

Time and *Newsweek's* Coverage of the Arab Uprisings in 2011: A Content Analysis Survey

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Abstract

The popular uprisings that took place in the Arab world, and led to the overthrow of four heads of states, namely Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali (January 14, 2011) of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak (February 11, 2011) of Egypt, Muammar al-Gaddafi (August 23, 2011) of Libya and Ali Abdullah Saleh (November 23, 2011) of Yemen, have attracted the attention of the world media and policy makers in the West and the Middle East, and triggered their concern for the political future of the region. This article does not offer a comprehensive assessment of these uprisings, but rather analyzes the coverage of Time and Newsweek of the underlying causes of the uprisings and their anticipated consequences. It also investigates how the two magazines have highlighted the scenarios that may pose a real challenge to Arab regimes supported by the American administration, and internationally reshape the priorities of American foreign policy in the region. These issues are examined from the two magazines' perspectives, which under-

line the features of U.S. foreign policy in the region, where the White House is more concerned about the security of the state of Israel, control of the Arab oil and suppression of “Muslim fundamentalism.”

Keywords

Arab uprisings, Muslim Fundamentalism, Newsweek Magazine, Time Magazine, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen

TIME AND NEWSWEEK MAGAZINES

Time magazine was founded in 1923 by Henry R. Luce (d. 1967) and Briton Hadden (d. 1929) who obtained their university degrees in Journalism and began their careers as editors on the *Daily News* at Yale. A few years later, they established *Time* magazine with the objective to deliver world news to the mass public in the United States of America and internationally. During the Vietnam War, *Time* covered war events from a republican perspective contrasting the *Newsweek's* liberal one. This magazine's conservative leanings seems to have been adopted by its successive thirteen managing editors¹, including its current one, Richard Rick Stengel, who has a wide number of publications, including his well-known work entitled, *Mandela's Way: Fifteen Lessons on Life, Love, and Courage*.

Newsweek magazine was founded by Thomas J.C. Martyn, a *Time* former foreign editor, on February 17, 1933, in New York City. It is currently considered as the second-largest weekly news magazine in the United State of America, having trailed behind *Time* in circulation at national and international levels. It offers a comprehensive coverage of world events with a global network of corre-

¹ James Kelly, “History of Time,” *Time*, March 31, 2003. Briton Hadden (1923–1929), Henry Luce (1929–1949), and Thomas S. Matthews (1949–1953), whose title was managing editor. From 1949 onward the managing editor became the senior editor of the magazine and his assistants continued as editors. The list of the managing editors who succeeded Thomas S. Matthews includes Roy Alexander (1949–1960), Otto Fuerbringer (1960–1968), Henry Grunwald (1968–1977), Ray Cave (1979–1985), Jason McManus (1985–1987), Henry Muller (1987–1993), James R. Gaines (1993–1995), Walter Isaacson (1996–2000), Jim Kelly (2001–2006), and Richard Stengel (2006–present). For further details, see, Wikipedia, s.v. “Time Magazine,” accessed February 20, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_%28magazine%29.

spondents, reporters and editors covering national and international affairs, business, science and technology, society, the arts and entertainment.² Its present managing editor, Daniel Klaidman, is an established journalist. His service as Washington Bureau Chief enabled him to cover the war in Iraq and co-author several stories on Al Qaeda's resurgence within the U.S.

Both *Time* and *Newsweek* have given special coverage and descriptive analysis of the root causes of the Arab uprisings in 2011, and their anticipated consequences that may change the political landscape in the region. These issues are examined in the context of articles, reports, editorial notes, and communiques published by the two magazines in 2011.

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE ARAB UPRISINGS

The Arab uprisings started in Tunisia on December 17, 2010, when a policewoman confiscated a vegetable cart of a twenty-six year street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, in Sidi Buzid 300 km south of Tunis. As a result, Bouazizi appealed to the provincial headquarters in Sidi Buzid, where he was humiliated by police officers who rejected his case. An hour later Bouazizi doused himself with flammable liquid and set himself on fire. Public outrage immediately erupted in Sidi Buzid where protestors were crushed by police and security forces. Social media sites, such as Facebook and YouTube, featured images of police dispersing youths who had attacked shop windows and damaged cars. At that moment Bouazizi was transferred to a hospital near Tunis, where he was visited by President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali in an attempt to quell the unrest. On Janu-

² "History of Newsweek," *The Daily Beast*, accessed February 24, 2012, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2007/10/10/history-of-newsweek.html>.

ary 4, 2011, Bouazizi died of burns in the hospital, and large scale demonstrations broke out in different parts of the country. Security forces brutally tried to suppress the demonstrators, whose prime demands were –“Jobs for all,” –“Down with the bribes and favouritism,” – “Tunisia free” and “Ben Ali get lost.”³ In a desperate attempt to quiet down protestors, in his second speech since the outbreak of uprisings in Tunisia, President Ben Ali promised that 300,000 jobs would be created in the next two years, while issuing a decision that closed down schools and universities, and branded protesters as “terrorists.” These measures did not calm down protesters, but rather provoked them to further confrontations with the government, calling for Ben Ali to step down and hand over his power to an elected democratic government. Under this mounting pressure of protests, the President dissolved his government called for parliamentary elections within six months, and promised the protestors that he would step down by the end of his presidential term in 2014. These promises did not improve the political situation on the ground but rather weakened the grip of the government and forced Ben Ali to leave the country for Saudi Arabia on January 14, 2011, marking the end of his 24 years of authoritarian rule in Tunisia.⁴

