

# Transformation in the Middle East

By: **Dr. Amer al Sabaileh**

The current atmosphere of change in the Middle East countries to various political groups. Policies and actions are being adjusted according to concerns and fears of being left out or vanishing altogether. All political protagonists will be obliged to follow the rhythm of these dynamic changes, in order to ensure their position in the coming phase.

It is also important to observe the impacts of active Iranian diplomacy on the Gulf Countries. These recent developments have created a serious political challenge for the Gulf countries a requires a high level of political flexibility.

Qatar has adopted an exit strategy to remove Doha from the conflict in Syria with the release of the Izaz detainees, and the potential release of the two kidnapped Patriarchs, beside the most recent statement by Hezboallah leader Hassan Nasarallah in which he confirmed receiving a Qatari envoy. The UAE has anticipated the changes and made a symbolic move toward Moscow with a \$5 billion agreement with Russia. The Emirati foreign minister was the first to visit Tehran after the nuclear agreement and discuss with the Iranian president the most



recent regional issues. The UAE has always sought to seize upon its neutral position in the Syrian crisis. The Emirati capital has seen an increase in political activism as Abu Dhabi is becoming be the destination of many Arab and international officials. Moreover, Sultan Qaboos of Oman is the strong man who shepherded the Iranian nuclear deal according to the American Magazine the Foreign policy.

This active Iranian diplomacy places Saudi Arabia in a very tough position,

as even the Gulf countries cannot cope with the recent Saudi stubbornness refusing any political solution for the Syrian crisis. The Saudis are likely to face serious challenges in the Gulf, regionally and at the international level.

However, many believe that the international determination to reach "Geneva II" would create some new realities driven by a crucial issue: Prioritizing political settlements in the region and its impact on those who try to obstruct it.

## Priority for Combating Terrorism

Security is the priority" - This could be the slogan of the coming period for most of the countries in the region. As the Syrian crisis passes through a new phase, and there is a real focus on putting an end to the violence, there will be consequences for the region, mostly regarding security. Most of the countries are expected to face real security challenges, especially those who were part of the conflict in Syria, on political or a geographical level.

The recent regional developments placed the urgent mission to combat terrorism on the international agenda. This consensual international vision was a natural outcome of expansion of terrorism in Syria and the region, especially with the increasing number of EU and foreign fighters in Syria that reached an alarming level.

This reality resulted in extensive debate on the linkage between those fighters in Syria and their activities back in their countries of origin. In this respect, the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov commented that "priority is for fighting terrorism, not for calling Assad to leave

power". Equally, there is a political effort to rearrange the major regional files into three main categories and its accompanying implications.

It is worth mentioning that many analysts believe that those placing obstacles for a political solution in Syria are the same groups responsible for the instability in Iraq. As such, any increase in pressure placed on them by America will serve two purposes. This was clearly demonstrated by President Obama in his meeting with the Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki, discussing an American role in defending Iraq from terrorism.

### Jordan's top priorities

Jordan needs to balance the economic implications with its ongoing political reforms towards a new national democracy, which could be key to facing future challenges. All the while, Jordan must remain vigilant in the fight against terrorism as its border with Syria could be used as the gateway for a mission designed to protect the region from the

growing threat spreading from Syria.

Internal harmony, flexibility and responsiveness to the regional changes should be the current priority of the Jordanian political agenda. As Geneva II is used as a launch pad for regional reforms, Jordan needs to step up and respond to the complex political challenges that are presented. Part of this will be to ensure it maintains open channels with the regional, and especially with Damascus.

Jordan should be careful of its current strategy to distance itself from the transformation of Geneva II from Syria to the region. It may lead to a political isolation of Jordan, as attention is focused on Syria and Egypt, the potential for economic and security impacts on Jordan are very real.

The path to resolution of the Syrian crisis has suggested the form of the next phase, and it has reshaped the roles of most of the regional and international players. Jordan should pay extra attention to its northern and western borders, and solidify a role in any reform process, as changes in Damascus and Palestine can have a real impact on Jordan.

