens had witnessed a reversal in their economic fortunes.

A second factor making Tunisia ripe for revolutionary change involved the growing authoritarianism of the Ben Ali regime. Since taking power in 1987, the regime had always dealt forcefully with perceived Islamic threats, especially in the aftermath of the al-Qaida bombing of the el-Ghriba synagogue on the Island of Jéba in 2002. Tunisians especially resented the deepening political capriciousness of the ruling regime. A prime example of this can be seen in the case of Ali Khelifi, a Tunisian student who was enrolled in a Master’s degree program in Common Law coordinated by the University of Cartaghe. Ali was jailed because one of his friends, unknown to him, was also friends with two young men who mentioned to the wrong person that the Ben Ali regime should be replaced by an Islamist regime. Ben Ali apparently learned of the public statements of the two young men via an informant. Ali were arrested and jailed, and given prison sentences of one to three years.

Ali recounted to me his first nights in jail when he would cry out to his jailers that he was innocent and should be let free. After several nights of this, one of the jailers told Ali they knew he was innocent and that he had no contact with the students calling for the government’s overthrow, hence why he only received a one-year sentence. When Ali asked, “Well, why am I in jail then, with a one-year sentence?” The response was, “Because you should know who the friends of your friends are.” The regime’s approach to incidents such as these had a chilling effect on societal political discussions, which in any case had always been guarded. “If I don’t know you, I don’t speak freely,” explained Ali after his release. Even among friends and family, however, Ali found himself ostracized after his release from prison. “Why should someone run the risk of losing a job, not getting a placement at the university, or worst of all, being sent to prison, simply because of their association with me?”

A third factor that made Tunisia ripe for revolution was public disenchantment with the growing corruption of Ben Ali’s extended family, estimated to include over 140 members. This trend is captured by the annual “perception of corruption” index maintained by Transparency International, in which Tunisia’s ranking declined from 43rd in 2005 to 59th in 2010, out of a total of 178 countries monitored. Special disdain is reserved for Leila Trabelsi, Ben Ali’s second wife, who is fifty-three years old (Ben Ali is seventy-four years old). Leila is derogatorily nicknamed the “regent of Cartaghe,” colloquially meaning “she who governs in the absence of the king,” a reference to her growing assertiveness in the governing of the nation. She is especially despised for enacting businesses throughout the country, including distribution centers, real estate, and more. According to the Central Bank, Ben Ali/Trabelsi family

Why were the Tunisians especially despised for enacting businesses throughout the country, including distribution centers, real estate, and more. According to the Central Bank, Ben Ali/Trabelsi family

Why were the Tunisian students particularly despised for these activities? It was by a brutal hammering, one day out of thirty, subjected him to the humiliation of being a five year old female police officer.

A second factor that provoked the use of deadly force most notably the Presidential torture against protesters, and the first five rounds were in the mid-nineteen year old Mohamed A. Hadid, according to a report from the number of heart-wrenching international community for hundreds of security forces to Match provided poignant coverage of the youth, eight year old Saoudi Wajhi, who many Tunisians as the site of during World War II, was the Akram Khelifa, an eyewitness international film crew. He note who sat on rooftops and slept in the sun was to him; he could not imagine
especially despised for enabling her rapacious side of the family to sink their teeth into businesses throughout Tunisia. Especially notorious in this regard was Leila’s brother, Bdhassen Trabelsi, often referred to as the “Godfather.” Trabelsi illegally assumed control over an array of companies, including an airline, several hotels, one of Tunisia’s two private radio stations, numerous car assembly plants, a Ford distribution center, a real estate development company, and the list goes on.4 According to the Central Bank of Tunisia, at least 180 major companies are “owned” by the Ben Ali/Trabelsi families.

WHY WERE THE TUNISIAN PROTESTS SUCCESSFUL?

