"Deficiencies in the social and regional development in North Africa: Catalysts for violent conflicts and political instability in the next decades?"

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1. Comments on problems associated with making prognoses

Researchers into the future agree that major social changes such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, wars and crises such as the energy crisis of 1973, the Gulf War of 1991 or the terrorist attacks of September 2001 ("9/11") and their proven consequences cannot be predicted 5, 10 or 20 years beforehand. Political and social scientists are no more accurate when making long-term forecasts than meteorologists predicting weather.
However,

- *If some pre-requisites are fulfilled* and
- *if certain restrictions are taken into consideration* one may make statements about *probable* developments in North Africa and the Near East, and the general direction they will take. Nevertheless, I consider 10 years to be a more realistic period for making predictions.
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The *pre-requisite* for any realistic prognosis is an analysis of each specific country. These analyses should for their estimates draw on historical, regional and international aspects.

The *limitations* effecting predictions about the future of North Africa and the Near East concern the general conditions for academic research in the region. The normal investigative methods used by social scientists to research the future involving large-scale regular surveys are not feasible in North Africa and the Near East, especially for foreigners.

My subsequent statements, all confined to North Africa, are based on verifiable data and are derived from concrete facts. My estimation of North Africa's future concentrates on a development trend that is to be expected if governments fail to adopt and enforce effectively and efficiently social and regional reform programs. I

can only provide a rough sketch of this complex theme and would prefer to go deeper into the subject during the subsequent discussion.

2. The need for a new angle of approach to the analysis of the future of North Africa and the Near East

As long ago as the 1980s, European and North African analyses correctly identified the key problems and deficits of North African countries: the first *Arab Human Development Report* published in 2002 was not able to add anything new. Since the 1990s, however, the concepts and measures propagated and demanded by European governments, international organizations and external financial sources have increasingly concentrated on goals that inadequately reflect conditions in North Africa.

The European and US-American view of North Africa and the Near East since the 1990s has been dominated by the concept *"expanded security"*, that has defined six main threats to the stability of the North African and Near Eastern region and the global system: terrorism, proliferation of weapons (especially weapons of mass destruction), poverty, hunger, epidemics (e.g. aids) and the conflict over access to natural resources. By supporting democracy and the market economy, the EU would like to avert effectively these threats and risks, or at least minimize them. It is assuming that democracy and the market economy are able to release development potential and by doing so contribute to durable development and internal political stability. The political and economic transformation of Eastern Europe triggered expectations that a similar sudden transformation might occur in North Africa and the Near East.

As a result, political practice and research has tended to concentrate on the issues of Islamist terrorism, Islamism and the lack of reforms designed to promote democracy, increased participation and economic development. September 11, 2001 once again reinforced this thematic orientation and the conviction that to combat militant Islamism and terrorism not only adequate security policies but also political and economic reforms (i.e. democracy and market economy) were necessary.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that the Islamist movement, in all its forms, and terrorist groups will continue to influence the domestic and foreign policy developments in North Africa and the Near East. It is even likely that they will be able to consolidate their influence if the governments' ability to advance social and regional development stagnates or even declines further and in doing so causes

large sections of the population to feel that they are being "marginalized" by the establishment.

Domestic stability and security in North Africa in the long term will depend on a relatively successful integrative approach to advancing social and socio-economic policies. As a result, any analyses of the deficits in social and regional development in specific countries and of the structural causes for the non-existence of reforms or their inability to take effect are indispensable. Gaps in social and regional development influence the way in which the effected population perceive their state and how they behave when dealing with it. The ability of a state's leadership to mobilize support for their reforms is closely allied to the success of individual measures to promote social and regional development. For that reason I think long-term success in social development and in closing gaps in regional development in the North African countries is decisive

- for the guaranteeing of civic peace and political stability in those countries and
- for ensuring that the respective governments are able to act effectively. Only if governments retain their full capacity to act will it be possible for the necessary reforms to continue.

3. What are the prospects for reforms designed to guarantee security, stability and development?

There seems to be little chance that countries in North Africa and the Near East will be able to fulfill the demands of the global economy as they need to do in order to guarantee long-term development and to curb poverty (including illegal migration) by means of economic integration. There are great qualitative and quantitative differences between different countries in the measures that they have already introduced to adjust to changing external circumstances. No country, however, has managed to achieve a real breakthrough in the implementation of reforms in development and economic spheres. Any positive developments should be described as "fragile".

Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt have all had numerous problems adjusting their national economies to the requirements of the global market. The problems, as recent surveys have shown, will become even more socially divisive once the Free Trade Agreement with the EU comes into force in 2010. (For details see e.g. "Le sud de la Méditerranée face aux défis du libre-échange" edited by Catin and Regnault in January 2007 and published by L'Harmattan in Paris.)

