SYMPOSIUM

Conclusion: Managing (In)security in Post-Arab Spring Transitions

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FROM UNCERTAINTY TO INSECURITY

The long-established authoritarian regimes in Libya, Yemen, and Egypt were very different in form. It is not surprising, therefore, that the way in which those regimes came to an end in 2011 varied significantly across cases. Nor is it surprising that the dynamics of transition in those cases have also varied since the Arab Spring. That said, the studies in this symposium have shown that, despite their many differences, processes of regime transition in Libya, Yemen, and Egypt have also shared two significant traits. First, disagreements among stakeholders over basic questions of institutional design have generated intense uncertainty about the nature of posttransition regimes. Second, political and military actors have occasionally turned to violence, in an effort to "resolve" their disagreements through force. In our symposium, we have tried to clarify the relationship between these shared traits of uncertainty and violence. To do this, we have disaggregated the concept of transitional uncertainty, considered the degree to which different forms of uncertainty have already fomented insecurity in post-Arab Spring states, and offered assessments of whether uncertainty may (continue to) prove destabilizing in those states going forward.

Throughout the symposium, we have identified and considered three particular paths from transition, through uncertainty, and on to violence in post-Arab Spring states. First, where state security services significantly weakened with the dissolution of the outgoing regime and nonstate actors then stepped into the resulting security void, uncertainty has arisen over the interests, capacities, and intentions of those armed actors. In Yemen and Libya, specifically, subsequent attempts by militias to clarify the balance of power between them have occasionally given rise to violent clashes. Until now, those clashes have remained episodic, despite early fears of protracted, large-scale violence in both cases. Second, where two or more sets of political actors have disagreed on who should control the process of transition and how that process should be managed, as in Egypt, intense uncertainty has developed about the nature of the future regime and the form of law that might be applied within it. In an effort to reduce that uncertainty, Mohamed Morsi tried to push through an accelerated constitution-writing and approval process. That step, however, simply generated resentment among groups that feared marginalization in a regime designed and controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood. That resentment translated into mass demonstrations in late June 2013, which paved the way for the intervention of the military, the removal of Morsi as president and, consequently, violent clashes on the streets of Cairo and beyond. Third, where there has been a reconfiguration of the security sector landscape, as in Libya, uncertainty has emerged about how power and resources might be divided among state and quasi-state security agencies in the posttransition era. Until now, security forces have not systematically turned on one another to resolve disputes over who should get what, where, when, and how. This scenario is a possibility, however—not only in Libya, but also in Yemen (where security reform is a work in progress) and in Egypt (where calls for security reform are likely to intensify, if/when there is a return to full civilian rule).

If the root cause of instability and violence in post-Arab Spring states is indeed uncertainty about the dynamics and outcomes of protracted processes of transition, then internal and external efforts to limit further violence should evidently focus on reducing that uncertainty. As we conclude this symposium, therefore, two policy-focused questions call for attention. First, how can transitional uncertainty be reduced? And, second, what role—if any—can external actors play in that effort? This short article invites discussion of these questions by proposing a set of policy responses to transitional uncertainty and violence in the Middle East and North Africa.

MANAGING UNCERTAINTY AND INSECURITY

There are arguably two broad ways to manage transitional uncertainty and associated violence. The first strategy reduces the *uncertainty* of transition by simply ending the *process* of transition. To bring about such an end, political or military power is concentrated in the hands of one set of actors, who then impose their will on competitors and, in so doing, clarify questions about the nature of the future regime and the distribution of power and resources within that regime. This remedy often requires external backing and international assistance, as was the case following Côte d'Ivoire's elections of late 2010. Specifically, after Laurent Gbagbo refused to recognize Alassane Ouattara's electoral win, ambiguity about the central locus of executive power resulted in several months of armed conflict. Large-scale, sustained violence only ended when the United Nations (led by France) intervened politically, and then militarily, to tip the balance of power in favor of Ouattara (Charbonneau 2012; Nossiter 2011).

