Issue Indivisibility as an Explanatory Model for the Arab Spring

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Abstract

This thesis examines the Arab Awakening in four countries—Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria—and argues that Ron Hassner’s model of issue indivisibility (2009) rather than James Fearon’s model of the commitment problem (2004) provides the best explanation for these uprisings. In each case, the presidency and control of the nation is best described as a super-valuable good, which was considered to be essentially indivisible by state and non-state actors. The presidential incumbents rejected the public’s demands for their resignation and democratic transition and sanctioned military violence to maintain the status quo. The public, maintaining their resolve to oust their president from office, rejected power sharing, fearing the deposed leaders would renege on any negotiated agreement in the future (Fearon, 2004). The second contribution of this thesis, albeit not a new discovery, is that the survival of these dictators was critically dependent on military support. In Tunisia and Egypt, the military’s shift of support to the protestors resulted in the sudden fall of Ben Ali and Mubarak from power. In Libya, sanctioned intervention by a UN military coalition resulted in Gaddafi’s elimination, whereas the Syrian military’s support of the regime ensures the continuation of Assad’s presidency. The third contribution of this thesis is that the Assad regime’s use of recombinant authoritarianism—the adaption of its policies following events in its neighbouring Arab countries—has strengthened its prospects for survival.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................................... ii

Table of Contents .......................................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgements......................................................................................................................... v

1. **Introduction** ................................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 A Brief Background of the Arab Spring .................................................................................... 1
   1.2 The Objective and Scope ........................................................................................................... 1
   1.3 The Central Insights .................................................................................................................. 2
   1.4 Issue Indivisibility as an Explanation for the Arab Spring ....................................................... 5
   1.5 The Other Explanation for the Arab Spring—Commitment Problem ...................................... 6
   1.6 The Rejected Models—Symbolic Politics and Predatory Elite .............................................. 7
   1.7 The Argument for Issue Indivisibility ....................................................................................... 9

2. **Tunisia and the Arab Awakening** ................................................................................................. 12
   2.1 Tunisia, the Epicentre of the Arab Spring .............................................................................. 12
   2.2 Ben Ali as an Indivisible Symbol of Corrupt Government ................................................... 13
   2.3 The Zero-Sum Nature of the Tunisian Presidency ................................................................. 15
   2.4 Ben Ali’s Flight Response ....................................................................................................... 18

3. **Egypt** .......................................................................................................................................... 20
   3.1 Mubarak’s Loss of Legitimacy ............................................................................................... 20
   3.2 Tahrir Square and the Facebook Effect ................................................................................... 22
   3.3 Can’t Take the Money and Run ............................................................................................. 25

4. **Libya** .......................................................................................................................................... 27
   4.1 Muammar Gaddafi, the Brotherly Guide of the Revolution ................................................... 27
   4.2 The Seeds of Discontent .......................................................................................................... 29
   4.3 Issue Indivisibility ................................................................................................................... 30
   4.4 Gaddafi’s Fight Response ....................................................................................................... 33
   4.5 The UNSC Resolution 1973 .................................................................................................. 34
   4.6 The Walking Dead Man Emerges .......................................................................................... 35

5. **Syria** .......................................................................................................................................... 37
   5.1 Emergency Rule as Status Quo in Syria .................................................................................. 37
   5.2 Military Might Triumphs All ................................................................................................... 39
   5.3 Recombinant Authoritarianism and Political Survival ........................................................... 41
   5.4 Assad’s Cat-and-Mouse Game of Deceit ................................................................................ 43
   5.5 The Fight to the Death, not Political Transition .................................................................... 45

6. **Conclusion** .................................................................................................................................. 47
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This thesis is a tribute to the heroes that surround us. Firstly, it honours the hundreds of thousands of Arab citizens who summoned the courage, after living for decades under tyranny, to fight for democracy, justice and dignity, and those who so bravely gave their lives for this most noble of causes: the struggle for freedom.

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1. Introduction

1.1 A Brief Background of the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring, with its attendant hope for democracy, caught the hearts and imaginations of many throughout the Arab world. Its dramatic start occurred on December 17, 2010, with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouzizi in Tunisia and the sudden fall of President Ali from power less than a month later, on January 15, 2011. As Tunisian-style mass protests spread across the Middle East, Egypt’s incumbent president, Hosni Mubarak, was the next Arab leader to be forced from office on February 11, 2011. Libya’s tyrannical leader, Muammar Gaddafi, continued his bold and defiant rhetoric until he was pushed from his presidential throne. As his regime collapsed Gaddafi transformed into a walking dead man as he fled to his hometown, where he was captured and abruptly executed on October 20, 2011. The collapse of these presidential regimes coupled with the unrest in other Arab nations in the region caused many to speculate that the Arab world was on the verge of an unstoppable transition to democracy. However, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad’s sustained hold on power clearly defies this prediction. Assad maintains his iron grip over the Syrian government through the use of military-driven violence directed against his own people.

1.2 The Objective and Scope

The objective of this paper is to offer a detailed explanation for the actions of Arab leaders and the public during the Arab Spring. This thesis will focus on four Arab countries, all ruled by a presidential-style government, that experienced the Arab Awakening. The countries under consideration are Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria with the exclusion of Yemen and Algeria.¹

¹ The scope of this thesis is limited to only four case studies. Although Yemen qualifies as the fifth presidential regime in the Arab region, it is excluded from the analysis. Yemen’s president Ali Abdullah Salih initially used the security forces to quash protests but was ultimately unsuccessful in his efforts. As a consequence of protests, “sits-ins, negotiations and international pressure” that began in January 2011, Salih eventually agreed to national
The scope of this investigation has been further narrowed to exclude the eight monarchies of the Arab world: Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia (Barany, 2012). The rationale for this decision is that these countries, with the exception of Bahrain, remained relatively resilient when compared to the aforementioned Arab presidential regimes (Ibid., 2012). The relative stability of the oil-rich monarchies of the Arab peninsula, namely Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman and Qatar, was attributed in part to their large oil and gas reserves and, therefore, their ability to “buy” peace (Barany, 2012). In contrast, the oil-poor Arab monarchies of Jordan and Morocco have less revenue at their disposal and thus face the king’s dilemma (Huntington, 1968). And yet, these monarchies were able to withstand the uprisings owing to the fact that they enjoy a higher degree of legitimacy and religious authority than their presidential counterparts in the neighbouring countries (Barany, 2012). Therefore, this paper will focus on only four Arab presidential states.

1.3 The Central Insights

The principal argument of this thesis is that, in each of the four case studies presented, the presidency and its control of the nation is best described as a super-valuable good, which was considered to be essentially indivisible by state and non-state actors (Hassner, 2009). In each case, the president and anti-government actors did not enter into negotiations for a power-sharing agreement. The Arab Spring is particularly telling of each leader’s rigid thinking and approach to
governing; each president rejected Arab Spring protestors’ demands for democracy and self-
determination and used all available resources to overpower the protestors. In each case, the
public was not deterred by the military or security forces. The citizens’ goal was to oust the
president and the regime’s political elite from office, since the public believed this was the only
viable way of achieving real and lasting political change.

I will argue that Fearon’s commitment problem does not provide a satisfactory explanation
for the power struggle in the Arab Spring states, as the extremely polarized views of leadership
held by these state and non-state actors prevented the negotiation of a power-sharing agreement.
Decades of dictatorship created opaque institutions that privileged the political elite, giving
presidential regimes the advantage over the opposition and rebel groups. The public rejected the
idea of a power-sharing agreement with the presidential incumbent, since they feared that the
incumbent would use his preserved power advantage to renege on an agreement and attempt a
future leadership challenge. Therefore, the control of the state became an indivisible good that
these actors fought to control exclusively. In addition, the elite-predation model and the model of
symbolic politics are rejected as possible explanations for the Arab Spring conflicts as they do
not even remotely apply.

The second important contribution of this thesis, albeit not a new discovery, is that the
survival of these dictators was critically dependent on whether or not the military supported the
regime. In Tunisia, General Ammar’s decision to shift his support to the protestors resulted in the
sudden fall of President Ben Ali from power. In Egypt, the military’s decision to not fire on
protestors but rather protect them from internal security police critically determined Mubarak’s
fall from power. In Libya, sanctioned international intervention by a coalition of UN forces
assisted rebel forces in their mission to eliminate Gaddafi. In contrast, Syria’s military elite continues to support the regime, and as a result Assad still holds his presidential seat of power.

The third contribution of this paper is that not only does the Assad regime (in its fight to suppress the popular uprisings in Syria) demonstrate recombinant authoritarianism in action, but its allies also use it in an effort to support the regime and protect their own government’s interests in Syria and the region. I will argue that the Syrian government had the “recombinant” ability to learn and adapt its policies following events in the neighbouring Arab countries, which strengthened its prospects for survival. The Syrian case also demonstrated that the country’s allies, namely Russia and China, demonstrated recombinant authoritarianism through their strategic shift in voting patterns on United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. The issue under UNSC consideration pertained, first, to intervention in Libya and, second, in Syria by a coalition of UN forces. Russia and China, as permanent members of the UNSC, voted in abstention in the Libya UNSC resolution, but after witnessing the fall of the Gaddafi regime vetoed a Syrian resolution that protected the Assad government and their own interests.

This analysis will proceed as follows: first, I will define the models of issue indivisibility and the commitment problem, and then I will present an argument for the potential of issue indivisibility to explain the contestation of the Arab Spring presidencies. In the following four chapters, I will examine each individual country under consideration. I will then trace the events and actions of the political elite and opposition groups involved in each Arab Spring state to assess whether or not the issue indivisibility framework better differentiates the outcomes in these four dictatorships. In chapter 6, the conclusion, I will summarize the central insights of the thesis.
1.4 Issue Indivisibility as an Explanation for the Arab Spring

Ron Hassner offers an interpretivist definition of issue indivisibility, which links the dynamic nature of actors’ relationships to the subjectivity of issues. It consists of three components—cohesion, boundaries and uniqueness (2009). Firstly, an issue is considered indivisible when it is not considered to be sub-dividable “without significantly diminishing its subjective value” (Ibid., 2009, p. 41). Secondly, the issue must have boundaries—the actors must hold the same issue in contention. And thirdly, the issue’s uniqueness makes its indivisibility disputable between all parties (Ibid., 2009). The contestation of an issue often leads to conflict and violence in dictatorships. Scholars acknowledge that indivisibility disputes can arise over challenges to reputation or status, the sovereignty of a nation, control of a geographic territory, access and control of sacred spaces and “culturally grounded and deeply held beliefs,” (Ibid., 2009, p. 39). To determine whether or not an issue is indivisible, it is necessary to identify potential sources of dispute by tracing the events and actions of actors surrounding a conflict.