The success of the Tunisian uprisings inspired other Arab countries to revolt against authoritarian leaders in their own countries, who have ruled for many decades, particularly in Egypt and Libya. On January 25, 2011, Egyptian activists called for uprisings against poverty, unemployment and government corruption perpetrated by President Hosni Mubarak and his closest associates. They urged the President to step down in favour of an elected democratic government that would address the protestors’ demands and expectations. On the next day, the government banned all public gatherings, and security forces used tear gas and concussion grenades to disperse the peaceful demonstrations. Protestors were

³ “Timeline of the Tunisian Revolution,” *Bulletin of Mass Strike*, accessed February 18, 2012, <http://www.luxemburgism.lautre.net/spip.php?article127>.

⁴ For further details, see, Vivienne Walt, “Tunisia’s Nervous Neighbors Watch the Jasmine Revolution,” *Time*, January 31, 2011, 17-21, especially 18.

dispersed by police and security forces, a curfew was set up, and all forms of communication, including Internet and mobile services, were blocked. The protestors continued their struggle against the authoritarian regime and their revolts spread from the Liberation Square (*Midan al-Tahrir*) in Cairo to other parts of the country. The first reaction of the President to the demonstrations was that he appointed Omar Sulaiman, Egypt's intelligence chief, as Vice President, and advised him to start dialogue with all political forces. On February 4, 2011, thousands of protesters gathered at Tahrir Square in Cairo and other principal cities of Egypt, calling for the departure of Mubarak without making any concession with the government. The President was left with no choice but to hand over his power to his newly appointed Vice-President, Omar Sulaiman, and remain in office until the end of his presidential term in 2013. But these proposals did not satisfy the demands of the protestors who maintained their position against the regime as a whole. When the regime reached a dead lock, Mubarak was internally and externally forced to step down on February 11, 2011, leaving the administration of the country to a military council headed by Mohamed Hussein Tantawi and a team of senior military officers who were members of the old guard of Mubarak's regime.⁵

A few days after President Hosni Mubarak's downfall, anti-government demonstrations began in Benghazi in Libya, when security forces arrested a human rights activist, Fethi Tarbel, who had been fighting to free political prisoners. Diplomats at Libya's mission to the U.N. sided with the revolt against their country's leader and urged the Libyan army to help overthrow "the tyrant Muammar Gaddafi." By the end of February 2011, Gaddafi's gov-

⁵ For further details, see, Babak Dehghanpisheh, Christopher Dickey, and Mike Giglio, "Rage Against the Regime," *Newsweek*, February 7, 2011, 19-25; Fouad Ajami, "Demise of Dictators," *Newsweek*, February 14, 2011, 14-21; Christopher Dickey and Babak Dehghanpisheh, "Among the Believers: The Muslim Brotherhood Stands up in Egypt," *Newsweek*, February 14, 2011, 25-27.

ernment had lost control of significant parts of Libya, including major cities such as Misrata, Benghazi, the important harbors at Ra's Lanul and Brega. The military confrontation between Gaddafi loyalists and anti-Gaddafi forces gradually escalated into a full-scale civil war. In response, the U.N. Security Council and EU governments intervened by imposing sanctions on Gaddafi and his family, and suspended Libya's membership in the U.N. On March 17, 2011, the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution imposing a no-fly zone in Libyan airspace and recommended that "all necessary measures" be taken to protect civilians against Gaddafi's forces. Supported by NATO air forces, the Libyan National Council in Benghazi declared itself the legitimate representative of Libya's people, gaining recognition from Western and Arab countries. The military confrontation continued between the two parties for a couple of months until the forces of the revolutionaries entered Tripoli in the last week of August 2011, and Gaddafi and his forces left the city, taking their final refuge in Bani Walid, Sirte and other cities. After the liberation of Tripoli, fighting between anti-Gaddafi forces and die-hard Gaddafi loyalists continued for about two months until Colonel Gaddafi was captured on October 20, and killed at the city of Sirte. His death marked the end of his 42-year rule, and three days later the Libyan National Council declared the liberation of the country, and started the process of drafting a new constitution and electing a new government.