Worsening socio-economic conditions against the backdrop of capricious authoritarian rule were not in and of themselves sufficient to promote revolutionary change. Several other factors were important. First, the revolutionary spark—both literally and figuratively—was Mohamed Bouazizi’s decision on December 17, 2010, to set himself on fire in an act of political protest against the Ben Ali regime. He died from extensive burns seventeen days later on January 4, 2011. The act of this twenty-six-year-old—a local fruit vendor who refused to pay bribes regularly demanded by the local police, while trying to make a living to support his family including his mother, uncle, and five sisters and brothers—captured the imagination of the Tunisian population. Like so many other Tunisians, he had been pushed to the edge. In this case it was by a brutal and indifferent police force that, after years of harassment, one day overturned his cart, confiscated his property, and allegedly subjected him to the humiliation of being publicly slapped by Faida Hamdy, a forty-five-year-old female police officer.

A second factor that prompted revolutionary change was Ben Ali’s decision to authorize the use of deadly force against the protesters. The Tunisian security forces, most notably the Presidential Guard, had, in the past used tear, intimidation, and torture against protesters and political prisoners. On December 24, 2010, however, the first live rounds were unleashed on protesters in Manzel Bouzayane, killing eighteen-year-old Mohamed Amnari and forty-four-year-old Chaouki Belhoussine El Hadjri, according to a report published by Amnesty International, which includes a number of heart-wrenching interviews with the families of those killed.5 The international community focused on events in Tala, where the regime deployed hundreds of security forces to brutally suppress protests. The French magazine Paris Match provided poignant coverage of the violence, featuring a picture of twenty-eight-year-old Saidi Wajhi, shot in the back by security forces.6 Kasserine, known to many Americans as the site of a major tank battle between U.S. and German forces during World War II, was the site of a particularly gruesome attack on protesters. Akram Khelifa, was an eyewitness to the Kasserine events, entering the town with an international film crew. He notes that dozens of citizens were killed, often by snipers who sat on rooftops and shot to kill. Akram told me how personally disturbing this was to him; he could not imagine Tunisians firing on other Tunisians with the intent.
to kill. Many other Tunesians felt this way, yet the use of deadly force still failed in its intended purpose: cowing the population into submission. Instead, it made the protesters more willing to confront the forces of control on the streets.

The widespread use of cell phones and social media, most notably Facebook and Twitter, were critical to the speed with which protests spread throughout the country. The initial protests in Sidi Bouzid that followed Bouazizi’s self-immolation were recorded on cell phones, posted on the Internet, and shared on Facebook, capturing the attention of the first international news outlet to run the story, the Al Jazeera network. As protests spread and the regime responded with lethal force, internets and doctors at local clinics and hospitals, as well as activists and family members of protesters killed by the government, took cell phone pictures and videos to distribute evidence of the violence rapidly over the Internet.

Facebook was particularly influential in the revolutionary process, prompting many to refer to the events in Tunisia as the “first Facebook revolution.” National statistics indicate that 20 percent of Tunisian citizens—more than 2.1 million—maintain Facebook pages. According to a survey conducted in Tunis in March 2011, 91 percent of university students use Facebook daily or multiple times a day, and on average spend 1 hour and 45 minutes each day on the website. Of great interest from a political science perspective is that this same survey demonstrated that 64 percent of students used Facebook as their primary source of information about protests and demonstrations during the 4-week period between December 17 and January 14. Indeed, 32 percent of all students indicated they first learned of Bouazizi’s self-immolation via Facebook.

A fourth element in Tunisia’s revolution was the emergence of a coalition of civil society forces that sent demonstrators into the streets. According to a recent report prepared by Syrine Ayadi, a Tunisian lawyer working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Tunisia, the number of civil society organizations had increased nearly five-fold from 1,976 in 1988 to 9,592 at the beginning of 2011. The foremost civil society factor was the youth, where 40.8 percent of the Tunisian population is less than 25 years old, 34.6 percent of those between 19-24 years of age are students, and one out of three young people are unemployed. Therefore, it is unsurprising that a large portion of the Tunisian protesters were under 30 years of age, with unemployed students or recent graduates often swelling the ranks. Additional portions of civil society that played key roles in demonstrations included women’s organizations, such as the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (AITD); human rights organizations, most notably the Tunisian League for Human Rights (LTDH); and a highly organized labor movement led by the nation-wide

TUNISIA’S JASMINE REVOLUTION

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The fifth and decisive factor under the command of General Anwar el-Sadat of the revolution in Egypt’s order to have the TUNISIA’S JASMINE REVOLUTION.

