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A Changing Regional Order:

The Arab uprisings, the West
and the BRICS

Christina Lassen

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The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) aims to harness the policy-related research of AUB's internationally respected faculty in order to achieve several goals: to raise the quality of public policy-related debate and decision-making in the Arab World and abroad, to enhance the Arab World's input into international affairs, and to enrich the quality of interaction among scholars, officials and civil society actors in the Middle East and abroad.

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Denmark's Former Ambassador to Syria and Jordan becomes IFI's first Diplomat in Residence

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) inaugurates its Diplomat in Residence program with Visiting Fellow Christina Lassen, Denmark's former Ambassador to Syria and Jordan.

Ambassador Lassen recently completed her three-year service in Damascus as Denmark's Ambassador to Syria and Jordan (non-resident ambassador), and was one of the last remaining ambassadors still residing in Damascus. Prior to her post in Damascus, Ambassador Lassen had served five years in Copenhagen as Director of the Executive Secretariat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Executive Assistant to the Permanent Secretary of State, and Special Advisor to the Danish Prime Minister on Middle East and Transatlantic Affairs. From 2000-2004, she was posted at the Danish Embassy in Washington, D.C. as political counselor focusing on US foreign policy towards the Middle East and Asia. Ambassador Lassen has a Master's degree and a Bachelor's degree (Business and International relations) from Copenhagen Business School.

In conjunction with her residency at the American University of Beirut (AUB), Ambassador Lassen is a Weatherhead Center Fellow at Harvard University.

At both Harvard and AUB, Christina Markus Lassen will conduct research on the Arab uprisings and their implications and consequences for relations between the Arab world and outside actors.

Ambassador Lassen gave a public lecture, interacted with students, and participated in other IFI activities during her visit to AUB's campus.

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Abstract

The Arab uprisings have thrown the regional order of the Middle East into disarray and are challenging traditional actors and alliances. Notably, regional actors, both governments and the region's people, are driving developments to a much larger extent than before. This paper will explore how the European Union (EU) ¹ and the United States, in the following referred to as "the West", reacted to the Arab uprisings and whether the West has managed to play an active role and influence the new regional order emerging in the aftermath of the uprisings. The paper argues that the influence of the EU and the United States in the Middle East has gradually diminished since the uprisings began, in spite of the groundbreaking events that could have brought the West and the Middle East closer together. While the West is retracting, other global actors, in particular emerging global powers such as the BRICS-countries,² are seeking to boost their influence in the region, either directly or indirectly through regional actors. While the BRICS as a group have no common project or coordinated policy, it seems that in the Middle East, their interests are currently converging in a significant manner. Common for all, they appear to have been more consistent in their policy towards the uprisings than the West, generally favoring the status quo, albeit for different reasons. The paper will explore the role of the BRICS in the Middle East after the uprisings and poses the question whether the competition for influence in the Middle East may reflect the battle for influence on a global level, where the Western-dominated order of the past decades is on the decline, and emerging powers seek to influence the new global order.

After a brief introduction to relations between the West and the Middle East on the eve of the uprisings, the paper will first analyze the EU's and the United States' reactions to the Arab uprisings and assess why the grand ambitions for active Western engagement in the first months of the uprisings have so far not materialized. Secondly, the reactions of the BRICS will be assessed with particular focus on the disagreement between the West and the emerging powers over Libya and Syria. And, finally, an attempt will be made to analyze what these developments mean for the emergence of the new regional order in the Middle East and the future role of the West.

1 Understood as EU as an entity rather than individual EU member states.

2 Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

1. On the Eve of the Uprisings: A Troubled Relationship

Though relations between the West and the Middle East had been complicated for decades, September 11, 2001 was a breaking point in the relationship and caused a period of both greater Western intervention and higher tension between the West and the Middle East. While there were differences of opinion between the EU and the United States about the causes of and the appropriate response to September 11, there was a general recognition in Western governments that the continued presence of the region's authoritarian regimes and the prioritization of stability over democracy was increasingly problematic and unsustainable in the long run.³ However, this pattern proved more difficult to change than expected.

