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Full Text of Dr Azmi Bishara's Keynote Lecture

Democratic Transition and its Problems

Theoretical Lessons from Arab Experiences

Azmi Bishara

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Azmi Bishara

General Director and Member of the Board of Directors of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. Dr. Bishara is a researcher and writer with numerous books and publications on political thought, social theory and philosophy, as well as some literary works. He taught philosophy and cultural studies at Birzeit University from 1986 to 1996, and was involved in the establishment of research centers in Palestine including the Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy (Muwatin) and the Mada al-Carmel Center for Applied Social Research. In 2007 he was forced to go into exile after being prosecuted by Israel. In 2002 he won the Ibn Rushd Prize for Freedom of Thought, and in 2003 the Global Exchange Human Rights Award. He received his doctorate in philosophy in 1986 at Humboldt University in Berlin, having previously completed his master's degree there in 1984.

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The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

Al-Tarfa Street, Wadi Al Banat

Al-Dayaen, Qatar

PO Box 10277, Doha

+974 4035 4111

www.dohainstitute.org

I would like to thank the College de France for this opportunity, and in particular Professor Henri Laurence and his colleagues. I hope that this sort of cooperation and cultural exchange continues into the future. I would also like to thank all those in attendance.

I will use the opportunity to present some of the ideas of a book that I have just completed, and which will be published soon, on the theoretical lessons that can be drawn from democratic transition in the Arab World and its successes and failures – and likewise on the possibility of benefiting from studies of democratic transition in other parts of the world. It proceeds from the premise that the social sciences and humanities cannot present comprehensive universal paradigms but are rather, ultimately, theoretical conclusions drawn from specific societies and human experiences, or area studies. At their birth in 19th-century Europe, the social sciences and the humanities were, in fact, European studies: in this sense they are "area studies" in contemporary terminology. They emerged from the application of rational thinking and what was considered to be scientific methodology to the European transition to modernity in the aftermath of the industrial and scientific revolutions and the emergence of capitalism and modernity and the effects of this transition on society and individuals. The generalisations, theories and laws induced and deduced therefrom became the foundation of the social sciences.

The social sciences thus began as European studies with a tendency and desire to produce universal generalisations. This was particularly true during the period in which the West conquered continents both geographically and epistemologically, armed with the will to know and the power which worked to exercise universal hegemony. But we have received them in the form of universal sciences, disregarding their origin as area studies. Given that this is my understanding of the social sciences, I have never been able to accept that knowledge produced outside Europe or North America should be categorised as area studies while those who study European or North American societies in Europe are 'social sciences'. Assuming it shows intellectual diligence and critical methodological rigour drawing on studies in other parts of the world, our research may allow us to arrive at universal generalisations – thereby contributing to the development of social sciences and the humanities more generally and giving expression to the humanistic impulse distinctive of social sciences and humanities deserving of the name.

I endeavour to do this in all of my work and in this study on democratic transition in the Arab World, in which I attempt to produce generalisations that may hold true of other societies – including theoretical concepts – while also necessarily drawing on developments within the body of knowledge and methodology of the social sciences and humanities as we know them. These developments include the theories of the so-called "Modernisation School", "Transitology" (an offshoot of comparative politics), among others.

My second premise is that democracy today is liberal democracy, i.e. it is based on two elements: popular participation in self-determination and the decision-making process via regular elections and the peaceful transition of power, checking and balancing state powers and the protection of civil liberties and political rights. The two components of contemporary democracy, the liberal and the democratic,

comprise the concept of modern citizenship, through which it manifests. A Democrat is a person who believes that people in our contemporary world have the right to have their relationship with the state regulated by this kind of citizenship, and as a democrat I believe that it is our duty as researchers and academics to investigate the prospects for this and the conditions under which it can be realised.

In the course of my research I have arrived at a few points that I would like to discuss, but I took the impression that much of the audience wants to hear my thoughts on the events of recent days in Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria and Sudan. This is of course not part of the study that you have received copies of in French and which you will be able to read at your leisure, and as such I will not keep to the confines of that written paper: instead I will take advantage to give a different lecture which nonetheless comes to the same conclusions.

