

## The Arab Spring, 6 Years on

### News:

January 2017 is the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Arab Spring where a number of rulers who had been in power for decades were overthrown. There was much optimism in those days when Ben Ali of Tunisia fled on a plane and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, after weeks of protests finally fell. But on the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary the world's media gave little coverage to the decadent events that took place in the region. The last six years have been long and painful and the slaughter of Aleppo in December 2016 encapsulates the trauma the people of the region are suffering. The Euphoria has been replaced with pessimism.

### Comment:

Real change did not take place in any of the countries where uprisings took place. The lack of vision and long-term agenda meant there was no blueprint for the masses to follow. The reasons for this are understandable as places such as Syria and Libya have never had a real opposition, whilst the opposition in Egypt and Tunisia were just a façade. As a result the mass uprising was focused towards removing the rulers and their focus was restricted to this. The problem then arose of what to do once the rulers were overthrown, leading to places such as Egypt, Tunisia and Libya using the existing system to move forward, which was the problem in the first place. The rulers in the Middle East had driven the region's economies to bankruptcy, used sectarianism to maintain their grip and little prospects existed for the medium to long-term for society. The people failed to uproot the whole systems and that's why only the faces changed.

In many of the countries where the rulers were overthrown the different groups have turned on each other, leading to civil war in some cases. In Libya, chaos and militia violence stalks the land, strikes threaten to cripple the oil industry, violence is on the rise and economic stagnation is everywhere. Today three rival governments exist looking to impose their will on the nation. In Syria, the West's support of moderate rebel groups over the other groups has led to the various rebel groups fighting each other. The arrival of ISIS has only complicated the landscape in Syria. In Yemen, the Houthis long marginalised by the Saleh government took to the streets for his ouster. But when he was replaced by his own crony and then were sidelined by the Hadi government the Houthis took to the streets of the capital – Sana'a and overthrew the government. Currently the country is being ripped apart with the south of the country predominantly supporting the old government with the Houthis dominating the north of the country. The euphoria of real change has now been replaced by anarchy, violence and instability – a far-cry for the positive developments from 6 years ago.

Being the most important region in the world, the global powers were never going to allow the region to slip through their grip and this resulted in the US, Britain and France interfering in the uprisings to ensure the underlying systems remained in place even if the personnel changed. Many movements across the Middle East incorrectly believed calling for western values such as democracy, liberal values and secularism would bring them western support and aid their attempts to overthrow the likes of Mubarak, Saleh, Ben Ali and Gaddafi. This foreign interference allowed the US to maintain its role in Egypt, with the army protecting US interests in the region through maintaining its treaty with the Jewish entity. When Muhammad Morsi could no longer maintain domestic stability the US abandoned him and justified Sisi's coup, describing it as 'Democracy restored.' In Libya, both Britain and France worked with the transitional and permanent government, which consisted largely of Gaddafi era officials. With the US, France and Britain having historical links to the political class in the Middle East they not only influenced the regions foreign policies but also maintained influence over many domestic institutions, political parties, the security services and individual personalities. When Abdul Fattah al-Sissi became the army chief, US officials described him as a known entity, i.e. someone the US was well aware of.

Today, the Arab Spring has gone in a direction which has maintained the pre-revolution systems. This is a significant result for the West who created the artificial nations in the Middle East 100 years ago. The great hopes of the masses are in serious trouble and it remains to be seen if the Arab Spring can be salvaged.

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