

The Future of Arab Revolts

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[Samir Amin's ZSpace Page](#)

The way Egyptian scholar and researcher Samir Amin sees it, nothing will be the same as before in the Arab world: protest movements will challenge both the internal social order of Arab countries and their places in the regional and global political chessboard.

Hassane Zerrouky: How do you see what's happening in the Arab world six months after the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia and that of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt?

Samir Amin: Nothing will be the same as before -- that is certain. That is because the uprising isn't only about toppling the reigning dictators, but it is an enduring protest movement challenging, at the same time, both various dimensions of the internal social order, especially glaring inequalities in income distribution, and the international order, the place of Arab countries in the global economic order -- in other words seeking an end to their submission to neoliberalism and the US and NATO diktats in the global political order. This movement, whose ambition is also to democratize society, demanding social justice and a new national and (I'd say) anti-imperialist social and economic policy, will therefore last for years -- though to be sure it will have its ups and downs, advances and retreats -- for it won't be able to find its own solution in a matter of weeks or even months.

Are you surprised that the uprisings have been carried out, nay driven, by new players, particularly young people?

No. It's very positive. New generations have been really politicized again. In Egypt, for example, the youth are very politicized. The youth have their own way, outside the traditional opposition parties which, in Egypt, are the parties belonging to the Marxist tradition. But their political awakening is not against those parties. I can tell you that, right now, there is deep, spontaneous sympathy between young people and the parties of the radical Marxist Left, that is to say the parties that come from the socialist and communist tradition.

You say that this is an enduring movement, but, if we take Egypt for example, isn't there a risk that the revolution will be hijacked by conservative forces?

There are certainly many risks, including, in the short to medium term, the risk that a reactionary, Islamist alternative may prevail. That, by the way, is the US plan, unfortunately backed by Europe as well, at least as far as Egypt is concerned. The plan is to establish an alliance between the reactionary Egyptian forces and the Muslim Brotherhood; that is moreover an alliance supported by Washington's allies in the region, led by Saudi Arabia -- supported by even Israel. So, will it succeed? It is possible that it will work in the medium term, but it won't provide any solution to the Egyptian people's problems. So, the protest movement, the struggle, will continue and magnify. In addition, it should be noted that the Muslim Brothers themselves are in crisis. . . .

This question is related to what you just said: what do you think of what's happening in Syria, first of all, where the regime of Bashar al-Assad has just authorized a multi-party system, hoping to restore calm?

The Syrian situation is extremely complex. The Ba'ath regime, which enjoyed legitimacy for a long time, is no longer what it was at all: it has become more and more autocratic, increasingly a police state, and, at the same time, in substance, it has made a gigantic concession to economic liberalism. I don't believe that this regime can transform itself into a democratic regime. Today, it is being forced to make concessions, which is a good thing, since a foreign intervention like what is done in Libya -- fortunately that is not possible in the case of Syria -- would be yet another catastrophe. Moreover, compared with Egypt and Tunisia, the weakness in Syria is that protest movements are very much a mixed bag. Many -- though I don't want to generalize -- don't even have any political program other than protest, making no link between the regime's political dictatorship and its liberal economic policy choices.

Do you not fear an implosion in Syria given the risk of sectarian conflict between Sunnis on one hand and Alawis, Druzes, and Christians on the other hand?

There is that risk. Causing the states in the Middle East to implode is a US and Israeli plan. But that won't be easy because the national sentiment is a powerful factor in Syria, which exists in all the movements challenging the regime today, despite ongoing disagreements among them.

What about Yemen, a US ally?

The United States supports the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh. The reason is its fear of the Yemeni people, especially people in southern Yemen. Southern Yemen once had a progressive Marxist regime, enjoying legitimacy and powerful popular support, forces for which are now actively involved in the social protest movement. Washington and its allies therefore fear a breakup of the country leading to the reestablishment of a progressive regime in South Yemen. That is why the Yemeni regime, with the American approval, is letting Al Qaeda -- which is a tool extensively manipulated by the United States -- occupy cities in the south, wishing to strike fear in the hearts of the progressive social strata, in order to make them accept Saleh's hold on power.

Regarding the situation in Libya, where lies the risk of implosion?

The situation is tragic, very different from those of Egypt and Tunisia. Neither side in Libya is better than the other. The president of the Transitional National Council (TNC) -- Mustafa Abdel-Jalil -- is a very curious democrat: he was the judge who sentenced Bulgarian nurses to death before being promoted to the Minister of Justice by Gaddafi. The TNC is a bloc of ultra-reactionary forces. As for the United States, it's not oil that they are after -- they already have that. Their goal is to put Libya under their tutelage in order to establish Africom (US military command for Africa) -- which is now based in Stuttgart in Germany, since the African countries, no matter what you think about them, have rejected their establishment in Africa -- in the country. Concerning the risk of partition of Libya into two or three states, Washington may very well opt for the Iraqi formula, that is to say, the maintenance of formal unity under the Western military protection.

The original interview ["Samir Amin «C'est un mouvement qui va durer des mois et des années»"](#) was published in L'Humanité on 1 August 2011. Translation by [Yoshie Furuhashi](#).