In the aftermath of September 11, a wide range of Western reform programs⁴ were launched to attempt to alter some of the inherent problems in the region that were deemed to be the cause of much of the popular discontent. To a large extent, the programs did not have the intended effect, mainly because those same efforts were undermined by fundamental contradictions in the approach.⁵ First of all, and not surprisingly, it was very hard to carry out the supposedly independent support of civil society groups and to further widespread democratic reforms if the governments in the respective countries were not willing to cooperate and the political will to push them was not present. Resistance from the local governments shifted the intended focus on independent support for local Arab pro-reform efforts toward bilateral and multilateral efforts to promote gradual liberalization.⁶ Secondly, the new Western focus on the fight against terrorism brought to the forefront the old question of stability versus democracy, as the very regimes in question were suddenly important partners in the fight against extremism and aptly made clear what would be the risks of their possible demise.⁷ Finally, some EU and U.S. policies further undermined the public standing of the West and questioned the real commitment of the West to democratic reforms. In particular, the West's benevolence was questioned after the war in Iraq, its continued support for the region's autocratic regimes, and its perceived double standards on the question of the Middle East peace process and the recognition of Hamas. The Western reform agenda may even have been seen as strengthening the regimes in power, as it gave a seal of approval to the questionable process of "authoritarian upgrading": regime-controlled processes of economic and/or political liberalization that gave the impression of expanding liberties, but where everything in reality was still under full government control. The repeated clashes in the post-September 11 decade over what was seen as Western denigration of Muslim values and insults to Islam furthered the negative impression. As a consequence, the West was increasingly unable to translate its overwhelming power into effective influence in the region, partly because its attractiveness declined in the period.⁸ This was the situation on the eve of the uprisings.

3 Most clearly expressed in then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's speech in Cairo in 2005 where she acknowledged that, for the past 60 years, the United States had pursued stability at the expense of democracy in the Middle East, but that the United States would now take a different course and support the democratic aspirations of all people. This ambition quickly proved its limits after the election of Hamas government in Gaza in 2006. Condoleezza Rice, "Remarks at the American University of Cairo" (Speech, American University of Cairo, Cairo, 20 June 2005).

4 Such as the U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and several EU member states' bilateral programs.

5 Although, to be fair, one can argue that the post-September 11 decade's focus on reform may have contributed to creating a space that made it possible for the protesters to take to the streets in Tunisia and Egypt.

6 Tamara Cofman Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March: America's Role in Building Arab Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2008), 91.

7 Sylvia Colombo and Nathalie Tocci, "The EU Response to the Arab Uprising: Old Wine in New Bottles?", in *Rethinking Western Policies in Light of the Arab Uprisings*, eds. Riccardo Alcaro and Miguel Haubrich-Seco (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2012), 81.

8 Joseph Nye argues that a country's "attractiveness", or soft power, is a combination of its benignity, its competence and its charisma. Joseph Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 92.

2. Euphoria and Big Promises: The Arab Uprisings Changes the Dynamics between the Middle East and the West

When the Arab uprisings erupted in Tunisia in the winter of 2010/early 2011, Brussels and Washington were taken by complete surprise, and were scrambling to find the right policy in response to the unexpected events. The first reaction was to see how the situations were developing and to express support to old allies, in addition to some statements expressing concern. When it became clear where events in Tunisia and later Egypt were heading, the West was quick to turn its back on its old allies and embrace the protest movements in what looked like a major policy change after decades of tacit support to the regimes in power. In addition to strategic considerations about the unsustainability of the status quo, in both Europe and the United States there was a sense of hope and anticipation for the future developments in the region. There was a general feeling that that a new democratization wave had finally hit the Middle East, and that the democratic aspirations of the popular uprisings could bring the West and the Middle East closer together, with scope for an active role for the West in the follow-up to the uprisings.⁹ As Steven Heydemann suggests, the West quickly determined democratic transition as the defining narrative of events, very much perceiving the developments in their own image.¹⁰ Consequently, after decades of accepting the region's authoritarian regimes in an effort to ensure stability, shifting support to the new democratic forces seemed to reconcile both values and interests of the West.

