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THE ONGOING CHALLENGE OF PRESSURE GROUPS IN THE 2011 EVENTS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

The young Tunisian, El Boazeezi who triggered the string of events in the Middle East was humiliated on 17 December 2010, when he was slapped in the face by a female police officer. It all started like this. El Boazeezi was selling groceries from his carriage. The municipality broke the carriage to prevent him from selling in the streets. He went to the Municipality to complain. In return a female police officer slapped him. He felt humiliated. As he was already fed up with his precarious living conditions he set himself on fire. That was the stroke which broke the camel's back. We may metaphorically say the grass was already dry and the fire extended quickly. The circumstances were ripe for reforms. It is the old story of prophets who look for the right background for their preaches. The middle class in Tunisia were highly dissatisfied. They had many things to complain about: first the general poverty, then the corruption of the government who deprived the people from their wealth. There are several other reasons for the people to complain about and one was the lack of freedom to practice their religion. Every citizen had to ask for and get prior permission where to pray, in which mosque. Girls were not allowed to wear the Islamic clothes. The middle class was deprived of basic necessities to make their living. After three weeks in hospital when El Boazeezi died by the beginning of 2011 he paved the way for the revolt that was soon to erupt. The pressure groups in Tunisia started to express their discontent immediately. They

were very thoughtful and expressed their point of view politely and peacefully. The government was tough and used sharp shooters killing dozens of civilians.¹

A new role of the pressure groups in the Arab World and the weakness of the governmental institutions

The developments that took place subsequently in Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan were not counted for by any of the great Administration Departments in the region or any states in the Middle East. The recurrence of the Tunisian experience in the Middle East took everybody by surprise. The events of January 2011 in Tunisia shook off the world as nobody expected such developments. The same happened with Egypt in January 2011. The process is not settled yet or still going on in Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain. In Jordan the demonstrations had started before Tunisia and continued time after. The demonstrators in Jordan asked for the change of the Prime Minister. The magnitude of the reaction in the countries which witnessed ongoing demonstrations and demands came as a surprise too.

Here are the main aspects of the developments in the Middle East in general (these are notes):

- The governments did not expect these developments. They were completely unaware of what was going on. As a matter of fact they were in complete darkness.
- Since the number of casualties was very high the demands of the pressure groups amplified. For example at the onset of the events in Egypt, the number of victims was over a hundred persons. The number of injured persons exceeded two thousands. However, the number of victims may be higher because people are afraid to report the victims to the authorities. In Tunisia, the number of those killed goes beyond 200 people. In Libya in the first four days, the number of victims surpassed 200.
- The participants were from the capital city and other cities in Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan. In Egypt the demonstrations took place in Ismalieh, Suez, Alexandria, Bani Swayef and other cities.
- The participants were ordinary people. They were part of the pressure groups but not members of parties. History will have to record a new phenomenon that has occurred in the Arab World, namely the role played by Pressure Groups and not parties or intellectuals holding various prominent positions. Moreover, the role played by pressure groups in the Arab World has got tradition. For instance in Jordan pressure groups have had a significant role in time. Yet pressure groups in Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen and Tunisia have got no impact in their historic development.

¹ The researcher used the Archives of *Addustour Paper*. *Addustour* is a daily political independent newspaper and is one of the important publications in Jordan.

The Arab countries, which have witnessed the so-called Arab Spring demonstrations, were traditional allies of the Western states and their leaders, the President of Egypt, of Tunisia, Yemen and the King of Bahrain have been their friends in the region. Only Syria was an exception. Most of these leaders were accused of corruption and inefficiency in running the business of their countries. The 2011 events proved that the systems in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia were aloof from their people and unaware of their hatred. The governments resorted to gangs to kill their civilians. Because of this, the number of victims was high and the people's demands spiraled up. In Egypt and Tunisia the police attacked the people. The government was accused of using sharpshooters to kill its people. Gangsters and the secret police were accused of involvement and that they wore civilian clothes and attacked the people too. It first happened in Tunisia, then in Egypt and later in Libya. The Libyan government, according to statements made by Libyan citizens opted for the services of foreign mercenaries.

That was not the case with Jordan. On 18 February 2011, the people of Amman complained of having been at the hands of gangs, who attacked them after the Friday prayers at El Hussein Mosque in down town while the Police did not intervene. The government reacted promptly to remedy the situation. The government disposed the making up of a Committee entrusted with the task of investigating the circumstances of the case. During such a demonstration, the police forces of Jordan handed out soft drinks and bottled water to demonstrators.