Issue indivisibility for the political elite can occur when state leaders fear that precedent-setting decisions have the potential to destabilize the status quo and jeopardize their grip on power. Autocrats fear that “granting concessions” to specific groups may initiate similar demands by other groups or additional demands by the same group (Wucherpfenning, 2008, p. 16). The ultimate concern is that such decisions may create new domestic tensions or reignite old issues or past hatreds. This has the potential to destabilize the country and lead to a contestation of political leadership and control of the political space by other actors. From the realist perspective, issue indivisibility makes dictators more insecure and worried over loss of power and subsequently legitimizes their oppressive policies. When issue indivisibility is firmly entrenched in a political system the bargaining space is eroded, thus leaving little room for
discussion or compromise between actors (Walter, 2003). The unfortunate lack of alternatives contributes to conditions in which the probability of a revolution or civil war is increased (Walter, 2003, 2006a, & 2006b). I argue that issue indivisibility is also a function of historical events, contemporary conditions and future expectations of all actors, which must be considered when examining the Arab Spring.

Issue indivisibility can greatly influence the actions of the political elite in authoritarian regimes. The leaders of these Arab Spring nations have a lengthy record of refusing to consider any form of power sharing and of rejecting the evolution of political parties or opposition groups. These leaders often have track records rife with manipulation of government institutions, the constitution and legislation to control the political space. Alliances and dependencies are typically forged between rulers and with the military and business elite to reinforce their centres of power with corruption, nepotism, rent-seeking and electoral fraud. State-sponsored violence and government-controlled media are two additional strategies leaders in these states use to limit contestation of government policy and actions. I will argue that these leaders became reliant on the support of the military or state security apparatus to ensure their tenure, the survival of their government and the censorship of their citizens.

1.5 The Other Explanation for the Arab Spring—Commitment Problem

A wise man once said that the commitment problem is a concern about the future, not the present, which leads to a fight in the present (Chowdhury, 2011). The logic behind the commitment problem is that actors, such as the presidential incumbents in the case of the Arab Spring, had a tremendous incentive to renege on a negotiated agreement (Fearon, 2004). In these cases, the incentive to renege on a power-sharing agreement arose from the opposing ideologies of the actors. In each country, the president wanted monopolistic control of the state and the
public wanted democracy. If the opposition and rebel groups had formed a power-sharing agreement with the regime, there was the real possibility that the government would manipulate the agreement to its advantage. In a post–Arab Spring world (with a power-sharing agreement), the opposition groups would face the ever-present danger of the deposed president and his allies launching a leadership challenge and regaining control of the country. This meant that the only viable option for the public was to oust their president from office. The anti-government groups’ and citizen’s rationale was greatly influenced by the past actions and policies of the government and military (Kirschner, 2010). The regime’s illegitimate use of violence, manipulation of government institutions and theft of government funds greatly reduced the willingness of non-government actors to negotiate a power-sharing agreement with the government, as did past violations of human rights, especially those associated with tribal or clan origins, skin colour or language (Ibid., 2010).

The model of the commitment problem has the potential to offer a strong explanation for the Arab Spring, when process tracing reveals that the incumbent and opposition groups negotiated power-sharing agreements. If there is an absence of negotiated agreements and the regime’s credibility is extremely low, further investigation of the regime’s actions will be necessary to discount the applicability of the model.

1.6 The Rejected Models—Symbolic Politics and Predatory Elite

Stuart Kaufman offers us the symbolic politics theory as a tool to assess the actions of leaders during periods of civil unrest and war (Walter, 2006a). Kaufman emphasizes the concept that “emotions motivate people to act, not rational calculations,” (2006b, 51). Leaders, through the careful manipulation and exploitation of myth-symbol complexes, are able to generate emotive responses, such as fear and hostility from the citizenry, and create in-groups and out-
groups within the population. The elite use these “hostile” or prejudiced ethnic symbols to legitimate their repressive and violent policies and to maintain status quo power structures (Kaufman, 2001).

In the Arab Spring, there is no evidence that the leaders or governments used or disseminated myth-symbol complexes as a tool to retain power. This is in stark contrast to the 1994 Rwandan genocide, where the Hutu in-group expended considerable energy demarcating the Tutsis as the ethnic “other”—the out-group—which resulted in their dehumanization and demonization and justified the policy of mass genocide. The social construction of this hate-based ideology may be a departure from more recent government rhetoric, but, as Kaufman stresses, it may also reignite past or “ancient hatreds,”—which was also absent in the Arab Spring cases (2001). Therefore, the model of symbolic politics was immediately rejected, as it does not provide a plausible explanation for the Arab Spring.

According to Rui de Figueirdo and Barry Weingast’s elite-predation model, it is the elite, not the public, who use top-down predatory policies “as a strategy to stay in power,” which often lead to “ethnic war or genocide” (Kaufman, 2006b, p. 57). The violence is not random or irrational, but is initiated by rational actors whose principal motivation is to control the nation, even when the violence impacts the majority of citizens. These policies are often accompanied by elite-centric narratives—the presence of which in the Arab Spring would suggest that this model could offer a possible explanation for the power struggle—and are not due to religious, ethnic or class divisions (Kalyvas, 2003). I argue that the elite-predation model does not even remotely explain the political events of the four Arab-Spring states because the contestation for power was between the regime and public and not between elites with opposing ideologies. In each country, the millions of people took to the streets to demand democracy and the immediate
resignation of their president, and each presidential regime rejected these demands. Therefore, the elite-predation model was also rejected at the outset.

1.7 The Argument for Issue Indivisibility

First, I argue that issue indivisibility is the most effective model to explain the actions of the leaders and their regimes in response to these popular uprisings. These four Arab Spring states satisfy Hassner’s criteria for issue indivisibility. The presidency had boundaries as each incumbent, the opposition groups and the protestors challenged, among other things, the legitimacy of the leader’s tenure, the exclusivity of his power and the length of his term in office. The uniqueness of this issue—the control of the presidency—for all parties made the issue disputable. The calculus of these leaders was directly influenced by their perception of the presidency—each rejected any form of power sharing and viewed the control of their respective nations as being indivisible. Therefore, the issue had cohesiveness, and I will argue that issue indivisibility is the best plausible explanation for these leaders’ actions and their response to the uprisings, as well as those of opposition and rebel groups. In addition, the empirical evidence provided in each case study will reinforce the necessity to “discard the notion of a singular Arab revolt” as the circumstances surrounding the uprisings are particular to each nation (Anderson, 2011, p. 7).

The indivisible issue for presidents Ben Ali, Mubarak, Gaddafi and Assad was the retention of their position as leader of their country and the perpetuation of institutional power structures. In these countries, one-party autocratic rule had existed for decades and staged presidential elections were de rigueur; it was only the illusion of free and fair elections that was broadcast by the state-controlled media. Each leader strived to maintain the closure of the political space in their respective states through the support of their militaries, intelligence
apparatuses and business elite. Since the leaders viewed the presidency as a super-valuable good, which was undividable, power sharing with opposition groups was not an option for consideration. In fact, the presidential term in all four countries grew from a limited term to essentially presidency for life. In Tunisia, for example, Ben Ali and his predecessor, President Bouruiba, would not consider power sharing and ran the country like “a private family company” (Jdey, 2012, p. 81). This analogy can also be applied to the Mubaraks of Egypt, the Gaddafis of Libya and the Assads of Syria and their closest allies, who all became exceedingly wealthy while many lived in poverty. Ultimately, this meant that the bargaining space over this issue remained tightly closed. There were, however, brief instances in which the regimes permitted slight openings, but these spaces were subsequently and forcefully closed by the state security apparatuses. In short, the presidency was a zero-sum game for these four leaders, and institutional easing was not possible in their regimes. There were brief instances where opposition groups hoped to negotiate leadership transitions in their respective countries; however, as the uprisings turned into civil wars (as in the case of Libya and Syria), the opposition groups soon realized that it was not possible to make a “pact” with the incumbents, who were intent on keeping power solely for themselves.

Second, I argue that the bargaining space in these autocratic states was closed because there were no effective mechanisms that enabled what I call institutional easing. In other words, the institutions in these autocracies were forged in such a way that they are inflexible and, therefore, resistant to reformation. The institutions in each country were rigidly controlled by the political elite and reinforced by their constellation of privileged and mutually dependant supporters. In addition, the corrupt political systems did not facilitate political discourse that deviated from the constructed norm, the contestation of policy or criticism of the political elite.
The inability of institutional easing to occur in these Arab states, therefore, impaired the process of democratic transition.

Third, I will conclude by asserting that the survival of these Arab regimes was dependent on the support of the military elite. I will argue that the survival of the regimes was influenced by recombinant authoritarianism—a process whereby authoritarian regimes learned and adapted to the events occurring on the domestic, regional and international stages—which is particularly evident in the Syrian case (Heydemann & Leenders, 2001).
2. Tunisia and the Arab Awakening

2.1 Tunisia, the Epicentre of the Arab Spring

In Tunisia, beginning on December 17, 2010, public protests exploded on the political landscape in what has come to be known as the Arab Spring. The epicentre of the Arab Spring is popularly declared to be Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia. The world became critically aware of the events that followed the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, on December 17, 2010, in this Tunisian town and his subsequent death on January 4, 2011. Mohamed Bouazizi was an unemployed university graduate who struggled to make a living by selling vegetables as a street vendor. Mohamed, along with other vendors, was repeatedly hassled by one of the town’s policewomen and forced to pay bribes (Knickmeyer, 2011). On December 17, after refusing to pay this policewoman a bribe, she abruptly, and without justification, confiscated his cart. To make matters worse, the policewoman slapped Mohammed on the face, which, in the Arab world, is considered to be a serious violation of a man’s dignity (Chulov, 2012). In a final act of desperation, he lit himself on fire after local officials refused to hear his complaint (Knickmeyer, 2011). Although President Ben Ali did go to his bedside in the hospital, the president’s attempt to defuse the situation failed.

