

**International Security Monthly Briefing – October 2011**

## **AFTER LIBYA – NOW THRIVE THE ARMOURERS**

Paul Rogers

### **Introduction**

In just four days during late October, events in three countries across the Middle East looked set to have a prolonged impact throughout the region. First came the fall of Sirte in northern Libya to the anti-regime rebels, resulting in the death of Gaddafi and one of his sons. The following day, President Obama announced that all US combat troops would leave Iraq by the end of the year, and two days later, Tunisia held elections as a prelude to the agreement of a new constitution. All three developments are highly significant, but it may be one of the less obvious aspects of the Libyan revolution relating to the arms industry that will have particular resonance.

Following the August/September report, which provided a long-term review of the post 9/11 decade, this month's briefing focuses on the Middle East and North Africa, placing these three events in the wider context of the uncertain if continued development of the Arab Awakening.

### **Tunisia and the Region**

The Tunisian election was not for a new parliament but was to establish a 217-seat Constituent Assembly with a mandate to draw up a new constitution. This will replace the 1959 constitution which was created around the dominant personality of President Habib Bourghiba, the first of Tunisia's autocratic Presidents, who was replaced in a coup in 1987 by President Ben Ali, who was himself ousted in January 2011. The result was marked by strong showings for the Islamic-orientated Ennahdha Party and a number of secular parties. These two orientations reflect divergences within Tunisian society, and neither group is likely to have a majority. Whether they can cooperate in establishing an acceptable constitution will be an early test for Tunisian democracy, but there is an underlying determination that the process will work. More generally, the current Tunisian experience is likely to have two major impacts across the region. One is the wide publicity being given to the electoral process, especially by the popular regional TV news channels such as Al Jazeera. A number of regimes, including the Saudis, remain adamantly opposed to any transition to democracy on the Tunisian scale, even if they are allowing for modest moves at local levels. Others, including Syria, Bahrain and Yemen, continue to repress popular movements with considerable force. The Jordanian and Moroccan monarchies are both favouring some degree of reform, especially Morocco, but both countries have undercurrents of dissatisfaction that are likely to be exacerbated by the changes in Tunisia. This also applies to Algeria but the greatest impact of the Tunisian elections will undoubtedly be in Egypt, where the early promise of a democratic transition has been called into question by the slow pace of change under the post-Mubarak military leadership.

As a widely publicised example of a rapid move towards more open democracy, the Tunisian example is therefore likely to have a considerable impact, but it is in this respect that the second factor is so important. This is the need for substantial changes in the political and economic organisation of societies in which there have been endemic socio-economic divisions accompanied by political inertia and corruption. Furthermore, many of the countries across the

Middle East continue to have high birth rates leading to a demographic bulge of increasingly well-educated young people with few prospects of employment. This difficult situation is the product of decades of autocracy exacerbated by the world-wide transition to a more markedly liberal economic system, but one of the most enduring effects of the Arab Awakening is to raise expectations, especially among the young.

Meeting these expectations will be a seriously demanding challenge, and it will not be rapid, even if governments come to power that are genuinely promoting greater emancipation and equity. Whether they will be able to satisfy expectations in the face of considerable frustration will be a huge task and will do much to determine the success or otherwise of a democratic transition. On the positive side, the Tunisian mood remains one of guarded optimism, which is stimulated by a much greater degree of freedom of expression. If that endures, then the recent elections in Tunisia could be of huge significance. If it does not, and deep frustration leads to renewed instability, then the negative effects could be just as significant for the Awakening as a whole.

## Iraq

On 21 October, President Obama announced that all US combat troops would leave Iraq by the end of 2011. This represents a rapid final withdrawal, given that over 30,000 troops remain in Iraq, and there had been detailed negotiations over the proposal to keep 5,000 troops in the country, principally in a training role. While this was a proposal that had support within the Iraqi government, it was unwilling to agree to a US insistence that such troops be immune from prosecution for offences committed in the country.

At its peak, in 2007, the United States had 165,000 troops in the country, and the seven-year war cost over 4,400 troops killed and 31,000 injured. Deaths among Iraqis were hugely higher, at well over 115,000, with at least twice that number injured. While all the combat troops will now leave the country, there will still be a considerable US presence, much of it centred on the huge embassy complex in Baghdad, but extending to smaller diplomatic missions in Irbil and elsewhere. These facilities will be guarded by US Marines, and there will also be many thousands of private security personnel and contractors, many of them former service personnel who will have served in Iraq.