In one of the Egyptian cities people got hold of 63 persons who were vandalizing and stealing. They handed them over to the Army. Three of them were carrying ID Cards showing they belonged to the Secret Police. There was fabrication of information by the government. The Centre of the National Democratic Party (The party of the President) in Cairo was not set on fire by the people, because it actually burnt from the inside and the upper floors. In Tunisia people spotted foreign cars with temporary plates attacking people. In Egypt, they people claimed that they saw cars with diplomatic plates doing the same thing. In Tunisia people claimed Israeli sharpshooters placed on top of buildings shot at the leaders of the demonstrations and killed them. I doubt that they were Israelis but rather European mercenaries. All demonstrators were acting peacefully. The agitation and brutal killings came from the government both in Egypt and Libya. The same happened in Yemen, Bahrain and Tunisia. The reaction of the governments of Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain Yemen and Libya was by far too tough and in return the reaction of the people was not. The governments of Egypt and Tunisia lost the battles and the leaders of these two states left their countries in less than a month. I think the situation in the countries where violence occurred is difficult because the governments made use of immoral methods to hurt the people. They assigned the secret police to attack civilians. Hundreds were killed. As a result the pressure groups demands amplified and gave way to the ultimate demand for the removal of the ruler. The same happened in Egypt. Egypt was very similar to Tunisia. The middle class was still frustrated.

By the end of the year-the demonstrators were the poorest class. They were not part of the class that took part in the events of January 2011.²

The leaders have now great confidence and they have lost the motivation for reform. They are confident they are protected by Western powers like the USA, which no longer calls for reforms in Egypt, Tunisia or elsewhere in the Arab world. People are fed up with these double standards. For example on Wednesday the 16 February, 2011 President Obama talked about human rights in Iran and ignoring totally other states³

The methods practiced by pressure groups and the methods practiced by governments

The middle class started the protests peacefully and continued this way even when they raised further demands once the government relied on gangs to crack down the demonstrations. Sharpshooters were commissioned to kill civilians. This immoral action was carried out by the Egyptian, Bahraini, Libyan and Tunisian government as well. In Egypt alone there were over 365 victims in the first few weeks. The number of victims in Tunisia is a bit less. Until 21 February 2011, the number of the victims in Yemen is high and several wounded. In Libya the number of victims went beyond hundreds according to people interviewed on Al Arabia TV. Some claim there are 35,000 mercenaries, mainly from Chad in Libya. There were rockets fired in the Eastern part of the country. A Commando Brigade joined the demonstrators. Half of the country collapsed. On 21 February 2011, Gadhafi's son appeared on TV in a very unconvincing way. He was threatening the people. But the people were no longer afraid. An Arab proverb says that a drowning person is not afraid of getting wet. In Bahrain, the demonstrators were exposed to the guns of the Police. One person was killed. During the funeral another one was killed. Consequently, the king addressed the people to absorb their anger. Nevertheless after his speech another three people were killed by the Police. As a result the demonstrators' demands escalated and they requested the instauration of a constitutional monarchy. They demanded an elected Prime Minister and the cessation of discrimination⁴

The circumstances in Bahrain were different from Egypt and Tunisia. In Bahrain the matter was not corruption or poverty. It was freedom. The Shiites thought the government was giving nationality to Sunni foreigners to balance or increase the Sunni presence in Bahrain. They claimed the population's census increased in 2008. The events continued to spiral on as of 17 February 2011. There were more victims. In Libya, the situation deteriorated after demonstrators demanded

² *Addustour Archives* and on 29 January 2011 a journalist talked to BBC.

³ *Addustour*, 17 February 2011.

⁴ *Addustour*, 22 February 2011.

the removal of the president in front of his supporters. The events were escalating every minute everywhere in the Arab World. Most of the countries witnessing demonstrations of pressure groups are friend of the USA. The people in Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Tunisia hated their rulers, and accused them for being the puppets of the Western regimes who humiliated them for the last 20 years after the collapse of USSR and the occupation of Iraq.⁵

The new role has been assumed by the pressure groups in the Arab World due to the weakness of the official institutions. This was a recurrent experience in the Middle East. In April 1989 Jordan did not expect the uprising either. The uprising in Tunisia in January, 2011 was very strong. No one expected it. The same was the case with Egypt in 1977 too. The demands of the demonstrators in Jordan asked to change the Prime Minister. The amplitude of the reaction in Jordan was unexpected too.

Some facts may be learned from the 2011 events.

