

# GEOPOLITICS OF ENERGY: The Arab McFB<sup>1</sup> ‘Spring’

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For the disciplinary scholars of geoeconomics and for the geopolitics chessboard practitioners, the current events in (and around) the Arab countries are particularly instructive.

The difference between a dialectic and cyclical history is (in) a distance between success and fall. Still, we are not yet sure: Since we are lacking a critical time-distance and sufficient information (the region is still in flux, far from being settled and calm), the following lines are a combination of descriptive notes and predictive claims – which certainly pose a risk of inaccuracy. With this proviso, let us start by examining the Gulf countries’ constellation.

The US has a lasting geoeconomic interest in the Gulf, which is inevitably coupled to its security interests of a rather extensive agenda. As is well known, oil is the most traded commodity in the world– roughly 12% of overall world trade. By far the largest portion of internationally traded crude originates from the Gulf. Hence, the US imperatives in the Gulf are very demanding: (i) to support the friendly local regimes (with their present socio-political and ideological setups); (ii) to get, in return, their continued approval for the massive physical US military presence and their affirmative vote in international foras; (iii) to maintain its decisive force in the region, securing unhindered oil flows from the Gulf; (iv) to remain as the principal security guarantor and tranquilizer, preventing any hostile takeover – be it of one crude-exporting state by another or of internal, domestic political and tribe/clan workings; (v) to monitor closely the money flow within the Gulf and to recycle huge petrodollar revenues, usually through lucrative arms sales and other security deals with the GCC regimes<sup>2</sup>; (vi) will not enhance, but might permit (a call for) any gradual change of the domestic socio-economic and politico-ideological frames in the particular Gulf state, as long as it does not compromise the US objectives in the region as stated above – from (i) to (v).

The US hegemony in the Gulf, a combination of monetary control (crude is traded exclusively in US dollars, predominantly via the New York-based NYMEX and London-based IPE) and

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<sup>1</sup> *The McDonald’s–Facebook*: McFB is a self-coined expression of author, which – since late 2009 – he uses in his university lectures to describe the overly consumerist and instant, disheartened egotistic and cyber–autistic ‘modern’ way of life. For the first time in a published text, it appeared in his *No Asian century without the pan-Asian Institution* article of May 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Contrary to the typical moral condemnations and usual pacific civil sector outcries, war and similar insurgencies (inter-state or intra-state) are – in strict Machiavellian or perhaps ‘commercial’ terms – desirable occurrences. Especially in countries where arms manufacturing and supply are detached from the state-owned military complex (situated in the hands of corporations), war-related military spending is usually good news for an economy.

physical control (the US Navy controls all transoceanic oil transports), is the essential confirmation as well as the crucial spring of the overall US global posture<sup>3</sup>. In exchange for the energy inflow security, the US anchors a loyal bandwagoning at many places around the globe. As long as oil remains priced in USD, it will represent the prime foreign reserve currency (globally some 68% of reserves is held in the US\$), as the functional tie between the major currencies' exchange rates and fossil-fuel energy cannot be derailed and delinked. Finally, it is not only the exclusivity of oil currency; it is also about the very policy of pricing.

Throughout most of oil's short history, the price for "black gold" was high enough to yield profits (via the 7-Sisters, mostly for Wall Street – besides the US military, another essential pillar of American might), still without pricing it overly high which would in return encourage sustained and consequential investments in alternative energy sources. Basically, the main problem with Green/Renewable (de-carbonized) energy is not the complexity, expense, or the lengthy time-line for fundamental technological breakthrough; the central issue is a geopolitical breakthrough. Oil and gas are convenient for monopolization (of extraction and intl. flows, of pricing and consumption modes) – it is a physical commodity of specific locality. Any green technology (not necessarily of particular locality or currency) sooner or later will be de-monopolized, and thereby made available to most, if not to all. Therefore, the overall geopolitical imperative for the US remains preservation – not change – of the hydrocarbon status quo<sup>4</sup>.

Within the OECD/IEA grouping, or to be precise; the G-8 (the states with resources, infrastructure, tradition of and know-how to advance the fundamental technological breakthroughs), it is only Japan that may seriously consider the Green/Renewable-tech U-turn. Japan's external energy dependencies are stark and long-lasting. After the recent nuclear trauma, Japan will need a few years to (psychologically and economically) absorb the shock – but will learn a lesson. For such a huge economy and considerable demography, situated on a small land-mass which is repeatedly brutalized by devastating natural catastrophes (and yet by another disruption of the external-dependency-maintaining Arab oil), it might be that a decisive tilt towards the green energy is the only way to revive, survive and eventually to emancipate<sup>5</sup>.