Even so, the Malaki government has shown a determination to demonstrate an independence from the United States that has surprised many external analysts and has raised two sets of political concerns in Washington. One of these is the marked tendency of the government to focus so many resources on the majority Shi'a population from which it draws most of its electoral support. While this is hardly surprising, given the experience of the Shi'a majority under the Saddam Hussein regime, this emphasis is one of the reasons for the growth in significance of radical paramilitary groups within the Sunni minority, including groups linked loosely to the al-Qaida movement. Given its role in Iraq since 2003, the United States is hardly in a position to give advice on post-conflict peace-building, but the fact remains that there is far too little emphasis on this necessary yet arduous and long-term process.

The second political concern is the undoubted increase in Iranian influence in Iraq, which is diametrically opposite to the expectations of the Bush administration back in 2003. Then, the assumption was that regime termination in Afghanistan and Iraq, followed by peaceful transitions to pro-western governments, would hugely constrain Iranian influence. Instead, the fractured experience of recent years has had the opposite effect. Whatever the instabilities and

uncertainties within Iran, its regional position has been substantially strengthened - a matter of deep concern in the United States and Israel.

Given the parallel concerns over Iran's nuclear ambitions, the reported plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador in Washington factors into this context, and could well mean an increase in tensions if the coming months, exacerbated by Saudi concerns over Iran's regional ambitions at a time when Saudi Arabia is already experiencing uncertainty. This relates to the succession to the ailing King Abdullah, following the death of his heir, Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz al Saud. His successor as presumed heir is likely to be the Interior Minister, Prince Nayef, who is regarded as one of the more conservative leaders, having close links with, and sympathy for, conservative Wahhabi religious leaders.

## Libya

The end of the Gaddafi regime has been widely welcomed across the region and within the NATO alliance, even if the nature of Gaddafi's death and the numerous reprisals have caused concern. The rebels would not have been able to succeed without sustained NATO intervention which, at times, caused deep tensions within the alliance. With the final collapse of the regime, however, these tensions have been forgotten, and Libya is even being seen as a successful example of liberal intervention, as well as being proof of the potential for the effective use of air power.

While this is not unexpected, there are other sides to the issue that are being largely forgotten and which present a very different picture. Prior to the start of the Arab Awakening, the Libyan regime of Colonel Gaddafi had been seen as a successful example of a regime enticed to halt its WMD programme and, from a western perspective, come in from the cold. Because of this, close relations developed with the Gaddafi regime, with many of them centred on military cooperation, much of it being between Libya and those very western governments that subsequently used force to end his regime.

According to the UK campaigning group, Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT), British companies were encouraging the sale of sniper rifles, the UK arm of General Dynamics was preparing to upgrade Libyan Army tanks, and there were evolving links with UK special forces. In the weeks immediately before the revolt, a French government-owned company had staff in Libya upgrading Air Force strike aircraft and a large Italian defence company was renovating armoured vehicles.

During the seven-month war, NATO forces expended large quantities of sophisticated precision-guided munitions in destroying components of the Libyan armed forces, no doubt including equipment that western arms companies had previously been contracted to upgrade. Those NATO munitions will now need to be replaced, and it is already clear that the post-Gaddafi Libyan authorities will be looking to NATO countries to develop their armed forces. What this means is that European arms industries will have supplied Gaddafi armed forces, will then have helped supply the means to destroy those weapons and will now benefit from arms contracts from both sides to this short but bitter war.

Now thrive the armourers indeed.

## Conclusion

This briefing has focused on just three of the many developments in the past two months across the Middle East. Least discussed in the western media have been the developments in Iraq and their relevance to Iranian influence, although it is here that there is potential for a crisis. The ending of the Gaddafi regime in Libya has been widely welcomed, while no doubt a cause for concern in Syria and Yemen. Even so, the nature of the war raises significant issues in that key western states completely reversed their position regarding the regime in a matter of days. That, too, will cause concern among regional autocracies currently allied to the West, while raising criticisms of hypocrisy, not least in terms of arms deals.

In spite of the attention paid to Libya, the success of the Tunisian elections may turn out to be the most positive development. It is far from certain that a democratic Tunisia can evolve with sufficient support to survive the difficult economic times that lie ahead, but the enthusiasm for the electoral process is a very welcome beginning and, if it stimulates more rapid progress in Egypt, then there is genuine cause for optimism.

---

*Paul Rogers is Professor of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford and Global Security Consultant to Oxford Research Group (ORG). His international security monthly briefings are available from the ORG website at [www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk), where visitors can sign-up to receive them via email each month. These briefings are circulated free of charge for non-profit use, but please consider making a donation to ORG, if you are able to do so.*

---