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TUNISIA'S JASMINE REVOLUTION

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The fifth and deciding factor in revolutionary success was the Tunisian army under the command of General Rachid Ammar. The army is hailed by Tunisians as the "hero" of the revolution, not least of all due to Ammar's refusal to follow Ben Ali's order to have the Tunisian military fire on the demonstrators. Had Ammar decided differently, events in Tunisia could have followed a very different and bloody path, perhaps even a military coup d'état in which the generals would have taken power. In this regard, it is now commonly believed that Ben Ali decided to leave power due to the urgings of Ali Seriati, head of the Presidential Guard, and not due to General Ammar. According to this theory, Ben Ali was convinced by Seriati that the latter would set the stage for the dictator's return at a later date to restore calm and stability, but who in actuality was intending to seize power for himself. Upon learning of this plot, Ammar ordered the arrest of Seriati and all of his associates, while at the same time closing down the airport so that Ben Ali could have safe passage out of the country. Ammar subsequently ordered the military to secure the major cities and crossroads, but made it clear that neither he nor the military had any intention of playing any political role beyond protecting the demonstrators and the Tunisian public more generally and ensuring the formation of a civilian-led democracy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION TO ENSURE POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY?

The "third wave" of the global spread of democratization began in 1974, and the Arab spring arguably constitutes the most recent surge of that wave. An important outcome from this is that scholars and practitioners alike are increasingly prone to speak of democracy as a universal value whose roots can be nurtured in all regions of the world, including the Arab world, which was once thought to be impervious to democratic change. As a result, discussions within both the academic and the policymaking worlds have gradually shifted during the last two decades from a cold war focus on whether democracy constitutes the best form of governance, to whether and to what degree state and non-state actors should be actively involved in democracy promotion efforts abroad. In this regard, the revolutions associated with the Arab spring raise an interesting question: What should be the proper role of the international community in ensuring that the Arab spring leads to transitions to democracy and the fostering of "popular sovereignty" (i.e., the notion that government is created by and subject to the will of the people)? Toward this end, the Arab spring has prompted the resurgence of at least four sets of debates devoted to this question.

The first debate revolves around the relative importance of domestic versus international factors in ensuring democracy's spread. The traditional consensus concerning what can be termed the "internal-external" debate is that domestic factors are decisive. Such analyses at best neglect the importance of international
factors, and in the extreme argue that they exert little if any influence. It should therefore come as no surprise that much of the scholarly literature devoted to understanding the third wave of democratization in general, and related to the Arab spring in particular has emphasized a wide variety of domestic factors. The most notable is the classic role of the military (i.e., does it refuse to follow the orders of the dictator, as in the case of Tunisia, or does it embrace the dictator’s orders, as in the case of Syria)? A more recent body of literature examines the role of social media, most notably Facebook and Twitter.13

With the benefit of more than a quarter century of hindsight, however, scholars are re-examining what is considered to be the neglected international dimension of democracy promotion. Philippe C. Schmitter, a noted scholar from the “transitions” literature who emphasizes the overriding importance of the internal dimension of democratization, constitutes part of this body of scholarship. “Perhaps, it is time to reconsider the impact of the international context upon regime change,” explains Schmitter. “Without seeking to elevate it to the status of prime mover, could it not be more significant than how it was originally thought?”14 Schmitter’s reassessment is characteristic of retrospective analyses of the third wave of democratization that underscore an important difference between the initial transitions that took place in Southern Europe and Latin America beginning in 1974, those of the post-1989 era that took place in Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa, and those that most recently are engulfing the Middle East and North Africa. According to this viewpoint, the post-cold war transitions on average may have been more influenced by international phenomena. In the end, however, external factors remain secondary in such analyses.15