Mohamed’s struggle, and subsequent death, resonated with the majority of Arabs throughout the region. It appeared to be the “tipping point” for the Arab Spring in which the pent-up personal frustrations of Arabs, living for decades under despotic rule, were spontaneously released (Black, 2011, and Knickmeyer, 2011). Despite Tunisia’s relatively large

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4 One article states that he was a computer science graduate, while another reports that he was a mechanical engineering graduate (Knickmeyer, 2011, and Chulov, 2012). In another account, Lina Ben Mhenni, a 27-year-old Tunisian linguistics teacher, was a well-known blogger who went to Mohamed’s town to investigate his death. She reports that he was not a university graduate and not even a high school graduate (Beaumont, 2011). Nonetheless, these narratives, whether they are true or not, can have a profound influence on people and the outcomes of political events.
middle class compared with that of other countries in the region, the lives of many were filled with despair and violation (Pickett, 2012). Mohamed, who was 26 at the time of his death, belonged to the under-30 demographic that constitutes 60 percent of the population of the Middle East (Knickmeyer, 2011). In 2010, this demographic faced 38 percent unemployment in Tunisia and the highest levels of unemployment globally (Ibid., 2011).

2.2 Ben Ali as an Indivisible Symbol of Corrupt Government

The 2009 and 2010 Tunisian Gallup polls indicated that Tunisians’ perceptions of their lives worsened from 2008 to 2010 (Tunisia analyzing, 2013). Despite positive growth in the national economy (as observed through an increase in the GDP per capita), the survey found that only 14 percent of Tunisians believed they were “thriving” in 2010 compared with 24 percent in 2008 (Ibid., 2013). The unpopularity of the Ben Ali government was attributed, in part, to the perceived worsening of the entrepreneurial climate in the country. The public perception was that the government was extremely corrupt and created unnecessary bureaucratic roadblocks for entrepreneurs (Ibid., 2013). The dissatisfaction with Ben Ali was heightened by Tunisians’ increasingly difficult lives, even those of the middle-class. The increased cost of housing and basic needs, along with a longer “waithood” period—the period young adults had to wait before they could get married thanks to high unemployment levels and the inability to afford the expenses associated with marriage—and dissatisfaction with health care also contributed to citizens’ long-standing grievances (Ibid., 2013). The results of this Gallup poll reinforced the

5 It is even more troubling, in terms of potential increases in youth (aged 15 to 24) unemployment, that by 2015 youth will compose 75 percent of Africa’s population (according to the 2010 African Economic Outlook report) (Moyo & Taiwo, 2011).

6 In the 2011 International Labour Organization (ILO) report, the percentages of unemployed youth in the Middle East and North Africa were 26.5 and 27.9 percent, respectively. This figure is much greater than the 17.6 percent unemployed for the same demographic in the developed world and is expected to increase to 32 percent by 2016 (Rosenburg, 2012). This, coupled with the youth to adult jobless rate being 4 to 1, does not bode well for the stability of the region should the MENA governments fail to address the problem.
disparity within the country and provided important background information regarding the wave of protests that began in December 2010. Initially, demonstrators took to the streets “angrily demand[ing] more jobs and denounced what they called the self-enrichment of Tunisia’s ruling family” (Pickett, 2012, para. 20). The uprising then grew into a democratic movement initiated primarily by disenfranchised youth and the middle class.

In Tunisia, as well in the other Arab Spring states, this disenfranchised under-30 population used social media as a power tool for their activism. The so-called Twitter Revolution emerged through the use of internet communication platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube (Nguyen, 2011). Social media enabled rapid, minute-by-minute communication of events on the ground so that Tunisians and people around the world could see first-hand accounts of the human rights violations and lethal acts of violence committed by the military. Television networks such as Al-Jazeera, BBC and CNN used the live feed from the internet for their news programs (Garton Ash, 2011). Social media also empowered citizens and opposition groups to organize against the regime and evade arrest, especially when combined with cellphones, which 85 percent of the population used (Delany, 2011). These modern communication tools accelerated the Tunisian revolution and, arguably, the fall of the regime (Ibid., 2011).

The videos and images posted on Facebook and shared by cellphone informed and influenced many Tunisians. Above all, the images of the Ben Ali clan’s excessive lifestyle became inextricably linked with the public’s opinion of the corrupt government. It became an indisputable fact that Ben Ali would never represent the interests of Tunisians over those of his family. These images helped solidify the belief that the essential requirement for attempting democratization in Tunisia was to remove Ben Ali from office and that members of the ruling elite had to also be eliminated from government, as they could not be trusted (Assad, 2011, and
Pickett, 2012). In essence, the end of tyranny in Tunisia was dependent on ousting Ben Ali from office.

2.3 The Zero-Sum Nature of the Tunisian Presidency

Ben Ali’s determination to retain political power at any cost reinforced his zero-sum view of Tunisian presidency. For him, the presidency was a super-valuable good that could not be divided. One of the first acts of the regime in response to the riots following Bouazizi’s self-immolation was to violently suppress the public demonstrations. The Tunisian security police, on December 19, 2010, attacked demonstrators in Sidi Bouzid, resulting in the injury and death of citizens (Ayeb, 2011). Ben Ali’s use of force to deter the protestors supported his disregard for the rule of law and international legal norms. Like his predecessor, Habib Bourguiba, Ben Ali had relied on the support of the military to maintain his “quasi-mafia” regime since his rise to power in 1987 (Ibid., 2011). Ben Ali was also no stranger to brutality, violence and extra-judicial killings. In Tunisia, a country with a population of 10.4 million, citizens were the subject of constant police surveillance, with reports of 100,000 police monitoring citizens’ daily activities as well as arbitrary detention and judicial harassment (Marzouki, 2011, and Situation, 2011). The creation of what Beatrice Hibou refers to as a state-run “control grid” system (*dispositif quadrillage*) instilled a deep sense of fear in the Tunisian population, which inhibited full-scale protests and mass uprisings—the desired goal of the regime (Marzouki, 2011, p. 2). The Tunisian uprising was a rejection of the government’s disregard for human rights and the rule of law, and it represented a demand for democracy and self-determination (Marzouki, 2011).

From December 29, 2010, Ben Ali’s second strategy for political survival was to appease the protestors. He promised significant political and economic reforms, which included the creation of 300,000 jobs, a reduction in the price of food staples, a promise not to run for re-
election in 2014 and an easing of the government’s censorship of the internet (Noor, 2011). This did not deter Tunisians in their determination to overthrow the regime, as they had become accustomed to its empty promises. To the government’s surprise, these political manoeuvres produced the opposite effect. Rather than acting as a mechanism to create social calm, citizens viewed Ben Ali’s rhetoric as a sign of weakness and responded by escalating the protests in late December 2010 and early January 2011 (Kirkpatrick, 2011a).

In a rapid sequence of events, Ben Ali lost the unconditional support of the military when he ordered the Tunisian security police to use lethal force in Sidi Bouzid to stop public demonstrations, on December 19, 2010. In reaction to Ben Ali’s order, General Ammar, the head of the military, immediately declared that “the army will protect the revolution” by protecting the public from the country’s security police (Kirkpatrick, 2011a, p. 1). With the loss of the military’s unconditional support, Ben Ali could no longer repress the uprisings or secure the presidency. The sudden reversal of support by Western governments further weakened Ben Ali’s tenure (Black, 2011).

Similarly, Tunisian opposition parties and citizens regarded the presidency as a super-valuable good. They also considered Ben Ali’s removal from office to be the best way to attempt a transition to democracy in Tunisia. Ben Ali’s decision to use violence to suppress the uprising was the fatal blow to his presidency as it erased all traces of his legitimacy and the trust of Tunisians (Hamid, 2011). The public’s distrust of the regime was further compounded by the government’s contempt for political institutions and the democratic process, particularly national elections. Citizens were well aware of the government’s ability “to escape the ballot box” (Black, 2010). Ben Ali’s government was famous for its “staged demonstration elections,” with his

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7 It is suggested that during the reign of the Ben Ali, the military had been excluded from political involvement and preference was given to the security forces over the military (Jdey, 2012). This helps explain why the Tunisian military shifted its support to the public and away from Ben Ali.
RCD\(^8\) party purportedly winning 90 percent of the vote in the 1994 and 1999 presidential elections (Marzouki, 2011, p. 1). In fact, the presidential term in Tunisia grew from a limited term to essentially presidency for life. Clearly, Ben Ali rejected any notion of democracy.

