

**P a l e s t i n e**  
**a n d t h e S e a s o n**  
**o f A r a b**  
**D i s c o n t e n t**

**By Lawrence R. Davidson**

**T**he Arab world is changing. An analogy can be made to an individual living under chronic stress. At some point that person finally has had more than can be borne and just explodes. The timing of the explosion is not clearly predictable. However, when it comes, it is life-changing and makes that individual reluctant to meekly go back into the same stressful conditions. For that there might have to be high levels of coercion. So it is with today's Arab masses. They have exploded. The future is in flux.

*(Continued on Page 3.)*

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## About This Issue

On March 16, 2010, Gen. David Patraeus, Commander, U.S. Central Command, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that he places "the U.S.'s inability to generate progress on the Israeli-Arab peace process and perceived U.S. favoritism toward Israel" at the top of his list of challenges jeopardizing U.S. interests in his area of operations.

That was prior to this year's Arab Spring and the convulsive uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa. How have these events impacted what the General calls the Israeli-Arab "peace" process and "perceived" U.S. favoritism toward Israel?

For answers we went to Dr. Lawrence Davidson. He is professor of history at West Chester University in Pennsylvania, author of "America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood," and co-author of the 9th edition of "A Concise History of the Middle East."



Professor Lawrence R. Davidson

Our book review selection on page 14 is "Traditional Palestinian Costume: Origins and Evolution" by Hanan K. Munayyer. This is a 14¼" x 10¼" coffee-table book, 554 pages in length, with over 500 full-color photographs. An opus by any measure.

As for the reviewer, a disclosure: I have known Hanan and her husband Farah for over 25 years and am a founding member of their Palestine Heritage Foundation. A few years ago, at a dinner event in New Jersey, I praised them for their years of intense research. And I concluded with the comment that, while others continue to rob Palestinians of their land, the Munayyers were making darn sure that no one will ever steal their Palestinian culture. This book is the illustrated deed to that culture.

Finally, a note about a previous *Link* issue. We are pleased to announce that Jonathan Cook has won this year's Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. He was told by the judges that they were particularly impressed by his December 2010 *Link* issue "Publish It Not." The citation for the prize reads: "Jonathan Cook's work on Palestine and Israel, especially his decoding of official propaganda and his outstanding analysis of events often obfuscated in the mainstream, had made him one of the reliable truth-tellers in the Middle East." We congratulate Jonathan and thank him, once again, for his contribution to our publication.

John F. Mahoney  
Executive Director

## The Present Circumstances

The Arab World has experienced popular uprisings from North Africa to the Persian Gulf. They began in December 2010 in Tunisia and spread the next month to Egypt. Since then popular protests have broken out in, among other places, Syria, Jordan, Yemen, Bahrain, and Libya. As we will see, not all of these revolts are harbingers of Spring. As of this writing, that prospect seems confined to two countries, Tunisia and Egypt, and even here the transitions are works in progress. Elsewhere, suppression of popular protests seeking a more liberal political environment has brought the prospect of a stark Winter.

We know the conditions that make outbreaks of unrest probable: economic problems such as high unemployment, inflation and erosion of local enterprise due to "free trade" engendered competition; rampant corruption that often results in the concentration of wealth in the hands of the ruling clique; and entrenched power that uses harsh repression causing the behavior of the "security services" to themselves become criminal forces of a criminal regime. In all the countries now experiencing popular unrest some or all of these problems have persisted for decades.

Against this backdrop one can describe the general evolution taken by the protests we now witness:

*First* - The default positions among the population of dictatorships are fear and passivity. The "security services" create an atmosphere of fear and this reinforces the natural orientation of the majority of people to be apolitical, to mind their own business, to not get involved.

*Second* - Against this background, something outrageous or inspiring may occur. In the case of Tunisia it was the self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi; in the case of Egypt it was a brutal murder of the young businessman Khaled Said by the police combined with the inspiring events in Tunisia. In the case of the Palestinians, the first Intifada was triggered by the killing of four Palestinians by an Israeli truck driver at Gaza's Erez Crossing in 1987, and the second by the failure of the Camp David process followed by Ariel Sharon's provocative "visit" to Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque in 2000. Whatever the event

happens to be, it is enough to overcome the fear and passivity of at least some of the people and bring them into the streets.

*Third* - At this point the regime in question often attacks the protesters violently. This may include shooting some of the demonstrators, as was the case in 1989 at Tiananmen Square in China. This can end the protests abruptly and send the discontented back into a state of sullen passivity. It can also give rise to an underground movement that may spark civil war.

*Fourth* - However, if the regime hesitates, as was the case in Tunisia and Egypt as well as Iran at the end of the Shah's regime, or responds in a relatively mild way, or if important elements of the security services refuse orders, more of the citizenry are likely to overcome their default norms. Fear and passivity ebb and all the discontent and hatred that has built up over decades comes pouring out.

*Fifth* - When and if the small crowds become massive, the regime may begin to offer half measures such as change of government personnel, "dialogue" committees and the like, in order to take the momentum out of the protests.

*Sixth* - If the populace resists the half measures and the protests persist, the days of most dictatorial regimes may be numbered, or a brutal civil war may develop.

