

International actors in the tunisian revolution politics essay

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



The Tunisian revolution is described not only as the event that triggered the Arab springs, but also the first to bring into place regime change following the successful conduction of the October elections, which were termed as “ free and fair”. For many decades, the country had endured the leadership of the repressive regime and lack of democratic developments (Tanriverdi, p. 547). While a number of political, socio-economic and technological issues are cited to have played a role in triggering the events that led to the uprising, the involvement of international actors is equally valuable. This paper will analyze the role played by the United States, Arab league and the European role in the transition process that saw the end of domestic despotism in Tunisia.

The role of the United States in the Tunisian revolution

During the jasmine revolution that led to the end of Ben Ali’s despotic rule, the United States assumed a pivotal role behind the scenes role. According to the former United States ambassador to Tunisia, the Tunisian revolution was the “ first postmodern revolution” based on its grassroots nature, use of new technologies and its lack of ideology. While the United States has had long-standing interests in Tunisia, efforts to safeguard its economic and geo-strategic interests took precedence during its intervention in ending the dictatorial regime that had ruled Tunisia for 24 years (Shahshahani and Mullin, pp. 67-68). Despite Washington having full knowledge of Ben Ali’s regime corrupt and brutally repressive practices, it took a full month of human rights abuses and sustained violence for the Obama administration to acknowledge the worsening situation in Tunisia. The reluctant nature of Washington to intervene and its late attempt to condemn the violence

perpetrated by the Tunisian government was seen by Tunisians and many people around the world as too little too and too late (Risse-Kappen, Ropp, Stephen and Kathryn, p. 198). As one of the powerful actors in shaping the global political and economic order, the US support for the Ben Ali regime, despite having full knowledge of the ongoing corruption, human rights abuses and power misuse contradicts its commitment to the value of democracy and human right protection.

The “ War on Terror” efforts first employed by Bush administration in reaction to the 9/11 attacks on US soil, marked a critical intervention by the united states in fighting despotic regimes that supported terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The inclusion of other bodies such as the North Atlantic Organization (NATO) and other Us allies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, contributed to the development of the “ war on terror” as an international military campaign spearheaded by the US, and UK. Tunisia as one of the MENA countries pledged its support to the United States in terms of providing substantial intelligence and strategic cooperation (Fawcett, p. 139). The consolidation of US relations with Tunisia over the years is considered one of the primary reasons that reduced the commitment of US in supporting the revolution carried by protesters.

Democracy promotion

For many years, the United States has played a pivotal role in the promotion of democracy in the MENA region, particularly Tunisia. However, it can be mentioned that, the US democratization agenda in Tunisia mainly focused to maintain, rather than to challenge the status quo (p. 81). In addition, foreign

funding from the US in the democracy promotion projects were geared towards NGOs that were recognized by Ben Ali regime, an effort that frustrated main movements to fight against the regime (Akbarzadeh, pp. 9-14). The involvement of the US during the revolution was seen by its concern with human rights violations in the forms of crackdowns against NGOs, activists and changes to the constitution engineered by Ben Ali regime. In a nutshell, the irrelevance nature of the US democracy-promotion projects to the movement behind the revolution, negatively shaped the involvement of the United States in supporting regime change in Tunisia (Shahshahani and Mullin, pp. 68-70).

France

France is another integral international actor whose role during the Jasmine revolution should be acknowledged. For many years, the country has been closely linked to Tunisia in both cultural and economic terms. The relationship between the two countries can be traced from the colonial period and has since strongly evolved. However, similar to Washington, political paralysis seemed to reign in Paris based on the reluctance by the French government to act on time (Peters, pp. 58-61). The offer by the then French foreign minister Michèle Alliot-Marie to send paratroopers to help suppress the protest against the regime elucidates the unclear stand by the French government to support the end dictatorial regime in Tunisia. Nevertheless, the French president emphasized the need for dialogue between the government and the opposition as the only way to bring a democratic and lasting solution the crisis.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom categorically condemned the violence against innocent civilians and called for a rapid return to law and order and restraint from all sides involved in the tumult. It also called for immediate efforts that will lead to the expansion of political freedom in Tunisia through an orderly move towards free and fair elections, respect for human rights and sustainable development (Fawcett, p. 45).

Arab league

The Arab league played a critical role in addressing some of the issues that faced the political, economic and social spheres of most Arab societies. Similar to most countries in the Arab region, Tunisia had been governed mostly exclusively by an authoritarian regime since its independence in 1956. The sporadic changes that shaped balance of power in Ben Ali regime on economic policies, foreign policies and domestic policies were attributed by the Arab league as some of the critical factors that triggered the frustration of the Tunisian people and the unexpected end of the 24-year old regime. According to the Arab League, the high levels of poverty, unemployment and general recession that faced the country triggered the inevitable events that led to the political transition in Tunisia. The league also condemned unacceptable repressive practices against the Tunisian citizens and called for orderly power change, with all sides retraining from violence and unjust practices (Filiu, pp. 14-17).

The European Union

The EU is one of the supranational organizations that expressed its support and recognition of the Tunisian people's efforts and their democratic aspirations to ensure a better Tunisia. The EU also pledged to provide any form of assistance to ensure the development of a lasting democratic solution to the crisis, which led to many deaths and destruction of property worth millions of dollars. Since the end of the dictatorial regime, the EU has been on the forefront in providing both financial and logistical support to help strengthen democratic institutions, as well as economic development and growth in Tunisia (Peters, p. 36).

Conclusion

The Tunisian revolution shaped the future of most despotic regimes not just in the MENA region but around the world. While structural factors are cited to have shaped the events that led to the revolution, the involvement of international actors equally transformed the outcome of the revolution. On one hand, some countries showed their willingness and commitment to ensure a peaceful transition. On the other hand, western countries such as the US and France valued the regime as an important ally in terrorism, regional stability and Islamism and hence refrained from the use of sanctions and other coercive measures. The future of Tunisia as the first country to undergo " postmodern revolution" will be shaped by how these actors intervene to support proper democratic transition and changes for the young democracy.

Work cited

Akbarzadeh, Shahram Piscatori, James MacQueen, Benjamin and Saikal, Amin. American

Democracy Promotion in the Changing Middle East: From Bush to Obama. New York: Rutledge, 2013.

Fawcett, L'Estrange. International relations of the Middle East. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Filiu, Jean-Pierre. The Arab revolution : ten lessons from the democratic uprising. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Peters, Joel. The European Union and the Arab Spring: promoting democracy and human rights in the Middle East. Lanham, Md. : Lexington Books, 2012.

Risse-Kappen, Thomas, Ropp, Stephen and Sikkink, Kathryn. The persistent power of human rights: from commitment to compliance. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Shahshahani, Azadeh and Mullin, Corinna. The legacy of US intervention and the Tunisian

<https://assignbuster.com/international-actors-in-the-tunisian-revolution-politics-essay/>

Revolution: promises and challenges one year on. Interface: A journal for and about social movements, 2012; 4 (1): 67-101.

Tanriverdi, Nebahat. Background of the Tunisian revolution. Alternative Politics, 2011 ;(3)3,

547-570.