Two years into the uprisings, however, this policy change has become less clear and has not been consistently implemented, to the extent that the West has played a much more limited role than was initially expected in the first euphoric months. To a large degree, the reactions of Brussels and Washington were rather similar: After some hesitation, both showed a strong will to support the ongoing developments politically and economically, but later slowed down somewhere along the road, and the results so far have been limited diplomatic engagement and economic assistance that have not lived up to original ambitions and expectations.

2.1 The EU: from active political role to watching from the sidelines

When the uprisings first began, the EU was quick to engage both politically and economically, mainly through the new External Action Service (EEAS) and the responsible Commissioner for the EU's Neighborhood Policy (ENP). That the EU member states, in particular the former colonial powers France and Britain, let the EU Commission and the new EEAS take the lead on an issue of such importance says something about the confusion in EU capitals. In spite of this there was a widespread feeling that the uprisings would provide an opportunity for the EU to take a leading role in the region, in particular as the United States had clearly indicated that it wanted to focus less on the Middle East.

The EU moved rapidly to draft a strategy for how to deal with the new reality, resulting in a policy paper published in early March 2011,¹¹ followed by a review of the entire ENP that had already been underway for a while and which laid out ambitious support programs to the countries in transition.¹² A number of high-level envoys were dispatched to Tunisia and Egypt to offer assistance on behalf of the EU to the transition process. Moreover, the Arab uprisings were the top issue of the EU foreign ministers' meetings in the first months of 2011 where the need for the EU to actively engage in its "Southern Neighborhood" was emphasized. A few months into the uprisings, however, the EU's ability to act was rendered more difficult, as it was faced with disturbing developments in several of the region's countries. Libya was initially the biggest cause of concern, being debated in all relevant forums

9 See for example the press release of the EU foreign ministers' meeting on February 21, 2011, where the expected partnership with the new forces in power on the bases of shared principles is described. Council of the European Union, *Press release, 3069th Council meeting, Foreign Affairs* (Press Statement, Brussels, February 21, 2011).

10 Steven Heydemann (2012), "Embracing the Change, Accepting the Challenge? Western Response to the Arab Spring," in *Rethinking Western Policies*, eds. Alcaro and Haubrich-Seco, 23.

11 The European Commission and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean* (Brussels, March 8, 2011).

12 The European Commission and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood: A Review of European Neighbourhood Policy* (Brussels, May 25, 2011).

starting in mid-February until the adoption of UNSCR 1973 on a no-fly zone in Libya where eleven EU countries participated in the military intervention. Developments in Bahrain were condemned but the EU did not actively seek to engage, partly because the EU had very little leverage to influence the Bahraini authorities, partly because there were conflicting views among member states. As for Syria, the EU's impact proved equally limited. From the outset of the violent crackdown in March 2011, the EU issued declarations condemning the events, but no attempts were made to play a more active role, mostly due to the inherent problem of obtaining agreement between member states on foreign policy issues of major importance that made it very difficult for the High Representative to take decisive action.

As the uprisings moved on and became more complicated - either in terms of difficult transitions, the violent developments in Syria, or the increasing influence of Islamists - the EU member states' political focus seemed to wane as the group's own domestic problems increased due to the financial crisis in 2012. The EU's crisis took so much of the decision-makers' energy that it was difficult for the EU bureaucracy to obtain the necessary political and economic attention to the Middle East. Rather symptomatically, at the EU Summit on February 8, 2013, where a main point on the agenda was supposed to be a stocktaking of the EU's response to the Arab uprisings, the agenda point was postponed to the Summit in June 2013, where it was again postponed without discussion.

The fact that the secular demonstrators that so excited EU policymakers in the first months of the uprisings were increasingly being replaced by Islamists, did not make things easier and posed a policy dilemma for the EU. There seemed to be a determination not to repeat past mistakes and to continue working with the new forces in power, Islamists as well as non-Islamists, albeit based on the principle of "more-for-more" and the clear understanding that democratic progress was required to unleash the promised EU assistance. In spite of this policy, however, the growing importance of political Islam as well as the rise of radical Islamists fighting on the ground in Syria caused great concern in EU capitals, bringing back the old security-democracy debate.