## Apparent Successes:

### TUNISIA

Tunisia's recent dictatorship had lasted over twenty years. Unemployment had hovered around 14 percent for a good part of that time. On average 25 percent of university graduates failed to find work. Many Tunisians saw no future for themselves or their children. Corruption thrived among those close to the dictator's circle as well as elements of the police. The police were, in effect, a privileged element whose position was dependent on the existence of the regime. Their interests were thereby separated from those of the population at large.

This was the situation when, on December 17, 2010, Mohammad Bouazizi, 26 years old, had a con-

frontation with the police in the town of Sidi Bouzid. Bouazizi's only means of support was a cart from which he sold fruits and vegetables. He had no permit for the cart. We do not know why he had no permit, whether it had anything to do with the prohibitive cost of the permit, or whether there was a demand of a bribe involved in obtaining a permit. Whatever the case, on that day the police confiscated the cart and assaulted Bouazizi when he protested. The authorities refused to hear his subsequent appeal. The combination of economic despair, police brutality and the utter indifference of the regime to his plight led Bouazizi to burn himself to death in front of the Sidi Bouzid's municipal building. This was the particularly outrageous occurrence that set off mass protests in Tunisia and, indirectly, much of the rest of the Arab world.

By the end of 2010 daily confrontations were occurring across the country. Police violence slowly escalated but not rapidly or harshly enough to quell the protests. On December 28, 11 days into the disturbances, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the head of the dictatorship, went on TV and warned the population that the protests were bad for the economy and therefore demonstrators would be firmly punished. This had little impact. Soon the unemployed and the poor were joined by large numbers of lawyers and students who demonstrated in solidarity with those who had been arrested, injured and killed by the police. Early in the new year, 2011, a "cyberactivist" organization named "Anonymous" announced "Operation Tunisia," attacking official government websites and temporarily shutting some of them down. Then, in the second week of January, the regime increased its level of violence through the use of snipers shooting randomly into the crowds. Instead of quelling the protests this action scandalized most Tunisians and earned the protesters nationwide support.

It was at this point, on January 13, that the regime sought to save itself by offering concessions.

Such a move must have marked an abandonment of Ben Ali by other members of the dictatorship for, on the 14th, he fled the country while those members of his family and his closest allies who remained began to be arrested. This was the period when the regime tried to placate the protesters by changing the faces of those in charge. The regime's ministers were shuffled about, but surviving elements of the ruling elite stayed in power. It was only when the population continued to protest, insisting that any new government must not be associated with the old ruling elite and, in a parallel development, internal order melted away along with the regime's police establishment, that the Tunisian army stepped in and took charge.

## In Tunisia the army, unlike the police, refused orders to shoot at the protesting crowds and the dictatorship began to collapse.

In the case of Tunisia, the temporary imposition of control by the army proved acceptable to a majority of citizens. This factor probably saved the country from civil war. Why was the army acceptable? Most importantly the army, unlike the police, refused orders to shoot at the protesting crowds. Also, it was probably the Tunisian army's Chief of Staff, General Rachid Ammar, who told Ben Ali that his position was no longer tenable, and that he should step down. At this point Ben Ali left the country and the dictatorship began to collapse. The army is also credited with maintaining order when the ensuing political vacuum threatened chaos. And finally, there is the fact that the Tunisian army is a conscript force. That means that the soldiers are drawn from the population at large and not select elements only. Asking them to fire on the crowds was asking them to fire on people just like themselves.

### Tunisia and the Palestinians

The Palestinians have a special place in their collective hearts for Tunisia. When, in 1982, the Israelis invaded Lebanon and forced P.L.O. forces to leave that country, it was Tunisia that agreed to take them in. For the next twelve years they remained there, returning to Palestine only with the signing of the

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Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestine National Authority (P.N.A.) in 1994. As a result of this history the P.L.O. leadership, including Yasir Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas, developed close personal ties with Tunisia's authoritarian elite, including Ben Ali.

This helps explain why, among the Palestinians, there were two reactions to the events in Tunisia, the popular one and the official one.

The popular reaction to the Tunisian protests and the fall of the Ben Ali regime was overwhelmingly positive. The Palestinian "street" felt a fraternal connection with the Tunisian people but not necessarily with their oppressive government.

The leaders, however, of the P.N.A., men such as Mahmoud Abbas and Salam Fayyad, were more likely to identify with the fate of Ben Ali. After all, the Palestinian Authority leadership can itself be identified by many Palestinians as authoritarian and collaborators with the Israeli regime. Therefore, it came as no surprise that soon after the outbreak of unrest in Tunisia, the West Bank based P.N.A. forcefully prevented a Palestinian demonstration of solidarity with the Tunisian protesters scheduled to be held in Ramallah.

Omar Barghouti, who was one of the organizers of the thwarted demonstration, concluded that "the decision of the Palestinian Authority to suppress the celebration of solidarity with Tunisia following the fall of the dictator, Ben Ali, indicates where its loyalty lies." The Hamas authorities in Gaza were more forthcoming, creating officially organized demonstrations of support. Their emphasis was on solidarity with the Tunisian people as well as the assertion that the Palestinians suffer from dictatorship (specifically that of Israel) just as had the Tunisians. All Palestinians, both in Gaza and the West Bank as well as abroad, shared a moment of optimism with events in Tunisia because of the implication that if the Tunisian people can rise up and win their liberty, so can the Palestinians.