Tunisians’ distrust of Ben Ali was further compounded by his failure to allow political participation in the country. During the 1989 national election, as part of his election platform, he promised a transition from Bourguiba’s authoritarian style of governance to democratic gradualism, with political pluralism being the cornerstone of the political reforms (Haugebolle & Cavatorta, 2011). In fact, Ben Ali did allow political opposition parties the freedom to function for a time. One of those parties was the (moderate Islamist) Ennahdha Movement, a party with a revolutionary history. It was co-founded in 1981 by Rached Ghannouchi, its president and intellectual leader, and Abdelfattah Mourou, a renowned Tunisian lawyer. Subsequent to its 1984 reorganization, the party was legally recognized in 1989 by the government and allowed to run in national elections. However, much to the dismay of Ben Ali’s RCD party, the Ennahdha Movement won 17 percent of the vote in the 1989 national election. In response, the Ben Ali government immediately outlawed the party, prompting the Ennahdha Movement and other Tunisian opposition parties, since the 1990s, to concentrate their efforts on regime change in Tunisia rather than negotiating for direct political participation. It also forced opposition leaders like Ghannouchi into self-exile for 20 years in London. Ghannouchi finally returned to Tunisia on January 30, 2011, after Ben Ali’s fall (Samti, 2011). The Ennahada Movement went on to win the majority of the seats in Tunisia's Constitutive Assembly after forming a coalition with two centre-left parties—the Congress for the Republic and the Ettakatol—after the October 23, 2011, national election (Parker, 2011). The opposition parties, knowing that Ben Ali viewed the presidency as a super-valuable good and blatantly rejected the democratic process, focused their

\(^8\) Rassemblement Constitutionel Democratique (RCD).
efforts on deposing him and eliminating the RCD party from participation in Tunisian politics for fear of future reprisals.

Surprisingly, Ben Ali swiftly abandoned the presidency when he realized that he could not rely on the Tunisian military for unyielding support or pacify citizens through empty promises of political reform. On January 15, 2011, less than one month after the death of Mohamed Bouazizi and much to the surprise of the world, Ben Ali and his family fled to Saudi Arabia (Chrisafis & Black, 2011). The distrust of the regime was further reflected in two subsequent events: Tunisians’ rejection of the appointment of the sitting prime minister, Mohamed Ghannouchi, as interim leader and the public demand for the removal of all RCD ministers from office (Ayeb, 2011, and Willsher, 2011).

2.4 Ben Ali’s Flight Response

During the 50 years of dictatorial rule in Tunisia, the regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali maintained an unrelenting iron grip on the country. These regimes made every effort to ensure that political space remained closed, with the support of state military and intelligence apparatus. The complete reliance on the military to maintain a control grid ultimately became Ben Ali’s greatest weakness.

Even when it was “game over” for the regime, as the protestors declared, Ben Ali made a last-ditch effort to maintain his power through the use of political rhetoric. When Ben Ali realized that loss of state military support severely threatened his survival, his flight-or-fight response mechanism engaged. He chose survival and fled to Saudi Arabia, rather than face the shame of loss of power and the possibility of prosecution. The degree of military support that Tunisian president Ben Ali was afforded by the military leadership was the pivotal factor in determining the survival of his government and, ultimately, his retention of power—the loss of
military support meant the immediate fall of the Ben Ali regime and the end of 50 years of dictatorial rule in Tunisia.
3. Egypt

3.1 Mubarak’s Loss of Legitimacy

In 1981, Hosni Mubarak, the fourth president of Egypt, rose to power after the assassination of Anwar Sadat and held office for 30 years\(^9\) (Hassan, 2011). Mubarak, like other Arab dictators, had no respect for the office of the president, the state institutions and the political process (Al-Awadi, 2004). In fact, Mubarak made numerous efforts, through the careful manipulation of the state-controlled media, to convince Egyptians that he favoured democratic reform, respected the rule of law and was addressing domestic income inequalities. One of his first acts after rising to power substantiates this claim. In 1981, Mubarak succeeded through political manoeuvring to pass a constitutional amendment, which guaranteed him the presidency for life (Hassan, 2011). Under the guise of ensuring national security, Mubarak further tightened the reins on his political leadership by enacting a series of legislations. These included the Emergency Act of 1981, the Anti-Terrorist Law 97 of 2002, military decrees and the extremely repressive Association Law 84 of 2002 (Brownlee, 2002, and Hassan, 2011). Mubarak succeeded in essentially sealing the political and civil society spheres; his objective was to bar the development of opposition movements to firmly secure his presidency (Hassam, 2011). This provided the president, in tandem with the continued support of the state’s security machine, an inordinate amount of power and severely limited political contestation. In essence, Mubarak’s actions suggested that he considered the presidency an indivisible good, and any form of power-sharing or political participation was out of the question.

Mubarak was not the first president, but one of a series of incumbents, to create the Egyptian presidential-centric political system by manipulating government institutions and the

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legal system. While Mubarak was successful in his use of constitutional reforms and the institutionalization of coercion to lengthen his tenure as president, these only suppressed the question of his legitimacy publicly. Although Mubarak’s ruling National Democratic Party had controlled the People’s Assembly for 24 consecutive years, opposition groups continued to challenge the Egyptian political status quo. Political activism occurred despite the security force’s violent attacks and torture of organizers, intellectuals and outspoken critics of the government.

In 2005, the social movement known as Kefaya (The Egyptian Movement for Change) officially emerged on the political landscape as a coalition of opposition groups. Prior to 2005, 500 to 1,000 Kefaya members launched the first-ever protest to demand Mubarak’s resignation and reject a much-speculated power transfer to his son, Gamal (El-Ghobashy, 2005). (This silent protest occurred in front of Cairo’s High Court, on December 12, 2004.) (El-Tahawy, 2012). Although it was immediately suppressed by Egyptian security forces, the protest did have a lasting impact on Egyptians (El-Ghobashy, 2005). The widespread culture of fear in Egypt had prevented the mass mobilization of citizens for protests up to this point, but Kefaya’s resistance movement marked a turning point for Egyptian society10 (Bishara, 2011). Mohammed El-Sayed Said’s statement that “[o]rdinary Egyptians want democracy but will not fight for it” was an accurate assessment of the political climate in Egypt prior to the High Court demonstration11 (El-Ghobashy, 2005, para. 21). The “January 25 Revolution” that overtook the nation reflected a major shift in Egyptian attitudes. No longer were Egyptians fearful of the regime. Their shouts of

10 “We did three things for Egypt with Kefaya: we broke the culture of fear in Egyptians, we brought back the right to protest, and we brought back the right to criticize the president of Egypt,” says George Ishak, a founding member of the movement, recalling how people were shocked when they heard the demonstrators on the street shouting “Enough Mubarak!” (El-Tahawy, 2012, para. 2).

11 Said was the founder of the Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies. He also forecast that modern (communication) technologies would help the pro-democratic movement in Egypt (Bishara, 2011).
“Enough Mubarak!” in Tahrir Square clearly indicated the courage and motivation of the demonstrators to oust Mubarak from office (Ibid., 2005, para. 21).

As I shall argue in the next section, the advent of social networks and the increasing use of smartphones eroded the regime’s monopoly of power over civil society and political discourse in Egypt and the Middle East. Even though the media was state controlled, this new technology increased the ability of citizens to communicate and opposition groups to organize like never before. This heightened ease of communication empowered citizens to engage in political activism.

### 3.2 Tahrir Square and the Facebook Effect

As in Tunisia, demonstrations in Egypt rapidly accelerated from localized events to nation-wide protests in January 2011. This Egyptian-style Arab Spring was attributable, in some measure, to Egyptian citizens living with decades of deep-seated anger and frustration for their lack of political freedom, rampant corruption within government institutions and high levels of poverty and unemployment—sadly one in two of Egypt’s 80 million people live in poverty (Shrenker, 2011). Cairo’s Tahrir Square quickly became the focal point of the demonstrations. It was where hundreds of thousands of protestors gathered to voice their demands, despite being subject to attacks by Egypt’s infamous state security police (Black, 2011a). Their calls for change included Mubarak’s immediate resignation, the “dissolution of the [Egyptian] parliament” and a transition to democracy, with a real and credible election process (McGreal, 2011, p. 1).

January 25, 2011, known as the Day of Anger, was the first day of national protests when protestors funnelled through the streets of Cairo and into Tahrir Square. This occurred only 11 days after Ben Ali fell from power (Lizza, 2011). Twitter and Facebook emerged as dynamic and
powerful weapons of social activism against the regime, much to the surprise of the political elite. Mobile social media—communication devices such as smartphones—also played a critical role in this “Twitter revolution” (Schonfeld, 2011). The use of live-tweets, principally via two key hashtags—#Jan25 and #Egypt—enabled the transmission of valuable information to on-the-ground protestors as well as to observers around the world in real time (Black, 2011a, and Schonfeld, 2011, p. 1). The ability of protestors and opposition groups to communicate within and outside of Egypt led to the regime’s loss of control over civil society.

One of the drawbacks of this “instant” form of communication was that the information conveyed was not always correct. There were distortions of information by all parties, and shared information was not always edited for accuracy (Beaumont, 2011). Just as Egyptians were successful in their efforts, the regime was also effective in its efforts to block internet communication, whether intermittently or permanently. For example, on January 26, 2011, the government blocked Twitter and Facebook (Arthur, 2011). In some instances, when the internet was blocked, protestors overcame this obstacle by holding up placards in the midst of a crowd of protestors to tell people when and where to gather for upcoming protests (Beaumont, 2011).

Social networking services such as Facebook enabled internet activists in Egypt to engage in what they believed to be anonymous activism against the government. Wael Ghonim was one such activist. The purpose of his “We are all Kahed Salid” Facebook group was to communicate to the world the violent death of Kahed Salid,\(^\text{12}\) on June 6, 2010, at the hands of Egyptian security police. In an almost viral wave of response, 500,000 people became members

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\(^\text{12}\) In Alexandria, Egypt’s second largest city, Kahed Salid was arrested by police in an internet café and brutally beaten to death. When individuals such as Wael Ghonim posted photos on the internet showing “him covered in bruises, with a broken jaw and broken teeth” it caused a national outcry while also becoming a “rallying point” for the Egyptian Spring (Crovitz, 2011, and Egypt We are all, 2011).
of this Facebook group (Black, 2011a). Ghonim then expanded his campaign to heighten awareness of the widespread abuses of his fellow Egyptians by state police (Ibid., 2011a). Internet activists like Ghonim were successful in reducing the government’s credibility and increasing citizens’ determination to remove Mubarak from office. The regime, witnessing the tremendous on-line participation of Egyptians, quickly realized that it could no longer hide its brutality. In an effort to intimidate protestors and suppress opposition, the government ordered its security police to find this “anonymous” Ghonim and arrest him. In response to his wrongful imprisonment, 148,700 people used Facebook to demand that the Egyptian government release him (Ibid., 2011a), and this new-found power of social media was reflected in the government’s decision to set Ghonim free after only 12 days (Black, 2011a, and Crovitz, 2011).

