



Book review: The Arab Spring 2.0: New Wave of Revolutions in the MENA Region by Leonid Issaev and Andrey Korotayev¹²

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The present book consists of twelve chapters (11 main chapters and a conclusion). The authors' main aim is to compare and analyse some case studies in the MENA region, discussing how revolutions initially started there and what their consequences were for each country, respectively politically, economically, and socially.

The volume offers a wide range of studies to identify the similarities and differences between the events of the Arab Spring of 2011 and the current upheavals, or even the second wave of revolutions in 2018 in the region under study. Researchers examine the causes in broader world-system context, analysing the motivating forces, goals and organizational forms of the protesters as well as other actors involved, portraying a semi-complete image on the political and economic consequences of these revolutions. They also answer why some countries, actively confused by the Arab Spring, have not been substantially affected by these inevitable developments. Focusing on comparative politics, Arab World, Middle Eastern politics, political sociology, and terrorism and political violence, the book is addressed to scholars of political science. Let's take a quick but accurate look at the work:

In the introductory chapter, the editors mention that towards the end of the 2010s, Middle Eastern countries faced a new revolutionary wave. Here, Leonid Issaev⁶ and Andrey Korotayev⁷ provide a primary description and analysis of this *phenomenon*,

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² Leonid Issaev – Andrey Korotayev (eds.): New Wave of Revolutions in the MENA Region. A Comparative Perspective. Switzerland, Cham, Springer, 2022. Perspectives on Development in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region: ISBN 978-3-031-15134-7, ISBN 978-3-031-15135-4 (eBook), USD 159.99. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15135-4>.

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which has led to the collapse of several regimes, including Sudan, Algeria, and Mali, while revolutions in Lebanon and Iraq have dragged on. Furthermore, a new quality of protests has manifested in Iran, Egypt, Morocco, and Jordan. This new wave of revolutions was also characterized by the so called “domino effect”.⁸ The events of the new revolutionary wave were characterized by the fact that the protests were directed against the political class, and not against a particular autocrat. The editors then noted another crucial point, that the slogan used in the revolutions was “All must go”, meaning that the departure of the ruler from power would not solve anything. In other words, the protesters' discontent during these revolutions was primarily directed against the whole political establishment.

In the second chapter Sergey V. Kostelyanets⁹ talks about the Sudanese revolution and the fall of Al-Bashir's regime. In April 2019, the long-serving Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir was overthrown by group of generals in a bloodless military coup d'état. In the four months leading up to the coup, Sudan had witnessed mass protests and civil disobedience. The December Revolution started in late 2018 and has escalated to unprecedented violent clashes between the Sudanese protesters and security forces. The Sudanese regime, which had ruled the country since 1989, has begun to weaken and fragment significantly politically and economically due to internal divisions, political failures, and international isolation, as well as unending insurgencies, corruption and the secession of the oil-rich southern region. The regime has also failed to meet its basic social obligations, such as the provision of food, fuel and medicine. Sudan's political opposition has disintegrated. On the contrary, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), a coalition of independent trade unions, became the main driving force of the revolution and took on the task of planning and coordinating mass protests and demands. The Sudanese December Revolution was a partial success, as the military remained in power, but it facilitated the emergence of a powerful and a vibrant civil society.

After the military coup of 2021, which was triggered by serious disputes between the military and civilians, violent protests have returned once again to the streets of Sudanese cities. While some of the armed opposition groups have begun to support the new regime, several other movements remained committed and fully supported the December revolution. In the fall of 2021, Sudan found itself in the core of a deep economic crisis compared to the period preceding the 2018 protests, which led to a significant decline in the popularity of the transnational government. And as we can see, Sudan has not escaped the ongoing difficulties caused by the events of post-2011 and it is still suffering on several scales.

In the 3rd Chapter, entitled *The Crisis of the Rentier State: How the Revolution of*

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⁸ This means that rising tensions and the protests in one country can have a direct impact on other counties, leading to more protests. The economic agenda has paved the way to the political one, which has led to the recurrence and actualization of unresolved problems in each country.