## EGYPT

Egypt had also suffered long under the dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak, an air force officer who took over the country after the 1981 assassination of Anwar Sadat. In 2010 a particularly brutal police murder of a young Egyptian businessman, Khaled Said, and the subsequent attempt at a cover-up created widespread dissatisfaction in Egypt. Some of this anger was vented in public demonstrations organized through electronic communications such as Facebook. Though electronic social networking

Though electronic social networking would certainly facilitate the protest movement in Egypt, it wasn't what made it possible.

would certainly facilitate the protest movement in Egypt, it is an exaggeration to say that it made these protests possible. It was the material conditions of ongoing economic despair, repression and corruption that made them possible. In terms of the latter, Wikileaks released U.S. government cables describing

the depth of Egyptian corruption in January 2011, and this only increased the growing anger within Egypt.

It is against this background that Egyptian activists, some of whom were adept at the use of social networking on the internet, were spurred on by events in Tunisia. On January 25, 2011, a day set aside in Egypt to honor the police, large numbers of citizens took to the streets in what they labeled a "Day of Rage" protesting police conduct. Soon there were almost daily demonstrations in Cairo, centered at the now famous Tahrir Square, as well as in Alexandria, Suez, Ismailia and elsewhere. As in Tunisia, Egyptian lawyers and students joined the protests in large numbers.

The Mubarak regime initially responded with tear gas and water canon in an attempt to control the crowds. Soon the authorities also were trying to disrupt internet communications. The regime started to target journalists, both foreign and domestic, for physical abuse and arrest. As time went on police violence escalated. Toward the end of January, the Egyptian army was ordered onto the streets of Cairo, Alexandria and Suez as a show of force, but did not

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take part in suppressing the protests. None of these moves lessened the demonstrations.

At this point Mubarak began to fire and replace members of the regime in the hope that superficial changes would placate public opinion. He fired his cabinet on January 29 and appointed Omar Suleiman, his intelligence chief, as vice president in charge of handling the emergency. On February 1 he promised not to run for reelection as president and to reform the constitution. He also ordered a cut in food prices. However, events had gone too far. As Mohamed El Baradei, the Egyptian born Director General of the International Atomic Energy Administration, said upon returning to Cairo, "What we started can never be pushed back." By this time it was clear that the primary demand was for Mubarak's resignation and an end to his dictatorship. The cosmetic changes would not work.

By February 3, the regime was attacking protesters with live ammunition. The army now moved tanks onto the streets. It is in the period between February 3 and 10 that the Egyptian army leaders must have made the decision that they were not willing, or possibly just not able, to command the troops to attack the protesting crowds. As in Tunisia, Egypt's army is a conscript one. The troops are of the same general background as the protesters.

This decision probably played a large part in Mubarak's February 11 decision to finally resign and give over power to a military council. The army commanders quickly announced that a process leading to a democratic government would begin. What was then and continues to be clear is the ability of Egyptian protest leaders representing youth, labor, religious groups, etc. to bring massive crowds back onto the streets in short order. It is this ability that serves as a guarantee that the promised process will go for-

ward at an acceptable pace.

### Egypt and the Palestinians

If the Palestinians had nostalgic feelings for the Tunisians, their feelings about the Egyptians were much more immediate and pragmatic. The Gaza Strip holds over one and half million Palestinians who have been under blockade by Israel since 2006 when Hamas had legally and fairly been elected to head the government of all Palestine. That blockade, functioning as little more than collective punishment against the Palestinians for having elected a govern-

ment unacceptable to Israel and the United States, was and is illegal under international law. The problem for Palestinian-Egyptian relations was that the Mubarak dictatorship, encouraged by the United States, had cooperated with Israel in this illegal venture.

That cooperation had kept the Egyptian-Gaza border crossing at Rafah restricted to but a trickle of traffic

while the living standards of the Gazan Palestinians fell precipitously. In January 2008, frustration with Egyptian policy at the Rafah crossing led to a Palestinian attack on the border fortifications and their partial destruction. This allowed for a brief interlude when Gazans poured into Egyptian Rafah to purchase supplies that were otherwise unavailable due to the blockade. The only other way to obtain these "contraband" supplies was through underground tunnels connecting Egypt and Gaza. These were the work of enterprising Gazans whose use of the tunnels was labeled "smuggling" by Israel, the United States and the Mubarak regime.

As a consequence of Mubarak's willingness to cooperate with Israel, there was not much support for his dictatorship among the Palestinians. What

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cordial relations existed were restricted to the Palestine National Authority of Mahmoud Abbas. This group, headquartered in the West Bank, had lost the parliamentary elections of 2006 to Hamas. However, instead of stepping down, they cooperated with Israel and the United States in the isolation of Gaza and the setting aside of the elections. In truth, this made Abbas and his group collaborators with the enemies of Palestine and the "authority" they continued to have was and is based on coercion and their control of outside aid money. Hamas, the real elected government of Palestine, was now restricted to Gaza.

