

Research Report

Security Council

Question of the maintenance of stability in the Middle East and Northern Africa



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Forum	Security Council
Issue:	Question of the maintenance of stability in the Middle East and Northern Africa
Student Officer:	Sandra Smits
Position:	Deputy President

Introduction

The Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) is a troubled region where instability poses a significant threat to peace and stability. This political turmoil recently escalated, sweeping across the MENA since around about the start of 2011 and the United Nations are facing challenges to respond accordingly to the erratic progressions. There are many root-causes of this turmoil, ranging from public demand for a democratic changes, on-going religious disputes, and wars over limited natural resources, i.e. oil. This instability has resulted in the halt of energy exports, trade, and investment. It is a matter of concern for the Security Council because they affect both global energy supplies, namely through oil and regional security.

Definition of Key Terms:

Stability

In this context, the noun stability is meant as “ The state or quality of being stable, especially: a. Resistance to change, deterioration, or displacement. b. Constancy of character or purpose; steadfastness. c. Reliability; dependability.”¹

MENA

The term stands for the Middle East and Northern Africa. This extensive region covers from Morocco to Iran, including the majority of Middle East and Northern African nations.²



¹ [The Free Online Dictionary](#)

² [Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia](#)



Political Unrest

The term is also referred to as political turmoil, this is when Government affairs are in a state of chaos or when politics are in “a troubled or rebellious state of discontent”³

Democracy

Democracy is a government where citizens have equal say in decisions. Ideally, it is a government that the people have chosen, as an elective representatives. It also encompasses certain social, economic and cultural conditions that should allow free and equal political self-determination.

Tension

Tension is defined as “A balanced relation between strongly opposing elements”⁴. In this context we mean two strongly opposing groups of people that have so much friction it spurs trouble and prevents stability.

General Overview:

Throughout the MENA, civilian protests and revolts have spurred as frustrations boil over. At the end of 2010, a young Tunisian fruit vendor set himself on fire in a protest by the way the local authorities treated him. This eventually led to the downfall of a 23-year dictatorship. This event in Tunisia seems to have been the final spark that released popular uprisings throughout the MENA.

Background

There are many underlying roots that have escalated to the political instability in the MENA and it is important to understand these. Firstly, amongst such a large region, differences outweigh common cultural and religious identity. This goes to show how dangerous it is to ignore the stark differences between MENA nations. It is believed that the root cause is long-standing problems and disagreements in the development of the MENA region.

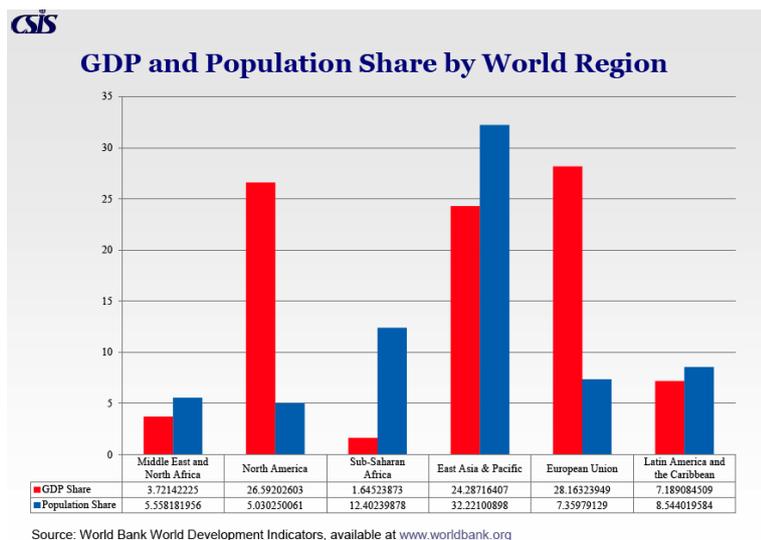
Secondly, to maintain superiority, control and influence over the region for the sake of oil, the West has placed corrupt Arab leaders into positions of power and supported the overthrow of those that are not seen as favorable. The underlying theme of this has been the struggle to control access to important resources such as oil.

Further, aside from the successful oil sector, MENA has a generally low global economic ranking, significantly taking a toll on income. Their economic growth is on par with Africa and Latin America, but far lower than that of Asia. Its GDP growth has constantly struggled to keep up with those of developing areas and fall short keeping up with the population growth in the MENA region.