In addition, the Twitter virtual network assisted the organization of the Friday, February 4 “Day of Departure” protests wherein an estimated one million people gathered in groups throughout Egypt to demand Mubarak’s resignation. Egyptians’ anger towards Mubarak was captured in the shouts from the crowd in Tahrir Square of “Down with Mubarak” and “Tell Mubarak to leave” (Cairo, 2011, para. 7). When the sheik leading the Friday prayers in the square announced, “I ask you to be strong, to stay until we get a breakthrough,” the crowd responded with cheers (Ibid., 2011, para. 3). On February 8, 2011, the 15th day of protests, demonstrators in Tahrir Square voiced their continued rejection of Mubarak’s promises of a gradual transition to a democratic government and insisted on his resignation (McGreal, 2011).

The internet and cellphones became increasingly powerful vehicles for Egyptians to hold the regime accountable for its actions. Egypt’s state-controlled media (the voice of the government) had lost its monopoly. Citizens, with their new-found voices, declared that Mubarak could not be trusted and democratic reform would only be possible if he was removed
from office. For Egyptians, the cry for democratic freedom became synonymous with the elimination of Mubarak.

3.3 Can’t Take the Money and Run

The power of the Facebook Effect and mobile social media to mobilize hundreds of thousands of protestors in Egypt is only part of the reason why the Mubarak regime fell from power 18 days after the mass protests began. On February 18, 2011, Egypt’s vice president Suleiman declared to Egyptians and the world that Mubarak was abandoning the presidency (McGreal & Tran, 2011). Prior to his resignation, the army announced to the protestors in Tahrir Square that they would not fire on them. The Egyptian army, on January 31, 2011, stated that it “would not use force to silence ‘legitimate’ demands for democratic reforms,” which signalled that Mubarak no longer had the unwavering support of the military (Shenker & Khalili, 2011).

In fact, the Egyptian military demanded that Mubarak resign from office and, on February 10, 2011, directed him to read the resignation speech written by the military, which was also vetted by Washington (Lutvi, 2012). Mubarak’s sons, however, convinced him to stay in office until September 2011. Mubarak ignored the military’s demand and stated that he would stay in office until national elections occurred in September; he also promised a series of reforms (Ajbaili, 2011, and McGreal & Tran, 2011). This strategy failed as the Egyptian military and demonstrators could not be dissuaded in seeking his immediate removal from office. As a result, Mubarak lost his chance to voluntarily resign and was, in fact, forced out of office by the military (Ibid., 2011). On February 13, 2011, the Supreme Council of the Military (SCAF) assumed interim control of the country (under the proviso that its term last only six months, until the national elections in September) (Ibid., 2011).

Mubarak’s determination to hold onto power and his rigid mindset was also reinforced by
his rejection of foreign governments’ calls for his resignation, including that of the United States (Grafe, 2011). Washington’s call for leadership change in Egypt was a sudden reversal in US foreign policy. The Mubarak government had enjoyed long-term support from the US with its annual receipt of more than 1.3 billion USD in US military aid (Byman, 2011). Washington had gambled that by promising the Egyptian generals continued US military aid in a post-Mubarak world, it could promote leadership change in Egypt and influence the political outcomes in the neighbouring state of Libya (Malka, 2011). After Mubarak’s fall from power, the SCAF, with Washington’s knowledge, moved weapons across the Egypt–Libya border for the rebel groups in eastern Libya in March 2011 (Scott, 2011). The US government, in essence, bought the support of the Egyptian military to increase the spectre of democracy in the Arab world while ensuring its own geo-political interests in the region.

As in Tunisia, the survival of the Egypt’s presidential incumbent ultimately hinged on the military’s support of the government—the loss of support of the army meant the sudden fall of Mubarak. Unlike Ben Ali, the Egyptian military thwarted the plan of Mubarak and his family to flee from Egypt and seek refuge in a sympathetic host country. In short, Mubarak was not able to take the money and run as Ben Ali did. On April 13, 2011, Hosni and his two sons, Alaa and Gamal, were charged with the embezzlement of government funds and imprisoned (Kirkpatrick, 2011b). In Egypt, domestic and international actors realized that Mubarak’s sole intention was to retain power and that their only option was to remove him from power. The only hope for a transition to democracy was to force Mubarak out of office, as it became an irrefutable fact that Mubarak as president equalled tyranny and chaos.
4. Libya

4.1 Muammar Gaddafi, the Brotherly Guide of the Revolution

Muammar Gaddafi, like other Arab dictators in the region, had reigned supreme for decades in Libya, after a turbulent rise to power. In 1969, elderly Libyan king Idris, while undergoing medical treatment in Turkey, was displaced from power and his nephew and heir apparent, Hassan el-Rida, was forced to abdicate his claim to the throne (Niland, 2011). Colonel Gaddafi was one of the principal actors in the campaign to end monarchic rule in Libya and skillfully used anti-imperialist, anti-Semitic and pan-Arabic rhetoric to gain the support of the populace (al-Werfalli, 2012). In the wake of this bloodless military coup, he seized the chairmanship of the Revolutionary Command Council, the interim government, and, in 1970, further consolidated his power by becoming the prime minister and minister of defence (Niland, 2011).

In the 1970s, Gaddafi continued to concentrate power in the presidency in addition to exerting the sovereignty of the Libyan government through a variety of strategies. These included the nationalization of domestic financial institutions, the expropriation of foreign-owned oil companies and the assets of wealthy Libyans and the closure of the Wheelus US Air Force Base near Tripoli (Popular protest, 2011). Not only did Gaddafi fracture the economic and political institutions, but he also eroded the power of religious institutions within the country. The religious bodies, as well as intellectuals in eastern Libya were brutally repressed by the regime (Popular protest, 2011).

Throughout his one-man rule, Gaddafi skillfully crafted his rhetoric by using a highly personalized style of communication to legitimize his claim to power. In one period, he adopted political language reminiscent to that of Mao during China’s Cultural Revolution. He espoused
the benefits of a socialist revolution—a *Green Revolution*—for Libya and released a *Green Book*—somewhat akin to Mao’s *Red Book* (Achar, 2011). In 1977, he went as far as renaming Libya as the Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (State of the Masses) but failed to institutionalize meaningful reforms, socialist or otherwise (Niland, 2011).

The Gaddafi-tailored form of Arab nationalism, however thin on well-devised policy, did increase incomes and literacy rates in the country through the formation of a state welfare system. The GDP per capita for Libyans, for example, had risen to 9,712 USD by 2009, which became the highest in the MENA region.\(^{13}\) Ultimately, Gaddafi, with his zero-sum view of the presidency, alienated himself from Libyans. This occurred by increasing levels of oppression, corruption and patrimony by governmental actors, eroding the credibility of his ideological platform and leadership (Al-Werfalli, 2012, and Popular protest, 2011). His ever-more distorted and aggrandized persona, along with his ineffective domestic and foreign policies, also distanced Libya from the rest of Africa, other Arab nations and the world at large (Niland, 2011).

After 42 years of autocratic rule, the spectre of a populist uprising in Libya seemed remote (Hanelt & Bauer, 2011). The operation of a police state, with an estimated 10 percent of Libyans paid as informants by the regime, appeared complete with its self-reinforcing network of loyal allies (Achar, 2011). And yet, in the wake of protests in Tunisia and Egypt, uprisings simultaneously spread to other Arab states throughout the region, including Libya. On February 15, 2011, the first Libyan demonstrators peacefully took to the streets in Benghazi and eastern Libya to reject their repression and the political status quo, after the arrest of Libyan human rights lawyer Fathy Trebil (Hanelt & Bauer, 2011, Hill, 2011, and Lizza, 2011). Protests in the capital and throughout the country followed on February 20, 2011 (Al-Werfalli, 2012). These

\(^{13}\) According to the 2009 World Bank report, the GDP per capita (USD) for Tunisia, Egypt and Syria was 3,792, 2,270 and 2,474, respectively. Similarly, Libya had the highest literacy rates of the four case studies with 88.3 percent of males and females above 15 years of age being literate (Hanelt & Bauer, 2011).
events marked the start of the Libyan Awakening, which eventually led to the fall of the ruthless “Guide of the Revolution,” Gaddafi.

4.2 The Seeds of Discontent

The origin of the Libyan uprising was in Benghazi and eastern Libya. This was not surprising given the fact that Gaddafi, a western Libyan, had used a policy of repression and state-led violence to isolate and oppress eastern Libya owing to its different tribal, religious and political histories—the Sanussi order of Islam, for example, originated in this region (Popular protest, 2011). During the monarchic era, there were two capitals of Libya. These co-capitals were Benghazi and Tripoli. In fact, Tripoli became the sole capital of the country only after Gaddafi rose to power in 1969.  

The unilateral decision to concentrate federal power in Tripoli, the subsequent displacement of Benghazi and the rejection of Cyrenaician identity fuelled the lasting resentment of eastern Libyans toward Gaddafi and his regime. The Libyan uprising can also be attributed to acts of political violence directed against citizens. In Benghazi, those with enduring hatred of the regime, such as family members of the 1,200 political prisoners murdered by internal security police during the 1996 Abu Salim prison riot in Tripoli, had direct involvement in orchestrating this 17th of February Revolution (Al-Jazeera, 2011 August 22, and Fahim & Kirkpatrick, 2011b). In fact, these families had previously engaged in public demonstrations and legal action against the regime (Becker, 2011). It is argued that these families‘ activism laid the organizational groundwork for the popular uprising in 2011 (Ibid., 2011). The organization of opposition groups occurred across Libya. In Ajdabiya (Libya), the five brothers of the Jidran family fought in opposition to Gaddafi. In an interview on March 18, 2011, they expressed their determination to

14 In addition, Benghazi historically retained a high degree of importance as it is an economic hub for eastern Libya and was actually the home of the king of Libya during the monarchy.
eliminate Gaddafi, which was indicative of sentiment among eastern Libyans. Muftah Jidran’s statement also supports this position: "Gaddafi's regime gave [him] two choices: To rule us as a dictator, or to kill us. The Libyan people have a message for Gaddafi: We are ready, we are six million people, we are ready for five million of us to die, so the other million will live in dignity" (Hill, 2011, last para.).

