Preliminary Note: This paper provides a brief presentation of the most important aspects of change that affected the Arab world, especially the changes that affected the state and society due to popular movements that began since 2011. Through the problematic issues and questions that it raises, this presentation aims to provide an entry point for discussion, and to develop and build upon ideas presented. (This report has been translated from its original Arabic version).
Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................2
Part One .............................................................................................................................................2
Part Two ............................................................................................................................................5
Roundtable Agenda ...........................................................................................................................7
Introduction

Since 2011, the Arab world has witnessed unprecedented popular movements that lead to toppling certain regimes either directly (Egypt and Tunisia), or indirectly either as a result of foreign interference (Libya) or as a result of a negotiation process that ended in a faltering transition of power (Yemen). Certain Arab countries that witnessed popular movements still undergo conflicts that differ in nature, elements and challenges from one country to another (Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and Libya). In other countries, such as Jordan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia, regimes resorted to adopting timid “reform” policies” to avoid the intensification of the popular movements. The results of these movements- notwithstanding whether they are called Arab spring, Arab awakening, or revolutions- remain unclear. Some consider that these movements are characterized by being a “continuous revolution”\(^1\), whereas others, on the contrary, deem that these movements lead to a “winter” or in the best case, to an “Arab autumn”\(^2\). And given that popular movements resulted either in “revolutions” in the sense of a radical change and total rupture with the past, or in a certain reform, Assef Bayyat noted that events in the Arab world combine to a large extent both cases, so he gave these movements the name of refolution - which is a hybrid case between revolution and reform - through which claims were made for reform in -and through- institutions of existing regimes\(^3\). This “refolution opened the door before two possibilities; either going back to the previous stage, or opening the political space to achieve some gains for the movements

Part One

State and Society

Despite the blurred vision about the future of Arab revolutions’ countries, the unprecedented movements have shaken the traditional foundations of the relationship between the state and society. Research conducted on Arab countries tend in general to consider that the state is an authority completely independent from society, as it is an institution superior to society, which imposes its decision on it. The nature of such state has been determined on one of two bases: either that it is a “rough”, “ruthless”\(^4\), or deep state, to shed the light on its suppressive, police role; or that it is a “rentier”\(^5\), “distributive” state that re-distributes resources without citizens contributing to the production process; consequently, they are deprived from participating in public affairs that became restricted to a “new fashioned – hereditary” authority established on the basis that natural resources belong to ruling elites. Hence, it is considered that the Arab state, as a political institution, has succeeded in adopting strategies

---

1 جيلبير الأشقر، الثورة مستمرة، الأخبار، 28 تشرين الثاني 2011
that aim at absorbing and controlling society, limiting its capacity to protest and demand better opportunities. This equation resulted in repressive regimes that monopolized political, economic, and even religious representation. It often resorted to violence to suppress citizens’ protests.

**Social Contract, popular movements, and the attempts to bring the state back into the heart of society**

This reality has been established and developed on the basis of an undeclared social contract between the state and society. In the aftermath of the independence of several Arab states, regimes emerged that declared their goals to be the liberation of society from colonialism and modernizing it based on the principle that the country’s resources belong to its citizens. Accordingly, the social contract has been established on the basis that the state is responsible for the country’s liberation, as well as for society’s economic and social security in its capacity as the main employer. In return, citizens present absolute loyalty to the ruling regime. With the adoption since the seventies of policies of economic openness, the role of the public sector weakened in favor of the private sector. This resulted in two factors; the first was characterized by the emergence and growth of finance and business networks that indirectly belonged to ruling elites under the title of private sector. This contributed, as the economy’s neoliberal aspect became stronger, in impoverishing society on the one hand, and consolidating the dictatorial character of the authority that relied mainly on strengthening the relationship between the private sector and the regime. The second factor was characterized by the increase in the number of the poor as a result of the economic openness policies. Consequently, a number of Islamist forces took the role of the state in terms of providing services to the needy through their charities, and social and religious institutions, which lead eventually to the emergence of a large mass that supported, politically and socially, the Islamist forces projects.