On the assistance side, the ambitious support programs envisaged in the new strategies proved difficult to implement. Due to the pressure from member states and the rapidly evolving situations in the region, the strategies were developed somewhat hastily, which may explain why the new programs were, to a large extent, a repackaging of existing efforts. The reasoning for the continuation of the somewhat odd lumping together of the Southern Mediterranean region with the countries of the former Soviet Union in the ENP was not obvious, in particular under the new circumstances. In addition to time constraints, however, there seemed to be a widespread conviction that the developments were, to a great extent, similar to the experiences of the Central and Eastern European countries' democratization process in the 1990s. While it is certainly possible to argue for this, there are also important differences. Most importantly, as asserted forcefully by Witney and Dworkin of the European Council on Foreign Relations, the EU's eastern neighbors had completely different motivations for fulfilling the demands of the EU, most notably the prospect of EU membership and a sense of belonging to the European culture; the countries of North Africa and the Levant, on the other hand, have no such realistic prospect and feel much stronger affinity with the Arab world.¹³

Moreover, since the ENP is aimed at countries who aspire one day to become a member of the EU or to generally be more closely integrated with the economy of the EU, it seeks to guide the concerned countries towards fundamental societal transformations of a very detailed nature that are very long-term and bureaucratic for the immediate needs of the Middle Eastern countries in transition. As argued by Kristina Kausch, "the reviewed EU policies do not offer insight on how to deal with countries that show little appetite for comprehensive institutional EU integration"¹⁴ and the overriding strategic objectives of the EU risk getting lost in more technical matters. To be fair, the appointment of a Special Representative for the Southern Mediterranean was an attempt to alleviate this problem by seeking better coordination between the political and technical instruments of the EU and ensuring a more constant dialogue with partner governments through regular task force meetings with all stakeholders. Moreover, the EU's humanitarian assistance, in particular to the on-going crisis in Syria, has been important: the EU is the biggest donor of humanitarian aid to the country and has demonstrated a real will to integrate all the EU's policy instruments in the effort. This does not, however, change the impression that, to a large extent, the EU's support to the countries in transition has been technical rather than strategic. As this came at a time when the United States has chosen to play a rather withdrawn role, it further highlighted the inability of the EU in taking the lead on this issue.

13 Nick Witney and Anthony Dworkin, *A Power Audit of EU-North Africa Relations* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2012), 32.

14 Kristina Kausch, "The End of the (Southern) Neighbourhood", *Papers IEMed/EuroMeSCo* 18 (Barcelona: IEMed, 2013), 9

2.2 The United States: from active leadership to leading from behind

The American response to the Arab uprisings in many ways mirrored the EU's, but the limited political role of the United States, in particular, has been surprising. After some confusion about the actual stand of the United States vis-à-vis the uprisings, President Barack Obama's speech on May 19, 2011, laid out the principles for U.S. policy after the changes in the region: Obama made clear that from that point on it would be the policy of the United States to promote reform across the region, and to support transitions to democracy through ambitious goals of U.S. assistance to these countries in transition.¹⁵

Obama's statement was tested in the case of Bahrain where the United States quickly realized that its influence was very limited given the huge influence of Saudi Arabia and the fact that the Saudis saw the uprisings there as an existential issue.¹⁶ In Libya, the United States only reluctantly joined the military operation after severe disagreements inside the administration, and after proclaiming that Europe would take lead on the operations, leaving the United States to "lead from behind" (although, due to limited European resources, the United States ended up taking a leading role).¹⁷ Similarly in Yemen, the United States chose a rather withdrawn role, leaving it to the GCC countries to be in charge of the negotiations, and the real depth of the transition in Yemen is still questionable. The new policy has proved even more difficult in Syria. For the first three months of the crisis, the United States tried in its statements to urge the Syrian regime to take the path of reform rather than suppression. When the crackdown continued, the United States—like the EU—increased the toughness of its statements and imposed sanctions on the regime, but the effect of these measures was negligible, partly because the U.S.-Syrian relationship was already heavily sanctioned and relations were very limited due to years of mutual distrust, but also because of the continued support to the Syrian regime from other regional and extra-regional powers.