The most comprehensive reassessment of the internal-external debate is provided by Laurence Whitehead, who points to several sets of international dynamics to argue that “there can be seriously misleading” to treat the international dimension of democracy promotion as “generally secondary in importance.”16 The most basic is the simple process of “contagion” the extensive and unintentional spread of an idea within a given geographical region, due to the socio-economic, political-military, or cultural similarities and channels which link its member states.17 The spread of the Arab spring, beginning with Tunisia’s Jasmine revolution, offers a textbook example of this process. The spread of protests throughout the Middle East and North Africa has been facilitated by the existence of a common religion (Islam), language (Arabic) and culture (large number of predominantly Arab countries).

The case of Tunisia’s Jasmine revolution, in which domestic factors were decisive in ensuring revolutionary success, nonetheless demonstrates the importance of understanding the international dimension within which the Arab spring is unfolding. In the case of the United States, administration statements by President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, including a mention of the Tunisian revolution in Obama’s State of the Union Address, ensured that the U.S. was on the right side of history. The U.S. Ambassador to Tunis, Gordon Gray, is credited with informing the French government about the Jasmine revolution in Tunis.

Tunisia’s Jasmine revolution is a case study of the successful use of social media in promoting democracy. The revolution began with a viral video of a woman demonstrating against the government’s proposed policies, which quickly spread across the internet, leading to a series of protests that ultimately led to the ouster of President Ben Ali. The revolution also demonstrated the power of social media in mobilizing people and facilitating communication between activists.

The revolution in Tunisia is part of a larger trend of popular uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa, which have been driven by a combination of economic and political factors. The revolutions have been met with a mix of success and failure, and have raised important questions about the role of social media in promoting democracy.

Despite the challenges, the revolutionary wave has had a significant impact on the region, leading to the ouster of several long-time leaders and the promotion of greater political openness. However, the path to democracy is often long and difficult, and the revolutions have also highlighted the challenges of building sustainable democratic institutions.

In conclusion, the success of Tunisia’s Jasmine revolution serves as a reminder of the potential of social media to promote democracy. While the road to democracy is never easy, the revolution in Tunisia demonstrates the power of people united for a common cause.
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credited with informing Ben Ali that he had to leave power, and that he could not count on exile in the United States.

The French government of Nicolas Sarkozy cannot claim to have been on the right side of history. Michele Alliot-Marie, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, not only vacationed in Tunisia between Christmas and New Year's Eve in 2010 while demonstrations were intensifying, she flew there on the private jet of a Tunisian businessman tied to the Ben Ali regime. Even worse, two days before Ben Ali fled the country and more than two weeks after the Tunisian police started using live ammunition against the protesters, Alliot-Marie offered to send French police to help the Tunisian police “restore calm,” because the French were skilled in “security situations of this type.”

Alliot-Marie became one of the first international casualties of the Tunisian revolution when she was forced to resign as a result of her actions in Tunisia.


Ironically enough, both the U.S. and the Tunisian governments sought to censor the appearance of the WikiLeaks cables, but for different reasons: Washington wanted to avoid diplomatic embarrassment, whereas the Ben Ali regime sought to prevent revelations that could fuel anti-regime sentiment. Tunisian bloggers avoided the censorship of both governments by creating an alternative “TuniLeaks” site that was visited by tens of thousands of Tunisians. The WikiLeaks cables undoubtedly provided fuel to the events of December 17-January 14.

A second debate fostered by the Arab spring revolves around the normative question of whether the international community should be actively involved in democracy promotion efforts. According to its most fervent proponents, democracy promotion should serve as the guiding foreign policy principle of the northern industrialised democracies in all regions of the world, including the Middle East.

