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Comparing Western Democratic Leverage: From Tirana to Tripoli

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Summary

What are the conditions under which external actors positively influence democratization? A growing literature analyzes the external dimension of democratization, focusing, for instance, on the power of EU enlargement conditionality to spur democratic reform in the post-communist world, and especially the Balkans. This paper compares the effect of Western leverage over transitions in the Balkans and the Arab Spring countries. Western democratic leverage is a function of external power and internal vulnerability to external democratizing pressure, but it is also related to factors such as Western political will, the influence of countervailing external powers, and nationalist resistance. The article demonstrates that on all of these dimensions, Western democratic leverage over the Arab Spring countries is significantly lower than it has been over the Balkan states, and thus that the prospects for democratization in states such as Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia are dimmer.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Democratization, Democracy Promotion, Balkans, Conditionality

Introduction

What are the conditions under which external actors positively influence transitions to democracy? As democracy has expanded around the globe in recent decades and become a norm enshrined in the conditionality policies of international organizations such as the European Union (EU) and international financial institutions like the World Bank, the external factor has taken an increasingly central role in the research agendas of social scientists seeking to understand processes of democratization.¹

¹ Recent examples of research that examine the international context of democratic transition include Donno (2013) and Youngs (2012).

Democratic transitions in post-communist Europe, and especially the Balkans, cannot be understood without reference to external leverage. The first decade of transition in a number of Balkan states was deeply troubled, marred by war and the dominance of nationalist-authoritarian regimes. Yet, in the second decade of transition (after 2000), under the close watch of the EU, the Balkan countries implemented democratic reforms so that by the second decade of the new millennium all countries in the region were firmly on the European path, with Croatia becoming a full member of the EU in 2013.

The ‘Arab Spring’, which started in Tunisia in 2010 and spread throughout the region in 2011, initially raised expectations of a ‘fourth wave’ of democratization, but major setbacks, such as the July 2013 military coup in Egypt and the civil war in Syria, have put on a damper on the euphoria of those heady months when ordinary people across the region rose up against corrupt and authoritarian regimes. Looking ahead, can Western leverage over the Arab Spring states play the positive role it did in the Balkans in terms of encouraging democratization? This article represents an initial effort to understand the scope and limits of Western democratic leverage in the Arab Spring, especially in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, the three countries that have experienced the greatest extent of regime change in the region.

The first section of the article compares the initial conditions of transition in the Balkans and the Arab Spring states, illustrating that, contrary to conventional wisdom, on many internal dimensions the Balkan countries were no better prepared for democratic transition than their Arab Spring counterparts. It will briefly review some of the literature on EU conditionality and its role in stimulating liberal democratic reforms. It will show that in the Balkans, owing to Western interests, will and resources, and the parallel absence of anti-democratic outside powers, the power of external democratic leverage was high and thus the international context was more favorable to democratization.

The second part of the article will explain why the international context in which the Arab Spring transitions are taking place is much less favorable to democratization than the external context in which Balkan states underwent democratization over the past decade. Western democratic leverage over the Arab Spring countries is weaker in part because the will to pursue a pro-democracy agenda faces many competing Western interests, such as security. The will to push democracy in the Arab world is further weakened by recession in Western countries and a general fatigue on the part of both policy-makers and the public with the perceived failure of ‘nation-building’ projects in Afghanistan and Iraq, continuing instability in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen, as well as ongoing war in Syria. Western democratic leverage over the Arab Spring countries is also compromised by a serious ‘credibility gap’ in terms of Arabs’ perceptions of Western intentions. Finally, Western democratic leverage over the Arab Spring is lowered by sensitivities related to

sovereignty and the rise of nationalism, as well as the influence of anti-democratic countervailing powers, especially those in the Gulf.