³ [The Free Online Dictionary](#)

⁴ [The Free Online Dictionary](#)





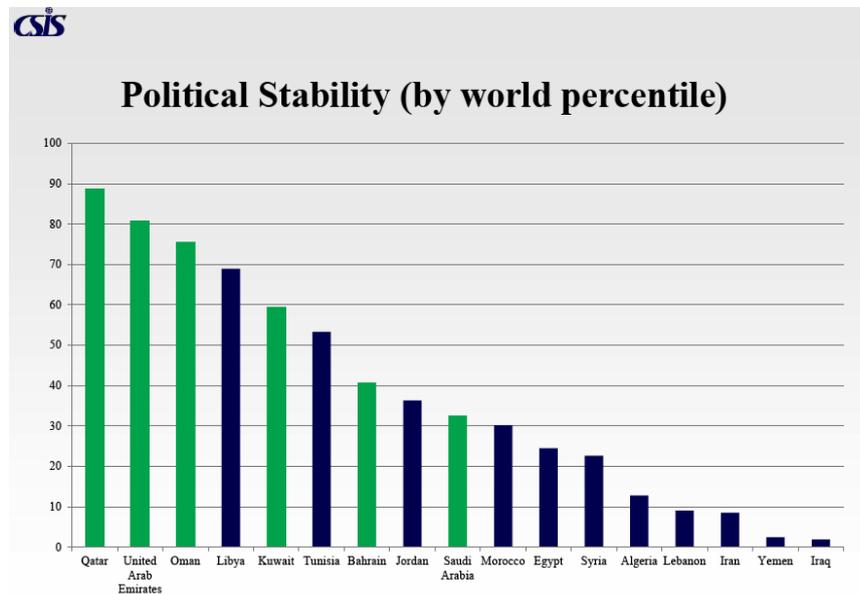
Because of the dominating oil sector in the MENA, any instability there affects all nations, thereby taking a toll on the world economy. The world economy for its energy supply depends largely on oil. Therefore, any significant disruption in oil supply is likely to result in price hikes for oil products worldwide. Because MENA has such a huge oil industry, it is naturally a hotbed for oil, furthering the already prolific instability.



Stability also largely relates to economics. The economic situation in many nations, for example Egypt, have been a key reason for the revolt in the country. In January, world food prices substantially increased, to some extent leading to the unrest in Egypt and Tunisia. Using Egypt as an example again, it was the largest wheat importer under the Mubarak regime and corruption consumed the money which was supposed to be used to aid disagreeable living conditions in poor parts of Egypt.

Another problem that contributes towards instability is that democratic systems are not well-established and rights of many populations are suppressed. Most MENA nations still follow

autocratic systems where there are no free elections with a proper full range of parliamentary groups, this has resulted in a lot of disruption and instability. The repressive regimes and lack of peaceful alternatives have led to civil challenges to security.

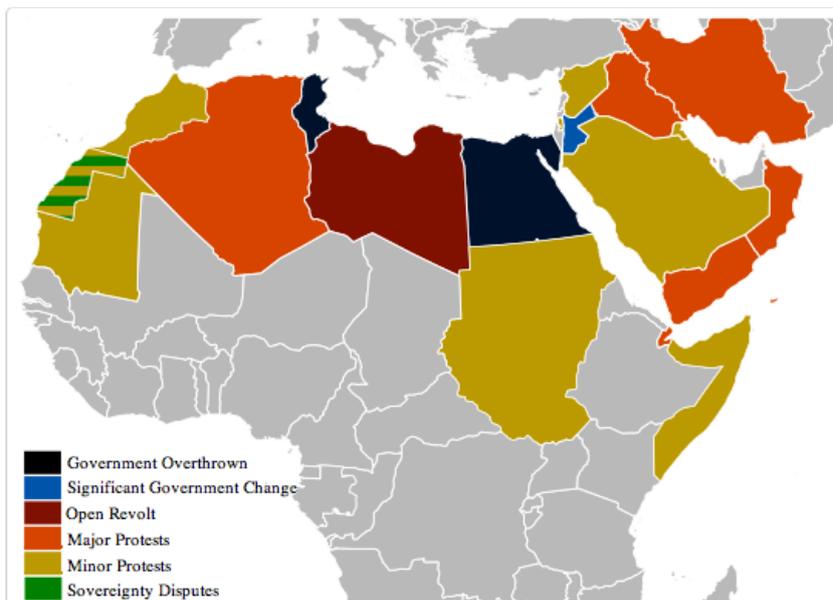


Source: World Bank Governance Indicators

Current situation:

The recent political revolts in the MENA have resulted in downfall of Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. The result of these first revolts have sparked a wave of political unrest, bringing about instability throughout most of the MENA. It seems to be that the common denominator in this case is the populations no longer being able to accept the flawed democratic systems.

