
Start of the Mediterranean Crisis

Yet the plight of the Mediterranean area remains extremely serious. Everything began with events that appeared—to most people—to be auspicious for reconstruction.

The wave of collective mobilisation that struck North Africa is like a huge flock of birds blotting out the sky. From afar, their solid mass is strikingly oppressive: they look like the grey sky in a Permeke painting. But as soon as we see the flock from closer up, our perspective changes.

The solid mass resolves to reveal the scales of a complex and continually asymmetrical fractal. Let me explain: this has come about because North Africa is one of the most diversified human ecosystems in the world with very clear fault lines if we immediately examine matters from a state perspective. This is the case in most of the areas affected by revolts, albeit with unequal intensity and multifaceted institutional configurations. Events in Egypt and Tunisia have nevertheless shown us that the state is what it is and its existence does not depend on the physical person holding power. Its physical or symbolic disappearance (ousting from power) does not culminate in the death of the institution, which goes on to replicate itself. This is essential for the continuity of business. In all cases, the army guarantees this continuity, constituting the very backbone of the state, but with two variants. The armies in this post-colonial and post-Arabian culture fall into one of the following two moulds: revolutionary (Algeria and Egypt) or monarchical-sacred (the Royal family in Morocco and in Jordan are hereditary lineages that claim their descendancy from the Prophet and the army's loyalty is thus twofold: to the monarch and to the Prophet). Both the armies, Algerian and

Egyptian, are of revolutionary origin, but now they have little national independence and are highly dependent on the West (primarily the USA and France). The greater the Western influence on the army, the more state continuity means business continuity: we have learnt this from Egypt. The moral of this story is that any transition to democracy (?) and any continuity in economic relations is bound to come to grips with the army, in other words the relationship between the business community and the army must be considered.

Another important issue is the clear inability of these countries to achieve economic development and therefore growth that is even only moderately unequal and only moderately imbalanced, despite their great national resources: mainly fossil hydrocarbons and certain mineral resources (Moroccan phosphates, for example). One contributing cause is not the economy but social stratification and the outcome of the post-colonial political struggle. This has given rise to a *rentier* and bourgeois class who act as brokers between national resources and their international exploitation, hence the family and clan trappings that parasitically cling to the state armies and bureaucracy. Egypt is a textbook example of this situation, with its sprawling state–family–patronage-based bureaucracy.

Lastly, we are left with the most explosive problem, which is the fuse that has been lit in Tunisia and lies at the basis of the revolt: the formation throughout North Africa of an intellectual sub-proletariat that has led to a genuinely new inter-class aspect of the revolt and is at the same time the untapped resource of the area: knowledge combined with youth may give rise to a passion for development if it is given an outlet in the dignity of employment. The danger is that this may occur with devastating consequences for the instability of those societies. Employment must be the first commitment for those acting in these countries; otherwise, all their plans are doomed to failure. We are then left with Libya, which is a case in its own right: tribalism, archaic social relationships, absence of the state of western origin and the personalistic continuity of a power that has changed from revolutionary to a presence so brooding that it is at the point of swallowing up the tribal children of the revolution. The first task should be to prevent the “Somalisation” of Libya and seek to fully understand the specific features of the case and in other words to change from economy to anthropology.



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