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Smiles Has Brought Down the Sultanistic Regime in Algeria, Yahia H. Zoubir discusses the situation in Algeria and explains how the Algerian Revolution played a significant role in the fall of the regime. In 2019, former Algerian President Abdel Aziz Bouteflika celebrated the 20th anniversary of his accession to power. Few people expected a tsunami of peaceful social protests and movements demanding that Bouteflika should not run for a fifth term as president. While the army has responded in favour of *Hirak*¹⁰ by removing President Bouteflika from office, in addition to imprisoning officials directly involved in corruption, the new Algerian authorities did not show real determination to change the regime or introduce political and economic reforms. The researcher aims to shed light on the reluctance of the authorities to break with past practices and why the protests did not result in protests that could have been used to negotiate a transition to a new political order.

In order to understand the situation in Algeria, it is first of all very important to briefly review the period preceding the uprising, to try to assess the twenty years of Bouteflika's rule and to analyse the causes and demands that triggered the mass protests. Zubair confirmed that *Hirak* marked a major turning point in Algeria's post-independence history. The attempts of Algerians to make the transition from an authoritarian regime to a system characterised by democracy showed that the collapse of old regimes will only happen if its drivers are motivated by the nation itself.

The *17 October (2019) Revolution in Lebanon: A Preliminary Analysis* discusses the situation in Lebanon, and its revolution of October 17th, broke out due to imposing the WhatsApp tax, as the social contract between the ruling elite and the people was no longer valid. The Taif Agreement was very significant as it contributed greatly to ending the conflicts between the warlords by initiating peace and putting them at the helm of the state. The state suffered from bloated bureaucracy, excessive spending, and much lower revenues due to the corruption that was taking place at the time. The author, Dania Koleilat Khatib, confirms that it is unfair to say that the revolution failed because the political elite remained in position.¹¹ Indeed, the uprising groups managed to achieve significant successes in the students' elections, for example. The fact that the then Lebanese government was unable to provide the necessary services to civilians increased the level of corruption in the government. The deteriorated situation is still ongoing, and no one can yet predict the outcome.

The *Revolutionary Protests in Iraq in the Context of Iranian-American Confrontation* or the 5th Chapter portrays the Iraqi protests, focusing on the causes that led to the revolution in the Middle Eastern country. The starting point was the demonstrations against unemployment, poor quality of public services, deteriorating living conditions and widespread corruption, organised by youth groups through social networks, which began on 1 October 2019 in Baghdad and the southern provinces of Iraq. These demonstrations quickly escalated into a wider protest movement demanding a change

¹⁰ Arabic word meaning movement.

¹¹ The fact is that the 17 October Revolution failed to create a quick and decisive regime change.

of government. It should be noted here that the Iraqi protests began at the same time as the demonstrations in Lebanon, which is considered part of the so-called “Shiite axis” in Tehran.

The nature of the anti-government protests, the lack of an organised structure as well as the demands of the protesters were similar in Iraq and Lebanon. The protesters accused the government of being corrupt and demanded changes in the electoral and political system and in employment conditions. After several months of political instability, the country was rocked by massive revolutionary anti-government protests that forced Prime Minister Adel Abu El Mahdi to resign despite some significant and key economic achievements.

In the next chapter, Andrey Zakharov and Leonid Issaev, authors of *Roots of New Wave of Protests in Jordan* and editors of the entire work, outline the unpredictable situation in Jordan. They point out that Morocco and Jordan are among the countries that have shown the persistence of political instability because of the events of the Arab Spring. In both, protests erupted during the 2010s. The authorities in the kingdoms responded to the disturbing events with varying degrees of political virtuosity and by suppressing the protests. At the same time, in examining Jordan and Morocco's policies to adapt to revolutionary trends, researchers have often realised the sacral nature of power: both the Hashemites and Alawites are direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Such a view seems inaccurate, “since the principle of untouchability does not always work in the case of crown leaders, even with such prestigious pedigrees” (Zakharov - Leonid Issaev, 2022, 109). Both the Moroccan and Jordanian rulers deliberately used religious rituals and institutions to consolidate their own power. The two authors show here, focusing on the Jordanian case, that the sacral nature of the Hashemite government does not provide the ruling regime with ‘immunity’ from possible shocks.