The important thing as far as I am concerned in recent events in Iraq and Lebanon is that revolutionary mobilisation has exploded in two countries which are part of the Arab Mashreq, whose history has been marked by the complexity of its ethnic and sectarian makeup – and that this is happening after the Syrian experience, which is used to generate fear of democratic transition in the Arab Mashreq. This mobilisation faces major challenges as the result of ethnic and sectarian cleavages, an observation made by modernisation theory since the days of Seymour Martin Lipset. It was reaffirmed by Dankwart Rustow in 1971 when he stated that the absence of major social cleavages and a "consensus on the state" or "national unity" are preconditions of democratic transition. This is an intuitive precondition, and one that transitology agrees on: without consensus on the state, particularly if there are deep ethnic and sectarian cleavages exacerbated by movements that seek to politicise them, emergent political pluralism tied to the weakening of an authoritarian regime can produce civil war or secessionist movements rather than democratic transition.

The response to this use of the results of the Syrian Revolution and its bloody suppression – and to what might we might call the counterrevolution across the Arab World – has come from Lebanon and Iraq. The headline issue in Lebanon and Iraq is, I believe, citizenship: i.e. rejection of sectarian affiliation as a regulatory of the relationship between individual and state, and affirmation of the idea of citizenship and the state, rejection of political sectarianism and the attendant parcelling-out of power, so-called quota system, in which political representatives of imagined sectarian communities deal with the state as prey and prove again and again that corruption is a built in component of such a system. The current revolutionary mobilisation in these two countries is thus recasting national identity and placing it in direct confrontation with political sectarianism.

Political elites should be the most invested in national unity but what is going in Iraq and Lebanon is entirely different, even if it is not surprising. The paradox is that the affirmation of national unity is coming not from ruling political sectarian elites but from below. We have heard many important political elites argue that there is no alternative to the sectarian system even as the masses affirm the rejection of the sectarian system and emphasise citizenship from below. It is a curious state of affairs: the ruling elite's political culture is less developed than that of broad swathes of a public who have suffered from their political and economic policies and their management of public affairs.

To a great extent, what is happening in Lebanon and Iraq is a revolution that is simultaneously political and cultural. I do not anticipate that transition will take place in either case via the toppling of the regime all in one go by revolution followed by the creation of a democratic system based on citizenship, for one simple reason: that there is no single centre of power that might direct its ouster, i.e. that there is no single decision-maker that might oust the regime in either of these countries, unlike in Egypt or Tunisia (irrespective of the differences between them in the subsequent experience of transition itself). Both the Iraqi and the Lebanese regimes are sectarian, parliamentarian, elected and multi-headed. There are, of course, differences between them. The Iraqi regime is a recent creation and not deeply-rooted in Iraq, while the Lebanese system of power-sharing can be traced to the Mutasarrifiyya created in the 1860s. There is another difference, too: Lebanon has a sectarian constitution, while Iraq does not. This means that the process of change in Iraq should be reflected in the nature of the sectarian political movements that interact with a relatively democratic constitution in a way that is political-sectarian. But resistance to change in Iraq is very violent; the forces of political sectarianism are still young and had believed until recently that they had consolidated their hold over the country's powers. It is close to miraculous that the popular movement has managed to maintain its energy and its peaceful nature.

In any case, neither regime can be toppled by a single political action – a mobilisation, uprising or revolution. This will be a long process inaugurated by the current revolutionary movement in both countries. The important thing is that it has begun in Lebanon and Iraq, and I believe that it will soon return to Syria, particularly now that the ostensible "victory" of the existing regime has proven itself worse than any defeat and it has shown that it is unable to guarantee a functioning economy and secure life even for its own constituency that has sacrificed so much for it.

In Lebanon a substantial central movement opposed to the sectarian system has clearly begun to emerge, built around the principles of the civil 'citizenship state'. This is happening for the first time since 1863, which is a remarkable historical development. There have always been movements opposed to sectarianism, but they have been ideological movements – leftist or nationalist parties opposed to sectarianism because of their ideological and political ways of viewing the world – and not a general civil movement representing a central current within society, penetrating and cutting across sectarian dividing lines, rejecting sectarianism from the premise of citizenship.

