

Background on the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia

October 2011

In return for slow but steady economic growth, the majority of Tunisians have accepted restricted political rights, a police state and an elite accused of corruption.

For foreign investors, Tunis has been a safe place to invest and a source of cheap labor however, this model seems to have failed - or maybe it was always unsustainable over the long term.

The turmoil in Tunisia started with Mr. Mohamed Bouazizi. Mr. Bouaziz became a hero throughout the country when he doused himself in petrol and set himself on fire on December the 17th because officials in his town prevented him from selling vegetables on the streets without permission.

Frustration with lack of freedoms, the excess of the ruling class and anger at police brutality coupled with a large number of unemployed graduates seem to have all converged to spark an unstoppable wave of public anger.

Tunisia's uprising began in Sidi Bouzid , a poor town in the interior of the country. This has triggered a much wider series of protests and clashes with the police in Tunisia. The violent response of the authorities-with the police opening fire on demonstrators-appears to have exacerbated the anger and led to the big day of the 14th January when the unrest reached the centre of the capital principally in the memorable street of Habib Bourguiba.

Despite all his attempts and promises to change, as the world watched, the President finally stepped down on 14th of January, 2011.He then fled to Saudi Arabia with his family

What happens next? The Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi stated that he became the acting President under Article 56 of the Constitution. Many lawyers disagreed with Ghannouchi's interpretation as pursuant to Article 57 of the Constitution, the Constitutional Council should meet and the leader of one of the houses of the Tunisian parliament should become an interim President.

Decision of the Constitutional Council the post of president is definitely vacant. Under Article 57, Fouad Mebazaa should become the interim President, with the obligation to call for elections within 45 to 60 days and to ask Prime Minister Ghanouchi to form a national unity government.

For Tunisia's new interim national unity government, satisfying the political aspirations of the Tunisian public is a tough job. Further, they need to simultaneously

restore the stability which has long been Tunisia's crucial economic asset.

Unforeseen Revolution Unplanned, emergent, organic to Tunisian society, this revolution is not ruled by mechanical time. Soon enough spontaneity will give way to pre-meditation.

Certainly, a combination of three attributes that make Tunisian society highly distinctive, and different from other Arab countries, set the stage:

- literacy rates over 80%
- emancipation of women
- a demographic transition from high birth and death rates to low birth and death rate, in part due to high literacy and women's rights.

As a tipping point: Tunisia's interim president Fouad Mbazaa announced on 3 March 2011 details of new elections promised after the overthrow of the dictator.

Mr Mbazaa said voting for a council of representatives to rewrite the constitution would be held by 24 July. The electoral commission suggested to postpone the country's elections from July 24 to October 23, due to technical difficulties related to the timeouts registration of voters. Until that time, a new interim government would run the country and he would continue in office, even though the current constitution limits caretaker office-holders to a 60-day term.

As a result, it appears that dates for a presidential vote and other elections will be decided after the October 23 vote.

In addition, Fouad Mbazaa addressed the Tunisian people on Feb. 27, 2011 announcing his decision to appoint Mr. Beji Caid Essebsi as Prime Minister following the resignation of Mr. Ghannouchi This is exactly what protesters had been demanding. Ghannouchi, had served under the country's old dictatorship, and as far as they were concerned, until he went, their revolution was unfinished.

The situation in Tunisia is now calmer, although the situation to the Ras Jedir border zone, where refugees flock by thousands from the Libyan territory remains tumultuous. For days, Tunisia — which is itself still grappling with the aftermath of a political revolt, has been overwhelmed with refugees, raising alarm among the international aid community.

Reasons for optimism

- **Economic Prospects**

Although difficult, it is not desperate. Arguably the greater participation of the Tunisian people will enable the government to exact the necessary sacrifices equitably.

The newly acquired freedom will ultimately generate many gains that will offset and surpass the losses sustained during the uprising. As an example, productivity is expected to reach a double-digit increase in the next two to three years. This statistic, by itself, will motivate

both domestic and foreign entrepreneurs and companies to invest in free and democratic Tunisia.

- **The Jasmine(a Tunisian national flower) Revolution’s democratic prospects:**
 - 1) The branches of government have their respective prerogatives:
 - 2) The independence of the judiciary is also of the utmost importance: It must regain its credibility in the eyes of the population and be the guarantor of the principle that the law is above all:

The embark of the government on a comprehensive decentralization effort both

- 3) administratively and economically:
- 4) Local authorities are invariably more in tune with local populations and are better equipped to deal with their preoccupations and needs: and
- 5) Democracy assistance groups and other NGOs will be able to engage in the transitional process and guaranty the human rights.

The question is: if there will be a broader impact of the Jasmine Revolution on the whole region?

Tunisia’s Jasmine Revolution was, in many ways, the most unlikely event to spark off the current wave of liberalization and democratization that is sweeping through the Arab world; starting from Egypt with the crumble of the long-feared regime of “Hosni Mubarak” to the “Revolution in Libya”, where enraged dissidents and the government are currently embroiled in titanic violence which has led to the freezing of the assets of Libya’s leaders including Kaddafi and the withdrawal of oil companies from the country.

Timeline: A chronology of key events

- 17 Dec: Man sets himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid over lack of jobs, sparking protests
- 24 Dec: Protester shot dead in central Tunisia
- 28 Dec: Protests spread to Tunis
- 8-10 Jan: Dozens of deaths reported in crackdown on protests
- 12 Jan: Interior minister sacked
- 13 Jan: President Ben Ali promises to step down in 2014
- 14 Jan: Mr Ben Ali dismissed his government after new mass rally before declaring a state of emergency, then steps down and flees.
- 15 Jan: Parliamentary president, Mr Foued Mebazaa sworn in as interim president
- 27 February 2011: Prime Minister Ghannouchi resigns, responding to demands by demonstrators calling for a clean break with the past and the appointment of Beji

Kaïed Sebssi as the new Prime Minister.

3 March: The interim President announced that a council of representatives to rewrite the constitution would be held by 24 July and the general elections would be held at a time later.

9 June 2011: Tunisia Vote for Constituent Assembly Delayed from July 24 to October 23, due to technical difficulties related to the timeouts registration of voters

23 October 2011: Curtains were opened in Tunisia, on the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elections, the first after the January 14 revolution

The observers noted a record turnout, "a rate nearing 90% in some constituencies with a "a large participation of women," from all age and socio-professional categories.

The next challenge for Tunisia will be drafting a new constitution that entrenches pluralism and lays the foundations of a new era that inspires all Arab countries.

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