While the challenges were daunting, and the ability of the United States to make a real difference was at times questionable in the ever-evolving environment, the limited involvement of the United States was, to a large extent, a conscious choice by the Obama administration. Like in the EU, the uprisings coincided with large domestic challenges in the United States. Obama came into office on a very clear ticket of reducing U.S. involvement in the Middle East, increasing American commitments in Asia, and focusing on problems at home. Moreover, part of the new administration's policy was to delegate responsibility to regional allies if vital American interests were not directly threatened, and to a large extent the Middle East (in particular North Africa) was seen as a European responsibility, while the United States increasingly "pivoted" towards Asia. Adding to this, newfound resources of shale gas in the United States with prospects to make the United States energy independent by 2020 caused some commentators to speculate that the future strategic importance of the Middle East for the United States could be weakened.

At the same time, the uprisings happened at a time when the U.S. political system was increasingly paralyzed. While the administration tried to piece together assistance programs for the countries in transition, resistance in Congress in particular was mounting. To a large extent, the sentiment in Congress reflected the widespread fatigue of the American public for spending more resources in the Middle East. Furthermore, the success of Islamist parties running for power in the post-revolution countries, the treatment of Christians and foreign NGOs, as well as the difficult security situation in several countries in the region did not make the administration's job easier, and transition assistance tended to be based on existing programs without notable new allocations. Most recently, in April 2013, Congress rejected the proposed flagship for the post-Arab uprising countries in the form of a new Middle East and North Africa Incentive Fund (USD 770 million), and the first small chunk (USD 250 million) of the promised billion-dollar assistance to Egypt was only granted during Secretary Kerry's visit to Cairo in March 2013.

15 Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa" (Speech, State Department, Washington, D.C., May 19, 2011).

16 Fawaz A. Gerges, *Obama and the Middle East: The End of America's Moment?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 109.

17 David E. Sanger, *Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), 339.

2.3 Unclear strategies, problems at home, and lackluster interest from the region cause limited Western impact

As described in the above, mounting problems at home as well as ever-changing situations in the countries affected by the uprisings may help to explain why on both sides of the Atlantic, there seems to have been rather unclear strategies for the approach to the uprisings and a tendency to use existing frameworks for a new situation. In many ways, this is understandable. The situation has been developing constantly since January 2011, and it was by no means clear what the alternatives to the chosen approach were or how much influence the West could realistically have in the volatile situation. While policy-makers on both sides of the Atlantic clearly decided to break with decades of policy of prioritizing stability over democracy in the case of the Middle East, once the situations became more volatile, there seemed to be a wavering between acting according to interests (as in Bahrain) and acting according to values (as in the continued support to the democratically elected Morsi-government in Egypt). While not in itself bad, the lack of a clear strategy in the public perception looked as if the West was continuing its opportunistic policy and only supporting the popular uprisings when it was in its own direct interest. This impression was furthered by the disappointing implementation of proposed assistance to the post-revolutionary countries. The Arab uprisings did not lead to a major change in the EU or the U.S. assistance programs, but rather to a moving of resources from different budget lines, and promised trade agreements and mobility programs have, so far, only shown limited progress.¹⁸

In addition to the relatively cautious approach by the West, the interest for cooperation with the West from the countries in transition has not been overwhelming, and the new partnerships expected by the West have so far not materialized. The new authorities in transition countries have, in many cases, been so absorbed with their own internal situations that dealing with far-away governments with complicated conditions has not been a priority. There has been a pride in maintaining the popular uprisings home-grown and a general inclination towards autonomy from external actors.¹⁹ More importantly, however, for the first time, the ruling elites have had to worry about their domestic constituencies and the potential consequences of policy decisions for public opinion, whereby foreign powers' preferences have become less relevant.