Comparing the Initial Conditions and the International Context of Transition

In both the Balkans and the Arab Spring countries, domestic conditions were not ripe for democratization. It's not that ordinary people didn't genuinely want democracy, but there were serious obstacles to building it, such as economic underdevelopment, a lack of democratic institutions and traditions, and deep ethnic divisions. As a result, at the outset of transition, conditions were not any more hospitable to democratization in states such as Bosnia, Albania, Bulgaria or Romania than they were in Libya, Egypt, or Tunisia. Consider the case of Albania. In 1991, on the eve of its transition, Albania was far poorer and more isolated than Libya, Tunisia, or Egypt in 2011. Much like Libya today, in the late 1990s the Albanian state was weak and the country was awash in arms and militias operating outside the control of the central government. Yet, today Albania is a functioning, albeit troubled, democracy. Prior to 1989, Bulgaria had no independent media, political parties, or civil society, while today it is a member of the EU. Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo have deeper and more divisive ethnic divisions than most Arab Spring countries, and yet they are all democracies, however deeply flawed and dysfunctional. Furthermore, most Balkan and Arab countries share an Ottoman imperial heritage, which scholars have shown provided a weaker foundation for democracy than Western-style feudal institutions (Blaydes and Chaney 2013). Table 1 contrasts the initial conditions of transition in a selection of Balkan and Arab Spring countries on a variety of dimensions, showing that the Balkan states were no better prepared for democracy than their Arab counterparts.

Table 1: The Domestic Determinants of Democracy in Selected Balkan and Arab Spring States

	GDP per capita	Civil Society	Experience with Democracy	Imperial Heritage	Ethnic/Sectarian Cleavages
Tunisia	\$9454 (2010)	Some	Limited	Ottoman	Low
Egypt	\$6417 (2010)	Some	Limited	Ottoman	Medium
Libya	\$13,845 (2010)	None	None	Ottoman	Medium
Albania	\$2630 (1990)	None	Limited	Ottoman	Low
Macedonia	\$5774 (1991)	Some	None	Ottoman	High
Bulgaria	\$7174 (1990)	None	Limited	Ottoman	Medium

Source: GDP per capita numbers are based on World Bank figures. www.worldbank.org

Of course there were some key internal differences between the two regions. One was the role of the military, which in Arab Spring states such as Egypt and Syria (and earlier Algeria) has emerged as a powerful anti-democratic force. By contrast, in the Balkans and other post-communist states in East and Central Europe, militaries were largely de-politicized and, following the collapse of communism, did not attempt to thwart the momentum toward democratic change. Another difference lay in the nature of the ‘triple’ transitions that have played out in the Balkans over the past two decades (Offe 1997): a transition from authoritarianism to democracy, a transition from a centrally planned to a market economy, and for the successor states of the former Yugoslavia, a transition to independent statehood. The Arab states, by contrast, underwent economic reform in earlier decades, and at least so far have emerged from the Arab Spring with pre-2011 borders intact, though both Syria and Yemen face tendencies toward disintegration.

While these internal differences are significant, none of them are decisive as determinants of successful democratization in the Balkans. If anything, a triple transition should complicate, rather than enable, democratization. And while a military ‘veto’ over democracy in the Middle East goes far in explaining recent democratic reversals in Egypt, it cannot account for the challenges to democratization in Libya and Tunisia, where militaries do not play a parallel anti-democratic role.

I suggest that a central difference between the Balkans in the 2000s and the Arab Spring countries in the 2010s lies not in the domestic factors enumerated above, but rather in the international context of transition in the two regions. More specifically, the contrast is between two very different degrees of Western leverage over democratization. Levitsky and Way (2010) have advanced a useful theory of how external forces shape democratic transitions using the concepts of leverage (the degree to which governments are vulnerable to external democratizing pressure) and linkages (the density of economic, political, social, diplomatic and organizational ties to the West and cross-border flows of trade, communication, investment and people with the West). They argue that in order for competitive authoritarianism to turn into substantive democracy, high degrees of Western leverage need to be complemented by strong linkages with Western countries. While Levitsky and Way’s goal is primarily to account for how the external realm can contribute to shaping various forms of hybrid democracy, their elaboration of how and when Western leverage can shape democratization is useful here.