It is reasonable, therefore, to argue that the centre for the resistance movement and anti-government forces, as well as Islamist opposition groups, could be traced to Benghazi and this eastern province—a region separated by more than its desert geography. The legacy of the brutally repressive policies conducted by military security forces served to erode Gaddafi’s legitimacy, thereby planting the seeds of discontent that eventually sparked the Libyan uprising (Popular protest, 2011).

It is important to clarify that the struggle to overthrow the Gaddafi regime was not a new phenomenon arising from the Arab Spring, but one that had existed for decades. The objective of opposition groups, such as the National Front for the Salvation of Libya and the National Council for the Libyan Opposition, was to eliminate Gaddafi. Militarized opposition groups were unsuccessful in their attempts to assassinate him over a 30-year period (IB Staff Reporter, 2011). The consensus about the necessity to oust Gaddafi from power was reflected in a statement by Ibrahim Sahad, the leader of the National Front for the Salvation of Libya. On June 25, 2005, Sahad said, “We have reached a conviction that no reform is possible while al-Qadhafi is still in power” (Opposition plans, 2005, para. 2).

4.3 Issue Indivisibility

From the beginning of the Libyan uprising, opposition and rebel groups sought “the removal of Gaddafi from power” after years of indiscriminate state-led violence against citizens
The rise in the defections of military officers and soldiers as the civil war proceeded reflected increasing anti-government sentiment among government forces. The veteran general Younes’s defection was a significant turning point for the Libyan revolution, since he had been a long-time supporter of the regime. As minister of the interior, he had belonged to Gaddafi’s powerful inner circle. In an interview, General Younes explained the reason that “he changed sides because the Gaddafi he knew was not the Gaddafi that was leading the country any longer” (Al-Jazeera, 2011 July 30). Under his command, the 17th February Brigade (an anti-government militia) successfully overtook the state’s military garrison in Benghazi (Ibid., 2011 July 30). The loss of this key military post enabled rebel forces to eventually seize control of Benghazi. This was a turning point for the battle to control the country and the presidency, as was the fall of Tripoli to rebel forces in August 2011. These events also reinforced the perception among the ex-military that the presidency was a super-values good that could only be secured through force.

The determination of the National Transitional Council (NTC) (a coalition of Libyan opposition groups) to end the Gaddafi era was reflected in the war they waged against pro-Gaddafi forces and their six-month pursuit of Gaddafi in Libya’s southern desert region. The stalwart objective of NTC rebel forces was to liberate Libya from Gaddafi’s tyranny (Ghannoushi, 2011). The last rebel offensive against Libyan security forces best exemplifies their determination. Moreover, this final offensive, lasting two months, eliminated the last remaining stronghold of loyalist troops in Sitre—Gaddafi’s hometown—which ultimately led to the capture and murder of Gaddafi and his son Mutassim Gaddafi, on October 20, 2011 (Birtley, 2011).

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The expansion of the rebel group’s centre of power included the addition of other Libyan military veterans. The head of the Interim TNC Military Council, for example, was Omar Hariri. Hariri was critically involved in the 1969 military coup that brought Gaddafi to power. Similarly, Younes’s boss, rebel commander Khalifa Hifter, had lengthy military involvement with Gaddafi (Winer, 2011).

In contrast, Gaddafi held firm to his assertion that “I will fight on to the last drop of my blood” (Fahim & Kirkpatrick, 2011b, para. 13). Gaddafi maintained this defiant stance throughout the Libyan civil war, in spite of the continued defections of commanders and troops and the resignations of government officials and diplomats. Journalistic investigations revealed that even though Gaddafi’s words were more “measured” in private he still hoped to retain power (Carlstrom, 2012). The recovery of recordings of Gaddafi’s telephone conversations with high-ranking Libyan officials during March and April 2011 reinforce this claim (Ibid., 2012). Gaddafi, in private and even while in hiding, was hopeful that a shift in public sentiment to his favour would occur. Even when it was apparent that his stranglehold on power in Libya had ended, Gaddafi continued to hold onto a glimmer of hope. He expressed the wish, however unrealistic, for the revolutionary green flag to rise once again over the country (Al-Jazeera, 2011, and Carlstom, 2012).

The years of violent oppression, particularly in eastern Libya, by internal security forces caused citizens to distrust Gaddafi and his promises of political reformation. On February 20, 2011, the immediate use of military force to suppress the initial peaceful protests in Benghazi proved to Libyans that the regime continued to reject expressions of political contestation (Iqbal, 2011). In Tripoli, Libyan internal security forces indiscriminately shot at anti-government protestors from the onset of demonstrations. Security forces also arrested and detained suspected (and in some cases murdered) protests and informants to foreign news corps (Libya End, 2011). Furthermore, Libyans were aware that pro-Gaddafi forces had launched deliberate attacks on civilians throughout the country, especially in those regions thought to harbour anti-Gaddafi sentiment and supporters. The loyalist forces’ attack on the village of Zintan (western Libya) in
May 2011 exemplifies this as it was the site of anti-government protests three months earlier (Libya Rocket, 2011).

The government’s retaliatory actions also cemented the belief among Libyans that, once the protests began, there was no turning back, with demonstrators and rebel groups alike fearing retribution by security and military forces (Iqbal, 2011). Gaddafi’s actions had eroded any remaining traces of legitimacy of his presidency among the public. Libyans, cognizant of the regime’s track record, also believed that Gaddafi would never resign and that their only option was to use force to oust him from office, even if this meant that it would be a fight to the death to determine who would control Libya (Ibid., 2011). This foregoing discussion helps to substantiate my argument that issue indivisibility is the best model to explain the motivations and rationale of Gaddafi, anti-government groups and citizens in the Libyan Awakening.

4.4 Gaddafi’s Fight Response

In contrast to Ben Ali’s flight response, Gaddafi decided to fight rather than flee. In doing so, he elected to use all the resources available to him to retain the presidency and, in retaliation to the demonstrations in Benghazi, unleashed loyalist forces on the city. The Libyan Air Force was dispatched with orders to launch air strikes on Benghazi as loyalist troops simultaneously mounted a land attack of the city by bombarding it with rockets (Pannell, 2011). Loyalist forces extended their campaign of terror to a nation-wide crackdown on protestors. As the struggle for political freedom escalated into a civil war, it is reported that Muammar’s son, Saif al-Islam Gaddafii, advised his father that it was only a matter of time before Muammar would regain control of the country (Al-Werfalli, 2012). Saif’s opinion was reflected in his statement that “loyalists would resist for ‘six months, one year, two years... and [eventually the Gaddafi’s] will win’” (Arsenault, 2011). Saif’s advice greatly influenced his father, who opted to use force to
retain power instead of pursuing peace or power-sharing negotiations.

From February 26, 2011, Western governments, operating through the United Nations, passed a series of sanctions and embargos to contain the regime. Meanwhile, opposition groups were undergoing a process of consolidation. On February 27, 2011, a union of anti-Gaddafi groups officially announced the formation of the Interim NTC (Bharwaj, 2012). This proved to be an important turning point for the civil war for two reasons. First, it resulted in Western nations recognizing the Interim NTC as a legitimate and credible political organization and as an acceptable replacement to the Gaddafi regime. Second, its formation was a critical factor in enabling foreign governments to win their citizens’ approval for foreign military intervention in Libya by a UN-NATO alliance (Ibid., 2012).

4.5 The UNSC Resolution 1973

Gaddafi’s public declaration, on March 16, 2011, that “[he] will find you in your closets”—in reference to his determination to crush the anti-Gaddafi elements in Benghazi—strengthened the resolve of the international community to implement a no-fly zone over Libya (Lizza, 2011, p. 15). The rationale for the United Nations (UN) and the Arab League demanding an “immediate cease fire” was to prevent the Libyan government from committing “crimes against humanity,” by targeting and indiscriminately attacking citizens and rebels (Lizza, 2011, and Security Council, 2011, p. 1). The urgency of this mandate was heightened by Gaddafi’s conduct during the uprising. Foreign governments and opposition groups were cognizant that Gaddafi was not concerned about the cost of human life in his struggle to maintain power.

On March 17, 2011, the UNSC Resolution 1973 was passed 10 to zero, with five abstentions, namely Russia, China, Brazil, India and Germany. This authorized a coalition of UN military forces “to prevent an ‘imminent massacre’” (Lizza, 2011, p. 18). The timing of this
resolution’s passing was critical as pro-Gaddafi forces were estimated to be just one day from over-taking Ajdabiyah—a city 160 kilometres south of Benghazi—which was considered to be strategically important in the civil war. Ajdabiyah was a critical supply hub in the transport of drinking water and fuel, among other essentials, for central and western Libya (Lizza, 2011).

Had the government’s security forces gained complete control of Ajdabiyah, analysts believed this would have increased their advantage over rebel forces in eastern Libya and resulted in the slaughter of thousands of innocent people. It was speculated that the fall of Ajdabiyah would have increased the likelihood of Benghazi eventually falling to loyalist forces. This would have been, at the very least, a major setback for rebel forces and, in the worst case scenario, a death sentence for the Libyan uprising (Fahim & Kirkpatrick, 2011a). The establishment of a no-fly zone over Libya weakened the ability of the Libyan Air Force to attack civilian and military targets. Many argue that establishing a no-fly zone facilitated the decisive victory of rebel forces over government forces in Benghazi and was a tipping point in the Libyan civil war, which paved the way for the removal of Gaddafi and his despotic regime (Lizza, 2011).