Iran is a unique country that bridges the Euro-Med/MENA with Central and South Asia, Far East, as well as it links the two key Euro-Asian energy plateaus: the Gulf and Caspian. This gives Iran an absolutely pivotal geopolitical and geo-economic posture over the larger region – an opportunity but also an exposure! No wonder that all throughout its millennia-long glorious history up to the pre-modern times, Persia/Iran was among the most influential and strongest Euro-Asian powers. Logically, the regional hegemonic ambitions were renewed by the Shah regime, and simply continued with the Revolutionary Ayatollah Iran.

Hence, the US physical presence in the Gulf represents a double threat to Iran– geopolitical and geoeconomic. Nearly all US governments since the unexpected 1979 Shah's fall, with the

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<sup>3</sup> The US is often criticized for its omnipresence, but frankly speaking, maintaining the security of global fossil-fuels energy flow is silently taken for granted. To imagine any alternative, nobody dares contemplate.

<sup>4</sup> Thus, the stubborn American resistance to provisions of the UNFCCC's protocol (Kyoto) is logical, if not justifiable.

<sup>5</sup> An important part of the US–Japan security treaty is the US energy supply lines security guaranty given to Japan. After the recent earthquake-tsunami-radiation armageddon, Japan will inevitably rethink and revisit its energy policy and its primary energy mix composition. That indicates the Far East as a probable place of the Green-tech excellence in the decade to come.

G.W. Bush administration being most vocal, have formally advocated regime change in Teheran. On the international oil market, Iran has no room for maneuver, neither on price nor on quotas. Within OPEC, Iran is frequently silenced by the cordial GCC voting<sup>6</sup>.

Besides an excellent geographic position, formidable conventional armed force (after Turkey, the largest of the region), the firm collective memory of its ancient past, Iran is economically very potent and is also the most populous state in the Persian Gulf. History teaches us that demographically and/or economically emerging player will inevitably press its peripheries to project itself beyond the given limits. Apart from its military support to the state and non-state actors in the wider Middle Eastern theater, Teheran is keen on its soft projection (politically/ideologically, but culturally too).

However, Iran is an island of Shiite Persians in a sea of predominantly Sunni Arabs (also of the Farsi Pashtuns, Hazara or Turkophonic Sunni Caucasus and Central Asians). Bahrain and Iraq are the Shiite majority countries, but importantly their Shiites (as well as the Lebanese, Syrian and Yemeni ones) are the Arab, not the Persian Shiites. Further on, Iran has no major territorial claim towards any of its neighbors (but has a significant minority of Azeris and 30,000 Jews) and is not antagonizing the Anglo-American presence in its neighborhood at all, neither in Iraq nor in Afghanistan. Having more than the 2/3 of its population below the age of 30, the nation's identification with the 1979 revolution is increasingly difficult. Clearly, the regime in Teheran is just trying (and so far, manages) to survive. Consequently, the nuclear armament program (if any) would serve primarily for deterrence— to defend (in the absence of projectable soft powers), and to stabilize the regime, increasing its chances for long-term survival. It would not necessarily bring the significant hard-power projection to Iran.

The Iranian imperative is to increase the economic and socio-political costs of the US military presence while avoiding any direct military confrontation. Military modernization, with its noisy nuclear program and missile tests, as well as the anti-Israeli (holocaust-denial) rhetoric are domestically used as a morale booster, while externally it is only aimed at costs exposure of – not for open military collision with – the US, Israel or any of the GCC states.

That is where Iran's consideration goes along with Russian and Chinese geopolitical agendas. Neither China nor Russia is interested in overt confrontation with the US over the Gulf. But to see the regional US presence suffering from costly overextension would not be bad news for the heavily dependent countries; of oil-gas exporting Russia and of (Africa) oil-hungry, importing China. As in the case of North Korea, neither China nor Russia is enthusiastic to witness the country going nuclear, but they are still far away from wishing for and permitting any regime change. North Korea as well as Iran (and Syria) on the Russian south-west flank is serving as a pivotal security buffer<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> This is the reason why the second largest OPEC oil producer has opened its own Oil Bourse in early 2008. The IOB/Kish Bourse was intended for Iranian and regional crude, gas and petrochemicals to be traded freely in other currencies than the USD. Until mid July 2011, the Bourse traded only in oil-derived plastic and pharmaceutical semi-final products using the basket of 'petroeuro' currencies – primarily Euro and Indian Rupee. Since fall 2011, oil has been traded at Kish Commodity Exchange too.