I would add that another great civilizational step has been made by the second revolutionary wave rising today across the Arab World: that it is a generational revolution, and that the underlying principle driving the youth to go out into the streets is not ideological but moral. The progressive civil mood is clearly present in the Lebanese mobilisation, and resembles in one respect the events of 1968 in France and Europe, in that the latter was also a cultural revolution that did not topple regimes but changed the nature of politics, political parties and the prevailing political culture more generally; the radical ideological movements that it produced were less important in terms of results. This is what I mean when I say there is a cultural dimension extending beyond the purely political in events in Lebanon and Iraq.

The new mobilisations have given me a certain amount of optimism because they have shown that the previously prevailing idea that the counterrevolution has won has its shortcomings. At the same time, in Europe and the USA, attempts are being made to promote a return to an agenda based on maintaining the stability of authoritarian regimes (the Cold War agenda, which has remained in force in the Arab region for reasons I discuss in my book). This idea was given new strength after the military coup in Egypt on 3 July 2013 and the return of despotism – and as you know, resurgent despotism is worse than the overthrown despotism because of its vindictive impulses. The current mobilisation has proven right our contention that what happened between 2011 and 2013 was merely the first revolutionary wave, to be followed by others; that the seeds of freedom in the Arab region have begun everywhere to sprout into trees; and that the civil wars in Syria, Yemen and Libya were the product of the nature of the despotic regimes that prevailed there – including the appearance of extreme sectarian and confessional Islamist movements and the structural damage they have inflicted on societies. The argument we made then was, in summary, that the factors that led to the revolutions of 2011 are still present, accompanied now by a new daring and aspirations towards freedom. The failure to solve the issues that led to these revolutions encourages a non-linear view of the process of transition from despotism to democratic transition.

I am also optimistic because this second revolutionary wave is distinguished by its peaceful quality and its distance from extreme Islamist movements. The revolutionary mobilisation in Sudan, and now in Iraq, is directed, to start with, against ruling political-religious movements. Algeria has seen a historic development leading to my belief that it is ready for democracy, particularly after the bitter decade following the military coup of 1991, which led to both the army and the people concluding that there should be no return to violence. The success of democratic transition in Sudan, led by organised political forces, as well as in Algeria, where the mobilisation has no organised political leadership, depends on whether the army still aspires to rule.

All this means that discussion of democratic transition in Arab societies is no longer marginal or passé (as the idea that the counterrevolution had been victorious that dominated until recently would have it) but rather a hot-topic issue, and one that will be with us – according to my understanding of the process of democratic transition and the factors and dynamics involved – for a relatively long period that may last between twenty and fifty years. The Arab region has entered a revolutionary era resembling that which took place in Europe from 1789 to 1848. In this sense I believe that as researchers, we should all anticipate – the uncertainty of predictions notwithstanding – that what is happening in the Arab World will be a long-term process that may last as long as half a century if the issues raised by revolutions and protest movements are not addressed. No authoritarian regime will be safe from its historical movement. In all cases, Arab peoples have broken the authoritarian bonds of fear and created a historical movement in their attempt to seize back the reins of their destiny. Whether this movement proves sustainable will depend on various factors. In this pivotal period (or at this critical juncture in political science terms) the most important of these is human agency, the political will, the elites and the actions of peoples.

Now to the issue I discuss in my paper and with which my forthcoming book is concerned. Many researchers working on democratic transition set off from so-called "modernisation theory". This body of theory does not, in fact, deal with democracy directly, but rather with the transition of traditional societies to modernity. Most of the modern social sciences and humanities in Europe and North America boil down to the study of this transition from a traditional to a modern society. The theories of Marx, Weber, Durkheim and other sociologists, economists and historians are all, in practice, theories of modernisation. They study the transition of society and the economy from their traditional state of being to so-called "modernity", with differing understandings of the structure of this transition and the social factors involved and approaches and answers regarding the meaning of modern society and what distinguishes it from its traditional counterpart. Even the science of psychology originated with attempts to treat the effects of this transition and the atomisation of individuals in modern society.

The association of the modernisation school with democracy began during the Cold War. Most theories of democracy also emerged during this period, if we think about theorists such as Robert Dahl, Giovanni Sartori, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba. Attempts to directly connect the theory of modernisation and democracy began with a famous 1959 article by Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy". His titular requisites included urbanisation, the size of the middle class, the level of education and the use of modern means and technologies of living on the one hand, and the issue of legitimacy on the other – i.e. the extent to which a system is capable of producing the impression that it is the best suited to the society in question and at the same time the most capable of confronting and solving the major issues and problems facing it.