The outcomes of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions also inspired opposition party leaders and political activities in Yemen to continue their struggle against the leadership of President Ali Abdullah Saleh who came to power in 1990. To curtail the political situation in Yemen, President Saleh announced that he would neither run for the forthcoming presidential election in 2013 nor hand power over to his son, Ahmad. These promises did not convince opposition party leaders and political activists who organized anti-government rallies on February 3, 2011 under the slogan of a Yemeni "Day of Rage," styled after similarly named protests in Egypt. A series of change squares was established in various cities across Yemen and the protestors' primary demand was that the President

should step down for early presidential and parliamentary elections. The spread of protests all over the country prompted President Saleh to fire his entire cabinet, and also encouraged the Yemen ambassador to the U.N. to resign from his post on the grounds that the ruthless treatment of peaceful demonstrators was indefensible. Several top military commanders defected, and Yemen's ambassador to Syria quit his post and joined the anti-government movement that called for Saleh's resignation. When the situation became very complex and out of control in Yemen, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries intervened and attempted to mediate between the President and the protestors by calling for a smooth transfer of power, but their proposal was rejected by the government. On June 7, 2011 President Saleh was more seriously injured in a rocket attack on Yemen's presidential compound in Sana'a. He was flown to Saudi Arabia, where he received medical treatment and the administration of the country was entrusted to his deputy. While Saleh was receiving medical treatment in Saudi Arabia, protestors formed a transition council on August 18, 2011 in order to strengthen their demand for the transfer of power. Under growing internal and external pressure Saleh signed an agreement, brokered by Yemen's Gulf Arab neighbours, in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on November 22, 2011, assenting to hand over power to his deputy, Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi, on the concession that he would be given immunity from prosecution. His deputy was then expected to form a national unity government and call for early presidential elections within 90 days. By signing agreement, Saleh ended his 33 years of authoritarian rule on the concession that he will retain his title and certain privileges until the new presidential elections took place in February 2012.⁶

⁶ For further details, see, Farhad Khosrokhavar, *The New Arab Revolutions that Shook the World* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 28-42, 43-58.

Apart from these four Arab countries, anti-government demonstrations and demands for regime change in the Arab world had spread to other Arab countries such as Bahrain, Algeria and Syria. The protestors in Bahrain and Algeria were crushed by government forces, while their counterparts in Syria have continued their struggle against al-Assad's regime. The confrontation between the two opposing parties has developed in a form of civil war because the primary demand of the protestors is that President Assad should resign to a transitional government that would implement constitutional reforms and make the necessary arrangements for parliamentary and presidential elections.

Based on this brief overview of the Arab uprisings, the subsequent sections discuss the underlying causes of these uprisings and their impacts on the political landscape and U.S. foreign policy in the region. The discussion is based on the special coverage given by *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines in 2011.

ROOT CAUSES OF ARAB UPRISINGS

In their weekly issues, both *Time* and *Newsweek* attributed the outbreak of the Arab revolts in 2011 to a series of causes associated with political dictatorship and corruption, unemployment, brutal crackdown on protestors, and the significant role of cell phones and social media (i.e. Facebook, YouTube) that mobilized the support of local masses against dictatorial regimes. The most immediate causes of the Arab revolts are addressed in the subsequent paragraphs that draw their information from articles, reports, editorial notes and communiqués published by *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines from January to December 2011.

POLITICAL DICTATORSHIPS AND CORRUPTION

In his essay entitled "Demise of Dictators," Fouad Ajami wrote, "The Arab dictators had taken their people out of politics, they had

erected and fortified a large Arab prison, reduced men and women to mere spectators of their own destiny.”⁷ Their post-independence promise, to restore Arab through modernization and social justice, had gone with the wind. Instead Arab regimes became corrupt and authoritarian regimes, losing them the faith of their people. *Time* and *Newsweek* both consider the corruption and oppressive policies of the post-independent Arab regimes amongst the factors that led to the eruption of the revolts in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria, and consider them as ingredients for other future revolts in the region. In her essay “Deepening Divide” Aryn Baker interviewed Rami Nakhal, a Syrian cyber-activist, working underground in Lebanon, about the main causes that led him to join the anti-Syrian government campaign. In his reply, Nakhal said, “we want what everyone in the region wants: an end to corruption, the ability to choose and dismiss our leaders, freedom of speech, and freedom of fear.”⁸ Nakhal’s answer rightly reflects certain features of authoritarian regimes that can be investigated in the following sections.

ZINE EL ABIDINE BEN ALI (R. 1987-2011)

Habib Bourguiba (1903-2000) was the founder and the first post-independence President of the Republic of Tunisia from 1957 until 1987. He was succeeded by his Prime Minister, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, based the official medical report that declared Bourguiba as incompetent to rule the country. This medical report gave him the political legitimacy to stage a bloodless coup against his predecessor. Shortly after seizing power in 1987, as Barak Dehghanpisheh and Christopher Dickey wrote:

⁷ Ajami, “Demise of Dictators,” 14-21.

⁸ Aryn Baker, “Deepening Divide,” *Time*, June 13, 2011, 26.

