

Middle East Dialogue...Glorious Past, Uncertain Future

THE “ARAB SPRING”, DEMOCRACY AND RELIGIOSITY: IS TUNISIA AN EXCEPTION?

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[The Economist](#) in an article titled “A light unto the Arab nations” and published on Oct 25th 2014 stated “THE hope that popular protests against Arab dictators in 2011 would bring justice and democracy has given way to despair, chaos and unimaginable bloodletting. Yet the spirit of the Arab spring survives in the country where it all started: Tunisia.” To a certain extent this statement is correct when we survey the negative outcome of this upheaval or the so called “Arab Spring” in Yemen, Syria and the neighboring Libya.

In Yemen, the constitution is not yet drafted, the population is starving and sectarian conflicts worsened. As of January 7, 2015 Shi'ite Muslim Houthi militia seized Sanaa, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has increased its attacks all over the country.

In Syria, Bashar Al-Assad is still in power amid a very impoverished and divided country between Shi'ites, Alawites, Sunnis, Christians, Arabs and Kurds. In Libya, the extremists' splinter group from Al Qaeda, “Daesh” which is running the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq, is pushing the country into chaos and endangering the democratic process and the political stability, not only in Libya but also in North Africa.

In contrast, Tunisia just ended two successful democratic elections, the legislative and the presidential. The seculars in Tunisia secured a very healthy majority in the legislative and the presidential elections. This overwhelming democratic success ousted the interim President, the interim government and the parliament which were almost entirely dominated by the “Nahdha Party,” a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia.

For this presentation, Tunisia's exceptionalism and its viability will be examined.