Later on, during the 1970s, an important development took place in Southern Europe: Greece, Portugal and Spain all made the transition to democracy, and a new wave of democratic transition began in South America. These transitions were accompanied by academic developments: researchers from Latin America, the US and Europe began studying democratic transition. Their studies created enough interest in comparative political science that they ultimately produced an autonomous discipline known as "transitology". In general, these researchers objected to modernisation theory structural preconditions for democracy to which some theorists also added cultural preconditions. They were not interested exclusively in explaining the theory of democracy nor in drawing out its foundations and the preconditions for its preservation for fear that it would once again collapse, and totalitarian regimes would emerge as had happened in Italy and Germany during the interbellum. They were interested in transition to democracy in developing countries.

Their critique of modernisation theory went beyond that offered by the various currents of dependency theory. Dependency theory critiqued modernisation theory from a leftist rather than a democratic perspective, while the transitologists approached it from a liberal-democratic perspective. They asked whether the countries of the Third World needed to wait for the average income to rise, the middle class to grow and education and urbanisation to spread in order to dispense with despotic

regimes – and what they were supposed to say to peoples labouring under fascist dictatorships. Should they satisfy themselves with the answer given by comparative political science and other social sciences – that they were not ready for democracy? On this basis transitology set off from a premise that might be described as supportive of Third World democracy and unwilling to concede that the preconditions suggested by modernisation theory were necessary for transition.

A few studies also showed that these preconditions had not in fact been met in the transition to democracy in the West. When the USA transitioned to democracy in the 18th century, most of its inhabitants were agricultural workers and the level of education was generally low. The same applies to the UK and France. The list of preconditions demanded that the peoples of the Third World were not even present in Europe when democracy first emerged there!

The main issue that we are still confronting, in my view, is that democracy in Europe and North America developed gradually – in the sense that it was a liberal system restricted to a small number of people (Male landowners and tax payers of the middle classes and the educated), a fact that partially confirms modernist thesis, and expanded to incorporate more people (wage workers, women, excluded minorities) over time with the broadening of the franchise. But the preconditions that modernisation theorists of peoples yearning for democracy in our world – a high rate of urbanisation, a broad middle class and a democratic culture widespread among the masses – are not prerequisites of democracy but products of the long historical process by which the democratic system developed. In fact, what is required of the peoples of the Third World is for them to absorb, metabolise and reproduce the results of these centuries of development – and for this development to be present and ready in Latin America and Asia in order for democracy to be realised. This is all the product of the Cold War. The aim of modernisation theories was to preserve democracy in developed countries in Europe and North America, demonstrate that it was the best available system, and study the conditions for its sustainability as part of the competition/confrontation with Communism. It might be added that the United States and other western countries sought to justify their support for allied authoritarian regimes in the Third World fighting Communism on the grounds that these countries and peoples were not ready for democracy.

In fact, in some respects modernisation theory is apologetic or at least has been used for these purposes. When the Cold War ended abruptly these claims evaporated and even for these peoples democracy became possible. It was no longer necessary to ally with dictatorships because the criterion of "they're either with us or they're with communism" no longer existed. The USA was thus no longer opposed to democratic transition in allied countries. But this does not mean that it now supported democracy.

Let me make a brief tangential observation here. The Cold War has ended everywhere except in the Arab World. This observation is important because it is relevant to the complications that are always alleged with regard to the "Arab exception". In fact, it never ended as far as the camp led by the USA is concerned, which once claimed to protect global democracy against communism in the Arab World.

The USA and to a great extent the European countries have continued to use Cold War logic in their dealings with the Arab World, in the sense that their camp never stopped supporting dictatorships because of three major anxieties:

1. The security of Israel. How could Israel's security be guaranteed if Arab countries had regular elections with unpredictable outcomes? Dictatorships are a much better bet as far as peace agreements and the protection of Israel's borders are concerned. The Syrian regime is always cited as an example – not as a friendly regime, but because it has guaranteed that a single shot has not been fired from the Syrian borders since 1973. The authoritarian Egyptian regime has also maintained the Camp David agreement despite all the difficult circumstances and fluctuations within the region; a democracy in Egypt could produce governments that might reconsider.