Ben Ali cast himself as a bulwark against militant Islam, and after 9/11 became one of the Bush administration's most reliable allies in the Global War on Terror. He also played by the economic rules of the International Monetary Fund, embraced globalization, and was rewarded with money and praise for his progressive policies. Diplomats in Tunis told NEWSWEEK in 2003 that Tunisia was "a country that works"—a relatively benign regime where criticism of the leader might bring torture and jail, but probably not death. It was "a soft dictatorship," the diplomats said, "more like Singapore or South Korea in the 1980s than like some other Arab countries today." But all the while, Ben Ali and his wife, along with several members of her family, were living out the starring roles in a real-life gangster movie.⁹

The corruption of Ben Ali's family and his in-laws was described in the following words of a *Time* journalist, Vivienne Walt:

The greed and corruption of the First Family were now intolerable. Protesters lambasted Ben Ali's second wife Leila Trabelsi, a former hairdresser who accumulated vast wealth as First Lady and bestowed lavish gifts on her numerous relatives; she has 10 siblings. About half of Tunisia's businesses -including a bank, hotels, a property-development firm and the two biggest newspaper companies - are in the names of the extended family. The distributorships of Porsche, Volkswagen, Kia and Alfa Romeo cars all belonged to Ben Ali's son-in-law, Sakher El Materi. His lavish lifestyle was the subject of a 2009 diplomatic cable, acquired by WikiLeaks, in which the then U.S. ambassador, Robert Godec, warned State Department officials that the ruling family's excesses could lead to the regime's collapse. Godec described a sumptuous dinner at El Materi's home, where the young tycoon pressed the ambassador to help him acquire the McDonald's franchise for Tunisia and where ice cream and frozen yogurt had been flown in from St.-Tropez, France, on his host's private plane. The household pets included a caged tiger named Pasha, which reminded Godec of Uday Hussein's caged lion in Baghdad."¹⁰

⁹ Barak Dehghanpisheh and Christopher Dickey, "A Dictator Dispatched," *Newsweek*, January 31, 2011, 29.

¹⁰ Vivienne Walt, "Tunisia's Nervous Neighbors Watch the Jasmine Revolution," *Time*, January 31, 2011, 20.

The ruling family's corruption and extravagance were heavily criticized by Fouad Ajami who stated that Ben Ali and his in-laws had no "patriotism and love" of their home country. His "ambitious wife, the hairdresser who had come out of nowhere to the pinnacle of power, made a run for it. It had been quite a racket for them, and it was now time to quit the land they had plundered and enraged."¹¹ The public's perception of Ben Ali's rampant corruption augmented the anger of protestors, and led them, along with other factors, to revolt against the leadership of Ben and his family, and called them to depart.

HOSNI MUBARAK (R. 1981-2011)

Hosni Mubarak is also a military officer who took over the leadership of the most influential country in the Arab World, Egypt. He came into power after the assassination of Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat in 1981, and ruled the country with an iron fist for three decades. He suppressed the activities of the Muslim brotherhood and jailed a large number of them and other political opponents. Mubarak maintained most of his predecessor's foreign and domestic policies, including the Camp David Treaty and Sadat's close ties to the United States of America. He also advised King Hussain of Jordan and Yasser Arafat of PLO to strike a deal with the state of Israel, recognizing Israel's right to exist in the region. In the last five years of his rule, Mubarak revealed grew increasingly disinterested in sharing power with other political parties, as he paved the way for his son Gamal to succeed him, following the Syrian model. In this respect, a *Newsweek* writer, Christopher Dickey, wrote:

¹¹ Ajami, "Demise of Dictators," 20.

[His wife], Suzanne guided the fortunes of her children and grandchildren, looking to establish a political dynasty that might endure for generations. The older son, Alaa, is a businessman who prefers soccer to the game of politics—a fact that has brought him occasional surges of popularity over the years as a big-name, big-mouthed fan of Egypt’s national team. The younger son, the handsome, aloof Gamal, was for years the apparently anointed but undeclared heir to the presidential palace. When writing about his rise, British tabloids never failed to mention the pharaohs’ ancient dynasties. Gamal himself, half-joking with friends and acquaintances even as he ritualistically denied presidential aspirations, preferred to speak of the Kennedys, the Bushes, and the Clintons.¹²

Dickey also described the situation before Hosni Mubarak’s departure in the following words:

The night before he finally stepped down as Egypt’s President, the protesters in Tahrir Square heard Hosni Mubarak delivers his final address as their head of state. “A speech from a father to his sons and daughters,” he called it, and like many of his orations in the past, it was filled with lies, although he may have believed some of these himself. He would stay as President until September, he promised, because the country needed him for a transition to democracy. This, after three decades of autocracy. The hundreds of thousands gathered in the square wanted to hear him say only one word: “Goodbye.” Amid their screams of fury, one woman could be heard shouting into a phone, “People are sick of the soap opera!”¹³

This passage illustrates that the protestors were not ready to accept any concession from the government, except the departure of Hosni Mubarak, his family and old guards. Stories of Mubarak’s corruption were widely circulated and many believed that Mubarak and his family had a fortune of \$40 to \$70 billion; and that he had rigged the last parliamentary elections of 2010. All reports of *Newsweek* and *Time* consider this terrific form of corruption

¹² Christopher Dickey, “The Tragedy of Mubarak,” *Newsweek*, February 21, 2011, 28.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 26.

among one of the fundamental causes that led to the end of his thirty-year authoritarian regime.