Some even argue that “exporting democracy” will allow the northern industrial democracies to “fulfill their destines” within the international system. Yet even more sanguine observers, who recognize that it is neither likely nor desirable that democracy promotion will override other foreign policy goals, cautiously argue that it should serve as a foreign policy priority of the northern industrialized democracies.

The opposition to democracy promotion is equally varied. Arguments range from a moral imperative to the principle of realpolitik.
from the isolationist perspective that the northern industrialized democracies should focus on their own affairs, including recognition that other foreign priorities (e.g., economic self-interest and national security) should predominate, to the belief that the ability to influence the democratic character of other countries is extremely limited. Others are more concerned with the negative consequences of democracy promotion programs regardless of how well intentioned their proponents may be. A corollary to this argument is that democracy promotion serves as a rhetorical veneer for the pursuit of economic self-interest on the part of the international system’s most economically powerful countries, which also happen to be democracies. Some add a cultural dimension to this debate, denouncing democracy promotion as the attempted westernization of the global south, and in the extreme arguing that it serves as a form of “neo-colonialism” in the international system.

The advocates of democracy promotion clearly have the edge in the normative debate. In its broadest sense, democracy promotion is perceived by policymakers within the northern industrialized democracies as a normative good that is worth pursuing. It is precisely for this reason that beginning in the 1990s and continuing during the first two decades of the twenty-first century the globe has witnessed the emergence of a virtual “democracy promotion industry,” the hallmark of which has been the willingness of the northern industrialized democracies to channel vast amounts of democracy assistance to the developing world. In the case of the United States, for example, it has been estimated that more than a half-billion dollars was devoted annually throughout the 1990s to some form of democracy promotion by the various agencies of the U.S. government.

Of equal importance in the democracy promotion industry is the growing involvement of a wide array of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and NGOs. The United Nations and its affiliated organs have progressively sought to codify democratic values and expand opportunities for democratic government throughout the world. As a result, international law has undergone a gradual transformation in favor of recognizing democracy as an “entitlement” to be both defended and promoted.

Within the northern industrialized democracies, a wide array of quasi-governmental political foundations and think-tanks both set the democracy promotion agendas of their respective governments and serve as important conduits for official government aid. In the U.S., the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) are two prominent examples. Politically-based foundations and think-tanks such as these are but one component of a larger network of NGOs and other pro-democracy organizations.

The emergence of enlightened democracy promotion has forms of intervention at the behest of democracies spread to African states with the Arab spring in its wake, with the U.S. and other democracies offering a variety of assistance programs to new democracies. The most coercive, are the folk who support the former dictators and their regimes.

- The pursuit of class office as a “bull” witnessed by Pres. Obama’s efforts to impose economic sanctions on the former dictator.
- The attachment of large amounts of economic assistance to Tunisian officials.
- The provision of foreign military aid to Tunisian officials.
- The adoption of an authoritarian regim as a result of an assault on the former dictator.
- The use of paramilitary forces to support the former dictator.
- The use of military and intelligence assets to support the former dictator.

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of a larger network of NGOs that seeks to link the civil societies of the northern
industrialized democracies with those of the developing world.26

The emergence of what constitutes essentially a global consensus in favor of
democracy promotion has ushered in a third debate related to the Arab spring: What
forms of intervention should constitute part of the global arsenal in seeking
democracy's spread? To answer this question, one can explore a "spectrum of
violence" in which a variety of intervention tools have been employed in
democracy's name. The most prominent of these, listed in order from the least to
most coercive, are the following seven forms of intervention:

- The pursuit of classic diplomacy, ranging from a leader's use of the executive
  office as a "bully pulpit" for promoting democratic values abroad, as
  witnessed by President Obama's inclusion of a statement of support for the
  Arab spring in his January 2011 State of the Union Address, to the funding of
  international observer teams to oversee elections, as was the case with
  Tunisia's October 23, 2011 elections for the Constituent Assembly (which
  is responsible for writing a new Constitution).