2. Oil and energy security. This is currently less important as far as the US economy is concerned because of increased shale oil production as well as the growing alternative energy sector, but was previously very important indeed, enjoying an organic and strategic link with the concept of US national security and the post-war Marshall Plan. It still preserves a great importance to the functioning of the economies of Europe and East Asia, as related to prices on the global level.

3. So-called "Islamic terrorism" or the emergence of terrorist movements and certain Western circles' need to change it into a new global enemy taking the place of the old "evil empire". This extreme violence emerged due to many factors including ideological ones and spread under conditions that there is insufficient space to discuss here, but the most important, in my view, were the despotic regimes and the never-ending question of Palestine.

These issues placed the Arab region outside the new post-Cold War rules of the game.

Let me return to the body of my lecture. After the Cold War, democratic transition studies emerged on the ruins of modernisation theory's ideas about transition. But it is my view – and this is what I say in my forthcoming book – that we nonetheless cannot dispense with modernisation theory's initial theses when discussing not democratic transition but the consolidation of democracy: specifically because what is required is the creation of democracy not gradual but all in one go, in such a way that universal voting rights are introduced in developing societies characterised by low average development, low individual income, and a low level of education and before there is a political elite dedicating itself to democratic political work. When we discuss the consolidation of democracy it is clear that consolidating it is a difficult matter without sustainable economic development tied to the realisation of actual development, without a particular level of education, etc. Once transition takes place, the new democratic system should concern itself with what modernisation theory calls the "social and economic requisites of democracy", the most important of which is education. Most statistics show that education is more closely connected to democracy than any other coefficient (level of income, development etc). But it would be difficult to consider this particular issue within the limited time available for this lecture.

I would add to this the importance of the political culture of the elites that take power. The emergence of a democratic culture among the broader populace cannot be expected under dictatorship. The Arab experience clearly shows the importance of a democratic elite culture to the process of transition.

Democratic transition studies entered their second phase after the countries of the socialist bloc transitioned to democracy, inaugurating a new round of intellectual contributions. Some of these went back to modernisation theory, because Eastern Europe had witnessed industrialisation, economic development, and a high level of education. An important new factor also emerged with the collapse of the communist regimes – a factor that transitologists like Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, Adam Przeworski and Laurence Whitehead did not pay enough attention to– the "external factor". The transition of the communist countries to democracy cannot be understood without the top-down reform implemented at the top of the ruling party in the Soviet Union. This removed Soviet protection from eastern-European regimes, which had never enjoyed legitimacy but had been imposed by force under the post-war Soviet occupation. Subsequent studies have applied these novel observations retroactively, taking the effect of the European environment on Spain, Greece and Portugal more seriously – and likewise the desire to join the Common European Market as it was then or the EU as it had become by the time that Eastern Europe began to democratise. This "external factor" and its influence on the construction of democracy will be of much importance when we talk about the Arab World: neither the international "external factor" nor the regional environment are supportive of democracy.

In 2011 spontaneous revolutions broke out across the Arab World, typically demanding an end to police violence and corruption (which they connected with despotism); these revolutions are still ongoing today in Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon and Iraq. The connection between despotism and corruption is still present in the second wave of Arab Revolutions. There is another issue that should not be dismissed with regard to any of the peoples of the world: "human dignity". In both Tunisia and Egypt, the proximal cause for the outbreak of the protests that led to revolution was physical assaults against people: the issue of respect for the human body and its sanctity was a central point in the rage unleashed against despotism. The Arab World was ruled by a group of regimes that did not respect the sanctity of the human soul or the human body. "Humiliation" was one of the key issues in the Tunisian Revolution, and in Egypt it is no coincidence that the people went out into the street after the young Khaled Saeed died under torture and the revolution began on so-called Police Day (25 January). This symbolic importance of torture and killing served to spark the uprisings and should not be forgotten – not only because of the victims, but because of its ongoing symbolic importance pertaining to human dignity. I believe that in Syria this factor played a much greater role than in Tunisia and Egypt: the issue of human dignity and the rejection of humiliation and continuous violations of the sanctity of the person and the body was a central issue of the Revolutions.