Thus, when the popular protests broke out in Cairo in early 2011, most Palestinians and particularly those in the Gaza Strip, welcomed them. While the Abbas regime in the West Bank, ruling by decree and with no democratic sanction, was busy trying to restrict Palestinian public displays of enthusiasm, the government in Gaza was sympathetic but cautious. Official demonstrations of support for the Tunisians had been organized by both Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza City in early January, but the authorities felt that such demonstrations in reference to Egypt should wait until it was clear that Mubarak would go. Nonetheless, the mood of the Palestinian "street" matched well that of the Egyptians demanding Mubarak's ouster. It was the opinion of most observers that once the Mubarak regime fell, whatever replaced it would neither want to nor be able to maintain the blockade at the Rafah crossing. Egyptian popular opinion was solidly against the Gaza blockade and, in the new political climate in Egypt, that opinion now was a powerful incentive to change the old ways and policies.

On May 28, 2011, with Mubarak no longer in power, the interim government of Egypt moved to at least partially normalize the Egyptian-Gaza border at Rafah. Now all Palestinian women, children and men under 18 and over the age of 40 can enter Egypt without a visa. Students of any age, who have been admitted to foreign schools can also travel. Still, those who fall outside the allowed categories or have no passports or other identification documents acceptable to the Egyptians continue to be confined.

In practice, things did not go smoothly between the new military council that temporarily runs Egypt and the authorities in Gaza. The initial opening of

the Rafah border crossing lasted only a few days and then was abruptly closed down once more by the Egyptians. This led to a near riot on the Gaza side of the border as hundreds of people who had expected to exit were turned away. The reason for this problematic beginning was Egypt's failure to be ready to handle the demand for exit from Gaza. They had set the initial number of Gazans who could exit at 400 a day while the demand was much higher. Their typical bureaucratic procedures made the entire process slow and uncertain, resulting in explosive frustration. As of this writing the Rafah border is reopened with the rate of exit increased to 550 a day—still much below the level of demand. Also, the ability to export goods from Gaza through Rafah is still stymied. These remaining restrictions may well improve once there is an elected civilian government in Egypt.

## **Possible Failures:**

### **SYRIA**

Syria has been a one party dictatorship since the early 1960s. That party is the secular Ba'ath Party and it has been dominated by the al-Assad clan since 1970. The al-Assads are part of the minority Alawite sect in Syria. The Alawites are a religious group, an off-shoot of Shiite Islam, and make up about 12% of the Syrian population. The Syrian Alawites were traditionally discriminated against by the majority Sunnis and often found their best economic hopes in the Syrian military. Over time they came to dominate the armed forces and today they are in control of the country's security services.

Syria shares some of the same domestic problems of other Arab countries ruled by authoritarian regimes. These include economic problems. Over the last 30 years the regime has moved Syria in the direction of a free market economy which has resulted in a lowering of state subsidies for basic goods and therefore a deterioration in the conditions of the poor. Freer trade has hurt local industries and crafts and raised the unemployment rate. Ethno-religious tensions have also persisted. Alawite control of the government is resented by the Sunni majority, an increasing number of whom have become influenced

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by the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in the country. Syria also has a sizable Kurdish population (about 7%) and there are reports of Kurdish unrest as well.

The regime has kept a lid on these problems through widespread repression. Since 1962 the Ba'ath has ruled using an Emergency Law that denies the population any constitutional protections. As a consequence, Syria has a poor human rights record as the police and the army use their unlimited powers of arrest and detention to silence all opposition.

As in other countries in the region, the events of 2011 had been preceded by sporadic protests and rebellions in the recent past. For Syria the worst past episode, and the one that unfortunately serves as a precedent for the present behavior of the Syrian security services, was the 1982 attack on the city of Hama. Hama was the stronghold of a conservative Sunni religious movement that began a rebellion against the secular Ba'ath dictatorship in 1976. Resistance to the regime persisted until 1982 when the Syrian army surrounded Hama and, using tanks and artillery, shelled the city indiscriminately. Reports of the death toll range up to 25,000. Kurdish-Arab riots that erupted in 2004 were also put down with what many regard as excessive use of force. This history helps explain the present regime's lack of hesitation to defend the dictatorship through the violent use of the army and police.

Small protests began in Syria in late January 2011. These drew little attention and Al Jazeera dubbed Syria "a kingdom of silence" in early February.

The protests did not pick up speed until the middle of March. On March 15 simultaneous demonstrations took place in a number of different cities in the country. This effort was obviously coordinated, as was what shortly followed. On Friday March 18, following communal prayers, thousands of demonstra-

tors took to the streets across the country. They were demanding an end to corruption. The central city for this protest appeared to be Daraa, a provincial capital city in south Syria close to the border with Jordan. By March 20, protesters in Daraa were setting fire to government buildings and the local Ba'ath party headquarters. Calls for the end to corruption were now joined by demands for the end of the Emergency Law and the release of political prisoners. These countrywide coordinated demonstrations followed a pattern (the demonstrations would regularly

follow Friday prayers) and pointed to Syria's Muslim Brotherhood as the organizing group.