Protests have taken place through the MENA region. The following 20 nations/areas have been involved: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Territories, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Western Sahara, Yemen.



Source: Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia

Currently, Gaddafi and other rebel forces are backed by a Western coalition and oil-rich Arab states. As a result of the havoc in Libya, European nations are being faced with refugees coming in by sea, air, and land through the Mediterranean and via Spain and Morocco. If things do not look up in Libya it is clear that the situation in the MENA will not get better with such a key player torn apart. The UN has recognized this and NATO allies have started bombing campaigns in numerous attempts to get rid of Gaddafi.

Although the situation has died down a bit in Tunisia and Egypt, unfortunately it is just the beginning of the knock-on effect in Yemen, Bahrain and Syria. Syria is currently in a very tender situation and it has been said that things need to get worse before they will get better.

"In view of the deteriorating humanitarian situation, the crisis is getting worse," Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon warns.

Major Parties Involved:

The Department of Political Affairs (DPA)

The DPA is the core of the UN's response to global diplomacy and public messaging. They want to help the UN peacefully solve issues and have provided public messaging and strategic leadership suggestions to the UN system. They are currently leading many efforts that aim to implement stability in the MENA. Following the protest-inspired changes in the government in Tunisia, the DPA has worked to ensure UN support to any requests for political assistance to these countries' democratic transitions.

Tunisia

Through collaboration between DPA and UNDP, a team of UN electoral experts has been deployed to assist national authorities in the organization of crucial Constituent Assembly elections scheduled for July 2011.

Egypt

Egypt was one of the 'sparks' to the political uprisings. Although the situation has simmered down, with the resignation of President Mubarak, its neighbours are still dealing with revolts. Islamist prisoners have been released, this may be a tactical move to prevent potential Islamist opposition and it is likely that this is only temporary. There seems to be relaxation of restrictions with Islamist groups, which should prevent a single movement under the Muslim Brotherhood's run up to elections.

Libya

With Gaddafi's prevalence coming to an end, fighting has spread to the west of Tripoli. This indicates Gaddafi could possibly flee the country or be killed. Until this happens however, there is heavy damage and savage populations, which will continue to drastically increase. The DPA is providing staff support and guidance regarding post-conflict planning. The UN is currently focusing its efforts on Libya.



Israel

Since its establishment, Israel has not been at peace with its neighbours because it has not been properly recognized as a state. At the same time Israel does not fully recognize the rights of the Palestinians having their own state. This is another ongoing cause for instability which hampers peace in the region.

Yemen

Senior DPA officials have carried out several missions to Yemen to express concern about tensions and violence in the country and to offer UN support for inclusive dialogue to resolve the political impasse. President Saleh has ordered for security forces to protect protests as a response to public outcry over the deaths from the many demonstrations. However there is still chaos in Yemen and President Saleh agreed to resign in a few days but it is unclear who his successor will be which is why he is somewhat reluctant.

Syria

Violence spreading drastically. Tanks are being used on the streets, the revolt is just coming to full-throttle. The United States have begun talks about sanctions against Syria. Syria is in one of the most tender situations currently.

Bahrain

The monarchy of Bahrain seems to be increasing chances of survival because it is portraying itself as receptive to opposition parties' demands and holding back from using force against protesters. There appears to be a significant divergence between the demands of the protesters and those of opposition parties but the Al Khalifa tries to meet most of these.

Saudi Arabia

It appears to be unlikely that the chain of revolts in the MENA region will simply overlook Saudi Arabia. There was a small Shia protest held in Qatif where eastern provinces demanded the release of prisoners but so far protests have been small-scale.

Algeria

Demonstrations are likely to lose even more momentum as opposition has split further and many groups did not take part in the demonstration planned in Algiers.