Added to the lackluster interest in dealing with the West, other powers, both regional and extra-regional, have become increasingly active in the region. In some cases, this has made the cooperation and assistance offered by the West less attractive, compared to the governments of for example Saudi Arabia and Qatar who pledge billions of dollars in aid and loans with no strings attached to the countries in transition.²⁰ Also, the seeming impotence of the West when faced with opposition from regional powers (as in the case of Bahrain) or extra-regional powers (as in the case of Syria) has probably motivated the new forces in power to diversify their partners as the real ability of the West to influence developments in the region has become increasingly doubtful.

In sum, in spite of a seemingly sincere wish from the West to support the countries in transition, the engagement has been slowly fading as the uprisings progressed and developments have turned more unpredictable in several of the region's countries. Having already weakened in the years prior to 2011, the role and influence of the West in the Middle East today two years after the uprisings broke out appear to be even more moderate and the impact of the West on the new regional order limited.

18 Danya Greenfield and Rosa Balfour, *Arab Awakening: Are the US and EU Missing the Challenge?* (Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council, 2012), 8, 29.

19 Hanaa Ebeid, *The EU and the Arab Spring: A View from the South*, IEMed/EuroMeSCo Brief No. 38 (April 18, 2012): 1.

20 According to the IMF, Riyadh pledged a total of USD 17.9 billion in loans, grants, and other support to Arab countries in 2011-12, including USD 4 billion to Egypt (of which 1.5 billion has been received). "Egypt has received sizable chunk of Saudi aid since 2011: IMF," *AhramOnline*, September 19, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/53305/Business/Economy/Egypt-has-received-sizeable-chunk-of-Saudi-aid-sin.aspx>.

3. The Emerging Regional Order – A Role for the BRICS?

Much has been written about the supposed Western decline and the rise of the emerging powers in the last decade.²¹ As is the case on a global level, the processes of power transition between old and emerging powers and power diffusion from state to non-state actors are also present in the Middle East.²² The Arab uprisings have accelerated these processes by reshuffling all the elements of the previous order and creating new power structures and alliances whose full extent are still not clear and which will continue to develop in the years to come. The role of regional powers, in particular, has been noticeable, and regional actors have, to a large extent, been driving events, led by Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Turkey has managed to increase both its economic power, political influence and soft power further after the uprisings, although the enthusiasm in the region about the so-called “Turkish model” seems to have declined compared to the first year of the uprisings, and the popular protests in Turkey in June 2013 have somewhat weakened the image of Prime Minister Erdogan as a leading democratic icon in the region. Iran is still a strong regional power, but the troubles of its allies Syria and Hizbollah as well as the fact that it is increasingly seen as a hostile power by many Sunnis in the region have weakened Iran’s influence, and the outcome of the situation in Syria will be crucial for its future standing. Saudi Arabia and Qatar are using their economic power and soft power in an attempt to maintain the status quo at home, while actively supporting uprisings abroad if they fit into the Sunni vs. Shia prism. Egypt and Iraq are still potential regional powers, but weakened by huge domestic challenges, Egypt possibly more so after the overthrow of President Morsi. At the same time, new non-state actors such as popular protest movements and various groups affiliated with political Islam have thrown themselves into the mix, further complicating the developing order.²³

While the maneuvering for influence among the region’s actors is obvious and expected, the ability of extra-regional powers to drive developments is less predictable. Apart from the EU and the United States, the role of Russia, China, and, to a lesser extent India, Brazil, and South Africa, has been noticeable. These countries today go under the acronym “BRICS”, and their influence in the Middle East will be further explored below.

While the “BRIC”-concept was originally invented as an investment tool with no political connotations, the four BRIC-countries started meeting as a group in 2006 in attempt to add a political dimension to the label.²⁴ The group is an issues-based coalition that has no decision-making structures and in fact the member countries on many issues have diverging views. It is in the interest of the members, however, that the group gives the impression of being a forum for global powers who define themselves as “not being the West” and who exert real influence on international affairs. The main interest of the group is to seek to influence norms and institutions of the emerging global order, or as one analyst puts it: “The BRICS form a heterogenous coalition of often competing powers that share a common fundamental political objective: to erode Western hegemonic claims by protecting the principle on which these claims are deemed to most threaten, namely the political sovereignty of states.”²⁵ At the latest BRICS Summit in South Africa in March 2013, the group decided to establish a BRICS development bank as a possible parallel structure to the World Bank. However, the group is also increasingly taking stands on political issues of global concern, and at the March Summit the Heads of States discussed Syria and Iran, where they underlined the need for diplomatic rather than military solutions.