The response of the authorities has remained consistently harsh. The regime claimed that the protests were the work of Islamic fundamentalists who wanted to replace Syria's secular regime with a religious one. They quickly involved the army in the

process of suppression, relying particularly on those divisions that were mainly Alawite. The precedent of Hama in 1982 was obviously there and the regime began to use artillery, mortar and tank fire, as well as live rifle fire, in Daraa and elsewhere.

At the same time the regime held out the possibility of concessions. Two hundred political prisoners were released on March 26, a promise to end the Emergency Law was made and subsequently on April 21 the Law was, at least in name, lifted. The cabinet was reshuffled. None of this made any difference to the pace or size of the demonstrations.

The al-Assad regime mounted large counter-demonstrations. On March 29 literally hundreds of thousands of Syrians demonstrated across the country in support of the government.

It was also in March that the demonstrations against the regime took on a new character. Some of the anti-government protesters appeared with weapons that had been procured through gun-running across the Lebanese border. Simultaneously, anger at Syrian minorities, particularly Christian groups

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whose relation with the regime is cordial, began to grow among elements of the protest movement. Fear of ever more sectarian violence in Syria is now a real concern.

As of this writing large demonstrations continue in Syria as does the regime's violent response. The regime continues a carrot and stick strategy, offering to create "dialogue committees" that would theoretically lead to democratic reforms. However, after years of periodically hearing such reform talk from Bashar al-Assad, few take it seriously. Some of the demonstrators are armed and it is now both protesters and security personnel who are being killed and injured. When you have a regime willing to use full force against its population, yet the protesting element of that population is not intimidated and portions of it begin to take up arms, you have a formula for civil war.

### **Syria and the Palestinians**

Syria is a very important country for the Palestinians. Over 400,000 Palestinians live there and in the past Syria has given refuge to a number of Palestinian political parties. Thus the Syrian regime has always been supportive of the Palestinian cause, though sometimes more favorable to one faction than another. Presently, the external wing of Hamas is headquartered in the Syrian capital of Damascus. There seems to be an expectation on the part of the Syrian authorities that Palestinians should be vocally supportive of the government in Damascus.

This expectation has put Syrian Palestinians, and particularly the Hamas representatives, in an awkward position. The Syrian regime has requested that Hamas publicly express their support for the al-Assad regime. They are, however, reluctant to do so for a number of reasons. One is that they simply do not know which side is going to win this contest and so declaring for one side at this point is a dangerous gamble. If they choose the ultimate loser it could cost them Syria's support for Hamas's position in Gaza. The second reason is that Hamas is an Islamic movement and it appears that the revolt in Syria is largely the product of the Syrian Islamists. For a Palestinian Islamic movement to declare itself for a secular government against Syrian Islamists is probably something Hamas wants to avoid.

So their preferred position is neutrality. Here is how Salah Bardawil, a Gaza-based Hamas spokesman, puts it: Hamas "cannot support a party against another party in an Arab country. The Syrian leadership ... should understand Hamas's strategic principle not to intervene in the internal affairs of the states." Syrian pressure on Hamas has not been so great as to threaten the organization's tenure in Damascus. Nonetheless, Hamas officials in Syria are no doubt looking for a back-up country to relocate to if necessary.

As for the nearly half a million Palestinians living in Syria, many are by now well integrated into the general population, yet they face the same dilemma as Hamas. Those who have obtained positions within the government bureaucracy back the al-Assad regime. Some of the younger generation have joined the protesters. However, it is probably safe to say that the majority of Palestinians in Syria have tried to remain neutral.

### **JORDAN**

Jordan too has been impacted by the popular unrest sweeping the Arab world. Jordan's economic situation is not good. Unemployment stands at about 12%, while 25% of the population live in poverty. Inflation, particularly in the case of foodstuffs and fuel, stagnant salary levels and regressive taxes make things worse. Corruption, at least at higher levels of government, is another problem. Until the latest protests, freedom of speech and the right to demonstrate were all restricted. Dissidents were regularly arrested without due process and usually tortured into giving confessions.

Taking their cue from the protests in Tunisia and Egypt, Jordanians began peaceful protests in late January 2011. These protests would soon be the product of not only the local Muslim Brotherhood, which is probably the organization that can bring the largest number of people onto the streets, but also of trade unions and student groups. In other words, at least for the sake of mounting protests, Jordan's opposition groups have shown a capacity to collaborate and coordinate.

The initial demonstration occurred on January 26 and the demands raised by it were both economic

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and political. Rising food prices were protested and linked to the policies of the prime minister of the time, Samir Rifai. The authority of King Abdullah II was not challenged at this protest.

As one demonstration followed another in relatively short intervals, and spread beyond Amman to other towns of the kingdom, the demands escalated. Soon it was not only the prime minister's resignation that was sought, but also that the office become an elected one (instead of appointed by the king). Another demand was that the country return to its original 1952 constitution that defined the government as a constitutional monarchy. Even more worrisome for the Jordanian authorities was the fact that other groups, traditionally identified with the monarchy, such as groups of retired army officers and factions within the Bedouin tribal network, now began to press for change.