Iran:

Protests in Iran have not escalated to those of Egypt, Tunisia, or Libya. Opposition leaders seem to lack an interest in violent confrontation with security forces, differentiating opposition in Iran to those of most MENA regions.

Timeline of Key Events:

Date	Description of Event
December 24, 2010	Violence, protests, demonstrations commence in Tunisia



December 25, 2010	Violence, protests, demonstrations commence in Egypt.
January 19, 2011	After the first cabinet meeting, the government offers amnesty to all political groups
January 21, 2011	In Saudi Arabia, rulers ban all protests, threaten use of all means necessary to suppress protests; security clampdown successfully prevented 'Day of Rage' on March 11.
January 22, 2011	Violence, protests, demonstrations commence in Algeria
January 23, 2011	Violence, protests, demonstrations commence in Yemen
February 11, 2011	Egypt's President Mubarak resigns
February 14, 2011	Violence, protests, demonstrations commence in Bahrain
February 15, 2011	Violence, protests, demonstrations commence in Libya
February 26, 2011	UN Security Council passes Ghaddafi's sanction vote
February 27, 2011	Tunisia's Prime Minister Ghannouchi resigns
March 1, 2011	The UN General Assembly suspended Libya from its top human rights body, it is the first time any country has been suspended from the 47-member council since it was formed in 2006
March 17, 2011	UN Security Council approves no-fly zone over Libya
March 23, 2011	Violence, protests, demonstrations commence in Syria
April – June 2011	Instability and violence escalates especially in Syria. Libya still angered that Gaddafi is in power, it does not look like the situation will mellow out until he steps down or is arrested.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue:

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has condemned violence while urging leaders around the region to respect human rights and to respond peacefully, through dialogue and bold reforms where needed, to the legitimate aspirations of their people for change. Senior officials of the DPA have reiterated this central message in their statements and briefings to the Security Council on situations in a number of countries in the region.

There have been numerous attempts by the UN to achieve stability in the MENA. Firstly, the UN General Assembly The United Nations General Assembly suspended Libya's membership in the Human Rights Council. The UN expressed its deep concern about the situation in that country in the wake of Ghaddhafi's violent crackdown on anti-Government protestors. In the appendices you can find the attached resolution.

The UN is especially concerned about Libya and the violence increasing there and another resolution was passed where the Security Council imposed touch measures on the Libyan regime in the wake of crackdown on protestors. This resolution can be found in the appendices. The Security Council also



approved a no-fly zone over Libya, taking precautionary measures to protect civilians from being attacked, again the resolution can be found in the appendices.

Recently, a UN official in Africa has called for a mobilization of the continent's youth for sustainable development, suggesting that the "recent turmoil in North Africa may be linked to high rates of unemployment among youth, their desire for freedom, and their demands for change."⁵

Possible Solutions:

There is no obvious or quick way to quickly implement stability in the MENA. The challenge is now to "bridge the gap" and find ways to access stability as well as provide security. With such a complicated issue there is no simple way to do this and it is very hard to find an agreed upon solution.

It is important to keep in mind that western countries are pro-democracy because of the threat to the rise of Islamic extremist groups, i.e. similar to the current regime in Iran. That being said it will be challenging to find agreement upon pro-democratic western countries and those battling with political upheaval who want to overthrow democracy.

It should also be considered to improve the democratic systems of the MENA region because this seems to be the underlying cause to the protests, which should be the number one priority considering the amounts of civilians getting injured or killed. The violence has led to myriads of injuries and deaths, it is important the UN provides security to people so governments of MENA nations should further implement laws which prevent the violence and keep a 'tighter leash'.

As previously touched upon by the UN, educating the youth of the MENA should also be a consideration, which will reduce unemployment, thereby reducing the desire for freedom and demands for change, providing more security.

Appendices:

- General Assembly Resolution. A/RES/65/265. Suspension of the rights of membership of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in the Human Rights Council:

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2011/ga11050.doc.htm>

- Security Council Resolution. S/RES/1973. Approves 'no-fly zone' over Libya, authorizing 'all necessary measures' to protect civilians:

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/268/39/PDF/N1126839.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵ <http://www.un.org/>



- Security Council Resolution. S/RES/1970. Imposes tough measures on Libyan regime in wake of crackdown on protesters:

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/245/58/PDF/N1124558.pdf?OpenElement>

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