<sup>7</sup> Iran is in constant need of diplomatic cover from Moscow (in return, it refrains from its own Islamic projection on and it shields the Caucasus and Central Asia – considered by Russia as its strategic backyard, from the aggressive Wahhabism) as well as the increased trade exchanges with and investments from China (to compensate for the Western economic embargo). The exclusivity and endurance of the Soviet–Cuban relations was an ideological wish of Castro, but it was also an embargo-

Nuclear North Korea has paid a huge political price for its security self-assurance: it has alienated the neighbors, isolated itself internationally, and endorses a perfect pretext for keeping a considerable conventional (and non-conventional) US military contingent on its periphery – all elements present in the Iranian case too. Paradoxically enough, further pressures from Iran (also the recent cooling of Israeli-Turkish relations) and American overextension in the region (including the Afghan and Iraq limbo), puts Arabs and Jewish state closer to the negotiation table, which in return decreases the Iranian appeal across the Middle East to exploit anger for its own ideological and geopolitical ends. Finally, if the two-state solution succeeds one day, it will be only the threat from an increased Iranian military strength that implicitly fuels the American arms sales in the Gulf.

The US induced GCC has so far managed to contain the Yemeni turmoil and tribal-clan clashes from spilling over deeper into the peninsula. Simultaneously, Bahrain (an absolutistic monarchy of the ruling Arab Sunni minority over the Arab Shiite majority) has been effectively silenced and other revolts within the GCC are not presently lurking on the horizon. Counterbalancing the GCC, the Russia-backed Iran–Syria axes (which influences Lebanon, but also stretches on Cyprus, including the Cypriot Greeks–Turkish Kurds links) is heavily challenged. It's not only Bashar al-Assad's Baath party that has much at stake– any significant change in inflammatory Syria would mean encirclement of Iran, worsening of Russia's anyway modest access to the Mediterranean and its position towards Turkey on the Caucasus and elsewhere. Finally, it could also lead to a total end of pan-Arabism<sup>8</sup>.

Syria's inner constellations traditionally influence the neighboring Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and of course Israel. By far and large, the symbolics and meanings of Israel are considerably larger than its tiny territory (approximately half the size of the Netherlands). Its real strength, power and influence resides outside its state parameters – these features, besides the Vatican, make Israel a unique state in today's world.

So far, Israel secured a separate peace treaty with Egypt, and with Jordan. It also has a rather comfortable and predictable truce with al-Assads' Syria (as it cohabitated a livable *modus* with the previous Tunisian and to some extent with Gaddafi's, regime). Finally, it still (formally) holds a close politico-military alliance with Turkey, which is the Israeli bridge to the NATO security block. During the entire 'Arab Spring', Israel remained silent and calm. Beneath, the official Tel Aviv was conducting a discreet but very intensive and extensive

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dictated necessity for a regime survival. That is how Americans implicitly enhanced the friendship of these two. Here, the supporting argument: in the Nagorno-Karabakh war that lasted from 1988-94, and brought Azerbaijan and Armenia into direct conflict, Turkey tacitly supported predominantly Azeri Turkophonic Muslims' Azerbaijan, but Iran was on the other side. It openly sympathized with the Russia-backed (Orthodox-Christian) Armenia.

<sup>8</sup> Undeniably, there were ideological complementarities between Soviet communism and the anti-colonial, leftist, egalitarian and republican pan-Arabism. Still, the post-Soviet and post-communist Russia remains on the same position, following its geopolitical rationale. Pan-Arabism is the only Middle Eastern counterbalance, an alternative to the Wahhabism-powered (or newly arriving, neo-Ottoman- powered) Islamism. Muslimhood might have an appeal among the Sunnis in Central Asia, Caucasus and within the Russian Federation, but pan-Arabism does not hold the same allure (which additionally seals-off Turkey and protects the Russian strategic Turkophonic backyard from that side too). On the other hand, the republican pan-Arabism was felt as a direct threat to the US-backed GCC monarchies. Rather unchecked, the Al Qaida cluster has managed to self-prescribe an exclusive monopoly on Islamism. By self-proclaiming an alleged struggle for the Sunni Ummah restoration, it actually corrupted and silenced all important debates within the Arab world, and effectively diverted the Arab attention from their real issues. In fact, the Al Qaida construct is only a radicalized and weaponized ideology of Wahhabism – of a sect that originates from the 19<sup>th</sup> century peninsular Arabian tribes on its anti-Ottoman emancipation quest, which finally demolished the centuries-long Caliphates-Ottoman Ummah. With religion *per se*, it has very little to do.

diplomatic offensive to hinder the international recognition of Palestine. The ‘enigma’ of the third Tuesday in September certainly brings additional tension to the whole Middle Eastern theater<sup>9</sup>.