Under these circumstances the king responded not with repression but with compromise.

Abdullah II soon fired the prime minister and took steps to replace the other government ministers as well. He simultaneously announced a \$650 million package of subsidies to temporarily dampen the impact of high food and fuel prices. He also liberalized the laws that restricted demonstrations and the use of the internet, and took steps to restrict contact between protesters and his own, often violent, pro-government supporters. While these moves did undercut some of the anger behind the protests, they probably will not prove to be long range solutions. For instance, Jordan's national deficit is quite high and the package of subsidies will make it higher still. Given that the country is enmeshed in a "free market" international economic network, this program cannot be maintained.

The king has appointed a 53-member "dialogue committee" made up of both government members and opposition leaders to present proposals for de-

mocratic reform and greater civil liberties. These are said to be making progress, but it is to be kept in mind that the king has the last say on these reforms. While the Islamic Action Front, the largest of the protesting groups, has not given its blessing to the committee, the ability of this process to come up with acceptable reforms will have an impact on the direction the protest movement takes in Jordan.

### Jordan and the Palestinians

The situation gets more complicated when seen from the standpoint of ethnic interests. There are two main elements of the Jordanian population. One is the Bedouin tribal networks who dominate the army and the security services, including the police. The other is the urban based, mostly middle and upper class Palestinians. Palestinians make up about 50% of the nation's population.

The relationship between Palestinians resident in Jordan (most are now citizens) and the monarchy has been very rocky in the past. In

September 1970, the Palestinians rose up and tried to overthrow the monarchy of King Hussein. As a result, Yasir Arafat and Fatah as well as other groups were thrown out of the country, relocating to Lebanon. This incident tended to raise a wall between the Palestinian population in Jordan and the ethnic Bedouin who supported the monarchy and from whose ranks the royal family come.

Thus, while both groups have demonstrated for economic and political reform, ultimately they have different ends. When it comes to employment the two groups tend to be in competition for a finite number of jobs. Many of these jobs are government posts and have traditionally been the province of those of Bedouin background. They do not want to see Palestinians gain open access to government positions. The Bedouin Jordanians also are afraid of what they see as an over concentration of private economic resources in the hands of the Palestinian

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**In September 1970, the Palestinians in Jordan tried to overthrow the monarchy. This raised a wall between them and the ethnic Bedouin from whose ranks the royal family come.**

entrepreneurial class. On the other hand, the election process for Jordan's parliament is based on gerrymandered electoral districts, particularly in Amman. These again favor non-Palestinian elements. So the Palestinians are demanding electoral reform. Finally, over the past several years the Jordanian Ministry of Interior has stripped the citizenship of Palestinian Jordanians with foreign residences. This seems to have been supported by King Abdullah II. Palestinian Jordanians consider this policy as driven by blatant prejudice on the part of the government. Thus, there is plenty of fuel here for sectarian strife, particularly if the nation's economic problems prove intractable.

## **Palestinians Under Occupation**

If the Palestinians under occupation draw hope and energy from the popular revolts in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere, it may in part be because they themselves have pioneered such uprisings. Long before 2011 the Palestinians had created the intifada (1987 and 2000) which, for the most part, were non-violent popular protests against the dictatorship of Israeli occupation. Unfortunately, in both of these cases their popular protests were crushed by a dictatorial regime that was quite willing to use excessive violence over an extended period of time. Also, unlike the present circumstances in Arab countries, Israeli government violence does not draw the same level of outside media attention and condemnation as does that applied by Arab regimes.

The Palestinians under Israeli rule do have problems with corruption but the major issues that goad them into revolt are the Israeli policies of purposeful economic deprivation and severe repression. They are subject to systematic underdevelopment aimed at creating despair and encouraging emigration. They are also confronted by massive Israeli police and military forces which not only have no relationship to the Palestinian population, but whose members have been trained from childhood to see them as deadly enemies and ethnic inferiors. In this case the

oppressors have significant support from outside governments which supply Israel with both financial and military assistance and diplomatic support. What this means is that the conditions of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, as well as those in Israel proper, are notably different, and much more difficult, than those of the protestors in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria or Jordan.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the Palestinians have been positively influenced and encouraged by recent events beyond the Occupied Territories. One of the results of the general upheaval in the Arab world has been the coming together of Palestinian youth in an organization called the March 15 Movement. The name is taken from the day, March 15, 2011, that Palestinian youth mounted demonstrations throughout the Occupied Territories to force a reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah. That is, the initial focus by the March 15 Movement was on Pal-

**The conditions of Palestinians are much more difficult than those of the protestors in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria or Jordan.**

estian authorities and not Israeli ones. The Movement actually achieved its objective, at least temporarily when, in May of 2011, both Hamas and Fatah signed a reconciliation agreement. It can be argued that this was the first significant conse-

quence of the Arab Spring within the milieu of occupied Palestine.

Much like their Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts, Palestinian protest groups like March 15 have a program that emphasizes democracy. The object of reform here is not just the Israeli dictatorship, but also the authoritarian behavior of the P.N.A. which, unlike Hamas in Gaza, has no electoral legitimacy.