Many researchers believe that the social contract that was based on the regimes’ control and protection of economic resources by resorting to political and financial violence was a direct factor of Arab revolutions that demanded “living, freedom, social justice and human dignity”. These revolutions go partly under the category of anti-neoliberal revolutions. Thus, movements constituted an attempt to bridge the gap between the ruling class and the people, through which the relationship between society and the state was reconsidered. And for the first time, priority has been given, albeit nominally, to the people in terms of self-
determination. Subsequently, the slogan “the people wants” became the cornerstone in expressing the demands and rights of Arab societies.

Since revolutions were not restricted to overthrowing only political regimes, but also “ideological systems”\(^\text{11}\), the state-society relationship had to be reconsidered. The revolution constituted a step toward re-opening the discussion around the aspects, foundations and components of the sought social contract between the state and society. One of the direct results of the revolutionary movements consisted in the elimination of the prevailing illusion that the state has an absolute power and enjoys full independence from a helpless society who can only submit to what has been called “state authority” that people discovered it was nothing else than the police state\(^\text{12}\).

After four years, the belief prevails that the “counter-revolution” has succeeded, as the suppression of activists in Arab countries increased. Moreover, the region succumbs today under violence, and the Islamic State occupies large areas of Iraq and Syria. What has been known as the war of the West against terrorism has become the war of Arab regimes against terrorism.

**Arab Movements and challenges to the cohesion of the state and society**

Revolutionary movements are clearly affected by the historical heritage, social structure, norms, relationship among social groups and institutional experiences of the national entity that encompasses them. By observing the processes of popular movements in the “Arab spring” countries, it becomes evident that they largely influence, and are influenced by the institutional structure of the modern state, that they overlap with traditional social structures, such as tribal/clan, sectarian/religious, ethnic, regional, or partisan- which preceded the emergence of political entities, and that they also overlap with new social, economic and political structures that are characterized by certain elements of modernity. The stakes and challenges of revolutionary movements have a different impact on sovereign political institutions, as well as on the structure and cohesion of political entities in countries composed of confessionally, linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous groups, that witness separatist trends, and where state institutions, namely military and security institutions, have been founded on tribal, sectarian or regional partisanzhips. These institutions are closely linked to the interests of the ruling minority and act based on a mentality of patronage. This societal heterogeneity has been manipulated to transform into societal divisions that in turn have been exploited to constitute a popular basis that supports, protects and ensures the stability and durability of the regime in a given juncture, which makes of those divisions a challenge to the national entity’s cohesion in a moment of radical change. In parallel, these divisions facilitate the interference of foreign countries and external powers, as well as the manipulation of the process of internal transformations witnessed by some countries, or the

---

\(^\text{11}\) فواز طرابلسي، الثورات تسقط أنظمة الأفكار أيضًا، 20 حزيران 2011.

confiscation of the results of this process to achieve goals that might be completely unrelated to the essence and demands of the popular movements.

Part Two

Problematic issues and questions related to the discussion
Based on the previous, popular movements paved the way for a new stage whose aspects remain unclear. Movements had an impact at four levels: the regimes level, the nation state level, the regional level and the new forces of change level. What follows is a quick presentation of some main problematic issues that accompanied/resulted from popular movements on the ground since their outbreak and up to this day. These issues would/could constitute and entry point to develop the discussion.

First: at the level of regimes
What are the main transformations that affected regimes? Have constitutional changes that took place after the fall of regimes, carry the concerns of popular movements, or they only aimed at absorbing it? Have new constitutions contribute in re-considering the social contract? And finally, would the new legal system contribute in opening participation areas before citizens at the political, social and economic levels?
On the other hand, and given that the role of ruling elites in the Arab world has long been to compete with each other over inheriting positions and dividing/sharing the countries’ resources, what role have popular movements have in terms of either establishing old elites, or producing new ones from outside the traditional powers in the Arab world?)? What new has the Arab spring bring about at the level of these elites? Have old elites succeeded in regenerating themselves? If yes how?