MUAMMAR AL -GADDAFI (R. 1969-2011)

Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi staged a military coup in 1969 against the first and last king of independent Libya, Idris al-Sanussi (1951-1969), and served the country as head of state with absolute power. Through his Arab nationalist rhetoric and socialist-style policies, Gaddafi gained the support of the local masses during the early days of his rule, and established himself as the Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council of Libya, claiming subsequently to be merely a symbolic figurehead. He involved himself in a series of terrorist activities outside the country, and ruled his own people in a very brutal way, to the extent that the Libyan population had lost faith in his tyrannical leadership, and eventually revolted against him in 2011. On the corruption of his regime and involvement of his family in the country's politics, a *Newsweek* journalist wrote:

Like his other six siblings, Saif, 39, was a puppet of his father, who ruled his family like he ruled Libya's tribes: playing one against the other. The Gaddafi children, for their part, carved up the country's wealth. Muhammad, the oldest son, controlled telecommunications. Hardliner Mutassim served as -national-security adviser until he lost his father's favor and was shipped to Egypt. Saadi, perhaps the best-known brother, captained the national soccer team. Aptly named Hannibal [he] earned infamy for beating his model wife to a pulp in a suite at the posh Claridge's hotel in London. His sister, Aisha, served as a lawyer not only for Hannibal but also for Saddam Hussein, a family friend. The two youngest brothers, Khamis and Saif al-Arab, got lost in the shadows of their older siblings. Of them all, it was Saif al-Islam, the

self-styled artist, who enjoyed life outside Libya the most. His father used him as a slick ambassador to the West. And Saif loved this role, which allowed him to travel abroad and hang out with his Israeli girlfriend.¹⁴

This passage leads us to agree with Fouad Ajami who argued that “The fortunes of the rulers, an Arab businessman once said to me, are the real weapons of mass destruction in the region. The Houses of Assad, of Mubarak, of Gaddafi and of Ben Ali (and of Saddam Hussein before his fall) are rich beyond measure. The line between the wealth of the rulers and the treasure of the realm has been erased.”¹⁵ In line with Ajami’s allegations, both *Time* and *Newsweek* reported the tyranny of the Arab rulers and corruption of their families to be amongst some of the most important reasons for the uprisings that terminated the leadership of four dictators in the region.

ALI ABDULLAH SALEH (R. 1990-2011)

Field Marshal Ali Abdullah Saleh was the first President of the Republic of Yemen after the unification between North Yemen and South Yemen in 1990. The unification of the two Yemens remained as one of his major achievements, enhancing his political image in the eyes of several tribes of Yemen. However, his grip on power slackened when the Arab uprisings inflamed Yemen. Some close associates under his thumb defected, powerful tribes turned against him and the U.S. administration - a longtime friend once happy to back Saleh as a proxy in the war against al-Qaeda - gave him the coldshoulder. His dictatorship, favouritism of his tribesmen and corruption of his regime were singled out among other causes that fueled the revolt in Yemen. Under international and regional pressure, Saleh signed an agreement on November 23, 2011, accepting the transfer of power to his Vice President on the con-

¹⁴ Eliza Griswold, “In the Name of the Father,” *Newsweek*, August 28, 2011.

¹⁵ Ajami, “Demise of Dictators,” 20.

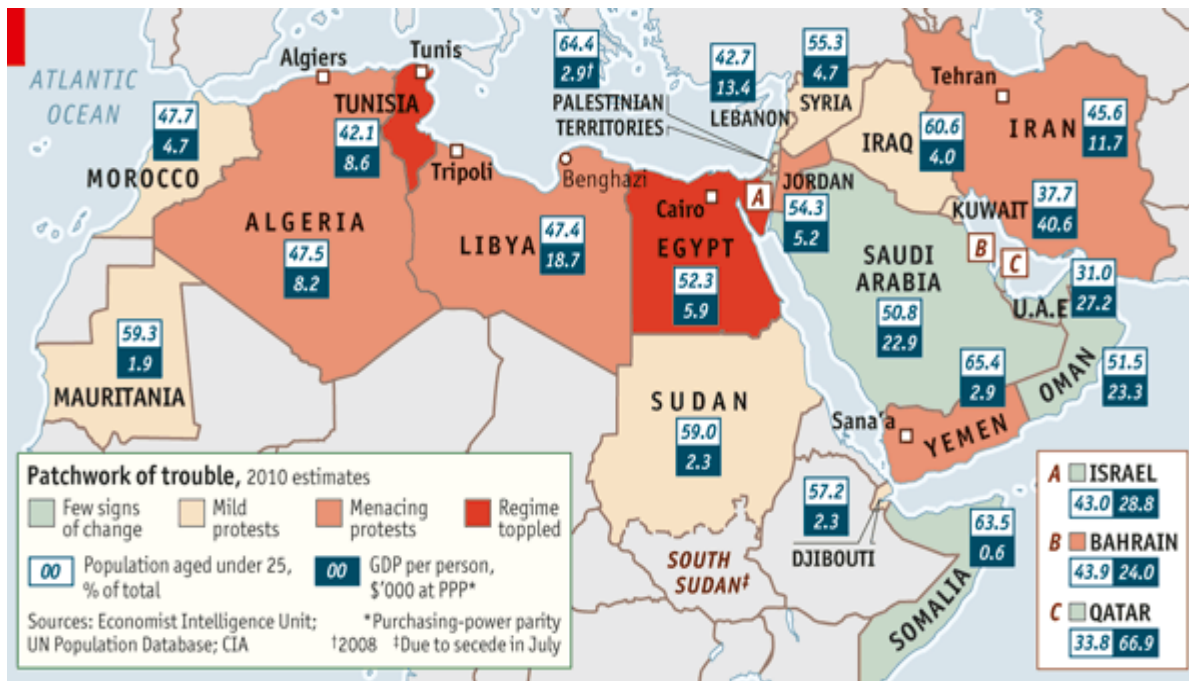
cession that he would reserve his title and certain privileges until the new presidential elections take place in February 2012. The whole episode illustrates that the vast majority of the Yemeni population had discredited the leadership of Saleh, accusing him of being corrupt, nepotistic and interested in turning the country into a family business, as he groomed his son, Ahmad, to succeed him.