Along with Levitsky and Way’s work on competitive authoritarianism, a large literature on the role of EU conditionality policies in building democratic institutions and encouraging democratic reforms in the Balkans and East Central Europe has appeared in recent years. While the EU did not invent conditionality, it has perfected its use. Conditionality links ‘perceived benefits for another state (such as aid,

trade concessions, cooperation agreements, political contacts, or international organization membership), to the fulfillment of conditions relating to the protection of human rights and the advancement of democratic principles' (Smith 1998). Indeed, the EU has tied the accession of new candidates to a set of intrusive reform criteria that were first outlined by the Copenhagen Council in 1993, and were then operationalized and expanded in subsequent enlargement documents. That these conditions come with sizable rewards for post-communist elites, especially the highly attractive promise of membership, increases the effectiveness of the policy. Moreover, candidate countries have no influence in the making of the rules that regulate their advance in the accession process. The asymmetrical power that the EU holds in this process, when combined with the high volume and intrusiveness of the rules attached to membership, has led to a top-down process of Europeanization, and has given the EU unprecedented influence over the restructuring of domestic institutions and the entire range of public policies in Eastern and Central Europe (Kubicek 2003).

The literature on EU enlargement conditionality has shown that democratization was faster and less prone to reversals in countries sharing a credible EU membership perspective (Pop-Eleches 2007: 142). Indeed, enlargement policy is seen as responsible for the quick, coinciding and, to some degree, convergent economic and political reforms throughout the post-communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe. Thus, EU democratic conditionality has long been considered the most successful EU foreign policy tool, which has encouraged stability, economic reform and democratization in the Balkans.

However, if conditionality is a uniform policy, and the attraction of membership is equal across space and time, we must still explain the divergent reform paths in target countries (Elbasani 2013). One strand of Europeanization research attributes a dominant role to the specifics of EU strategy, especially the top-down policy of conditionality, when explaining the scope of domestic change (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005). An alternative approach to Europeanization adopts a more sceptical view of the EU's strategy and influence over the candidate countries. Critics of the EU, and other external factors more generally, share the concern that it is important not to 'overestimate the EU influence' (Grabbe 1997: 305) or focus exclusively on the EU over sources of domestic change. Top-down accounts of Europeanization, therefore, call for the need to give more credence to domestic factors as the key to explaining the variety and success of EU conditionality across candidate countries (Vachudová 2005; Boduszyński 2010). Levitsky and Way's focus on linkages (networks with the West) provide another possible explanation of varying degrees of compliance with EU conditionality, where countries enjoying a greater density of linkages (i.e. Croatia) provide greater reinforcement

for external democratic leverage than those with weaker linkages (i.e. Macedonia).

Such differences in approach notwithstanding, scholars agree that the EU possesses unprecedented democratic leverage thanks to the enlargement incentive, and that it is this enormous leverage that accounts for existing liberal democratic reforms in the region, however variable or shallow these reforms have been. Yet, it would be distorting to see conditionality in isolation from the broader geopolitical and strategic context of Western democratic leverage over the Balkans, for it is a recognition of this context that brings the contrast between the Balkans and the Arab Spring into sharp relief.

In explaining the international dimension of democratization, we are also faced with the task of explaining the degree to which democracy-building is part of a Western country's agenda, given that the pro-democracy content of Western foreign policy varies over space and time. For instance, one may compare robust U.S. pro-democracy policies in Burma (Myanmar) versus its weak push for democracy and human rights in the Arab Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia or Bahrain. Or one may contrast vigorous EU criticism of authoritarianism in Belarus versus the much more muted criticism of democratic transgressions in Kazakhstan. Such differences reflect strategic interests, political will, resources, history, domestic politics in Western countries, and a host of other factors.

One may argue about the quality of democracy that has emerged in the Balkans, or whether policies of Western interventionism and nation-building in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo were good for the long-term legitimacy of certain key institutions. But the fact is that Western pro-democracy policies played a critical role in conditioning democratic reforms in the Balkans, and it is doubtful that any democracy would have prevailed were it not for Western involvement, and in particular, were it not for the promise of EU membership.