Jordan was also affected by the new wave of revolution. In 2018, the country witnessed its largest protests since the Arab Spring, triggered initially by the rise in fuel and food prices. As a result, King Abdullah II was once again forced to call for another resignation of the government, sacrificing economic expediency in exchange for the political loyalty of citizens.¹² Zakharov and Issaev conclude that the Jordanian experience of the 2010s, which has seen Jordan establish itself as an ‘island of stability’ in the MENA region, is more a testament to the art of Abdullah II's political manoeuvring and pragmatism than to the exploitation of his religious status. King Abdullah II, in order to quell public discontent without giving the green light to fundamental reforms, allows him to act as a defender of public interests, directing the protesters' anger towards

¹² In 2019, the Razzaz government had already faced another round strike, this time by teachers dissatisfied with their low salaries. As a result, the new government quickly became hostage to the old problems of austerity in a country with one of the highest public sector spending on wages and pensions (\$13 billion). A month after the strikes began, King Abdullah II had to intervene again, ordering the government to revise the original plan to raise teacher' salaries by 35%, which the protesters called “breadcrumbs” (Voice of America 2019). Finally, the Razzaz government had to make concessions to the teachers' union and raise salaries by 60%.



unwanted governments, of which there were eight in the 2010s alone.

In the chapter “*Tunisia. Revolution of Ballot Boxes?*”, Anna Kashina sheds light on the situation in Tunisia in the ten years following the Arab Spring. Tunisia has gone through several stages of development. In the transition phase¹³, provisional authorities were established, legislation was revised and the 2013 crisis, triggered by political assassinations against a backdrop of sharp social polarisation, was resolved. The second phase began in January 2014 with the adoption of a new constitution, marked by the first free democratic elections and consensus politics within the alliance of the secular *Nidaa Tounes* party¹⁴ and the Islamist Ennahda. This agreement was broken by the political manoeuvres of the Islamists. The growing trend of fierce confrontation between President Essebsi and Prime Minister Youssef Chahed ended with the death of the President in July 2019 and the holding of the next elections.

The 2019 presidential-parliamentary elections in Tunisia took the form of a protest vote and were described as a “political earthquake” or “second revolution”. The newly elected president, Kais Saied, expressed this idea on 23 October 2019.

The new phase of Tunisia's development started after 2019 and “was not only marked by a transformation of the political space, but also raised new questions: how reasonable is it to interpret the events of 2019 as a »Revolution«? Why is there no end to the nationwide political protest in Tunisia, which political actors set the agenda for the country, who are the new political elites and what is their agenda? Why is Tunisia repeatedly raising the question of changing the form of government? The most important question is: will this North African country, under the weight of the economic turmoil exacerbated by the coronavirus epidemic, continue to move towards

¹³ The moderate Islamist movement Ennahda won the support of 41% of the active electorate, winning 89 out of 217 seats in the NCA. The Islamists organized a highly successful election campaign and propaganda in mosques. They won over “a quarter of the people” with sermons and charity events and promised the secular elite that they would not go beyond moderate Islam. Increasing its share in the NCA to 138 seats, Ennahda formed the main parliamentary coalition with two secular parties, the Congress for a Republic (also referred to as CPR, its French acronym) and the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (Ettakatol or FDTL) in an alliance called the Troika. This coalition arbitrarily distributed key state posts. For example, FDTL leader Mustafa Ben Jaafar became the president of the NCA, while Moncef Marzouki was elected interim president. At his inauguration at the Carthage Palace on 13 December 2012, the latter, dressed in the traditional Tunisian brown *burga*, stressed that Tunisia would develop an Arab-Muslim identity while remaining open to the world. In addition, in December 2011, Hamadi Jebali, Secretary General of the Ennahda Movement, was appointed Prime Minister. Moreover, an Islamists triumph in the NCA elections was not to be expected. Rachid Ghannouchi, the leader of Ennahda, who in February 2011 would have received only 1.6% of the vote in opinion polls, was far behind the left-wing Democratic Progressive Party leader Ahmed Najib Chebbi (8%), the army chief Rachid Ammar (4.4%) and the then acting prime minister Mohammed Ghannouchi (3.7%). Expectations on the eve of the Tunisian elections that the relatively weak Islamists would be able to enter parliament and submit to the rules of the game set by the secular opposition elite that replaced the autocratic regime have therefore proved wrong. Thus, although the Islamists were neither an inspiration nor an active participant in the 2011 uprising, they were nevertheless able to seize the moment to spread their wings and succeed in marginalizing left-wing parties and movements (such as the Democratic Progressive Party or the Democratic Modernist Pole, which was initiated by the Ettajdid movement), which appeared to be in the best position to consolidate and expand their influence in the context of the power elite reshuffle.