3.1. Demographic and demography related factors inhibiting reforms and modernization

The four most important factors that are going to challenge substantially the governments' ability to adjust and to act effectively in the next ten years are:

(1) **population growth.** Even though the birth rate is falling in the Maghreb states, Morocco and Algeria combined will have around 75m inhabitants. Egypt on its own will have 79.2m inhabitants by 2015.

(2) **growing internal migration.** Internal migration goes hand in hand with increasing urbanization. The growth of Mega-cities (in North Africa: Casablanca/Rabat, Algiers, Alexandria, Cairo) and cities of between 500,000 and 2.5m inhabitants is inevitable. Urbanization, however, is already proving too much for the governments to control administratively and provide services for.

(3) **the ecological consequences of population growth.** The pollution of earth, water, and air is already considerable and effects health. The availability of resources, especially water and food, is steadily getting worse.

(4) **the social factor, i.e. the integration of the majority of the population in the labor market.** Owing to the moderate average GDP growth rate, jobs are increasing insufficiently to serve needs. As a result, unemployment will continue to rise, especially among the younger generation. Thanks to satellite TV these young people are, of course, familiar with the international consumer economy; accordingly, they have high expectations of the state to guarantee welfare and consumption, accommodation, recreation, as well improvements to the infrastructure, health service, and education system. The pressure exerted by this "impatient generation" is going to increase and as it becomes more frustrated it will escalate into political protest. An indication of this trend could be found in Algeria, where since 2004 there have been almost daily social protests throughout the country but most especially in regions that are less developed and where the inhabitants feel marginalized. In Morocco there are regular protests by unemployed graduates or those who fear the loss of their jobs. Moreover, young adults are looking to the informal sector and – as has been reported by the security services – increasingly in illegal activities to escape from the lack of opportunities in the formal sector. (Government and civilian reports in all countries in North Africa confirm that petty crime and organized crime, along with the

corresponding sense of insecurity within the population, are on the increase.)

In addition to conflicts arising from the poor performance of the state, there are conflicts concerning political and social power and order. These conflicts are mostly between supporters of a religious and Islamist oriented concept of state and society and representatives of a comparitively "secular" concept. The ability of Islamists to mobilize forces against the incumbent governments, or their pro-Western foreign and economic policies, has been boosted and energized by external events in the Near East, such as, for example, the Iraq War, and by the pressure to keep up with global developments.

Whether North African governments continue their reforms and modernization, or even accelerate the process, depends, on two factors: the ability of the Islamists to win over support and the strength of those in the administration and in organizations of civil society seeking to defend the status quo so as to retain their privileges. As a result, the prospects for the successful implementation of reforms and their corresponding developmental programs are poor for two reasons:

(1) First, the durability of socio-economic problems and the on-going intervention of external forces, especially in the Near East. The continuing internal problems and unrelenting foreign influence and pressure on some states or groups of the last ten years have helped align the Islamists, the religious conservatives, nationalists and representatives of left-wing organizations in rejecting "Westernization" and Western economic, social and political concepts. Their influence on society has become so pervasive that even if a government is willing to push through reforms this counter movement manages to inhibit them.

(2) The second reason is that any economic and social reforms have only made very slow progress so far, or even in some cases stagnated or regressed. As a consequence, it is unlikely that a breakthrough will occur concerning the modernization of the states, economies or societies across the entire region in the next ten years. This assessment is supported by the fact that currently only the Tunisian leadership still has considerable freedom to implement economic reforms. Nevertheless, if Tunisia should suffer an economic slump, e.g. because of loss of revenue from tourism, a worsening of the security situation or as a consequence of the 2010 Free Trade Zone with the EU, then public protest can be expected. This would in turn restrict the ability of the government to act. In other words, the capacity of the decision makers in North Africa to implement risk preventive policies is restricted by the opposition movement and the

willingness of young people to organize public protest and use violence against either others or themselves (e.g. hunger strikes; suicide). Governments in the region give priority to short term stability and power political considerations over the continuation of reforms if protest and resistance reaches a particular level. The governments tend to resort to measures that reinforce their legitimacy and power in the short term but which are contra-productive for the long-term development; in particular, this includes at the moment the intensification of subsidies and redistribution policies, especially, but not only, in the oil producing countries.

3.2. Aspects of political culture inhibiting reforms and modernization

Furthermore, several factors from the *political culture* support the governments' short-sighted attempts to retain power and stability. Political actors *and* the majority of the population have a very ambivalent attitude to reforms. Factors born out of the political culture that inhibit reforms include:

(1) The provider and rent state mentality

This mind-set obstructs open debate about the state's capacity and capability for providing public services in the future. Governments still attempt to gain loyalty and support by cultivating clientalist style relationships, tolerating corruption and adopting an appropriate policy of distribution that "provides" their supporters with material and immaterial goods. All of this simply perpetuates the people's expectation that the state or its leaders will act for them. Self-initiative cannot be developed.