Beyond that, and because of the unique nature of the Palestinian struggle, the emphasis on democracy is not just national, but international. For instance, the March 15 Movement wants to integrate Palestinians worldwide into the national political process. All Palestinians, everywhere, should have the right to vote for the Palestine National Council, thus drawing their support for a "comprehensive resistance platform." If the Zionist capture of Palestine scattered its native people worldwide, then resis-

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tance should reflect that worldwide status. And, indeed, some of this development of consciousness seems to be taking place, as Palestinian youth in several Western countries have recently demonstrated and sat in at a number of Palestinian National Authority missions demanding democratic reforms.

The general milieu created by pan-Arab popular protest has also encouraged a united front orientation among the myriad Palestinian parties and organizations. This can be seen in the formation of the Return to Palestine March Committee, the representative group that sought to coordinate the multiple marches to the Israeli borders by Palestinians residents in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt on the anniversary date of the Nakba. Further demonstrations were organized for "Naksa" day, or the day set aside for remembering the defeat in the 1967 war.

These efforts were met with lethal violence on the part of the Israelis. Their soldiers used live fire that killed scores and, despite the essentially non-violent character of these demonstrations, the Israelis compared them to the infiltration of Palestinian "terrorists" (the Palestinians refer to them as freedom fighters) that took place in the 1950s and 1960s. Even though the 2011 cross-border actions were ultimately stymied by Israeli violence, these protests raised the sense of solidarity between those Palestinians under Israeli control and those stranded in neighboring countries

In these and other ways, the Palestinians have shaped the protests of the wider Arab world to correspond to their own environment. However, it is doubtful that these customized programs and actions will be sufficient to realize in Palestine the same apparently promising results that have been seen in Tunisia and Egypt. The prognosis for the Palestinians under occupation is probably closer to that of the Shiite majority of Bahrain, where state terror now suppresses those who dared to seek democratic change from the minority Sunni monarchy. Under the circumstances one cannot exclude the possibility of a third intifada.

Yet morale is high, particularly among Palestin-

ian youth who now feel that they have a decisive role to play in their own future. Both Hamas and the bureaucrats of the P.N.A. will, no doubt, attempt to co-opt these reformers, while the Israelis will shoot them without a second thought.

Under these circumstances, organizations such as March 15 Movement and the Return to Palestine March Committee, now looking beyond the prison-like borders of the Occupied Territories to Palestinians abroad, might go further still. There is an energetic and growing Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement spreading across the globe. This too is a willing and able resource for support of Palestine's version of popular protest. If there is ever to be a Palestinian Spring it must spread its roots to all its potential allies.

**As of 2005, some 650,000 Israelis, the vast majority of them Jews, have left.**

## **Repercussions of the Arab Revolts for Israel**

What consequences might the Arab uprisings, and their manifestations among the Palestinians, have for Israel? Perhaps the potential impact can best be seen in the area of Israeli demographics.

There have been studies originating both in Israel and abroad that show up to half of the country's Jewish citizens are considering emigration if current political and social conditions continue to erode.

This finding is in addition to the fact that *yerida*, or emigration out of Israel, has long been running at higher numbers than *aliyah*, or immigration into the country. As of 2005, some 650,000 Israelis have left the country, apparently permanently, according to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. The great majority of these were Jews. In addition, polls show that at least 60% of remaining Israeli Jews "sympathize with those who leave the country."

Among those who stay, there is the conviction that the safe thing is to have a second passport issued by the United States or a European country. At present the United States has issued over half a million passports to Israelis and a quarter million additional applications are pending. Ironically, Germany runs second with 100,000 passports given to Israeli Jews and 7,000 new ones issued yearly. Why the

scramble for foreign passports?

One prevailing explanation for this phenomenon is that it reflects the conviction that the safe haven that Zionism was supposed to create is not safe at all. This is the position taken by the University of Pennsylvania political scientist Ian Lustick. "The danger for the Jewish state is that, given the choice between convincing Middle Easterners that Israel can be a good neighbor and leaving the neighborhood, more and more Israelis are attracted to the latter.... The logically extreme expression of escape is, of course, emigration." Lustick is supported by Stephen Walt, professor of international relations at Harvard University, who suggests that "the Zionist ideal is losing hold within Israel itself" because the Israeli government "endlessly delays the [peace] process"

The recent Arab revolts may well encourage these views and thus accelerate the pace of Israeli emigration. In those places where new Arab governments appear, now more responsive to popular pressure, relations with Zionist Israel will likely deteriorate. Even where the revolts fail, Arab dictators will probably be more sensitive to popular opinion. Also, Palestinian protests on the Israeli borders have clearly shown that the issue of the Right of Return is still very much alive.

Any projected increase in Israeli Jewish emigration, though perhaps encouraging to Palestinians, is likely to have serious repercussions on Israeli society and politics. Let us take a look at a conjectural scenario for the next 20 years or so.