4.6 The Walking Dead Man Emerges

Ultimately, the actions of Gaddafi—the “Guide of the Revolution”—planted the seeds of discontent among his people that facilitated the development of a strong opposition movement. His actions eroded the legitimacy of his leadership and the regime and created deep-seated distrust among Libyans, after 40 years of tyranny. It is also apparent from the Contact Group on Libya’s statement in July 2011 that “the Gaddafi regime no longer ha[d] any legitimate authority in Libya, and Gaddafi and certain members of his family must go” (McNaught, 2011). This is a much stronger statement compared to that from the Contact Group’s Libyan Conference in
London on March 29, 2011, in which Qatari prime minister Al Thani “urged Muammar Gaddafi, the Libyan leader, to step down to halt bloodshed” (New Libya, 2011).

Gaddafi’s Machiavellian world view prohibited him from entertaining any notion of power-sharing or institutional easing to allow the entry of opposition groups into national politics. In the end, Gaddafi was transformed into a walking dead man as it became apparent to all actors that Gaddafi would fight to his death in an effort to retain sole control of the presidency—a super-valuable good.
5. Syria

5.1 Emergency Rule as Status Quo in Syria

Syria, a country with 23 million people, has essentially been a police state for more than four decades. In the 1960s, Hafez al-Assad entered politics after gaining significant power in the military and assuming the leadership of the Ba’ath Party. After deposing the Syrian leader Salah Jadid in the 1963 coup d’état, Hafez then persevered to become president in 1971 (Abouzeid, 2011). In 2000, Bashar assumed the presidency after his father’s death and has maintained the status quo in Syria ever since. Since 1971, the Assads had increased their control of the country through their preferential treatment of the Alawite sect to the detriment of the Sunni majority and Christian and Druze minorities, thus contributing to ethnic and religious tensions in Syria. The regime’s survival strategy was to place members of the Alawite minority and Ba’ath Party members in senior posts in the government, military and business community (Syria decision, 2011). In Syria, the durability of the Assad regime was strengthened by the flexibility of the institutional and personal networks. The structure of these networks allowed the political elite to remove those individuals who were no longer considered to be friends of the regime (Hemmer, 2003).

The Syrian government used the Emergency Law, enacted in 1963, to prohibit “citizens’ rights to demonstration” as a tool to effectively seal the political space and give the security police the unchecked power to “arrest suspects or people who threaten security” (Abouzeid, 2011, para. 1). The dominant narrative generated and broadcasted by state-controlled media throughout this period was that if the country’s emergency law was repealed, Syria would be consumed by sectarian violence and fundamentalist extremism (Harling & Birke, 2012). This rhetoric bore a distinct likeness to that of Ben Ali’s, where the Tunisian government used a
parallel type of reasoning to justify the restriction of civil rights and the violation of human rights. Like Tunisians, Syrian protestors also engaged in peaceful demonstrations in 2011 and only resorted to violence after the state began to use excessive force to punish citizens. For Bashar, and his father, the indiscriminate use of force was deemed an acceptable tool to secure their presidencies. The Syrian presidency, I argue, remained an indivisible issue for which either man was prepared to unleash (in a rational and calculated manner) untold horrors on Syrians.

As in Tunisia, there were also accounts of events sparking public demonstrations in Syria. On January 26, 2011, a policeman slapped the face “of a young man in the Hariqa commercial district in the heart of Damascus,” (Sayed, 2012, p. 43). The public’s perceived violation of his dignity caused protestors to take to the streets yelling, “The Syrian people will not be humiliated” (Ibid., 2012, p. 43). On March 6, 2011, school children in Dir’a were arrested for writing graffiti against the regime. After the release of a YouTube video showing these children being strapped on the soles of their feet as punishment, outraged Syrians called for Assad’s execution (Harling & Birke, 2012, and Sterling, 2011).

Human Rights Watch reported that, in retaliation to the spread of protests from the city of Daara to Damascus, the government’s security forces used lethal force against peaceful protestors in Daara, on March 25, 2001, and have continued to do so throughout the civil war (We’ve never seen, 2011). The regime legitimized the use of force by claiming that outside forces, “armed gangs,” and Salafists—fundamentalist Sunnis equal to al-Qaida in their views and methods—were also involved in the “armed insurrection” in Syria (Ibid., 2011). Since March 30, 2011, Bashar had refused to make any concessions with the pro-democracy protestors or opposition groups16 (Landis, 2012). Despite being condemned by a legion of countries and

16 The poor organization of opposition groups and the divisions within the Syrian National Council (SNC), Syria’s opposition party, functioned only to strengthen Bashar’s resolve (Landis, 2012).
international organizations for its use of violence, the regime continued to lay military siege against citizens. In April 2011, the regime announced that it would overturn the Emergency Law but its military continued to attack citizens (Harling & Birke, 2012). In September 2012, opposition groups estimated that 27,000 deaths and no doubt countless human rights violations were attributed to this state-led violence (Homes & Liffey, 2012). And, as of February 2013, the UN reported that 70,000 Syrians had died since the start of the conflict in March 2011. The conflict in Syria has evolved into a full-fledged civil war with both sides determined to eliminate the other regardless of its toll on the country.

5.2 Military Might Trumps All

Bashar continues to hold firm to a zero-sum view of his presidency and uses military offensives launched against demonstrators in regions of the country viewed as opposition strongholds. The initial public demonstrations, such as the 200,000 protestors in Hama on July 1, 2011, or the Day of Defiance on July 15, 2011 when one million protestors gathered to reject the regime, indicated the large public support for regime change (Mroue & Karam, 2011). In response, the Syrian security forces escalated military offensives in cities such as Hama, Homs and Daara. Foreign government sanctions, such as banning travel and freezing the assets of the political elite, have been as ineffective as the imposition of an embargo on oil exports by the European Union (EU), on September 2, 2011 (Al-Khalidi, 2011).

The EU, the United States and Britain have maintained a critical stance against the Assad regime for its military brutality during the Syrian Awakening. Surprisingly enough, even the Saudi king Abdullah, on August 8, 2011, condemned the Syrian government’s actions, stating that “the events in Syria ‘had nothing to do with religion, or values, or ethics’” (Saudi Arabia, 2011).

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17 The UN reported in November, 2012, that an estimated 3,500 Syrians had died due to the conflict.
In November 2011, the Arab League held an emergency meeting in Cairo to declare that Syria had violated the Arab League Peace Plan. The Arab League ruled that Syria’s membership was suspended and also imposed economic sanctions on the country in an attempt to affect Assad. The failure of these actions by foreign governments to influence Assad reinforces his blind determination to control Syria.

However, Russia and other states, such as China, Iran, Lebanon and Iraq, continue to support the regime. On September 12, 2011, Russia entered into the fray with President Dmitry Medvedev categorically rejecting the sanctions levied against Syria. In the UNSC, Russia and China banded together to protect Syria by preventing UN military intervention (Harling & Birke, 2012). In addition, Russia and China blocked a UN resolution, on February 4, 2012, that was intended to condemn Assad’s actions and approve a plan whereby Assad would transition power to a deputy (Ibid., 2012).

In contrast to the three aforementioned case studies, Assad’s grip on power persists despite domestic opposition and international condemnation. Since the start of the uprisings, on March 25, 2011, the Syrian military continues to support him. The composition of the Syrian military is one of the key determinants of the regime’s survival. Of the 220,000 troops, “the rank and file is largely Sunni conscripts” (Nepstad, 2001, p. 3). In contrast, the majority of the military officers originate from the Alawite sect. It is also the government’s policy that all Sunnis holding important government or military posts are to be carefully vetted to ensure their loyalty to the Assad regime18 (Barany, 2011, and Landis, 2012). In the face of the defection of more than 10,000 soldiers, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and rebel groups still have not been successful in toppling the Assad regime (Syria’s uprising, 2012). Assad is well aware of the weakness of his

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18 One estimate is that 80 percent of the Syrian officer corps is Alawi (Landis, 2012).
opponents, which include the inferior FSA, fractionalized rebel groups and the incomplete alignment of the opposition groups under the umbrella of the Syrian National Council, as well as Islamists and secular Syrians, who are profoundly divided (Ibid., 2012). After more than 50 years of emergency rule, the interests of the military have become deeply entrenched with the Ba’ath political elite. These groups are invested in maintaining the status quo in order to protect their personal interests or avoid prosecution should the regime fall (Barany, 2011, and Nepstad, 2011).

These factors helped to increase Assad’s success in creating recombinant policies to reinforce his iron grip on the country. In stating this, it is important to not rule out the possibility that the military or the nation’s business and political elite may shift their allegiance to opposition groups in the future should it become in their best interest to do so.19 There have been defections from the rank and file of the Syrian government and military but not in sufficient numbers to destabilize the regime.

5.3 Recombinant Authoritarianism and Political Survival

The second factor that has aided the survival of the Syrian dictatorship is the timing of the uprisings. Tunisia was the first country in the region to experience a popular revolt. Due to the speed of events that unfolded in that country, the Ben Ali regime, when compared to the Assad government, did not have the time or opportunity to learn from the actions or, for that matter, the mistakes of other regimes facing similar domestic political opposition. In contrast, the Syrian government was in a more fortunate position as it was able to watch the protests unfold and monitor the international reactions to the other Arab uprisings. As a consequence, the Assad regime had time to adapt to the changing domestic and regional political conditions and plan its strategic military response or, in other words, engage in recombinant authoritarianism

19 The military, at some point in time, may conclude that it is necessary to eliminate Assad in order to protect their interests as in the case of Egypt.
(Heydemann & Leenders, 2001). More specifically, Assad—while being keenly aware of the fate of Tunisia’s Ben Ali, Egypt’s Mubarak and Libya’s Gaddafi—understood the critical role the military played in the fall of these leaders.

The unexpected disintegration of these despotic Arab regimes reinforced the political hazard that loomed, writ-large, for the Assad regime—to appear weak in the eyes of Syrians could result in the escalation of nation-wide protests and cause the collapse of his government. Bashar needed only to look to his father’s legacy to realize the effectiveness of brutal military force in subjugating the masses and, thereby, ensuring his political survival. The 1982 attack on the Syrian city of Hama illustrates this point. Hafez along with his brother Rifaat, as head of the Syrian Republic Guard, unleashed the full force of the Syrian military on Hama in response to public demonstrations rejecting Alawite tyranny. The attack on this Sunni opposition stronghold demonstrated to the entire country the determination and brutality of the Assad regime.