Since its creation 1948, Israel exploited every military opportunity and every diplomatic occasion to outmaneuver its neighbors. By doing so, it has managed to enlarge its territory and to keep a constant influx of migrants (predominantly Ashkenazi from Central and Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet republics). Presently, nearly half a million of Israeli settlers are living beyond the 1967 borders – a ‘Gordian knot’ related to any international recognition of Palestine today. After a series of unsuccessful war campaigns and diplomatic deadlocks, the Arab neighborhood, primarily Palestinians, eventually bitterly accepted a de-facto tradeoff: territories for a lasting peace and statehood. The Israeli governments of past decades have found every reason to postpone (implementation of agreed) peace accords for a possible win of more settlements – meaning more territories. Admittedly, this was well-resonating for some Arab regimes which feared that a fully-fledged recognition of Palestine would mean an important regional problem off agenda – a possibility less to divert citizens’ attention from the pressing domestic problems<sup>10</sup>.

If the sunny ‘Arab spring’ day is clouded in Tunisia by the incapability of domestic forces to turn the popular revolt into viable and badly needed socio-political reform, and if such a ‘Spring’ in Egypt is shadowed by the military uniforms and old faces with new rhetorics that are effectively running the country (jointly with the USAID and IMF), then the spring skies over Libya are full of pelting rain, across tribal lines. The inability of (coalition of the willing dressed in) the NATO to bring about a fast and decisive result in the Libyan episode puts Russia and China into a very comfortable position – to recapture initiative and lead moral condemnations on the international scene. (In the bold demonstration of solidarity ordered by Beijing, China’s ambassador accredited to Libya was even walking every morning all the sites bombed in Tripoli in the night raids.) Nevertheless, in practical terms there was no real difference between the affirmative vote on the UN Security Council Resolution 1973 of France, the UK and the US, and the non-blocking abstention of Russia and China – both combined were needed for the adoption of the resolution and the rapid intervention that came along. To complete the puzzle, Brazil and India – contrary to their vocal anti-Western moralization – also casted abstentions, not negative votes, on the Resolution.

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<sup>9</sup> With or without a blessing of the UN Security Council, the international recognition of Palestine (formalization of the two-state solution) would be a significant breakthrough, a true historic moment. Although hardly digestible for the hardliners on all sides, it would definitely tranquilize the situation. The recognition as such would surely relax the Israeli-Arab tensions, increasing the survival prospects of a Jewish state in Middle East on a long-run. Palestinians are pointing at first to the UN Security Council to pass the resolution and define a Palestine state as within the 1967 lines. Only if that unilateral initiative fails – which is the most likely outcome – President Abbas would directly approach the UN General Assembly during the 66<sup>th</sup> Regular session – with the recognition pledge. It is the so-called ***statehood of the non-state UN member epilogue: still too much for Israel and too little for Palestinians/Arabs, yet far away from the badly needed, lasting regional tranquility.***

<sup>10</sup> It is to hope that the current government in Tel Aviv will not respond to the mounting domestic social unrest on one side, and to the announced quest for the Palestinian statehood, on the other side, by turning to the military conflagration, and by doing so, effectively de-railing/ rechanneling the first and (indefinitely) postponing/eroding the second one. The US, the Arab monarchies and most of the Atlantic Europe/EU member states would prefer the postponement of the Palestinian statehood, surely avoiding any open Israeli-Arab atrocities in this particular moment. However, past so many (unfruitful) years since the Oslo accords of 1993, it is very difficult to reject the direct Palestinian call for statehood recognition before the principal UN bodies, and it’s Specialized Agencies. Thus, the maximum would be to postpone/erode the effort – therefore, France assists on drafting the resolution at the same time discouraging Palestinians from the recognition quest (before the UN General Assembly). On the other side, the provocation (*casus belli*) may come from the sudden Egyptian flux, a post-Cedar southern Lebanon, or (less likely, but still not quite impossible) from the Golan, Bakaa or Gaza.