YOUTHQUAKE IN THE ARAB WORLD

Another contributing factor that led to the Arab Spring is increasing number of young people under the age of thirty years.¹⁶ As Fouad Ajami wrote, the Arab Human Development Report of 2009 provided a telling portrait of the world of 360 million Arabs. They were overwhelmingly young and about 60% of them lived in urban centres where economic growth and job markets did not meet their expectations, no fewer than 65 million Arabs were living below the poverty line of \$2 a day and fifty-one million new jobs have to be created by 2020 to accommodate university graduates and others. The case of Mohamed Bouazizi is one of the alarming instances of the uprising that shows the frustration of youths in the Arab world, who cannot find jobs to satisfy their ambitions.¹⁷ The map below illustrates the distribution of youths who are under 25 years old and the gross domestic product (GDP) per person in each Arab country.

¹⁶ Christopher Dickey, "Bye-Bye to Tunisia's Ben Ali," *Newsweek*, January 24, 2011, 7.

¹⁷ Ajami, "Demise of Dictators," 16.

Figure 1: Distribution of Youths and GDP/person in Arab Countries

Source: Cultural Wizard, <http://rw-3.com/tag/middle-east/>

Based on the above statistics, U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, alerted the leaders of Arab countries to listen to the demands of their young people since the old foundations of the Arab world “are sinking into the sand.”¹⁸ The response to their demands should address issues such as democratization of the political system, creation of new jobs, and suppression of government corruption.

CELL PHONES AND SOCIAL MEDIA (FACEBOOK, TWITTER, AND YOUTUBE)

Both *Time* and *Newsweek* paid special attention to the social media, such as Facebook and Twitter which provided a space for activists to talk, organize rallies against their authoritarian regimes, send out information and challenge any attempt to shut down their public political forums and communications. Their dialogues and discussions on the channels of social media addressed the corruption of the ruling elites, and mobilize the masses, encouraging

¹⁸ Walt, “Tunisia’s Nervous Neighbors Watch the Jasmine Revolution,” 18.

them to organize against their tyrannical leaders and their clients. Social media proved served as a platform for the exchange of steady stream of anonymous text messages, Twitter and Facebook updates. Mobile-phone videos posted documented governments' reactions against peaceful protestors, including the police beatings and shootings of peaceful protestors who overcame their fear and challenged their autocratic leaders.¹⁹ In Egypt, for instance, *Newsweek* journalists, Babak Dehghanpisheh, Christopher Dickey and Mike Giglio described the role of the social media, saying:

One by one, the lines of communication that connected Egypt to the 21st century shut down. Twitter, Facebook, and eventually all Internet access were cut off; text messaging became impossible, and then millions of mobile phones went silent across the country. But the protests and riots continued, as they had for most of the week, with thousands of young Egyptians trying to take down the regime of octogenarian President Hosni Mubarak. They set last Friday for their "day of rage," drawing in supporters from all over the country, including the outlawed but powerfully organized Muslim Brotherhood. In the hours leading up to the demonstrations, the government did everything it could to cut them off from each other, and from the rest of the world.

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Christopher Dickey and Babak Dehghanpisheh also emphasized that the actual instigators of the revolt in Egypt were "a band of young techies who used their mass-communication skills to mobilize thousands of people from almost every stratum of Egyptian society in an uprising against Mubarak's reign—with the notable ex-

¹⁹ Ibid., 20; Christopher Dickey, "Morning the Middle East," *Newsweek*, Special Issue, 2012, 9-13.

²⁰ Dehghanpisheh, Dickey and Giglio, "Rage Against the Regime," 22.

ception of the Brotherhood, which declined to join the first massive but peaceful demonstrations”²¹ on January 25, 2011.

In Syria, young activists took advantage of the tools Assad had made available to campaign against him: through the use of cameras on their mobile phones protestors were able to record the abuses of the security forces; and through the internet they were able to send these recordings to news agencies around the world. “You can’t quash an uprising if millions of people are acting like their own independent news stations.”²² All these examples highlight the concern of *Time* and *Newsweek* about the role of the social media that facilitated the dissemination of information and the organization of the Arab youths to stand against their corrupt leaders. They also emphasized that economic reforms and political changes were among the primary demands of the protesters who openly criticized the leadership and management of their countries.

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WHAT WAS THE JUSTIFICATION OF RULING AUTHORITIES?