- The governments did not foresee the events. It happened before in the history when the revolution took place in Iraq in 1958. Iraq was the Centre of the Baghdad Pact. Nevertheless the British and the Iraqi government had no idea of what was going to happen. They were in complete darkness although they had the strongest intelligence Departments in London, Washington, Ankara, Tehran and other capitals.
- The number of the victims was high in Cairo and other cities in Egypt during the first days of demonstrations (there have been no victims in Jordan however).
- There were more than hundreds of victims in Cairo alone. The number of injured persons exceeded two thousands. The number of the victims could be more because people were afraid and to report to the authorities the number of casualties. In Tunisia the number of the victims went beyond 200.
- In Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan the demonstrators were from the capital as well as other cities from around the country. In Egypt the demonstrations occurred in Ismailia, Suez, Alexandria, Bani Swayef and other cities. In Libya the demonstrations started in the Eastern part and extended to the capital.
- The participants were ordinary people. They represented pressure groups not parties. History records a new phenomenon in the Arab World, namely the role of pressure groups. The parties or intellectuals holding prominent positions had no impact. In the fifties the changes in the Arab world were carried out by officers backed by Western powers. This was the case of Egypt in 1952 and Syria after the 1948 war with Israel. Later on the officers who did the revolution in Iraq on 14 July 1958, Yemen in 1961 and Iraq in 1963 were backed by Egypt.
- The role of pressure groups in Jordan has been obvious in its history whereby the role of the pressure groups in Egypt and Tunisia is a novelty.

⁵ *Addustour Archives...*

- The states which have witnessed the latest demonstrations as well as their leaders, like the President of Egypt, Tunisia are allies of the Western states. In Jordan the demonstrators criticized the prime ministers not the king of course. In the early days of 2011, the Prime Minister of Jordan was accused of corruption and inefficiency in running the country's affairs.
- All the demonstrations were peaceful. No riots or agitation occurred. The agitating and brutal killings came from the government sides in Egypt and Tunisia.

Post Tunisian Era

In Egypt pressure groups went out to react against humiliation and the poor living conditions, created by the class of fabulously wealthy businessmen. For instance, Mubarak's wealth, the Egyptian President, was estimated at \$75 billion whereas President Qadafi's wealth was estimated at 1500 billion. The further development of events in Egypt is the outcome of their leaders' conduct.

On 19 January 2011, the Egyptian President changed the government and promised to go ahead with reforms. Nevertheless, people kept on expressing their haltered towards the regime and the ruling party. In the absence of security forces, the Army scattered in cities. On 30 January 2011, Mubarak appointed a new Vice President, Omar Suleiman. The Egyptians accused Omar Suleiman of being a CIA agent and for having facilitated the American invasion of Iraq. He was also accused of having assisted the Americans in interrogating the prisoners kidnapped by the CIA and the American Forces from Italy and Afghanistan with the purpose of establishing a relation between Saddam Hussein of Iraq and El Qaeda. Consequently, Mubarak appointed Ahmed Shafeeq as Prime Minister. He had been a pilot and Minister of Aviation for years. In December 2010 *The Wall Street Journal* mentioned Ahmed Shafeeq as the one to replace Mubarak. Both Omar Suleiman and Ahmed Shafeeq were abhorred by the people. As such Omar Suleiman disappeared after the departure of President Mubarak.

On 31 January 2011, on the sixth day of the crisis in Egypt the number of the victims rose to 160. Some leaders in the Arab World like the King of Saudi Arabia and the Prince of Kuwait expressed their support of Mubarak. The Police returned to the streets of Egypt. Mubarak ordered the resignation of the Minister of Interior. On 1 February, Mubarak declared he would not candidate for the Presidency in September. As a result, there was a call for one million demonstrators in Egypt. Meanwhile in Syria President Assad declared Syria was away from this political instability and opened the gates for foreign banks and private universities. On 2 February and 3 February 2011, the ninth day of the uprising in Egypt. Riding on horses and camels the secret police attacked the demonstrators. The demonstrators had declared that Friday would be the day of Mubarak's departure. The famous

Egyptian religious Sheik of Qatar's Al Jazeera, Yousef Gharthawi supported the departure of Mubarak. In the meantime, in Yemen the President declared that he would not nominate himself for presidency again. However, this declaration did not appease the people as it came too late. On 20 February 2011, he declared he would allocate 60,000 jobs to the youth. But the people did not believe or trust their leaders any more.