- The provision of foreign aid to fund activities ranging from the holding of
democratic elections to the strengthening of civil society as demonstrated
by the commitment of the European Union and the U.S. to expand foreign
aid to Tunisian organizations involved in the promotion of civil society.

- The attachment of political conditionality to the foreign policy relationship,
as in the case of the Obama administration placing pressure on the
Mubarak regime by noting that the U.S. might have to reconsider its
"foreign assistance posture" (i.e., more than $2 billion in annual aid) if the
regime did not take concrete actions in the areas of social, economic and
political reform.

- The adoption of economic sanctions to punish the undemocratic acts of
authoritarian regimes and promote transitions to democracy, as in the case
of the Obama administration, the European Union and the Arab League
imposing economic sanctions against the Syrian regime of President Bashar
al-Assad for using deadly force against pro-democracy demonstrators.

- The pursuit of covert intervention against authoritarian regimes, including
assassination plots, coups d'etat, propaganda, and psychological warfare, the
latter of which was employed against the Qaddafi regime.

- The use of paramilitary intervention in which the funding of a guerrilla
insurgency seeks to overthrow an authoritarian regime through the proxy
use of force, as witnessed by the Obama administration's recognition and
support of Libya's Transitional National Council (TNC), with its capital in
Benghazi.

- The use of military intervention to directly overthrow an authoritarian regime
and install a democratic regime in its place, as demonstrated by United
Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1973 that permitted the North
Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to undertake a military campaign
against the Qaddafi regime.

The least coercive end of the interventionist spectrum, as one might expect, includes the least controversial and most widely adopted forms of international democracy promotion: the pursuit of classic diplomacy and the provision of foreign aid. Foreign aid particularly has emerged as the "most common and often most significant tool" in international democracy promotion. As one proceeds along the interventionist spectrum, however, questions increasingly are raised as to whether specific interventionist tools are both proper and effective in securing democratic norms.

Many who question whether democracy should or can be "forced upon" another country are often critical of the middle tier of the interventionist spectrum, in which political conditionalities and economic sanctions are imposed on another country in the name of democratic values. This middle tier nonetheless enjoys widespread support, particularly within the policymaking establishments of the northern industrialized democracies, as a useful "middle road" between the two coercive ends of the interventionist spectrum.

The most coercive end of the interventionist spectrum (which includes the use of covert, paramilitary, and military force) naturally generates the greatest level of concern among many supporters of democracy promotion. For these individuals, the critical question is whether the ends justify the means. For example, is it both acceptable and proper to impose democracy at the points of bayonets? For many the answer is no due to the fact that, in their opinion, the use of force is simply antithetical to the democratic ideal. The case of Libya, however, is an exception in that the military operation was initially designed to protect the Libyan population against atrocities being committed by the Qaddafi regime. Critics can nonetheless note that at the bare minimum the Libyan military operation went beyond civilian protection to actively promoting regime change, with some assuming that France and other powers, including the U.S., were intent on promoting regime change at the point of bayonets all along. The implications of this shift potentially manifested themselves in an October 2011 UN Security Council vote, in which China and Russia, frustrated by what they perceived as NATO overstepping its UN-sanctioned role in Libya (which they had not opposed), opposed more aggressive UN-sponsored sanctions against the Syrian regime, which was heightening attacks against civilian pro-democracy activists.

A final debate raised by the Arab spring focuses on what should constitute the proper guidelines for democracy promotion, raising several important questions. Are unilateral interventions more effective, or should attempts be made to foster multilateral initiatives? Although the last quarter of the twentieth century demonstrated that the vast majority of democracy promotion efforts have constituted unilateral interventions, more recent scholarship has underscored the
promise associated with multilateral efforts. How important is the degree of support for such actions within the general population of the target country? If such support is lacking, how justified is foreign action regardless of the undemocratic nature of the regime in question? What about the regional dimension? Should democracy promotion policies be pursued in the absence of support among the regional neighbors of the target country? Finally, what should be the roles of international law and support for democracy promotion efforts within the wider international community? In short, the challenge for the international community revolves around determining the circumstances in which intervention will be both legitimate and effective, an increasingly difficult task as one moves to the more coercive end of the interventionist spectrum.