(2) The rift between the people and the state and their willingness to refuse cooperation

The "impatience" of sections of the younger population in relation to governments rose greatly in the 1990s. In particular, they are dissatisfied about the drop in living standards, the widening social divide and the lack of legal protection given to the individual. The legal and illegal opposition uses this dissatisfaction for their own purposes. They employ a whole range of actions to foment dissatisfaction: criticism of the government's policies; a questioning of the legitimacy of the leadership; calls for violence to be used against the state and its supporters. The government is assessed by each interest group according to the benefits it provides. If it fails to provide benefits for that specific group then the government, its representatives and organizations are adjudged to be opponents or even enemies of that group's interests. To avoid such confrontations the country's leadership employs the traditional policy of compensation. The capacity of the state is not sufficient, however, to meet the demands of all the diverse groups pressing for policies to

serve their interests so that the leadership suffers more and more criticism. As a consequence, the younger generation, which makes up well over 50% of the populations of North African countries and suffers most from the state's deficiencies, tends increasingly towards desolidarization. Desolidarization means, however, that the general willingness to co-operate with state structures diminishes. Instead, the willingness to mobilize against the state grows.

The socialization of the adolescents in families and schools reinforces the perception of the state as a "distributor" of benefits and as a "provider" (e.g. of jobs). Together with inadequate training facilities and an understanding of performance which is at odds with the demands of the modern economy, this attitude contributes to obstructing reforms and ensuring their failure.

(3) The lack of a culture of compromise

The dominant dichotomic thinking and its corresponding world view (a simple division into friend and foe) suits those individuals, organizations and groups who insist on their right to monopolize. They claim to be in possession of the truth, the true path etc. Social, developmental and economic measures as a result are sabotaged or "watered down" by ideological debates.

(4) Value Conservatism

The younger generation is still strongly affected by traditional values; its expectations are high therefore when it comes to fulfilling the "obligation" of solidarity and to providing for the individual on the level of family (extended family), tribe, religious community and last but not least the state. Traditional values determine too the behavior between the genders and assure the continued existence of the patriarchy and the standing of religion in society. The dominant thinking and behavior in hierarchical structures is reinforced by patriarchal forms of relationship. In addition, the lack of secularization helps perpetuate the pronounced influence of conservative and fundamental religious values in society and the political system. (An example of this is found in the contents of the Friday sermons.)

(5) Widespread Illiteracy

Illiteracy suits all those who, for their own various reasons, call for the retention of the status quo, encourage people to fear the loss of identity, and, as the Islamists do, propagate the "return" to behavioral and organizational structures based on religious thought as a way of protecting the cultural (religious) identity.

4. Resumé

According to researchers into the future a society's values are transformed gradually and only to the extent to which the younger generation, having grown up in other conditions, with other experiences and habits, slowly takes over from the elder generation. Childhood and adolescent experiences, moreover, are more important than later socialization. If all these assumptions are accepted as true, then in North Africa it is probable that the dominant perceptions, ideas and styles of debate mentioned above and the attitudes that result from them will not lose their power to influence before 2015 to 2025. The socialization of adolescents in North Africa has not yet taken place in circumstances that challenge traditional patterns of thought and perception and the dichotomic world view found there. Anti-Western and anti-American positions have been maintained because of the on-going violent conflicts in the Near East. In addition, it is likely that diffuse fears will spread, for example:

(1) *Individual existential fear* (i.e. fear of job losses, fear of losing the social integration and recognition that comes through work; fear of loss of living standard and the opportunity to consume);

(2) *Fear that local "security" will be lost* (i.e. fear of chaos in society caused by the dissolution of social cohesion);

(3) *Fear of the globalization process and its consequences* (e.g. the fear of losing cultural identity through growing outside influence).

These fears are usually accompanied by the retention of traditional thought patterns: they reinforce the religious and cultural tendency to isolate oneself. Populist theories that involve the apportioning of blame and the offering of potential solutions for fears, problems, frustrations and conflicts spread through such communities more easily. Extremist ideologies can expect to attract a lot of support if the situation worsens for the bulk of the population at the same time as their feeling of being marginalized and lacking prospects increases. Loyalty to the central powers and their representatives declines parallel to that.

For the future of North Africa this means:
Owing to the above mentioned reasons, it is to be expected that the deficits in social and regional development will persist and maybe even worsen. As a result, in the next two decades, especially in Algeria and Morocco, as the most populous of the Maghreb states and in Egypt, there will probably be temporary and violent civil protest characterized by anti-Western feeling. Extremist ideologies will remain attractive given the conditions described in this text.