Although a centralization of power may bring about a short-to-medium term reduction in collective violence, as it did in the Ivorian case, there are evident long-term political risks associated with concentrating executive power in the hands of one set of actors—even if those elites are initially democratically elected. Recent history is littered with examples of power brokers backing supposedly benevolent leaders, only to find

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that the commitment of those leaders to the needs of their people waned once they enjoyed unchecked control over the levers of governance. Given this danger of despotism, and the possibility of violent resistance to such rule, it is doubtful whether efforts to centralize power and expedite transition are suitable ways to reduce uncertainty and violence in the cases reviewed here. Indeed, the limitations of such strategies have already been seen in Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood took steps to concentrate power in the presidency in late 2012, before using that power to push through the constitution-writing and approval process. Problematically, that move did not bring an end to transitional uncertainty and associated conflict. To the contrary, the strengthening of presidential power sparked street violence in late 2012 and it launched a tide of popular resentment that culminated with the military toppling Morsi and calling for a new constitution. Centralized efforts to rapidly end the transition in Egypt, therefore, simply brought the process back to square one. In Yemen and Libya, meanwhile, debates over the merits of centralizing and concentrating power are largely moot because those steps are simply not feasible at present. Even if there were significant external backing for such a move, regional power holders would likely resist centralization, with a real possibility of violence. If that were to happen, then misplaced efforts to reduce transitional uncertainty and violence would, in fact, simply trigger an upswing in conflict and confrontation between armed actors.

A second—and arguably more suitable—remedy to transitional uncertainty does not accelerate and conclude transition. Instead, the uncertainty of an ongoing reform process is reduced by increasing public information about the rules governing that process and about the interests, actions, and capabilities of transition players. Clarity, transparency, and information thus become antidotes to uncertainty. To consider how these antidotes can be applied in the cases reviewed here, I will disaggregate transitional uncertainty into the three "types" that we have identified throughout this symposium, so that tailored responses can be considered accordingly.

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First, where state security services have weakened during transition, and uncertainty exists over the balance of power between emergent militias, that uncertainty can be reduced through efforts from power brokers to establish and publicize a set of (possibly informal) rules, which can guide the actions and interactions of armed factions. Because no state agency is capable of enforcing those rules, networks of trust and reciprocity among militias are needed to facilitate voluntary compliance. Internal or external political actors can contribute to the development of that trust by sponsoring confidence-building measures, such as the regular monitoring and dissemination of information about the interests and abilities of armed nonstate actors. Such measures have already been employed in Libya, with some effect. Since 2012, for example, the Misratahn Union of Revolutionaries has hosted weekly meetings with leaders of all 236 of the city's revolutionary brigades, in order to manage relations among those brigades and monitor their compliance with informal arms control agreements (McQuinn 2012, 21–22). Trust and cooperation have also been facilitated by the willingness of brigade leaders to release information about the military capabilities of their armed units; that information has been documented in conjunction with international observers, who have inspected and reported on the arms storage facilities of Misratah's revolutionary brigades (McQuinn 2012, 50–54).

Second, where there is uncertainty over the balance of power between political factions that aspire to control the process of transition, that uncertainty and the associated potential for violence can be reduced by ensuring that deliberations about the nature of the new regime are as inclusive and transparent as possible. When all interested parties are given a voice about the design of the new regime, it is less likely that any one faction will feel compelled to make its voice heard through other—more violent—means (see Karl 1990, 12). Moreover, because transition deliberations are forums in which political actors are invited to present their political interests and capabilities, the more inclusive those talks are, the more information will be available about the preferences and relative power of stakeholders. As that data comes to light, uncertainty about the balance of power between competing political factions will decrease—as should the danger of those factions turning to violence in order to clarify the balance of power between them (see McFaul 2001, 17–19). In Yemen, initial steps toward inclusiveness in deliberation were taken in late 2011 when the country's most powerful stakeholders were invited to negotiate a roadmap for political change (in a deal that was brokered by the United Nations). Since then, however, regional political movements in the north and south of the country have come to view the agreed roadmap with suspicion (ICG 2012, 2). To ensure that the armed wings of those (or any other) movements do not act as spoilers to the transition process going forward, it is now vital that all political actors be included in the "National Dialogue" talks of 2013, where details of Yemen's political future are being negotiated.

Third, when significant security sector reform (SSR) is expected but there is uncertainty surrounding the nature of that reform, various interrelated transparency efforts can be

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combined to reduce transitional uncertainty and the potential for associated violence. One step to transparency is ensuring that processes of security reform are managed from outside the ranks of the security services (that is, by civilian authorities), rather than from within (Wulf 2004, 14). All institutions suffer from a limited capacity for introspection and self-reform, and security services are no different. When there is civilian ownership of the SSR process, a second boost to transparency can come from ensuring that deliberations about the distribution of security sector resources are made public, whenever possible. Publicizing discussions limits the danger that reform efforts might be coopted and corrupted by governing elites, who may see control over the distribution of security resources as a potential source of patronage (see Perito and Kristoff 2010). While public deliberations are taking place, power brokers may also wish to separate the individual interests of those who work for security agencies from the corporate or institutional interests of those agencies. Such a separation can be realized by creating attractive career opportunities for security actors outside of the security sector. When the individual interests of officers are successfully disconnected from the corporate interests of their employing agencies, any subsequent moves from civilian authorities to downsize, disempower, or dissolve security organs will not present a direct threat to the economic interests of security officers. Those officers should then be less concerned about, and less likely to fight over, the distribution of power and position among state security agencies in the new regime.