The historical record demonstrates that scholars and practitioners are wise to keep at least three sets of guidelines in mind as they consider undertaking any interventionist practices in the name of democracy promotion in a country comprising part of the Arab spring:

- Determine the degree of popular support within the target country. Foreign efforts have a greater chance of success if they are embraced by the overwhelming majority of the target population. The efficacy of such efforts declines in situations marked by less than majority support, and is particularly compromised when an undemocratic leadership for whatever reason enjoys majority support.

- Seize majority support within the region and the international system. Foreign efforts also stand a greater chance of success if they are embraced by the majority of countries within the region and the international system. Such support signals support of specific regional concerns as well as important international norms. In its ideal form (i.e., unanimous support), it suggests the existence of a well-crafted coalition of regional and international forces that transcends ideological, ethnic, and religious differences.

- Construct policy within the framework of international law. Although international law prohibiting intervention may be ignored with relative impunity by countries pursuing self-interested policies, there is no denying its importance as a legitimizing factor, particularly in terms of creating international coalitions.

Although the combination of these guidelines cannot guarantee a successful interventionist episode, they at least enhance the possibility for success and ensure that any democracy promotion effort will enjoy a high degree of legitimacy. If we apply these guidelines to the international community’s response to the Qaddafi regime in favor of a more inclusive form of governance. The use of military force was overwhelmingly supported both regionally in the Middle East (e.g., the Arab League), North Africa (two of Libya’s immediate neighbors, Egypt and Tunisia, supported military action),
and throughout the international system, including the UN Security Council and NATO, although the African Union provided an important contrarian view that was opposed to military intervention. Furthermore, according to accepted precepts of international law, the Qaddafi regime was in violation of numerous international conventions and treaties. In short, the key to success of the anti-Qaddafi military effort, which should be taken seriously by advocates of democracy promotion, was the creation and gradual strengthening of a popularly-supported, multilateral coalition that was crafted under the auspices of international law.

TOWARD ENSURING POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

The Arab spring has ushered in a period of change in the Middle East and North Africa that raises important questions as to the role of the international community in promoting transitions to democracy, including the fostering of popular sovereignty. Tunisians voted in historic elections on October 23, 2011, roughly nine months after the Jasmine Revolution, to elect a constituent assembly that will be responsible for crafting a new constitution to serve as the framework for future democratic elections. International observers have deemed these elections as both free and fair, providing a boost to Tunisia’s status as the first Arab country to make a transition to democracy.

Now the question is whether Tunisia will emerge as a unique democracy within an otherwise authoritarian constellation of Arab states, or will serve as a leader for other Arab countries to follow, as was the case following the Jasmine Revolution. In this regard, the future success of the Arab spring will be potentially constrained by several domestic and international realities, most notably in cases where the normative goal of democracy promotion clashes with other more self-interested foreign policy interests of powers external to the region.

Throughout the cold war and post-cold war era, several northern industrialized democracies have been willing to adopt a reaopolitik approach to international politics that compromises democratic values in favor of national security interests. This was shown in Tunisia by the initial French support for the Ben Ali regime when protests were mounting in December 2010. One simple fact, however, provides the basis for optimism: each wave of global democratization that has occurred in the last two centuries has further strengthened the international democratic context in which democracy promotion policies at the nation-state level are pursued. As a result, the international democratic environment today is much more nurturing and protective of democratic practices than was the case at the beginning of either the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. If history is our guide, the Arab spring over time is likely to lead to the further consolidation of democratic practices and the strengthening of popular sovereignty.

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TUNISIAS JASMINE REVOLUTION

Notes


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For example, see Bruce N. Russett and John Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000).


Old Wine in Protest Cyc

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