The logics of *You do not touch Syria* (Russia) and *You don't touch Sudan* (China), in exchange for a free upper hand in Libya presents itself as a seductive guess to the possible grand bargaining of the P-5 behind closed doors (offering comfort to the question of discrepancy between the loudly declared and factually committed). Still, from this short time distance with a lack of conclusive information, it is a highly speculative hint. Admittedly, up to this writing there has been no Security Council resolution followed by concrete action to stop mass and repeated atrocities in either Sudan or Syria. An additional international legitimacy burden streams now: a slow and weak response on the side of the Libya-intervention eager coalition of the willing to the colossal humanitarian catastrophe in the East/Horn of Africa – an outbreak that was mounting since the early spring of 2010 (not to mention Bahrain and Yemen)<sup>11</sup>.

It is not clear whether the popular revolts triggered by the austerity measures and the grave socio-political situation in Tunisia and Egypt have been therefore preempted (or diverted). One thing is certain: both societies have failed to translate the street demands and to broker lasting political reform. Besides the personal shifts in the presidential palaces, additional exposure to the foreign creditors (and implosion of neighboring Libya), pretty much everything remains the same in both countries – they are sinking further into a socio-economic quagmire<sup>12</sup>. “We are the suckers, the eternally expectant ones, the hopeful ones – and the eternally disappointed ones<sup>13</sup>...”

Young generations of Europeans are taught in schools about a singularity of an entity called the EU. However, as soon as serious security challenges emerge, the compounding parts of the true, historic Europe are resurfacing again<sup>14</sup>. Formerly in Iraq (with the exception of France) and now with Libya; Central Europe is hesitant to act, Atlantic Europe is eager,

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11 From January 2011 up to this writing (end August 2011), the UN Security Council has adopted as many as 37 resolutions. Out of this total number, only 12 resolutions were dealing with the non-Africa related issues (just 2 resolutions were dealing with the Middle East, but as many as 7 about Côte d'Ivoire and 6 about Sudan).

12 Is there life after *Facebook*? Or after the ‘revolution’? Through the pain of sobriety, the Arab protesters are learning that neither globalization nor the McFB way of life (mostly spent in the large air-conditioned shopping-malls) is a shortcut to development; that free trade is not a virtue, but an instrument; that liberalism is not a state of mind but a doctrinated ideology, and finally that the social media networks are only a communication tool, not a replacement for independent critical thinking or for the cross-generational contract. (Machines run on binary-coded algorithms can neither compensate for an empathic human touch nor can they replace the wonders of socio-emotional interactions of individuals in a real time-space. Sociableness is neither of a linear, one-directional dynamics à la *Running Sushi*, nor can it be simplified like the three-size pack of *Starbucks coffee*. Relations are lived, not utilized by a mouse click. Human integrity is self-molested and self-reduced into the lame shop-window commodity which is purchasable 24/7 by ‘poking’ on the photo of someone’s personal profile. The social media networks might end up like a smoking of 21<sup>st</sup> century. In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, smoking was cool, sexy, brave, rebellious, liberating and most of all: social. As such, it was glorified and promoted by that time Western press, film and similar entertainment industry. However, as soon as the dependency, submissiveness, physical and mental distortion and heavy-addiction have been credibly verified, smoking was barred from all public places, children and elderly, schools and hospitals. First opposing for some decades, the tobacco industry was eventually forced to visible and clearly state the warnings about all hazards associated with its products. Today, smoking in the OECD countries is proscribed, ghettoized, and effectively reduced to the specially designated glass-boxes with powerful ventilations systems and sensitive fire-alarms. The developing world will maybe follow one day successfully. As for the OECD states and media networks; London/UK’s *tweet and loot* nights of the early August 2011 is an indication enough.)

<sup>13</sup> The full quotation sentence states the following: “The world is one great object for our appetite, a big apple, a big bottle, a big breast; we are the suckers, the eternally expectant ones, the hopeful ones - and the eternally disappointed ones...” (Erich Fromm: *The Art of Loving*, 1956, page: 80)

<sup>14</sup> The EU is a powerful economic block, an even larger superpower than the US itself. However, in the politico-military sense the EU doesn’t behave like a big global player at all. The universally (omni-)present power does not hesitate to coerce friends and foes, and even to fight a war for its interest. The superpower inevitably sees and patrols the whole globe as its sphere of interest. **In today’s world, the US is practically the only power that conducts wars all over the globe.** Frankly, **neither the EU nor anybody else can afford it** economically, politically and militarily! In the past 30 years, the only military involvement of the EU was when the US deployed its troops and Atlantic Europe sporadically bandwagons to it.