CONCLUSION

Post-Arab Spring states remain volatile and, as such, there is an ongoing need for clarity and transparency in transition. Because processes of political reform are taking place at the national and community levels, ultimate responsibility for ensuring transparency lies with domestic political and security elites. That does not mean, however, that external (governmental and nongovernmental) actors have no role to play. In fact, external actors have already made some promising contributions to transition processes in the region, although more could arguably be done. In Yemen, for example, there has been positive international backing for reform efforts, but transparency has not always been a priority in those efforts. The United States, specifically, has supported a firewalled process of military reform, which has limited civilian input into the process (ICG 2013, 35). Although this approach has allowed the United States to ensure that SSR is managed in a way that attends to Washington's counterterrorism concerns in the short term, the failure to ensure adequate civilian participation risks undermining the viability of restructuring efforts in Yemen over the long term. In Libya, by contrast, a diverse coalition of external actors has expressed a commitment to work with civilians to facilitate transparent reform efforts there—particularly in the security realm.[1] Now the challenge for the international community is to back that commitment with coordinated action. Security reforms initiated by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya are encouraging,[2] but further cooperation between external and local actors is necessary. In Egypt, there was early fear that Western involvement in SSR may be framed as "meddling" by some of the country's top military brass (Ashour 2012, 13), and so the light touch of the West on security reform there was arguably understandable. Less justifiable, perhaps, was the subsequent reluctance of the West to press Mohamed Morsi to reach out to political factions that were voicing concern about the Brotherhood's dominance of the transition process (see Ezzat 2013). Going forward, external actors should use any leverage that they have over Egypt's military and interim governing elites to ensure that those actors bring all stakeholders—including the Muslim Brotherhood—into discussions over Egypt's revised constitution and the new regime.

After all, if any of the diverse political actors who hit the streets and battlefields in 2011 with the aim of overturning dictatorship were to find themselves permanently excluded from ongoing processes of transition, then those parties may return to the streets and battlefields. The ensuing confrontations between street-based opposition groups and state actors could well turn violent, as has already been the case on occasion.

In the absence of well-considered external support for transparent transition in all three cases, there is a danger that restructuring efforts will be captured by domestic political and security elites who privilege power over inclusiveness. Such captured transitions would be fundamentally unstable. After all, if any of the diverse political actors who hit the streets and battlefields in 2011 with the aim of overturning dictatorship were to find themselves permanently excluded from ongoing processes of transition, then those parties may return to the streets and battlefields. The ensuing confrontations between street-based opposition groups and state actors could well turn violent, as has already been the case on occasion. Beyond the immediate costs of any such violence in terms of physical security, there could also be long-term costs in terms of human security because transitions that are violently contested in the short-term are likely to give rise to regimes that are illiberal and unstable over the long-term (McFaul 2002). ■

NOTES

1. International Ministerial Conference on Support to Libya in the Areas of Security, Justice and Rule of Law—Communiqué. Paris, February 12, 2013. http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/libya/events-7697/2013/article/international-ministerial.

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2. For details on cooperation between Libyan authorities and UNSMIL on security reform, see UNSMIL's web page: http://unsmil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=35568&language=en-US.

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American Political Science Association

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The American Political Science Association, supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, calls for applications from individuals interested in serving as co-leaders of a two week workshop in sub-Saharan Africa. The workshop will be the seventh in a multi-year effort to organize annual residential political science workshops in Africa.

The goals of the workshops are to: (1) enhance the capacities and resources for theoretical and empirical scholarship by political scientists in Africa, (2) explore a compelling intellectual theme underpinning basic research in political science, (3) provide a forum for connecting participants with recent developments in the field, and (4) support the participants ongoing research.

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Applications must be from a team of two U.S.-based and two Africa-based scholars. Preference will be given to teams demonstrating previous research collaboration. Those applying to be co-leaders of the 2014 workshop must propose a workshop theme, location, and African institutional partner. Workshop leaders will serve as academic directors of the project and be responsible for the substantive content and organization of the workshop.

Application deadline November 1, 2013

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