On 3 February and 4 February 2011, the heart of Egypt was burning. Demonstrators in Alexandria demanded the hanging (death sentence) of Mubarak. 149 UN officials left Egypt for Cyprus to avoid the instability. The demonstrators caught 120 persons from the secret police and members of the National Party who dressed in civilian clothes attacked the demonstrators. The situation was getting chaotic. Foreigners were not welcomed anymore. People did not trust foreigners any longer and a foreigner was killed. The people handed the suspected foreigners over to the Police. On Friday 5 February 2011, the people call this day: The Friday of Departure. Two millions gathered in Cairo, Alexandria and other cities of Egypt. Just a few supporters of Mubarak gathered. Different entities exerted pressure on Mubarak to leave or delegate his power. A new committee emerged. This committee comprised of wise people from several sides demanded Mubarak to delegate his power to his deputy. Mubarak refused to leave claiming he did not want to put the country in chaos.

On 6 February 2011, the press declared the gas line in Al Areesh East of Egypt was destroyed. This line supplied gas to Israel, Jordan, and Syria. In Aqaba, Jordan two units out of five work on gas. This station in Aqaba provides Jordan with 30% of the needed gas in winter and 25% in summer. According to Jordan Resources Department Jordan imported 230,000 cubic meters daily. According to foreign sources Israel gets 60 billion every year whereas Jordan gets 8.5. In the same day, it was called the Day of Martyrs in Egypt and that week was the week of steadiness. In this day, in spite of the heavy rain a large number of people, although less than before streamed to Tahreer Square, Abdil El Muniem Riadh and some other streets hosting the governmental departments.

In Egypt people were angry because Israel buys the unit of gas for 8 cents, which is much less than the regular price of about 2 \$. A few years back the people went to the court and got the court decision not to export gas to Israel by this price but later on they lost the battle at the Administrative Court level.

The change of the regime in Tunisia and Egypt was followed by the change in Libya and Yemen. In Jordan the king was quicker than the government in containing the escalation of events and prevented the situation from getting worse. He distributed food packages to the needy families and prepared three roving hospitals to remote areas where Bedouins live such as Maan district, the North and Middle Desert areas. The King increased the salaries of the army, public employees and pensions by 20 JD (30 \$). The King visited two poor villages in remote areas of Jordan and furnished the houses of these two villages with furniture. The

Queen promotes actively educational workshops. Moreover the king appointed a new Prime Minister and urged him to take special care of the youth. The Prime Minister pledged to combat corruption. The King visited more remote villages in the Eastern desert and assisted the poor people in those areas with housing and medical treatment. The Queen frequently meets women from underprivileged quarters in Amman.

The real problem is poverty and the corruption. In Jordan people rose up to protest against the high prices. On Sunday 16 January 2011, the government declared a price cut of yoghurt, sugar and imported meat. But the people are reluctant to acknowledge this measure and claim the prices were the same. On 22 January 2011, the King declared he would raise salaries with 20 JD (\$28).⁶ Before the collapse of the Tunisian government, the Jordanian government reduced the prices of fuel, which had been increased two weeks earlier. Nevertheless, the people started to demonstrate against the government and demanded the departure of the Prime Minister. There were demonstrations in Amman and outside the capital in Jordan. The demonstrators asked for changes in the legislative system like the changing of the election law and for reforms. The real problem in Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen has been the problem of the middle class which has been affected by impoverishment and unemployment. At the same time there is a ruling business class which has no stomach for reforms. Poverty along with corruption, which reached its peak in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya at presidential while in Jordan at ministerial level, were among the factors that led to the uprisings. In Bahrain the lack of freedom and discrimination motivated pressure groups to stand up.

Společné grupy nacisku a wydarzenia na Bliskim Wschodzie w 2011 r.

Wydarzenia na Bliskim Wschodzie w 2011 r. nie miały precedensu w historii świata arabskiego. Zmiany polityczne, które nastąpiły w następstwie tych wydarzeń w takich krajach, jak Egipt, Tunezja, Jemen, Syria czy Algieria, zostały bowiem wymuszone oddolnie przez niezorganizowane masy społeczne, a nie – jak do tej pory – przez partie polityczne. Społeczeństwa odegrały rolę bezpośrednich grup nacisku na elity władzy. W odróżnieniu od partii politycznych społeczne grupy nacisku nie zamierzały przejąć władzy; nie miały kadry przywódczej ani etatowych pracowników. Nie otrzymywały też żadnego wsparcia finansowego z zagranicy. Presja na władze ze strony społeczeństwa okazała się bardziej skuteczna w przeprowadzeniu reform niż działalność partii politycznych. Społeczne grupy nacisku są ciągle aktywne w państwach arabskich, a problemy społeczne, będące źródłem ich aktywności, są nadal nierozwiązane.

słowa kluczowe: społeczne grupy nacisku, partie polityczne, Arabska Wiosna

⁶ *Addustour*.