The Arab revolutions add a new element to revolutionary theory – an element I dedicate a whole chapter of my book to. Democratic transition studies have not discussed revolution. They have taken Spain and Brazil as examples of transition via top-down reform. After reforms the ruling elite differ

on various issues – the need for reform, how deep it should be – and can split, opening up space for bargaining between moderates in the ruling elite and moderates in the opposition to arrive at a so-called "pact" (which could be written or unwritten). Most transitions within what Huntington refers to as the "third wave" took place via top-down reform and without a revolution. They were sometimes accompanied by popular protests calling for the intensification of reform, but most if not all transitions took place through splits in the ruling elite as the result of reform efforts. Even in Poland – where the Solidarity movement began with a labour mobilisation that developed into a revolutionary movement followed by a military coup – when the USSR began reforms, negotiations between the opposition and the Communist Party became possible through church mediation, and agreement took place between the two sides.

Democratic transition has almost never taken place, historically by means of a revolution. Even the French Revolution was followed by a period of violent terror against those considered to be its enemies, then the First Republic, then Napoleon's imperial interlude, then the return of the Bourbon monarchy with Louis XVIII and Charles X, then the relatively liberal constitutional monarchy of Louis-Philippe I, the short-lived Second Republic, the Second Empire declared by Napoleon III, and then seventy years of the Third Republic (1871-1940), ending with a liberal democracy that managed to overcome the tension between liberalism and democracy. I believe that French liberal democracy was only truly consolidated after the Second World War. Examination of historical experience shows that Revolution has nowhere led directly to democracy. The well-known revolutions to overthrow a regime directly have produced dictatorships, not democracies. The Bolshevik and Iranian revolutions provide us with classic examples of this. Protests that have accompanied democratic transition have taken place within a broad framework of reform and simply demanded its intensification.

What has happened in the Arab World? In the last two decades of the 20th century several Arab countries underwent political reform as the result of a popular mobilisation following falling oil prices as well as moderate US pressure after the end of the Cold War (as well as certain other factors). And some regimes were forced to pursue particular political reforms. But in the Arab World – the great exception that I tried to investigate in my book The Arab Question (published in 2007 before the first wave of Arab Revolutions) and which I will take up again in my forthcoming book – ruling elites did not split as the result of reforms in Morocco, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan or Tunisia. All of these countries underwent reforms but the ruling elite did not split in any of them, showing that the despotic Arab regimes developed a "Sultanic" character. A ruling elite in the Sultanic state is no more than the court or retinue of the decision-maker and that there are not multiple centres of power. As a result, the ruler can carry out or reconsider a reform whenever he believes the conditions to be appropriate. The only country in which the elite did split was Algeria after the 1982 reforms, leading to the 1992 military coup against the reform process.

The revolutions from below came long after it became clear that top-down reform was a purely cosmetic process. But these spontaneous revolutions did not offer a specific alternative to authoritarian regimes capable of taking over government. Herein lies the contribution to the theory of revolution. We have a "reformist revolution" whose basic characteristics are as follows:

1. It is a revolution taking the place of top-down reform. It does not want to seize power as in Russia or Iran, or the French Revolution when radical elements took control from 1789-1792. Rather, it "demands" the regime's ouster. The well-known historical revolutions did not demand the ouster of the regime bousted it themselves, taking power directly. The Arab revolutions, meanwhile, shake the walls of the regime and demand that it be changed. None of the Egyptian revolutionaries in January 2011, or the Tunisian revolutionaries, wanted to take power. None of them had a program for taking power. Instead, they went out into the streets demanding change from the regime. But revolutions do not demand change from regimes – they change them themselves and seize power. What we have here, however, are revolutions demanding change.
2. It is a revolution that can sometimes take the place of top-down reform in practice. When democratic transition began in Arab countries it did so after revolutions – not reform – split the ruling elite, which were divided over how to deal with these revolutions.