Second: at the level of the nation-state
In addition to the direct impact of popular movements on the regimes and their inner structure, these movements also had a direct impact on the structure of the state and on the basis on which the state has been founded, with the diversity and plurality it encloses (ethnic, linguistic and religious…). We have always read that borders of Arab states are artificial. Accordingly, many nationalistic or regional projects have emerged that called for the return to the natural borders of certain “nations”. Recently, and after the Arab spring and military conflicts, many maps have been developed that drew new geographic borders on the ashes of the Sykes-Picot borders. Would current transformations affect the borders of existing nation states, either directly or indirectly? Have popular movements contributed in the emergence of ethnic and sectarian identities that lead to questioning the legitimacy of the unified state, opening the door to claims of secession and the formation of new independent states? Or is it that the emergence of such identities is nothing but the result of regimes and/or external powers manipulating these identities for different interests?
Third: the regional level
Repercussions of popular movements were not restricted to the domestic level of each country. They rather surpassed it to include regional balances engendering in them certain shifts. One can discriminate between different levels of regional shifts; among these are the following:

1. Reform level that consisted in the emergence of a cross-border “reform spirit” through the networking between civil institutions and associations in the Arab world. This networking has not been confined to the virtual space; it has been rather translated on the field in different reform sectors, as well as in human-rights and legal domains. How strong are these networks and how able are they to create a kind of Arab-Arab cooperation founded on new bases?

2. Political activity level: the liberation of national political spaces from the domination of security apparatuses and of the one party system contributed in the increase of direct participation of parties and movements in political activity, and their overt competition with the authority. However, has openness inside each state contributed in mutual openness of political movements in Arab countries within new or renewed common ideological and dogmatic spaces that take into consideration the transformation, development and requirements of reality? Have transformations that political spaces/arenas have witnessed and still witness forced supranational or supranationalist parties (Arabist, leftist, Islamist…) to undertake an exhaustive process of criticism of their roles, positions and programs? Would we witness the emergence of new currents?

3. Media Level: Media played a key role at the regional level through satellite channels and social networks. Have media contributed in the formation of a reform power, or have it lead to the fragmentation of such a power by supporting certain forces at the expense of others? To what extent does social networking contribute in moving forces of popular movements from the stage of networking on the lowest common denominator to unifying around alternative governance programs and projects?

4. Regional level: What is the nature of current regional divisions? Who are the actors and what are the fields of confrontation (ideological, political, economic, religious, sectarian…)?

Fourth: Forces of change? Future projects and vision
Who are the forces or groups that aim today to achieve an actual change in Arab countries? What is the nature of shifts that it aims to achieve? What are their proposals/projects, activities, programs, areas of action and tools? What is the situation of these forces or groups and how able are they to network at the domestic level of each country, as well as at the level of different Arab states?
Roundtable Agenda
Beirut, 13 – 14 March 2015

Friday, March 13, 2015

9.00 – 9.30: Introduction of participants and presentation of methodology

9.30 – 11.30: First Session: Impact of popular movements on regimes

11.30 – 12.45: Break


13.45 – 15.45: Lunch break

15.00 – 17.30: Third Session: Impact of popular movements regionally?

Saturday, March 14, 2015

9.00 – 11.00: First Session: What forces or groups seek to achieve a real change in different Arab countries? What are their goals, arenas of activity and tools?

11.00 – 11.30: Break

11.30 – 13.30: Second Session: What is the reality of these forces and groups and how capable are they to work nationally and regionally? What are the main challenges they face?

13.30 – 14.30: Lunch break

14.30 – 16.30: Third Session: Resume discussion of second session

16.30 – 16.45: Coffee break

16.45 – 18.00: Fourth Session: Next steps