In the Balkans, Western will, values, interests, strategy and resources, as well as geopolitics, converged in favor of strong democratic leverage. The EU and U.S. both wanted and pushed for real democracy in the Balkans, especially after 2000. The idea of the EU as a 'community of values', embodied in the aforementioned Copenhagen criteria of 1993, came to guide EU conditionality policies, and reinforced the consistent push for democracy in southeastern Europe. The international order helped too, in that the countervailing powers (or 'Black Knights', as Levitsky and Way call them) which could otherwise be the source of anti-democratic counter-leverage were not present. China was not a factor, while Russia was dealing with its own internal problems, with no desire or ability to seriously derail the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the Balkan states (with the possible exception of Ser-

bia, but even there Russian efforts were lukewarm).² Geography and related strategic interests mattered, too. The Balkans were in Europe's backyard, and besides hard security interests – the idea that if Europe did not export security the Balkans, they would import insecurity to Europe – the EU and its member states also had an economic stake in the region.³

Since enlargement is a costly process for existing members (and therefore unpopular with the public), it is difficult to explain it in purely rationalistic terms. This is because the project to expand the EU eastward is also based on the desire on the part of both the U.S. and EU to validate democracy as a universal value. After all, if democracy could not take root on the doorstep of Europe, how could it succeed further afield? This kind of thinking underpinned political will in Brussels and Washington, a will born of the desire to prevent future wars by co-opting the Balkans into Euro-Atlantic organizations. Such will permitted the transfer of generous amounts of aid (nearly 750 million Euros in pre-accession assistance to the Western Balkans in 2011 alone) and a readiness to enforce liberal norms through harder forms of power: consider the High Representative's annulling of elections in Bosnia, or the Western-brokered Ohrid Framework Agreement in Macedonia, both backed by the presence of Western troops on the soil of these countries. All of this was bolstered by identity – the vast majority of Balkan citizens saw themselves as Europeans – and both pre-existing and fast-developing 'linkages' between the Balkans and the West (in trade, civil society, travel, and otherwise). These factors fortified already strong Western democratic leverage in the Balkans, and made EU conditionality to be as effective.

The Arab Spring and Western Democratic Leverage

Democratization in the Arab Spring countries, of course, does not benefit from the incentive of membership in the richest and most technologically sophisticated club of nations in the world. Yet, the literature on civil-military relations in Turkey suggests that the Turkish democratic reform process was strengthened by EU involvement and conditionality, despite the absence of a credible offer of full membership. However, beyond the applicability of specific policy tools, there is ample evidence that both the U.S. and EU simply lack will, strategy and influence over democratization in the Arab world (Atlantic Council 2013). The Obama administration initially expressed great optimism about the prospects for democracy in the region. In a May 2011 speech at the State Department, President Obama vowed to provide

² By contrast, Russian involvement has worked to derail democratization in post-Soviet states such as Georgia, Armenia, and Ukraine.

³ Witness, for instance, the dominance of Austrian banks in the region.

diplomatic, economic and strategic aid to boost a swift transition to democracy in the Arab Spring countries.⁴ Since then, his administration's focus and determination have dwindled (Landler 2013), while EU policies have been characterized by a mismatch between rhetoric and actual commitments of resources. Aid numbers are paltry when compared to the assistance that has flowed to the Balkans over the past two decades. For instance, in 2012 the Obama administration's request to Congress for non-military U.S. assistance to all the Arab Spring countries (including Yemen, which is desperately poor, and Egypt, which has a population of 85 million) was \$700 million (Goodenough 2012). The EU's SPRING program (Support for Partnership, Reforms and Inclusive Growth) pledged funds of €65 million in 2011 and €285 million in 2012. Support was to be tailored to the needs of each country, based on an assessment of the country's progress in building democracy. Tunisia and Egypt, for example, were to receive additional financial resources (€160 million and €449 million for 2011-2013, respectively). These figures, however, besides being a fraction of aid allocated to the Balkans in per capita terms, are far from the expectations of the Arab Spring governments, even when one considers alternate sources of assistance, such as funds from the Deauville Partnership and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). But they are especially modest when one considers the aid flowing to the Arab Spring countries from the Gulf States, discussed below.