The first wave of revolutions broke out in five Arab countries, but democratic transition took place in only two, Tunisia and Egypt (to which can be added a fragile transition in Libya). In Yemen the revolution became a civil war after a foreign intervention took place – despite Yemenis themselves engaging in a sophisticated national dialogue that produced a pact not unlike the famous Moncloa Pact in Spain – with the pact overthrown by a Houthi coup backed by elements from the old regime and Iran, followed by a Saudi-Emirati intervention. Yemen became the setting for a war between different regional axes despite the Yemeni elite having produced a democratic pact with UN sponsorship. In Libya, it has been demonstrated that consensus on the state is not sufficient and that it is necessary to begin by building institutions – first among them the army – which failed because of different armed groups' refusal to give up their arms and because of foreign intervention. The second conclusion that can be drawn from the Libyan experience is that elections are not necessarily the first and most urgent step towards democratic transformation. If state institutions are not strong, if the army has not yet been built and armed groups are widespread, elections only deepen cleavages and do not further democracy. Pressure from western states and nongovernmental organizations to hold elections is not always well-placed. It is not necessary to start with elections. Elections can sometimes be harmful for democratic transition.

So much for Libya. As far as Syria is concerned, as you know, the following have all shown themselves to be true:

1. An important fact often forgotten by liberals is that the violent suppression – if continuous, determined, and unrestricted – can "serve" very well to preserve the regime despite the moral position that says that violence serves nothing in politics. This applies to the Syrian regime, whose use of violence has been subject to no limitations whatsoever. This was the first of the factors that led to the failure of the Syrian revolution through its transformation by unlimited use of violence into a harrowing civil war.

2. The non-persistence of Syria's allies because of the failure of the USA's experience in Iraq as well as uncertainty about the alternative and the Syrian opposition. By this I do not mean the political opposition, but the armed factions who lacked political leadership and a political program.
3. The persistence of the regime's allies and the direct intervention by Iran and Russia on the ground to decide in its favour a war that had almost been lost.
4. The rise of an extreme sectarian Islamist tone within some of the revolutionary factions, bolstering the coalition of so-called minorities in Syria as well as secular groups within the majority. I believe that the majority in Syria are secular – a secularism that may be religious, i.e. the secularism of those who believe that the state should not be used to impose a particular religious way of life. This is the secularism of the majority in the Arab World as a whole as I understand it.

Tunisia and Egypt, meanwhile, are the only two cases in which democratic transition actually took place – succeeding in one and failing in the other. This comparison is theoretically productive, providing the best contribution to theory. Because the two cases are similar, we can ask why one succeeded and one failed. This is the crux of the issue: why were the results so different even though in both cases there was consensus on the state, national unity, and deep-rooted institutions? Before investigating statistics on individual incomes, the level of education, human development indices, the breadth of the middle class or the poverty rate in each country, I had more or less concluded that modernisation theory might be of use here: I believed that Tunisia was more modernised than Egypt, i.e. that the level of education was higher and the size of the middle class greater in the former than the latter, and that this might explain the success of Tunisia's transition where Egypt's had failed. But I found that in fact the average income in Tunisia was very close to that in Egypt. The numbers surprised me. The education level was likewise similar, and so was the size of the middle class, which I measure as the mid three fifths of income according to the GINI coefficient.

The results are surprising and mean that modernisation theory does not explain the success of transition in Tunisia and its failure in Egypt. It may be amusing to a French audience that Lipset, writing in a 1993 article (reviewing his earlier article mentioned above), and other researchers as well drew attention to two more factors. The first of these was political culture, in which connexion he stressed "Islam", since it was clear from statistics that there were no democratic countries with Muslim majority, only semi-democracies like Turkey or perhaps Pakistan: wherever there is Islam, there is no democracy. The second was that former French colonies do not become democracies, only British colonies. The paradox for us here is that Tunisia, which was a French colony with Muslim majority, became a democracy, while Egypt – which was under British tutelage – did not!

Onto the conclusions of the study. Firstly, there is an important part of this context in democratic transition studies, the "political culture of the elites". The Tunisian political elites were able to engage in what transitology refers to as "bargaining". Bargaining is not, in this context, a bad thing – it means arriving at results in which there is not, necessarily, a winner and a loser. Elements from the old Tunisian regime elite were prepared to negotiate with the opposition in order to bring about a democratic

transition. These elements continued to rule after the fall of Ben Ali, they entered into negotiations with the Tunisian opposition and reached agreement on democratic procedures as happened in Spain. But the difference between the two experiences is that in Tunisia it did not begin with top-down reform following the death of a president but with a popular revolution. This is an Arab innovation: when Sultanic regimes block reform, it becomes possible after bottom-up revolutions.