¹⁴ The literal meaning of the Arabic term (حركة نداء تونس) is “Call of Tunisia”, “Call for Tunisia”, or “Tunisia's Call”. It is considered as a big tent secularist political party in Tunisia.

democratisation or will it choose an alternative path?” (KASHINA, 138).

In Tunisia, the role of the armed forces in the political space is rather limited. This, and perhaps its relatively modest size (35,000), has certainly contributed to the army's fortunate refusal to participate in the struggle for power.

In Chapter 8 (*Egyptian protests 2019: harbingers of a new revolution?*), authors Shady Mansour and Hala Elhefnawy discuss the Egyptian protests of 2019. In that year, Egypt witnessed short-lived protests calling for the overthrow of President Al-Sisi. These events were seen by some as a new beginning that, even if suppressed, would sow the seeds of another revolution that could eventually end the current regime. Others argue that the Egyptian government has successfully managed the protests, not only through security measures but also through the implementation of development policies. By resorting to historical methodology, the authors have assessed both views and attempted to compare the 2011 and 2019 protests,¹⁵ recognizing the drivers and factors that led to the outbreak of the 2011 protests and assessing whether they are present in the 2019 protests. The researchers also sought to understand the implications of the 2019 protests in a regional context.

It is also worth noting that the Sisi government has sought new ways to engage young people to participate in several ministries linked to the Egyptian government through the “Presidential Leadership Programme”, which El Sisi launched in September 2015.

Chapter 9th, *Revolutionary Events in Mali, 2020-2021*, deals with Mali. On 18 August 2020, Malian army officers led by Colonel Assimi Goïta took power in the country and arrested President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta and several government officials. Keïta resigned the same day and dissolved the government. He was later allowed to leave the country and go to the United Arab Emirates. The coup, which followed 11 weeks of protests in Bamako, was welcomed by most demonstrators.¹⁶ However, on 24 May 2021, another coup took place, proving that the new military regime in power was still able to control current political trends. Meanwhile, the revolutionary instability that Mali is experiencing at the end of the second decade of the 21st century cannot be separated from the period of instability that began in the country in the 1990s and culminated in the destabilisation of 2011, which led to the events mentioned above.

Authors Andrey Korotayev and Alina Hohlova confirm that the events of 24 May

¹⁵ One of the main reasons why the protests in 2019 were remarkably different from 2011 revolution is the fact that by 2011, there was a widespread frustration among different sectors of the Egyptian society. At the time, they felt that their interests had been destabilized and that they had no prospect or hope of any change, which critically undermined the legitimacy of the regime. In addition, by 2011, Egyptians believed that the removal Mubarak regime would end all the hardships they had suffered. However, just the opposite happened as their circumstances deteriorated further. Thus, not only has economic growth stalled in the years following Mubarak's overthrow, but the security situation has also deteriorated with the rise of ISIS in Sinai and mainland Egypt. As a result, people have lost faith in using protests as the main instrument for improving economic and social conditions.

¹⁶ A state rife with coups and violent regime changes: the first Tuareg uprising of 1962–1964, which was almost a domestic political issue and may be classified as internal national-liberation movement; the second Tuareg uprising (1990–1996), which spread to northern Mali and Niger and was triggered by, among other factors, the drought of the 1970s; and the third Tuareg uprising, which took place just before the Arab Spring, in 2006–2009.