Based on the weekly coverage of *Time* and *Newsweek* of the Arab uprisings, the dictators of the Arab countries who had been challenged by protestors tried to attract the support of their Western patrons, claiming that the demonstrations were orchestrated by the loyalists of al-Qaeda in the region. They assumed that this claim would readily arm them with the support of their Western patrons, or at least encourage them to turn a blind eye to any form of brutality that might be used against peaceful protestors. All the challenged dictators presented themselves as key players in the region, leading the fight against extremism and al-Qaeda’s supporters. A role that was crucial for them to play after 9/11, when they

²¹ Dickey and Dehghanpisheh, “Among the Believers: The Muslim Brotherhood Stands up in Egypt,” 26.

²² Baker, “Deepening Divide,” 26.

²³ For further details on the role of social media in the Arab revolution, see Jean-Pierre Filiu, *The Arab Revolution: Ten Lessons from the Democratic Uprising* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011), 43-56.

received substantial support from Western countries and the American administration, in particular, to confront the threat posed by "Muslim extremists" in their home countries. When they were confronted by peaceful protests calling for political and economic reforms, they raised the issue of Islamic extremism to divert the attention of Western media from their internal problems and corruption. In Syria, for instance, when the army tanks stormed the southern town of Daraa, a military spokesman claimed that the assault had targeted "extremist terrorist groups." President al-Assad himself asserted that the jihadists were behind all the demonstrations taking place in Syria.²⁴ In this sense, Arab leaders assumed that if the protestors were branded as the ideological shadows of al-Qaeda, the West would not intervene.²⁵

WHAT WAS THE REACTION OF THE AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION?

President Obama was reluctant to intervene in the bloody conflict that took place between the protestors and the die-hard loyalists of the Arab dictators who ruled their people with iron fists and loaded guns. His response to the situation in Libya was that "the best revolutions" should be "completely organic," in the sense, that the American administration should not intervene in the internal affairs of the Arab countries. Journalists of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines criticized his attitude, particularly Niall Ferguson who listed a number of successful revolutions that were not completely organic, including the American Revolution, but their success was partly based on foreign assistance. Therefore, he suggested that President Obama should be given "a history lesson before thousands of Libyans share their fate. It will be tragic indeed if America concludes

²⁴ Nibras Kazimi, "Handing Jihadis Cause," *Newsweek*, May 9, 2001, 9-10, especially 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

from the experiences of overthrowing murderous tyrannies in Afghanistan and Iraq that the correct policy is to turn a blind eye to murder in Libya.”²⁶ In line with these remarks, Rosemary Righter wrote:

Barack Obama’s public reluctance to point Hosni Mubarak toward the exit door pushed open by millions of disgusted Egyptians was defensible, if not exactly admirable: the U.S. did not wish to be seen peremptorily dumping so longstanding an ally, although the White House should have seen much earlier that there was no alternative. The president’s dithering over Libya has been neither defensible nor admirable. His electoral pitch made much of America’s “moral obligation” to intervene to prevent atrocities against civilians. Atrocity is a strong word: it does not describe the familiar travails of the subjects of unjust and corrupt rulers. But atrocities are happening in Libya. Obama’s declared principles in foreign affairs face a test he seems loath to recognize. From the first lethal volleys against peaceful demonstrators, it was clear that Muammar Gaddafi would wage war to the death on his own people, a war that his “reformist” son Saif swore to fight “to the last man, the last woman, and the last bullet.” Obama duly declared that Gaddafi had “lost legitimacy” and must go; last week he assured the Libyan people that “we will stand with them in the face of unwarranted violence and the continuing suppression of democratic ideals.” Yet all week, as Gaddafi reduced Zawiyah to rubble and pounded Ras Lanuf, the White House resumed its leisurely consideration of “the full spectrum of possible responses.” NATO kicked its heels; the EU, as usual, met to decide on what it could not decide. Libyans bled.²⁷

In his submission, Righter also raised a very provocative question: “Does Obama believe that the era of U.S. leadership should be seen to be over?” She answered the question by saying that “the issue is not the narrow one of the legality or military effectiveness of a no-fly zone. It is what to do about an outlaw.” Since Gaddafi had breached the U.N.’s demand to end violence against his people and meet their “legitimate demands.” The only resort left, from Right-

²⁶ Niall Ferguson, “How to Get Gaddafi: Mr. President, Don’t Send Guns to the Libyans. Send them a Piece of Paper,” *Newsweek*, March 21, 2011, 13.

