

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EVENTS IN ISLAMIC COUNTRIES (JANUARY-APRIL 2011): A VIEW FROM OUTSIDE

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*“May you live in interesting time”
Chinese curse*

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Introduction

In this paper, author will look into the problem of current events in Islamic countries of Northern Africa and Near East. The aim of the paper is not to name the reasons of the revolts, not to create hypothesis, but to clarify the basic data, see what reasons for rebellion mentioned in mass media don't look trustworthy.

In the beginning, the author will describe the situation in main countries, affected by revolts. Then, author will prove three stories told by mass media wrong and give essential facts for it. In the end, the author will give a list of benefits that Western countries can get from conflicts in Islamic countries. The latter information is given not as a hypothesis, but for further discussion.

As the author was using the study of mass media as the research method, the biggest amount of sources are articles and press releases from New York Times, CNN and EuroNews, dated from January to April 2011.

Current situation in the region

The current situation in Northern Africa and Near East leaves us without any doubts that the stability of the region is gone for a long time. The changes for better or worse are evident right now (in brackets will be named the latest changes for the beginning of April):

Morocco experienced massive uprisings, now the ruling elites are seeing the future in working together with former protesters (—The panel formed by King Mohammed to review Morocco's constitution has invited a youth-led protest movement to present its ideas in the course of consultations on democratic reform with political parties and trade unions^{li});

Algeria already had some riots and still has several secondary patterns of unrest, but the overall situation seems to be normalizing (—Some 80 percent of Algerian public employees were on strike Wednesday, with local government hardest hit, their union leader said amid widespread labor unrest in the country^{lii}, —Algeria's interior minister has threatened to fire members of a state-armed militia who are protesting government plans to dissolve their units^{liii}). The ‘loses’ of steam in Algeria is often explained by the failure to gain momentum, as in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya^{liv};

Egypt is ruled by military junta at the moment, Mubarak stepped down;

Yemen, Bahrain and Syria are all seeing the riots, uprisings and protests (Syria is granting citizenships to Kurds, Facebook with the group —Syrian Revolution 2011 is announcing the uprising in all cities of Syria, protests in Yemen continue). Yemen is moving slowly to the same situation as Egypt, Bahrain is pretty much stable after the intervention of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Syrian authorities were pushed to meet some needs of protesters, situation's development is still not clear;

Situation in Libya doesn't need any explanation. The intervention of Western allies, UNSC Resolution 1970, the declaration of European Council of 11 March are self-determining.

Whereas, the reasons and motives of revolts are clear – internal issues, problems in economical and social situations in the country, overall fatigue of the middle and lower class, which is shown by mass media; the external influence is often misinterpreted and omitted. Also, the reaction of third countries is interesting in every case. We will come back to these topics a bit further.

Three myths told by mass media

1. “Jasmine Revolution” in Tunisia

Pretty much all events in Northern Africa – in Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria are named as revolutions by mass media and Western government officials^{viii ix x}

Whereas, the events in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen are called as protests, riots.^{xi xii xiii} Nobody from NATO even paid attention to the intervention of Saudi Arabia and Qatar into Bahrain, even though it was a clear violation of UN charter.

Where this term —Jasmine revolutions is coming from? The answer from unknown source is that it is the name of CIA covert operation planned about 2 years ago.

What does actually the word ‘revolution’ mean?

According to the situation we have in the Near East, we can refer to the second definition of the ‘revolution’ from Webster dictionary:

Revolution is:

—2 b : a fundamental change in political organization; especially : the overthrow or renunciation of one government or ruler and the substitution of another by the governed

c: activity or movement designed to effect fundamental changes in the socioeconomic situation^{xiv}

Do we see that ‘fundamental change in political organization’ or ‘changes in the socioeconomic situation’? First change – the answer is no. In Egypt, Tunisia and Libya – three countries where the ruling elite has stepped down or in the process of it – the group that took over the power doesn't differ a lot from the previous. Egypt is in the hands of military junta who was in rule also during Mubarak's presidency. Fouad Mebazaa, who is in the head of Tunisia can't be called as a young leader, as he is even three years older than Ben Ali. The future of Libya is not clear, but there were already rumors about handing the power to one of Kaddafi's sons.^{xv} About second change – the socioeconomic changes – we will talk in next point.

The reasons of unrest were social and economic problems

New York Times and CNN call socioeconomic issues among main motives of the events in Northern Africa – particularly, in Tunisia and Libya. —Tunisia's economic progress spawned a myriad of socio-economic problems.^{xvi} —The Arab soul is broken by poverty, unemployment and general recession.^{xvii}

Let's look at some of the estimates of Libya and Tunisia before the infamous protests:

Tunisia by Christopher Hitchens (whose page is actually not available right now):