Scandinavian Europe is absent, Eastern Europe is bandwagoning, and Russophonous Europe is opposing. The 1986 Reagan-led Anglo-American bombing of Libya was a one-time, head-hunting, punitive action. This time (19 March 2011), Libya has been given a different attachment: The considerable presence of China in Africa, successful circumventing pipeline deals between Russia and Germany (which will deprive Eastern Europe from any transit-related bargaining premium, and will tacitly pose a joint Russo-German effective pressure on the Baltic states, Poland and Ukraine), and finally the overthrows of the EU friendly, Tunisian and Egyptian regimes –all combined– must have triggered alarm bells across Atlantic Europe.

The economically prosperous (the most developed African state, and a provider of solid jobs for many in the region, including Egyptians and Tunisians – in total, half a million of their guest-workers), but of socio-politically spent clan-cronyism regime, of a jovial leader who championed pan-African unity, Libya emerged as an easy and appropriate target for the Anglo-French-led coalition: (i) to reassert the presence in the Arab world (from Libya to damage-control the affairs and the *Facebook revolution* outcome in the Francophone and Anglophone Maghreb); (ii) to renew the presence in Africa and to slow down China there; (iii) to send a bold message of prestige (glory of colonial past) and strength elsewhere in the world, in particular to Central and Russophonous Europe – to essentially disagree that Russian oil/gas, (geo-) politically and socio-economically, is the most affordable for (all in) the EU.

**Gaddafi's government was a totalitarian one, but the post-Gaddafi government will be dysfunctional** (like in other countries where NATO brokered a change in the last 15 years). The post-Gaddafi Libya will be – unfortunately – a territory<sup>15</sup>. It will be a mare space of the grave political, territorial, economic and social problems, energized by a growing and nearly self-perpetuated sectarian (ideological and racial) violence and inter-tribal blood revenge<sup>16</sup>.

If all the above represents a little bit more of the same (the old geopolitical story of history surrounding the Middle East), there is still one novelty in the current events. It is Turkey<sup>17</sup>.

A growing economic and demographic power house, of pivotal geography, and of omnipotent secular army, Turkey has lately recaptured self-confidence by its foreign policy shift, usually coined as neo-Ottomanism. Invigorating its harmonious inter-ethnic Ottoman past, Turkey is

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15 The nomadic tribes that got their first nationhood in 1951, and were effectively united only under Gaddafi, have finally managed to overthrow the only indigenous governing structure they have ever experienced. It has been done after nearly six months of armed struggle and the help of over 4,000 NATO air-raids deployed against their own country and the properties built for generations. Deliberately or not, the current momentum of Libya – with infrastructure devastated, police force dismantled, properties plundered, and the streets full of civilians (of minor and other ages, but some with the previous criminal prison dossiers, sporadic racist killers or looters) of many nationalities, armed with long guns (including the air-defence mobile rockets) without any visible command – does not create a context for any political debate or any promising future. With its social cohesion brutally fractured, and society at large deeply traumatized, Libya may sink into the limbo and a lasting, bloody interregnum.

16 To conclude with the Huntingtonian *Clash of Civilizations* wisdom: When the predominantly Christian air-force is bombing a predominantly Muslim country for 4 consecutive months and keeps doing so all throughout the ‘Muslim Christmas’ – the holy fasting month of Ramadan and *Eid-ul-Fitr* – it surely will not help to maintain secularism and introduce democratization locally, nor will it assist the war against Islamist radicals regionally.

17 Although largely ignored or understated in contemporary literature, Turkish secularism (nearly a century old) is stronger than the secular traditions of some EU states. Turkey has a young population (2<sup>nd</sup> most populous European nation after Russia), vibrant trade and tech-led growth (16<sup>th</sup> largest world economy and member of the G-20). It represents a well-working democracy in an exceptionally hard, unstable surrounding environment. The Army (a half a million strong force, after the US, the largest of the NATO), which traditionally enjoyed the special constitutional position and societal role as the designated guardian of the Kemalist Ideology, has been put under strict civilian/governmental control in August 2011 – for the first time since the Atatürk republic exists. Turkey is either the founding or focal member of the Council of Europe, OECD, NATO and OSCE. Still, it was not qualifying enough for the Turkish admission into the family of European nations.

airing a bold and appealing soft-power offensive all across the Euro-Mediterranean theatre that is paralyzed by growing clerical-nationalism<sup>18</sup>. The Turkish EU accession is no longer a waiting-room captivity trauma for Ankara, but a drifting problem of the EU perceptions. In fact, Brussels failed to understand previous messages from and to analyze current actions of Ankara, that it is both false and dangerous to simplify the strategic choices of Turkey; either islamization or westernization (joining the EU). Whether right or wrong, the official Ankara concluded that the EU accession process was more of an exercise in humiliating hindrance of Turkey rather than a sincere admission of a reasonable prospect.

