*Patron-Client State Relations and the Geopolitics of Authoritarian Survival and Breakdown: evidence from the MENA countries*

*Online appendix - File A*

*Belated pressures for democratic opening in Tunisia (2011)*

Compared to states like Egypt or Iran, Tunisia – as a small North African country – had minor strategic relevance for Washington, yet it became a US client in 1974 and acquired impoPatron-client state relations and the geopolitics of authoritarian survival and breakdown:

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rtance in the fight against terrorism after 9/11 attacks. Like other US' clients, Tunisia received not only economic aid from its patron, but the US government also provided free of charge a program of training for Tunisian troops. In contrast with Egypt and Iran, during the Jasmine Revolution that resulted in the overthrow of Ben Ali regime, the role of the external patron in authoritarian breakdown seems less decisive, yet not negligible, as we shall see.

As in other MENA states, during the last decades the authoritarian bargain had deeply changed, especially with the rise to power of Ben Ali and the adoption of infitah policies in late 1980s. From that time on, the basis of support of the regime shifted from urban workers and rural peasants to the business elites. However, the state was still capable to design institutions to relieve poverty and provide social security to the most vulnerable. As for the elites, the business interests were promoted through privatization programs and some members of the opposition were co-opted through the establishment of a façade multi-party system. This apparently stable political system revealed unsustainable for two main reasons: first, market-oriented reforms and privatization programs failed in reducing unemployment, which is considered the main cause behind the Jasmine Revolution, and second, during

the last decades, economic resources that were previously shared among the elite were monopolized by the President's family and his inner circle. As a result, when the uprising began neither party cadres nor its members mobilized in support of Ben Ali (Wolf, 2017).

In order to retain power, during the very early stages of the Jasmine Revolution – like other dictators in the area – Ben Ali tried to quell the protests by promising the creation of 300,000 jobs over two years and announcing that he would not run for re-election in 2014. Later, lacking the capacity not only to co-opt the opposition, but also to maintain its base of support, the President relied on the National Guard and the Special Forces for repression. However, contrary to what is generally reported, some accounts argue that Ben Ali warned the police not to shoot demonstrators and decided to deploy the military to the capital only on 11 January, after more than three weeks of protests (Holmes & Koheler, 2018: 8). The hesitation to rely on the army might be grounded on domestic and international reasons. As for the first, Ben Ali feared the military could stage a coup, given that – like his predecessor – the President kept the army small and marginalized in order to curb potential political ambitions. As for the role of the international environment, even though there are unanswered questions surrounding orders issued by Ben Ali during the last days of his rule, according to Ritter, it seems unlikely that the President ordered lethal violence because he did not want to further alienate the West and the business class, who feared that their economic arrangements with Western countries would be jeopardized by the widespread use of force against unarmed protesters (Ritter, 2015: 156).

Fears of punishment for using coercion against the population may have been grounded also on more direct pressures exercised by the democratic patron during the last stages of the uprising. Even though it has been widely noticed that the US did not react in a timely fashion to the protests, in early January 2011 Washington called on President Ben Ali to respect civil rights and liberties, including the right to peaceful assembly. As a response, US ambassador in Tunis, Gordon Gray, was summoned and, on that occasion, he reportedly told Ben Ali he had to step down and that he could not count on exile on the US

(Schroeder & Redissi, 2014: 212). Moreover, as protests intensified, on 11 January, the US Department of State expressed deep concern about the use of excessive force by the government (Quinn, 2011: webpage). Indeed, the French daily Le Figaro reported that there had been close contacts between the US Embassy and General Rashid Ammar, commander-in-chief of the Tunisian army, in the days preceding the departure of Ben Ali (Minoui, 2011: webpage). Thus, besides domestic isolation, it is plausible that also warnings from Washington might have played a role on Ben Ali's decision to refrain from ordering widespread repression and to flee the country.