However, modest financial assistance is just one symptom of a deeper disease, which is lack of Western will. Fatigue and frustration with the progress of the Arab Spring have taken center stage in Western capitals, and the result is a retreat to well-trodden patterns of policy behavior, which emphasize interests like stability and security over attention to democratization. The global economic recession of recent years has only exacerbated this, as has lack of progress in Afghanistan and Iraq. For domestic political reasons, Western governments have no appetite to put any 'boots on the ground' in the Arab world, engage in extensive nation-building activities, or indeed, to put any Westerners in danger. The Obama administration does not want its domestic initiatives, such as immigration and health care reform, to be overshadowed by intractable foreign policy dilemmas.

But the lack of Western will to genuinely promote democracy in the Arab world has roots that reach deeper than 2011. The U.S. focus on issues such as counterterrorism, peace with Israel, and maintenance of military relationships at the expense of democratization (despite momentary rhetoric in support of democracy, such as

⁴ See 'Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa', available on <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa> (accessed December 18, 2013).

George W. Bush's post-2005 'Freedom Agenda', from which the Bush administration largely retreated in 2006⁵ is well known (Brownlee 2012). Past EU policies have similarly suffered from a major gap between rhetoric and actual support of democratic processes. The European-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), also known as the Barcelona Process, was launched in 1995 and contained some general principles related to human rights, and some tools for the EU to put pressure on countries that violated human rights norms. However, as Balfour (2012: 14) writes, 'throughout the years of the EMP, and despite the abundance of cases justifying applying some pressure, the EU never resorted to negative conditionality in the case of the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, with the exception of endorsing international sanctions towards Libya in the 1990s'. Nevertheless, the EMP was a significant step beyond previous partnership initiatives, which focused entirely on trade and economic cooperation (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2011).

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), formulated in 2003, was another, overlapping attempt to encourage democratic reforms in the Arab World. The ENP drew on the experience of the EU enlargement process in Europe (Kelly 2006) to strengthen conditionality towards the countries in the southern Mediterranean (Balfour 2012). It featured 'Action Plans' and yearly progress reports on reform in partner countries, similar to EU progress reports on candidate countries such as Albania and Croatia (for the latter, until 2013). However, as Balfour (2012: 16) notes, the ENP did not take into sufficient account the fact that the ultimate incentive of membership was missing (the main incentives were aid and trade), not to mention the 'fundamentally different understanding of sovereignty and external interference in the internal affairs of the state'.

As with the EMP, under the ENP real democratic pressure was rarely exerted on the Arab countries. Democratic transgressions were occasionally criticized, but repercussions were almost never implemented, and in any case conditionality focused mostly on economic rather than political reforms (Balfour 2012). For example, despite high levels of repression, the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia was rarely criticized, and instead Tunisia made progress on its Association Agreement thanks to its neoliberal economic reforms (Balfour 2012: 15). Furthermore, as Balfour (2012: 13) notes, in order for incentives to be attractive, they need to be delivered. Before the Arab Spring as now, certain policies, such as expanding the number of migrants allowed to enter Europe, are the policy domain of member states and not the EU as a whole, and thus the EU loses leverage when it is unable to deliver the reward. A

⁵ See Bush's speech at his second Inaugural Ceremony, available on <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4460172> (accessed December 18, 2013). The Freedom Agenda did result in the creation of democracy-promotion agencies and mechanisms for the Middle East such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI).

recent report emphatically notes: ‘The EU does not have a strategic vision because the priorities of the member states vary. Some such as France and the United Kingdom have a stronger focus on security; others such as Spain and Italy, focus on mobility and migration; and still others, such as Sweden, the Netherlands and Poland are more committed to democratic transition’ (Atlantic Council 2013).

In the end, as in the case of the U.S., the EU policy repertoire in the Arab world has closely followed strategic interests such as resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, fighting terrorism, stopping the flow of illegal migration, and ensuring access to energy – and, as Balfour (2012) notes, these interests were controlled in bilateral relationships between individual Arab and EU states, undermining the larger, EU-wide, policy of democracy promotion. Increasing engagement with Libya in the 2000s, for example, did little in terms of improving the human rights situation there under the former Qadhafi regime (Chorin 2012).