First: The Arab population, which already has a higher birth rate than the Jewish one, will grow apace while the Jewish population, experiencing a growing rate of emigration, shrinks more rapidly. Factor in the Occupied Territories and there will be many more Palestinians than Jews. One can, of course, say that this is as it should be. The notion that Palestine must have a Jewish majority has always been a perverse one. Nonetheless, as a consequence of the changing demographics, it is almost certain that relations between Palestinian and Jewish Israelis, which have never been good, will get rapidly worse. Why so?

Second: Of the Jews who remain in Israel, an

increasing percentage will be ideologically motivated. Take a look at the armed and aggressive settlers on the West Bank and then imagine them, along with their political allies, making up 60 or 70% of the Jewish population.

Third: The other remaining Jews, the ones who are not necessarily ideologues, will be mostly docile. These are the ones who cannot get foreign passports, who have no relatives abroad to vouch for them, and who lack the resources to bankroll a new start even if they could find another place to go. They will follow the orders they are given by their increasingly fanatical government for the sake of their jobs, their pensions and because their peers are doing so.

Fourth: Ideological fanatics confronting their worst nightmare, in this case the "demographic holocaust," are not going to be devotees of democracy and human rights. Israel's government will turn more and more dictatorial, becoming ever more aggressive against what it regards as anti-Zionist elements, particularly within the Jewish population. What will result is a society where everyone must support injustice or be themselves condemned as traitors or criminals.

## Conclusion

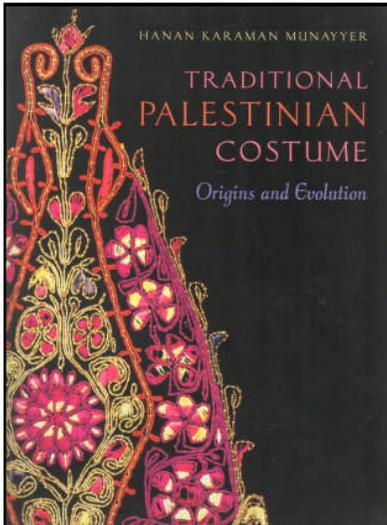
Spring is likely to be all too restricted in the Arab world. Outside of North Africa, many of the Arab uprisings are likely to be put down, though they may well set the scene for recurring revolts in the near future. The horrific conditions facing the Palestinians under Israeli occupation will not ameliorate because of the Arab revolts. Indeed if our demographic speculations are accurate, they may get worse in the long run.

However, what positive changes we do get in Arab politics will serve as a model for the future. They will also certainly result in more support and encouragement for the Palestinian cause. Much of what is going on are works in progress. The end is not in sight. We will have to watch closely and lend what support we can to the progressive elements whose voices will be louder and more recurrent as time goes by. ■

## BOOK REVIEW

### Traditional Palestinian Costume *Origins and Evolution*

by Hanan K. Munayyer



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554 pp., illustrated, 2011

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*Reviewed by John F. Mahoney*

We think of history as a written record – most often written by men.

However, as Hanan Munayyer shows in her monumental work “Traditional Palestinian Costume,” history can also be stitched – and nearly always by women.

By just looking at the magnificent dresses in this work – over 500 full-color photos – Dr. Munayyer can tell where they came from: Galilee, Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarem, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Jaffa, Ramleh, Lydd, Al-Khalil, Gaza, Al-Naqab. And not only, where they came from, but when, and under what historical conditions. It’s all there, recorded not with pen and ink, but with needle and thread.

And not only dresses. A whole chapter is dedicated to Palestinian jewelry and home accessories, including wooden sandals, decorated with mother-of-pearl, and a 19th century pottery water jar, produced in Gaza, that families would cover with a crochet net and put on a windowsill to catch the

breeze, providing a naturally cooled drink.

Then there’s that section on “Origins.” And here we need to note that today’s Zionist state of Israel is one of the rare cases in history where the colonizers are bent on expropriating the culture of the colonized. Palestinian dresses are a case in point.

During the Catastrophe of 1948, over 750,000 Palestinians were forced into exile, their homes looted. The Zionist military leader Moshe Dayan filled his home and garden in Tel Aviv with stolen artifacts, while his wife opened a shop in London, where she sold Palestinian dresses as examples of Israel’s heritage.

In 1980, flight attendants aboard Israel’s national airline El Al adopted the Palestinian dress from Ramallah as their official uniform, introducing it as Israeli culture during the tourist season.

In 2007, in the 4th volume of the International Encyclopedia, Israel registered the bride dress from Bethlehem, known as “Malak,” as an Israeli traditional costume. Later, under protest from Palestinian groups, the editors expunged the claim. (A radiant picture of the Malak dress can be found on page 190 of the Munayyer book.)

This is why pages 8 to 50 of this book are so important. It puts the lie to the Zionist claims. Palestinian spinning, weaving, dyeing, and embroidery evolved over 3,500 years, going back to Canaan, the “Land of Purple,” so called for the purple dye extracted from murex sea snails on its shores. Canaan would later be known as Palestine.

The dream of the Munayyers is that, one day, in the not too distant future, visitors will be able to walk through a museum, located somewhere here in America, where they can experience, first-hand, the full richness and beauty of their extraordinary collection. Until then, however, this book is the next best thing. ■

*John Mahoney is Executive Director of Americans for Middle East Understanding*

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