Traditionally very cordial, the relations with Israel have also deteriorated lately. It is the same sort of message like that one sent to the EU – no more exclusive relations, we are now open for all. Thus in return, Turkey has gained through intense and skillful diplomatic maneuvers, an equidistant foothold deeper in the Middle East – by talking to Arabs, Iranians and Russians (its NATO partners, the EU and Israelis too). This multi-vector foreign policy (the so-called zero problem neighborhood policy vs. the selective EU's European neighborhood policy) uplifts Turkey from the confrontational/detering peripheries right into the center of intl. political arena. It increases Turkish leverage and the number of its strategic opportunities.

The “sick man of Europe” is not on Bosphorus anymore: As the last European country that maintains both solid economic and demographic growth, Turkey seems to continue its self-emancipated and awarding, independent foreign policy dynamics. If so, this could mean that the EU has missed its historic chance (to keep its decisive say in the country of indispensable geography for the energy corridors and socio-cultural exchanges), as Turkey might seek a grand accommodation with one (e.g. Russia) or a combination of players in its quest for (revived) regional hegemony<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> One of the chief architects and promoters of this Ottoman revivalism, Foreign Minister Davutoglu, claimed in his famous Sarajevo speech that the Balkans, Caucasus and the Middle East were all better off under Ottoman rule; peace and progress prevailed ... and that the region has been in subsequent divisions, frictions and war ever since the Ottoman control ended and European powers came along. He concluded his Sarajevo speech by returning the usual EU rhetorics back to the European front-yard: “...I have to say that my country is disappointed that an important religious symbol, that of a minaret, has been subjected to a referendum in Switzerland. It is a mistake to put a fundamental religious right to a popular vote and I hope that this mistake will be rectified. The spread of human rights and fundamental freedoms may not have been possible, had countries chosen to put specific freedoms to referenda. It might be useful to recall that the Franciscan Catholic Monastery in Fojnica, some 35 miles from here, holds the original copy of an edict issued by the Ottoman Sultan on 28 May 1463. This edict protects the religious rights of Bosnian Christians and the sanctity of their churches. It is one of the oldest documents on religious freedom.” (BiH MVP Archives, 14 DEC 2009)

<sup>19</sup> Ankara's neo-Ottoman, lately also ‘Islamized’ rhetoric, is more of a need for the external projection than it is aimed at or permissible for the domestic Turkish consumption. It is not something that just happened, as witnessed with the current rise of escapist anti-politics (politics in retreat) dressed up in the Western European wing-parties, by which – with all their Right – Europe loses its own right. This pre-meditated and fine-calibrated policy of galvanization steers Turkey (not to the nationalistic, emotionally-charged and retreating, anti-secular right, but) right into the centre of grand bargaining for both Russia and for the US. To this emerging triangular constellation, Turkey wishes to appoint its own rhythm. Past the ‘Arab Spring’, neither will Russia effectively sustain its presence in the Middle East on a strict pan-Arabic secular, republican and anti-Islamic idea nor will the US manage to politically and morally justify its backing off of the absolutistic monarchies energized by the backward, rigid and oppressive Wahhabism. Turkey tries to sublime both effectively: enough of a secular republican modernity and of a traditional, tolerant and emancipating Islam, and to broadcast it as an attractive future model across the Middle East. Simply, Turkey wakes itself up as an empiric proof that the Islam and modernity goes together. Indeed, Turkey is by large and by far the world's most successful Muslim state: It was never resting its development on oil or other primary-commodity exports, but on a vibrant socio-economic sector and solid democratic institutions. This is heavily contesting, not only for Russia, but primarily for the insecure House of Saud regime, which rules by the direct royal decree over a country of recent past, oil-export dependent and fizzing presence and improbable future. No wonder that on the ideological battlefield, the two belligerent parties will be dominating the Middle East, which is currently in self-questioning past yet another round of hardships. The outcome will be significantly beyond the Arab world, and will reverberate all across the Sunni Muslim world. Ankara is attempting to justify that the Saudi-promoted Islam is actually an aggressive,

Nevertheless, Ankara's current gambit is not without risks. The serious constitutional (and secularist equilibrium) interference has occurred. Although generally huge, the current policy enjoys a full support primarily from Anatolian hinterlands, while the coastal urban regions remain sceptical. If Turkey does not manage to successfully project itself onto the region soon, it might implode under its own government's massive weight.