The first conclusion, then: the capacity of the Tunisian elites to engage in bargaining – including the elites of the Tunisian Islamist movement, which was prepared in the crisis to compromise on government fearing a repetition of the Muslim Brotherhood's experience in Egypt. The flexibility that the Islamist movement showed in Tunisia was one of the factors that allowed it to come to an accord with elements from the old regime. The faction that engaged in bargaining with the Islamists were in fact the Bourguibist current within the Tunisian regime that had been neutralised by Ben Ali. This faction, led by Baji Caid Essebsi, was able to come to an understanding with Islamists throughout the transitional crisis that threatened the whole process. The radical secularists, however – radically hostile to the existing regime as well as any Islamist movement – were a factor impeding agreement, not facilitating it. They opposed any agreement, to the point that as in Egypt they called for the army to intervene. They were willing to favour a military coup over an agreement that might lead to a democratic transition. This is very important. The Islamist and secularist elites in Egypt, meanwhile, both failed to engage in dialogue and reach an understanding on how to save the transition. Each side attempted to win the army over and use it against other sides.

Here I disagree with modernisation theory in my emphasis on the political culture of the elite and not that of the people. The culture of a particular people cannot become democratic under despotism, only under a democracy whose institutions have been consolidated. What is required in today's late all-in-one-go transitions is not that the people be democratic but that the culture of the elites active in the transition be democratic.

The second conclusion: In both countries the army disobeyed orders given to suppress the revolution and as a result both revolutions succeeded. The difference is that the Egyptian army had political ambitions while the Tunisian army did not. One of the new observations that our study of the Arab cases adds can be summed up as follows: It is not possible to bring about democratic transition if the army is opposed: either the army remains neutral or else it supports democratic transition. If it is opposed to transition and has political ambitions then democracy cannot be established.

The third conclusion: The external factor. We can sum this up as follows: the more geo-strategically important a country may be, the more important the external factor will be. Tunisia is geo-strategically unimportant. It does not border on Israel and does not have any oil. As a result, none of the great powers were concerned as to whether Tunisia became a democracy or not, unlike Egypt and Syria. Egypt, for example, has borders with Israel. It has the largest Arab population, and if a democracy is established there it will constitute a threat as far as certain Gulf countries are concerned, especially the larger ones. Here I do not mean specifically small states, which do not fear

democracy because of the high living standards made possible by oil rents, but rather the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Curiously, the UAE, which is a relatively small rentier state not much threatened by democracy – but which has an ideological opposition to democracy – has played a "pioneering" role against democracy. The US intervention has likewise been decisive: the US did not only remain silent in the face of the Egyptian military coup as it appeared at the beginning , but actively supported it, according to former NYT Cairo correspondent David Kirkpatrick's reports of meetings between US officials and the Egyptian army.

But This external factor becomes decisive when the main political forces are unable to reach an understanding. Here comes the fourth conclusion: What happened in Egypt is that given polarisation between "Islamist" and "secularist" forces, the Brotherhood's insistence on ruling with a 52% majority during the transitional period, and the presence of a deep state opposed to the elected ruler, this majority was unable to rule without national unity, because there is no way of combatting a deep state apparatus opposed to the elected government except through revolutionary legitimacy and this demands unity between pro-revolutionary forces. But in Egypt pro-revolutionary forces were polarised between secularists and Islamists, and this polarisation took the place of polarisation between anti-democratic and pro-democratic forces. This both legitimised the intervention of the army and allowed external forces to meddle – especially in a transitional period characterised by a falling development rate, which happens in all countries in which transition takes place. Popular social and economic expectations are high after revolutions, but they cannot be realised within two or three years. As a result, popular frustration increases and even "nostalgia" for the old regime which can be exploited by external forces – doubly so if the revolutionary elites are divided.

Thus, my conclusions are that the following factors determine the outcomes of a transition to democracy: elites' political culture; the army's political ambitions; the geostrategic importance of the country; and finally, the impossibility of ruling in the transitional period if the old state apparatus is opposed to it unless pro-democratic political forces are united.