—In the 2006–7 World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report, it was ranked No. 1 in Africa for economic competitiveness, even, incidentally, outpacing three European states (Italy, Greece, and Portugal). Home ownership is 80 percent. Life expectancy, the highest on the continent, is 72. Less than 4 percent of the population is below the poverty line, and the alleviation of misery by a ‘solidarity fund’ has been adopted by the United Nations as a model program. Nine out of 10 households are connected to electricity and clean water. Tunisia is the first African state to

have been accepted as an associate member of the European Union. Its Code of Personal Status was the first in the Arab world to abolish polygamy, and the veil and the burka are never seen. More than 40 percent of the judges and lawyers are female. The combination of stylish females, excellent food, clean streets, smart-looking traffic cops, and cheap and efficient taxis made me feel I was in a place more upscale than many European recreational resorts and spas.^{xviii}

Libya by the estimates of Sergey Mitrofanov:

—GDP per capita of Libya – 14,192\$. For every family member state pays annually 1,000\$. Unemployment benefit is 730\$. Salary of a nurse-1,000\$. For every newborn baby is paid 7,000\$. Newlyweds get 64,000\$ to buy an apartment. At the opening of private business the start out sum of financial assistance is 20,000\$. Major taxes and levies are prohibited. Education and medicine are free. Education and training abroad are at state expense. Chain stores for large families are with symbolic prices for main food supplies.^{xix}

Everybody can see the photos of protests and so-called ‘_revolutions’, but not everybody can see that the people on these photos don’t look desperate or poor, they are mainly well dressed. World Mass Media call the —Jasmine revolution and the events in Syria as first Facebook revolution. It is obvious that a person with nothing to eat or sleep in will not be able to use Internet or even maintain a Facebook page.

The conclusion is that if there were serious reasons for events in Northern Africa and Near East, the poverty and social injustice were not among them.

2. The reasons of unrests are only domestic

This topic is not even discussed in main world mass media.

There are some interesting facts that could be hints for further understanding:

- Almost nobody noticed that in mostly Arabic-speaking countries the protesters were holding the slogans in English and German.

- In the infamous video about ‘_thousands leaving Libya’ to Tunisia,^{xx} we can see only men of middle ages, no women, no children. Once again, most of them don’t even look tired or hungry.

- The coup d’état were not expected. —Diplomats of Western countries and of Russian Federation ‘_overslept’ the change in ruling elites in Libya.^{xxi}

- There were facts when the US influence was seen during the protests in Egypt. The US was pushing for Omar Suleiman as the next President of Egypt. His candidature for presidency was warmly supported by both Israel and US administrations.

How this situation is beneficial for Western countries?

For the United States of America everything what is going on in Near East is of great interest. Here is the list of all the benefits that the US can get from the current situation:

a. Oil. Libyan rebels are already ready to sell oil.^{xxii} Libya is well-known for its oil, even if it produces only 2% of all world oil industry;

b. The price of oil. The conflicts in North Africa and Near East raise the prices of oil futures. The oil companies of the US are selling oil for bigger prices;

c. State-building in Syria and Egypt by the US will bring about the creation of military bases in the region;

d. There were rumors that Islamic countries were going to get rid of US dollar as currency and create their own common currency – dinar. This would have hit the US economy deeply;

e. The US is emphasizing the threat of ‘_Islamic factor’ in the region, thus keeping alive ‘_invisible enemy’ of America.

f. The benefit of sufficient peaceful time for Israel, a usual counterpart of the US;

g. Diversionary theory of war: the US public is distracted by unrest and army involvement in Libya from domestic issues, as economic crisis, unemployment;

h. Elections are coming soon. Barack Obama’s approval rating at the moment is 52% which is 2% lower than average President starting from Franklin Roosevelt. A small victorious war would be a great success for Obama’s chances for reelection.

The pattern seen starting the administration of George Bush-senior was that every time, during the first term of Presidency, exactly 1.5 years before following elections, the USA starts a conflict:

I. George H.W. Bush – April 1991 – Humanitarian operation in Iraq – No-fly zones

II. Bill Clinton – April 1995 – Bombing in Bosnia and Herzegovina – A quick victory in the end of the year

III. George W. Bush – March 2003 – War on Iraq IV.

Barack Obama – April 2011 – Conflict in Libya

Pretty much the same benefits we can see for Europe. Sarkozy is losing a lot of electorate because of wrong decisions. He was a friend of Mubarak, once called Ben Ali a role model for Islamic leaders, Kaddafi announced himself as a sponsor of Sarkozy's presidential campaign. All of these factors could have damaged his chances.

It is still not clear why China and Russia remained neutral during the voting for UNSC resolution No 1970 and whether there are any benefits for them.

Conclusion

The author of this essay was not putting as an aim to blame or suspect any of international actors in starting or causing the revolts in Islamic countries.

The only aim of the paper was to show some of the true facts about the current progress in the situation.

The fact that the revolts started in quite well-off countries and in many regions out of sudden and at the same time pushes us to think. There are many other countries where it is even worse to live, but most of them either don't revolt or their revolts stay unnoticed like the intervention of Saudi-Qatar forces in Bahrain.

The sad fact is the double standards and lack of transparency of modern mass media.

It is hard to see clear the real reasons of the revolts at the moment, as it is still in progress. But it is clear that it is a win-win situation for big players and lose-lose situation for the population of revolting countries.

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ОБЩАЯ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА ПОЛИТИКО-РЕЛИГИОЗНЫХ ДВИЖЕНИЙ