“No one governs innocently” – noted de Beauvoir in her 1947's *The Ethics of Ambiguity*... After a lot of hot air, the disillusioning epilogue of the popular McFB revolt is more firearms and less confidence residing in the region, and a higher (moral, economic and political) carbon energy price everywhere else<sup>20</sup>. As if the confrontational nostalgia, perpetuated by the intense competition over finite resources, in lieu of a real, far-reaching policy-making has prevailed again. Besides maybe (the Russian oil exporters and government in) Ankara, nobody has anything to celebrate for. Caught in the middle of its indigenous incapability and the global blind obedience to the fossil-carbon addictions, and yet enveloped in just another trauma, the Arab world and the wider Middle East theatre remains a hostage of mega geopolitical and geoeconomic chess-board drama. One thing is certain, if anything springs from the Arab soil, it is the oil. Everything else is (still) up in the (roaring) air.

What is the overall international impact? The regional unrest does not ease the ongoing OECD/IEA debates, yet it may catalyze and accelerate them, primarily between the EU, Japan and the US (the largest economic and consumer blocks). The issues discussed are fundamental: energy security and efficiency (including the diversification of the origin and composition of the PEM – primary energy mix); dependences-reduction, protection capacitation and diversification of the transport routes, and related mega (pipelined or LNG) gas and oil projects for and through the EU, Euromed, Russophonous Asia/Arctic and the East/-Far East; de-carbonization and anti-nuclearization. Finally, the way out of the deadlock on the Kyoto II negotiations, as well as the related roadmap for the comprehensive universal consensus on global climate change. Both for its own ends, clearly surfacing challengers of the status quo are at least the following two: Japan and Turkey.

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separatist/sectarian Wahhabistic ideology that self-constrains Muslims and hinders their socio-economic and political development. It does this by keeping Muslims on a permanent collision course with the rest of the world, while Turkey-promoted Islam is not a weaponized ideology, but a *Modus Vivendi*, which permits progress and is acceptable for all (including the non-Muslims), with the centuries-long history of success.

<sup>20</sup> Misled by a quick triumphalism of the social-media cheerleaders and corporate media nomads, the international news agencies have definitely confused the two: revolt and revolution (as they later missed to co-relate a massive bail-outing and the UK loot-outing). The very precursor of the ‘Spring’ was the winter of the (still unsettled) global financial crisis with its severe impact felt or misused locally. Consequently, the Arab unrests started as a (social, not political) public revolt over high unemployment and soaring costs of living (Tunisia and Egypt), over the inter-tribal inequalities (Libya, Bahrain), or over a combination of all factors (Yemen and Syria). Besides publicly ‘crucifying’ a couple of scapegoats, it has then failed to bring about structural change (r/evolution), and is paradoxically ending up with more debts, ever higher living costs and more unemployment than before the real or fabricated austerity measures were imposed in a response to the mounting global financial crisis. **The difference between a dialectic and cyclical history is in a distance between success and fall:** The Arab Oil Embargo of 1973 (that interestingly enough also included the non-petrol exporting republics of Egypt, Syria and Tunisia) was an attempt at political emancipation. In the aftermath of the Oil Shock that the Embargo subsequently triggered, the Arab states have found themselves within ever stronger external financial and politico-military dependences.

## **Post Scriptum**

How can we observe and interpret (the distance between) success and fall from a historical perspective? This question remains a difficult one to (satisfy all with a single) answer... The immediate force behind the rapid and successful European overseas projection was the two elements combined: Europe's technological (economic) and demographic expansion (from early 16<sup>th</sup> century on). However, West/Europe was not – frankly speaking – winning over the rest of this planet by the superiority of its views and ideas, by purity of its virtues or by clarity of its religious thoughts and practices. For a small and rather insecure civilization, it was just the superiority and efficiency in applying the rationalized violence and organized (legitimized) coercion that Europe successfully projected. The 21<sup>st</sup> century Europeans often forget this 'inconvenient truth', the non-Europeans usually never do. The large, self-maintainable, self-assured and secure civilizations (e.g. situated on the Asian landmass) were traditionally less militant and confrontational (and a nation-state 'demarcational'), but more esoteric and generous, inclusive attentive and flexible. The smaller, insecure civilizations (e.g. situated on a modest, geographically remote and peripheral, natural resources scarce, and climatically exposed continent of Europe) were more focused, obsessively organized and a "goal-oriented" (including the invention of virtue out of necessity – a nation-state). No wonder that European civilization has never ever generated a single religion (although it admittedly doctrinated, 'clergified' and headquartered the Middle East-revelled religion of Christianity). On the other hand, no other civilization but the European has ever created a significant, even a relevant political ideology.

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However, the views expressed are solely those of the author himself.

### ***Note:***

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