²⁷ Rosemary Righter, “Right to Protect: International Law Offers a Robust Doctrine for Intervention in Libya,” *Newsweek*, March 21, 2011, 14-15, especially 14.

er's perspective was to force him to stop fighting and listen to the legitimate demands of the Libyan protestors. On the other hand, a *Newsweek* journalist, Fareed Zakaria, addressed Obama's reluctance from a different perspective, arguing the President's concern was that he did not want to repeat the mistakes of his predecessor, George W. Bush, when invading Iraq in 2003. Therefore, his precautions included the establishment of a local opposition movement that would be able to wage war against Gaddafi and his loyalists; the securing of regional support so that they would not denounce foreign intervention in Libya as another example of Western imperialism in Muslim lands; and finally, gaining the support of the U.N. would legitimize intervention in Libya against Gaddafi's regime.²⁸

In the case of Syria, journalists of *Time* and *Newsweek* promoted a different approach that supported the disinterest of Western countries in backing a radical political change of Assad's regime on the grounds that his successors would be the "radical Islamists." In this sense both magazines indirectly advised Western leaders to follow Tel Aviv's wisdom: "Better the devil you know than the devil you don't,"²⁹ meaning, priority should be given to the security of the State of Israel rather than given to the protestors' expectations and demands that call for genuine political and economic reforms in Syria. Their stance on Syria reflects the double standard in the rhetoric of *Time* and *Newsweek*, if we compare their coverage of Libyan events with that of Syria.

²⁸ Fareed Zakaria, "How the Lessons of Iraq paid off in Libya," *Time*, September 5, 2011, 18-19, especially 18.

²⁹ Richard Haass, "The Revolution Stops Here," *Time*, April 18, 2011, 16.

PREMATURE CELEBRATIONS

Journalists of *Time* and *Newsweek* agreed that the Arab uprisings which took place in 2011 did not have charismatic leaders who would put the demands of the ambitious young protestors on the right track and secure their participation in the process of decision making.³⁰ This situation led them to raise concerns about the possible attainment of democratic outcomes, since Islamist opposition parties may take over the leadership of the Arab countries. From their perspectives, this political shift would create three challenges.

Firstly, the security of the State of Israel would be vulnerable since the leaders of all Muslim parties have genuine support for the Palestinian cause.

Secondly, the Christian minorities in the Arab countries would face some difficulties in dealing with the Islamists, who are in favour of reinstating new forms of Islamic states that may undermine their citizenship and human rights. Habib C. Malik described the fear of Christian Arabs in the following words:

At the heart of Christian Arab apprehensions lies a shaken trust in both the staying power and shelf life of Sunni-Muslim moderation. Christians fear that once the dust of the Arab Spring settles, Islamist radicalism could sweep away in its path all the well-meaning, liberal-minded, pro-democracy leaders within the opposition movements. This fear characterizes the present decisive juncture for all Arabs; now is indeed a defining historic moment for moderation in the vast world of Sunni Islam. Will the Arab Sunni moderates, the silent majorities in their respective societies, prove capable of preventing a slide toward intolerance and violence brought on by the fanatical few in their midst? This is the ultimate question of the Arab Spring, but already the Copts appear to have their grim answer: Egypt's moderate and pluralist-minded revolutionaries are proving impotent in the face of determined religious extremists and hostile armed forces of the indifferent authorities.³¹

³⁰ Bobby Ghosh, "Revolution Delayed," *Time*, February 21, 16-22, especially 16.

³¹ Habib Malik, "Intolerant Arab Spring," *Newsweek*, October 24, 2011, 6.

Thirdly, American and Western interests might be disturbed if the Islamists took over the leadership of the oil rich countries in the near future. These three scenarios lead policy-makers and political activists in the West and the Arab world to be more doubtful of the outcomes of the Arab uprisings, as they neither satisfy the protestors' expectations nor Western countries' prospects. Therefore, they consider any forms of celebration as premature since the new governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen are or will be controlled by Islamists who do not have clear strategic plans to overcome the series of challenges which they are facing. This view is supported by Dr. Schueftan, Director of the National Security Studies Center, the University of Haifa, who argues that "The Arab Spring has led to deep systemic changes -- mostly negative -- in the rules of the game throughout the Middle East. If this trend persists, it will harm the interests of not only the United States and Israel, but also Arab countries, particularly those that have been longstanding U.S. allies." ³²

CONCLUSION

This content analysis of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines' coverage of the Arab uprisings in 2011 shows that the two magazines addressed the underlying causes and anticipated outcomes of the uprisings from a journalistic perspective that was informative but less academic in nature. *Newsweek* was more comprehensive in its coverage and concern by inviting certain scholars in the field, such as Fouad Ajami, to offer their academic insights. However, the two magazines were pessimistic about the outcomes of the uprisings on

³² Dan Schueftan and Michael Singh, "Arab Spring, Arab Storm: Implications for Israel," Policy Watch no. 1862, Special Forum Report, October 24, 2011, accessed February 24, 2011, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=3413>.

the grounds that elections may bring Islamist parties to power, taking into account that these parties are not in favour of American foreign policy in the region. The victory of Islamist parties in Tunisia and Egypt had alarmed the two magazines causing them to be less enthusiastic about the interference of Western countries and the U.N. Security Council in supporting the massacre of peaceful protestors in Syria. Their salient rationale is that the success of Islamists in Syria may affect the security of the state of Israel and generate a real challenge to U.S. foreign policy in the region, bearing in mind that all the Islamist parties have a soft spot towards the Palestinian cause. These anticipated scenarios have led them to suggest that there be a revision of U.S. and Western foreign policy in the region, so as to meet the mandates of the new regimes and their supporters. They also raise a special concern about the future of the long patron-client relationship between the American Administration and its key clients in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Jordan.