Interests on the part of the EU and U.S. that competed with promoting democracy pre-2011 not only undermined Western democratic leverage over Arab democratic reform, but also harmed the credibility of democracy promotion efforts once authoritarian regimes fell in 2010 and 2011. The credibility gap inherent in the many apparent contradictions of Western policies toward authoritarian Arab regimes came to a head in revolutionary Tunisia, where the close relations between former French Foreign Minister Michele Alliot and the ruling Ben Ali family, besides deeply embarrassing then-President Sarkozy, showed the depth of entanglement between the French political elite and the Ben Ali regime. Similarly, close relations between Qadhafi and former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and other European leaders such as former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, which were based largely on economic interests related to Libya’s substantial oil wealth, also undermined the faith of ordinary Arabs in Western powers as sincere supporters of democratic change.⁶ In the case of the U.S., the fact that many Arabs associate American democracy promotion with the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and the despised policies of George W. Bush more generally (support for Israel, extraordinary renditions, torture, Guantanamo, etc.) further lowers the credibility of U.S. policies, and thus democratic leverage.

If, as Levitsky and Way write, leverage depends on the vulnerability of a given state to outside democratizing pressures, then we must also consider the role and sources of domestic resistance to such pressures. Here too, we find that Western democratic leverage is substantially weaker in the Arab Spring cases than the Balkans. Domestic resistance may be rooted in economic alternatives (for instance,

⁶ Post-2011 revelations about close cooperation between American and British intelligence and Qadhafi’s security services further served to confirm such skepticism.

Libya's oil wealth and dependence on oil exports mean that aid and the promise of free trade or investment cannot serve as a major incentive for reform), but it can also be rooted in issues of sovereignty and nationalism. Sovereignty has always been a political flashpoint in the post-colonial Arab world, and indeed, the 2010-2011 uprisings and the overthrow of authoritarian regimes coincided with a resurgence of nationalism that views any Western interference with suspicion. Throughout the region, there is a suspicion of Western motives and a history of rejecting Western interference. Widespread perceptions among secular groups (and Coptic Christians) in Egypt that the U.S. propped up the Muslim Brotherhood (a stunning turnaround in Egyptian public opinion considering that the U.S. shunned the Brotherhood for many decades and supported its oppressor, the Mubarak regime) has diminished U.S. influence among a natural ally.

Although political Islam has traditionally been the main locus of resistance to Western involvement in Arab affairs (Paz 2003), in Egypt nationalist resistance to Western interference comes from both ends of the political spectrum. The attacks on Western-funded NGOs in 2012 came from secular, Mubarak-era government officials, and the state media, rather than the Islamists that dominated Egypt's short-lived parliament. In successive polls, Egyptians have clearly voiced their opposition to U.S. and IMF economic assistance, with overwhelming majorities (Gallup 2012). In Libya, where there is an enormous reservoir of goodwill toward those Western countries that participated in the 2011 military intervention that helped bring down the Qadhafi regime, there is also firm opposition to Western meddling in Libya's political transition (Gallup 2012). In general, Arabs are unlikely to tolerate the kind of heavy-handed, invasive conditionality that was more readily accepted by elites (if not always the public) in many Balkan countries.

Finally, a key difference between the Balkans and the Arab Spring states is the influence of powers that play the role of a countervailing force to Western democratic leverage, especially those located in the Gulf region. Oil-rich Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates have been heavily involved in the Arab Spring countries from the beginning of the uprisings and have provided massive infusions of cash that often dwarf those that Western states and international financial institutions are able and willing to provide. Each Gulf state (and private foundations located in Gulf states) use money to curry favor among various groups. For instance, there is a widespread perception in Libya that Qatar has supported Islamist militias. Saudi Arabia was vocal about its dismay at Mubarak's fall, and never forgave the Obama administration for dropping support for his regime. Accordingly, just a week after the 3 July 2013 military coup in Egypt, the Saudis announced a \$12 billion aid package for the country, and a month later, they promised to make up any aid cut by Western donors to punish Egypt's military leaders for their undemo-