2021 can be considered a classic coup, as they were not accompanied by any perceptible mass mobilisation and one part of the elite simply replaced the other. However, in a broader context, it can be seen as part of the 2020-2021 Malian revolution. Some experts have already pointed out that the 2020 Malian revolution, unlike most urban revolutions of the 21st century, typically lacks democratic slogans. The Malian revolution advocated order, the establishment of control over territory and the building of a more just society without corruption. It has also been said that one of the key security considerations emphasised in the final phase of the National Reconstruction Conference was 'the establishment of a new military partnership with the military powers to better protect national sovereignty'.

The 10th chapter, *Sanctions and the Socio-Economic Roots of Iran's Domestic Instability (2010–2020)*, examines the situation in Iran between 2010 and 2020. As is well known, US sanctions have had serious impacts on Iran for the past forty years, during which time their pressure on the Iranian economy has been uneven. The most sensitive measures of economic pressure against Tehran were applied in 2010–2015 and 2018–2020, as they cut the country off from the international banking and insurance systems, restricted Tehran's access to foreign investments, advanced technologies, and international sea carriage services. Tehran's ability to sell oil on external markets and import gasoline has thus been limited. The adoption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, or “nuclear deal”) signed between Tehran and the international negotiating team in 2015 was welcomed by the Iranian population and a large part of the country's elite, as it lifted many of the nuclear-related sanctions previously imposed and gave Iran economic development aspirations. However, US President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the JCPOA in spring 2018 has once again changed the situation in Iran, raising significant concerns in the international community. In his well-structured article, Nikolay Kozhanov has confirmed that the stability of the Iranian regime is not only ensured by a strong repressive apparatus, but also by a willingness to correct its mistakes. Following the suppression of the revolutionary protest Green Movement after the 2009 elections, the Iranian authorities have tried to gradually eliminate the disturbing factors that led to the growth of discontent and have made certain socio-economic compromises.

In the 11th and last chapter, “*Why Has the Recent Wave of Revolutions in the MENA Region Missed Kuwait and Bahrain?*”, entitled, Elena Melkumyan clarifies the situation in Bahrain and compares it with Kuwait, as both are Arab monarchical states with high living standards and well-developed social support system. However, these two Gulf states were the scene of active mass revolutionary protests in 2011. Bahrain and Kuwait are the most politically advanced of the Arab monarchies. These two countries have many common features in their political structure: power is mainly in the hands of ruling families. Both countries were protectorates of Great Britain, and British influence became a factor that pushed for government reforms and enhanced the socio-economic development of these countries. In both countries, oil exploration began earlier than in other Gulf monarchies. Bahrain was the first to discover oil in 1932, while in Kuwait the

exploration of oil fields began in 1938.

The uprising in Bahrain was severely suppressed by the authorities. In Kuwait, the situation was different: the authorities adopted a compromise stance, which contributed significantly to ending the mass protests, and the conflict between the authorities and the opposition continued, as in previous years, in the parliament. So, the mass protest action did not drastically change the political situation in the two countries.

Finally, the authors have sought to provide the reader with a comprehensive comparative analysis of the different revolutionary waves that have taken place in the MENA region. The analysis has been discussed in several dimensions, firstly by presenting the historical background of each country, explaining the nature of the political regimes and the nature of the populations living there, focusing on the roots or main causes that led to the outbreak of revolutions in each country, highlighting the reasons that triggered the revolutions. There was, however, one main objective, common to all countries, namely, to get rid of the governments of those countries, which were clearly oppressing the population, whose demands they were unable to meet. That was the main reason for these revolutions, namely, to put an end once and for all to authoritarian and bureaucratic systems and to introduce more democratic, flexible and vibrant systems capable of meeting the needs of the population.

The volume is an excellent guide for those who want to get a clear and comprehensive picture of the revolutions in the MENA region, as well as detailed answers on why they originally broke out, what political systems were in place in these countries, and what the populations were like. The book is interesting and informative.