*Formal co-optation without external pressures in Jordan and Morocco: non-confirming cases?*

The monarchies of Jordan and Morocco experienced little popular mobilization if compared with other countries during the Arab Spring. However, in both states the protests were cross-class and, in the case of Jordan, cross-sectarian as well. On 20 February 2011, tens of thousands of Moroccans protested in over 50 towns. It was an alliance of students, left wing activists and non-parliamentary Islamists. In Jordan, during 2011 and 2012, Islamists organized weekly protests in Amman, in which also professional syndicates and parties of the secular left participated. What alarmed the Hashemite regime was the large presence of East Bankers in the demonstrations, since political discontent traditionally had come from the Palestinian urban population.

In sharp contrast with other dictators hit by the 2011 uprisings, King Mohammed IV of Morocco and King Abdullah II of Jordan had preserved their coalitional capacity and managed to pacify demonstrations without resorting to widespread repression. Indeed, both regimes are grounded on large cross-cutting bases of support. Through rent distribution and elite co-optation the Alaouites managed to win the loyalty of Moroccan business class, agricultural elites and religious authorities, whereas the Hashemites expanded the public sector in order to marginalize Jordanians of Palestinian descent while incorporating tribal communities and religious minorities (Yom & Gause, 2012: 81). Later, also Palestinian businessmen became part of the social contract. Along with informal co-optation, the two

monarchies have also resorted to formal co-optation and incorporated segments of the elites within the ruling coalitions through parties, parliaments and elections. Moreover, in contrast with other Arab monarchies, the ruling families of Jordan and Morocco exercise power at some institutional distance from the political arena (Bank et.al., 2014: 166). This gives them two advantages: first, they can maintain their legitimacy since they can blame elected officials for failed policies and take credit for successful reforms. Second, remaining above the political fray enables the monarchs to mediate among various factions without fear of being ousted, offer concessions to the opposition and reform the system from above (Gause, 2013: 13).

With high coalitional capacity and facing more limited protests than other authoritarian regimes, in 2011 both kings immediately responded to demands for political freedom, promising constitutional reforms. In Morocco a new Constitution was approved through referendum and in November 2011 parliamentary elections brought a new government headed by the Party of Justice and Development, a moderate Islamist-oriented party (Houdret & Harnisch, 2018). In Jordan, earlier in 2011, the king appointed two committees to reform the Constitution and change the electoral laws. Afterwards, the official narrative painted the January 2013 elections as a milestone on the road to constitutional monarchy. As a result, the monarchs demonstrated responsiveness to domestic pressures for reforms, without significantly altering the regimes' political and economic prerogatives.

As this brief outline of the events in Jordan and Morocco shows, the two regimes' reactions to protests cannot be attributed to direct US intervention. Even though both countries are loyal and geo-strategically important US clients, Washington did not feel compelled to pressure these dictators to adopt democratic reforms. In our view, US behavior can be explained in two interrelated ways: first, through concessions to the opposition, kings of Jordan and Morocco behaved exactly as the patron wished. In order to retain patron's support, these rulers may have anticipated potential external pressures. Second, due to their high coalitional capacity, both rulers proved able to pacify a large

portion of the protesters and preserve their countries' stability. As a matter of fact, in contrast with demonstrations in other states, protests in Jordan and Morocco never gained high resonance in Western media or public opinion. As a consequence, clients' apparent stability defused US' concerns about losing legitimacy as a liberal hegemon. As a consequence, inflows of foreign aid have intensified during the Arab Spring as a signal of support for ongoing political reforms. After the elections in Morocco, Secretary Clinton called on the king to "implement the amended constitution as a step toward fulfilling the aspirations and rights of all Moroccans" (Arieff, 2013: 1). In a similar fashion, in early 2011 other members of the Obama administration reassured the Jordanian King of US' continuing support and "urged him to move quickly to open up his government and not resist change as Mubarak had" (Mann, 2012: 192).

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