cratic actions (Nordland 2013). During the Morsi government, it was Qatar in turn that provided billions of dollars in aid to Cairo, allowing Morsi to avoid negotiating an unpopular stabilization agreement with the IMF. Western governments were left wondering if they even had much to offer to counteract such vast wealth and the influence it could buy. Gulf countries have their own interests in the Arab Spring countries, and few of these have anything to do with democracy, given their desire to preserve their own longstanding undemocratic orders. In the Balkan states, as we have noted, the geopolitical context in this regard was more favorable to democratization, with a notable absence of external anti-democratic leverage.

Conclusions

All of these factors combine to make Western democratic leverage over the Arab Spring countries substantially weaker than it was in the Balkans. Given the lack of will, and the forces of resistance to Western influence present in the region, democratic leverage is low, and even receding. Trends in the U.S., which in some ways is better equipped to exercise democratic leverage in the Arab World than the EU with its still-unwieldy institutions, are extremely unfavorable to further democracy promotion in the region. As *The New York Times* reported, Obama's October 2013 speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations signaled a clear shift toward greater realism in U.S. policy toward the Arab Spring: 'Mr. Obama, who hailed the crowds on the streets of Cairo in 2011 and pledged to heed the cries for change across the region, made clear that there were limits to what the United States would do to nurture democracy in [the Arab Spring countries]' (Landler 2013). It is no wonder that U.S. criticism of the Egypt's military rulers following the 3 July 2013 coup has been muted. Nor was there vocal criticism on the part of the Obama administration when President Mursi unilaterally appropriated extraordinary judicial powers for himself in November 2012, precipitating mass protests. As for the EU, to a large extent its demands for reform in Egypt are weaker than in the past: whereas before Brussels prodded Mubarak to repeal the emergency law, now that the law is back, the EU is silent on the subject. As for the ENP, a recent analysis argues that the EU approach to democracy promotion in Tunisia and Jordan suffers from a 'lack of analytical depth as far as concepts and processes are concerned', thereby diminishing its effectiveness (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2011).

The dream of Arab democracy appears to resonate with certain Western politicians and policy-makers, and yet just as many whisper that Arabs are not ready for democracy and need strong rulers. Fewer Western elites were willing to whisper that about the Balkans. While the West was ready to attack Milošević for his nationalism, it is much less willing to criticize new Arab leaders for xenophobic or anti-Semitic statements. As a U.S. diplomat in Libya, I watched in frustration and disap-

pointment as the Obama administration retreated from much-needed engagement with the fragile democratically-elected government in Tripoli following the attacks on the U.S. mission in Benghazi in September 2012, and as the emphasis returned to counterterrorism, as it had been in the last years of the Qadhafi regime.

Enduring Western interests in the Middle East and North Africa region continue to incline foreign policy to emphasize security and stability more than democracy. There is oil, and there is also the perceived need for close cooperation on counterterrorism with security agencies that are holdovers from the *ancien régime*. There are ties built over many decades between military and intelligence structures. There are deep fears of what ascendant Islamism will bring. For the Europeans, there are fears of illegal immigration. For those who believe that Western policies, if properly calibrated, could increase the chances for democracy to succeed in the Arab Spring countries, all of this is not encouraging. The lack of Western will, and the penchant of Western governments to emphasize stability rather than encourage democracy, is especially disheartening to the young Arabs who took to the streets three years ago to demand democracy, dignity, and justice.

Indeed, the international context of the Balkan transitions provided much more fertile ground for optimism about the development of democracy. In light of these challenges, policy-makers in the West need to think anew about what kind of tools, if any, are available to encourage democratization in the Arab world. This article has only begun to address the issue, but hopefully it will serve as a catalyst for further research of the role a host of external actors, from the Arab Gulf states to Turkey to Europe and the United States, are playing in the massive changes currently taking place across the Arab world, and what this tells us about the possible futures for liberal democracy in the Middle East.

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