Domestic recombinant authoritarianism comes into play in this instance as Bashar had the opportunity to learn from his father’s past successes in controlling the nation. The regime established military brutality as the normative tool for controlling the country and effectively sealed the political space in Syria. The Assads had created an autocracy in which the president was the law—*rex lex* (Rodrigues, 2011). It was, therefore, predictable that a violent military response to the Syrian Awakening would occur.

The survival of the Assad government was also assisted by international recombinant authoritarianism. On reflection, Russia and China believed that their abstention from UNSC Resolution 1973, on March 17, 2011, on military intervention in Libya was an error. The passing of Resolution 1973, with a vote of 10 in favour and 5 abstentions, authorized a coalition

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20 According to international law, Hafez was guilty for the massacre of 20,000 of his own people and razing Hama but was never tried for these killings (Rodrigues, 2011).

21 In fact, the BRIC countries and Germany were the five countries that abstained (Tahir-Kheli, 2011).
of member states to take “all necessary measures,” including the creation of a no-fly zone over Libya to protect Libyan citizens from pro-Gaddafi forces (Libya UN Resolution, 2011, and Smith & Thorpe, 2011). Instead of delaying intervention in Libya, as Russia and China had hoped—and avoiding international criticism of supporting this despotic regime had they vetoed the resolution—the Libyan pro-democratic militia, with the support of the UN coalition forces, swiftly destabilized the regime, aiding Gaddafi’s demise. Since Russia and China had witnessed the events unfolding in Libya, they immediately rejected the Arab League initiative for military action in Syria on the grounds that the actions of NATO coalition troops in Libya had exceeded those approved under Resolution 1973 (Rice, 2012, and Smith & Thorpe, 2011). Russia and China’s position regarding Syria was also influenced by their own domestic political interests and geopolitical interests in Syria and the region.

5.4 Assad’s Cat-and-Mouse Game of Deceit

Since March 2011, Assad’s actions have eroded any remaining traces of legitimacy the regime may have had. Bashar continues to play a cat-and-mouse game with opposition groups and the international community as a method of retaining power and holds firm to the presidency despite other nations’ calls for his resignation. In February 2012, ambassador to the UN Susan Rice warned Assad “that [his] days [were] numbered” and stressed that “it [was] time and past time for [him] to transfer power responsibly and peacefully” (Watkins, Levs & Yan, 2012). As evidenced in the June 30, 2012, Geneva communiqué, the Action Group for Syria also demanded a cessation of the regime’s armed violence against Syrian citizens in a six-point plan and Security Resolutions 2042 and 2043 (Action group, 2012). The group also demanded a political transition to replace the Assad regime, including a transitional governing body and a new constitution (Ibid., 2012). Kofi Annan, the UN and Arab League’s special envoy, attempted to
broker a peace deal with Assad by implementing a “Syrian-led transition” with a “unity government” but failed miserably (Annan Russia, 2012). On October 26, 2012, Lakhdar Brahimi, as Annan’s replacement, negotiated a four-day cease fire, but the agreement was immediately violated (Steele, 2012).

On January 7, 2013, Assad presented his own three-point peace plan, in his first public statement in seven months. In his plan, he did not concede to the Action Group’s demand for his removal from office (Surk, 2013). Rather, Assad continued to blame “terrorists” and “thugs” for the violence in Syria, charged the UN in a biased analysis of the Syrian civil war and refused to negotiate with opposition groups, whom he referred to as “murderous criminals” (Ibid., 2013). In response, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon acknowledged Assad’s rejection of “a political handover and establishment of a transitional governing body” (Ibid., 2013).

The National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces22 (Syrian Coalition) argued, in response to Assad, that “he [was] incapable of initiating a political solution that puts forward a resolution for the country’s struggle and an exit for his regime” (Owen, 2013). Compared with other opposition groups the Syrian Coalition, having the endorsement of the international community, does differ in its position regarding the resolution of the Syrian civil war. In October 2012, the National Co-ordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC) asserted that the negotiation of a cease fire with the absence of foreign intervention was the only viable route to realizing a truce and possible peace (Steele, 2012). Even though there is an apparent division between these two opposition groups, the Syrian Coalition’s position that military intervention and increasing international pressure were needed to topple the Assad government is more in line with what the “street” wants (Kaileh, 2011). As of February 2013, the

22 The Syrian Coalition was formed in November 2012 and has the recognition of the UN and the Arab League as a legitimate representative body for Syrians (Sidner, Khadder, & Alkhshali, 2012).
regime showed no signs of halting the state-led violence, as seen in the current battle between the military and rebels to control the city of Aleppo (Surk, 2013). Some of the Syrian opposition groups may disagree as to whether or not a power-sharing agreement can be negotiated with Assad, but given that Assad continues to view the presidency as a super-valuable good, physical force may well prove to be the only option to remove him from office (Owen, 2013).

5.5 The Fight to the Death, not Political Transition

The battle for Aleppo, Syria’s largest city, between rebel troops and the Syrian army has become one of the hot spots of the civil war. The Syrian military first launched its attack in the rebel-controlled district of Salaheddin in Aleppo, on July 28, 2012 (Peterson, 2012). The fight to control the once pro-Assad Aleppo has become a symbol of the fight to control the country—a fight that now appears to be to the death (Eulich, 2012). There have been no productive negotiations or peace talks between the two sides—only bullets, grenades and artillery. The FSA considers a military solution to the conflict the only viable option for the country, with the FSA’s emphasis on military intervention overpowering the more moderate Syrian voices, such as the NCC (Al-Arabiya, 2012, and Nerguizian, 2012).

Analysts argue that Assad’s position is most vulnerable to the defections of high-ranking military officials and en masse defections, but not those of the rank and file. Yet, since January 2011 (the start of the Syrian uprising), the Syrian army has experienced a continual stream of defections from its rank and file, but not en masse defections (Al-Arabiya, 2012). These defectors have become the backbone of the FSA, but have not severely weakened the Syrian military. One report found that only 74 high-level officers have defected as of December 27, 2012 (Atassi, 2012). Of this number, 54 were senior military and security officials with the remainder being government officials (Ibid., 2012). Other reports suggest that only 40 of the
approximately 1,200 brigadier generals in the Syrian army have defected, which does not pose a serious threat to Assad’s presidency (Al-Arabiya, 2012). The 100 or so senior-ranking generals, those above the rank of colonel, are still loyal to Assad, which improved the regime’s ability to survive (Ibid., 2012).

On December 26, 2012, Major General Shallal himself defected from the Syrian army; his defection is ironic as he was responsible for preventing military defections (Fahim & Gladstone, 2012). On Al-Arabiya, Shallal confirmed that “the regime has lost control over most of the country” (Ibid., 2012). The survival of the Assad regime or the victory of the Syrian Coalition will be greatly influenced by whether or not senior-ranking generals or en mass defections, such as a brigade, occur (Ibid., 2012). If they occur, Assad’s presidency could be in peril. Although the outcome of the Syrian civil war remains uncertain, the opposition groups and rebel forces continue to wage their battle against the regime. In closing, the Syrian presidency hangs in the balance as a super-valuable good, with Assad refusing to accept a leadership transition and the FSA focusing on ousting Assad from office. A compromise by either party seems out of reach.
6. Conclusion

On December 17, 2010, the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouzizi, in response to the perceived violation of his dignity by Tunisian police and his subsequent death, ignited the Arab Spring. The Arab dictators immediately responded with the unwarranted use of brutal military force to suppress (what were initially) peaceful protests. This resulted in millions of Arabs throughout the MENA region to spontaneously release pent-up frustrations, after enduring decades of autocratic leadership, with cries for justice, freedom and dignity. Arab citizens, opposition and rebel groups quickly mobilized to demand the immediate resignation of their respective leaders. These Arab presidents, on the other hand, used all possible resources to maintain the political status quo. The focus of this thesis was to offer an explanation for the responses of these rational government and non-governmental actors in the contestation of the leadership of each nation.

In the examination of the Arab Awakening in four countries—Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria—the principal finding of this thesis was that Ron Hassner’s model of issue indivisibility rather than James Fearon’s model of the commitment problem provided the best explanation for these uprisings. In each case, I argued that the presidency and control of the nation was best described as a super-valuable good, which was considered to be essentially indivisible by state and non-state actors alike. The Arab Spring was particularly telling of each leader’s rigid thinking and approach to governing; the governments refused to enter into negotiations for a power-sharing agreement. The presidential incumbents blatantly rejected the public’s demands for their resignation and democratic transition, and, in retaliation, they sanctioned military violence to control the country. The public, being keenly aware of the institutionally reinforced advantage the decades-long dictatorships gave the regimes, rejected the negotiation of a power-
sharing agreement for fear that the deposed president and his allies would renege on the agreement and mount a leadership challenge at some future time. In addition, the public, and opposition and rebel groups, maintained their resolve to oust their president from office throughout the uprising.

The second important contribution of this thesis, though not a new discovery, was that survival of these dictators was critically dependent on whether or not the military supported the regime. In Tunisia and Egypt, the military’s decision to shift support to the public resulted in the sudden fall of Ben Ali and then Mubarak from power. In Libya, sanctioned international intervention by a coalition of Western powers resulted in the elimination of Gaddafi, whereas Assad continued to hold firm to his presidency owing to the Syrian military’s support of the regime and the blockage of international military intervention with the support of Russia and China on the UNSC. The third contribution of this thesis was that the Assad regime’s use of recombinant authoritarianism—the adaption of its policies following events in its neighbouring Arab countries—resulted in increasing the prospects of his survival. Lastly, the Arab Spring has shown us that the power of one is not infinite but can be durable (Ghonim, 2012).
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