## US and Iran amid the Syrian crisis

by **Emiliano Stornelli**

*Mediterranean and Middle East Program, Italian Atlantic Committee*

Syria is the crucible of the dynamics and disputes crossing the Middle East today. The civil war has not been confined only to local actors. It has deeply involved various regional stakeholders, pursuing different agendas within a broader conflict that has increasingly assumed a sectarian dimension. After almost 3 years of fierce battling, the course of the war epitomizes the lack of success of the actors concerned, which were not

able to achieve their objectives neither in Syria nor in the broader region. An exception is represented by al-Qaeda, whose militants are now dominating the ranks of the opposition to Bashar al-Assad and have gained ground in Egypt (Sinai) and Libya during the "Arab Spring". The recent crisis over the use of chemical weapons was about to engender a further escalation, looming a military intervention led by the United States. The agreement at the UN Security Council on the disposal of the Assad's chemical weapons stockpile helped defuse the crisis and seems to have opened new prospects for a political settlement in Syria and on a regional scale. In this wake,

the signs of détente from the US and Iran presidents, Obama and Rouhani, might constitute the start of a reconciliation process encompassing the Iranian nuclear program and other significant lingering questions: from Syria and Afghanistan to Iraq and Lebanon, from the peace process between Israel and Palestine to the fight against terrorism. This process relating to security and foreign policy issues shall also be complemented with an open and constructive dialogue in the cultural domain, in order for the US-Iran rapprochement to be strategic in nature and enduring in the long term, to the benefit of peace and stability in the Middle East and beyond.

## Crisis of Governance in the Arab World

By: **Jamil Jreisat**

*PhD University of South Florida*

The development of democratic, effective, and accountable governance is a universal objective of modern societies. Since independence, many Arab states endured traumatic succession of leadership, lack of freedom, and failed developmental policies. Arab governance, in general, remained centralized and autocratic, perpetuating lack of accountability, corruption, and nepotism and cronyism in appointments to public positions. But, the Arab people changed dramatically. Today, they are more educated, better users of technology, joining in the information revolution, and demanding more responsive public policies.

A combustible mixture of flaws of governance, particularly corruption and unemployment, ignited the Arab Spring uprisings that ousted leaders of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen. Syria is a different case; its uprising has become excessively violent, even catastrophic by evolving into a brutal proxy war among foreign powers. The Arab Spring, however, confirmed that people can resist despotism, bring about democratic legitimacy to governance, and expose an underlying power structure that served mainly the privileged few. Until recently, the basic values of governance reforms were mostly donors' values and foreign reformers' conceptions, which limited theoretical and intellectual thinking beyond the inherited colonial roots. The Arab Spring changed the process by effectively bringing in the local interests and the demands side.

Despite allocation of huge financial resources over the years to create professional public management, Arab bureaucracies remained largely incompetent, corrupt, insensitive to citizens, and non-innovative. Arab countries share many common attributes, but each country is distinct. The search for alternatives by reformers has to answer basic questions as what system of governance and how to overcome past limits and promote principles of freedom, dignity, justice, equity, and accountability. The new system has to be able to effectively manage public services and translate developmental policies into actions consistent with societal reality? The search for alternatives by reformers has to overcome deficiencies of the past, while constructing effective and accountable systems of governance.

A critical test of governance is the ability to translate emancipating revolutionary objectives and values into public policies and programs for action. An imperative in this regard is employing competent, ethical, and visionary leaders and managers capable of building consensus and settling differences through free and transparent public debates. The uprisings found a vacuum of civic and political associations that cross boundaries of ethnicity, religion, and tribalism. Some people found sanctuary in the safety of religious and ideological assertions away from the watching eyes of the state. Others retreated to tribal, ethnic or regional affiliations where they can preserve their identity. Leaders neglected development of institutional structures and collaborative culture that connect people to serve common interests and objectives. Thus, the massive social and political uprisings also endured basic limitations that continue to trouble their movements: they lacked unified experienced leadership and specific, cohesive, and practical set of goals and the strategies to reach them.

We know from public polls that the Arab people have strong desire for democracy. But, constructing the appropriate governance system also requires certain preconditions such as political culture and experienced leaders with clear definitions of the problems and the solutions. At the present, change is made through moderate attempts to develop more effective laws and institutions to fight corruption and to achieve more effective governance as in Jordan and Morocco. Many Western observers have fixed opinions about Arab societies irrespective of the facts. They see only a battle between Islamists and secular liberals, Shiite and Sunni, and a region equating freedom with chaos. Despite such negative views, increasing in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, one should not discount the importance of what is unfolding and transforming the region. This transitory phase, problematic as it is, does not reflect potential and real assets of the region: youth, technology, education, motivation, and human and material resources. The final results of the transition are not clear yet, but there is no going back to the previous situation either.