21 See for example: Haass, “The Age of Nonpolarity: What Will Follow U.S. Dominance,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2008; Stephen M. Walt, “The End of the American Era,” *The National Interest*, Nov/Dec. 2011; and Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of the Rest,” *Newsweek*, May 3, 2008.

22 According to Nye, power transition among states take place when more states become increasingly powerful on the world stage, thereby decreasing the relative power of existing powers. Power diffusion happens when power is transferred from state actors to non-state actors with the result that even more actors have to “share the power pie”. Nye, *The Future of Power*, xv.

23 The role of regional actors falls outside the scope of this paper and will not be treated in more detail, except where it is relevant to illustrate extra-regional powers’ use of regional actors as vehicles for influence.

24 The BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) idea was first conceived by Goldman Sachs in an exercise to forecast global economic growth in 2001. The four countries started meeting formally in 2006, in 2010 enlarging the group with South Africa and changing the acronym to BRICS. The role of South Africa in the Middle East is seen as less important and will only be highlighted when relevant.

25 Zaki Laidi: The BRICS against the West. ScienCo Po, CERl Strategy Papers, November 2011

While the BRICS have no coordinated Middle East policy, they tend to share views on issues such as the Middle East Peace Process and Iran. Moreover, there has been a high degree of correspondence in the BRICS-countries' policies towards the Arab uprisings, albeit for different reasons. Common to them all has been a cautious reaction to the uprisings, and skepticism towards outside intervention. As an example of the group's ability to present itself as an alternative global power forum on the Middle East, the Syrian regime has several times appealed to the BRICS, whose members it considers to be "more reasonable" global powers, including in a letter to the BRICS Heads of State before the 2013 Summit where President Assad urged the group for assistance to fight the "terrorists" in his country and lauded them for their balanced approach to international affairs. Hence, while the BRICS are still far from being a united political force, the Middle East may be the object of a first attempt by the BRICS-members to seek to increase their influence both individually and collectively at a time when the West seems to be resigning.

3.1 Russia and China

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was a leading actor in the Middle East; but after the breakdown of the USSR Russia's regional power faded significantly. With regards to the Arab uprisings, the Russian reading of these events was always more pessimistic than the West's. Where the West saw peaceful democratic demonstrators, Russia saw potential threats to other authoritarian leaders closer to the Russian periphery as exemplified by the color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine of the mid-2000s.²⁶ Where the West (after some hesitation) came to see the fall of the Arab autocrats as something positive that might lead to democratic developments in the region, Russia saw the risk of Islamic fundamentalists rising and eventually threatening its own Southern republics. As noted by one observer: "Moscow has taken a firm counterrevolutionary stance and shows no intention of switching to the possible, but not definite, winning side."²⁷

Where the West and Russia really differed, however, was in the case of Syria. The Russian leadership was furious about the way the Security Council mandated operation in Libya developed (cf. below), turning, in the eyes of the Russians, from a no-fly zone into a regime change operation. This seems to have been the determining factor for the subsequent Russian policy on Syria: while concern about Islamic fundamentalism and to a lesser degree the wish for continued access to Tartous harbor have certainly played a role, it seems that the main objective guiding Russian policy was the wish not to repeat the Libya situation, including by vetoing draft Security Council resolutions putting pressure on the Syrian regime and openly acknowledging its support of the regime with arms.

On the other hand, China, unlike Russia, has no history of influence in the Middle East but, as a natural consequence of the country's rise to global power, China is asserting its influence in the region and has, as in other parts of the world, strengthened its economic power in the Middle East by increasing trade and investments. Due to its growing energy needs, China has a very direct interest in uninterrupted energy flows from the region, and the importance of the Middle East for China has increased significantly over the last decade. In 2009, China for the first time surpassed the United States as the leading purchaser of Saudi crude oil and between 1999 and 2009, there was a ten-fold increase in China's trade with Egypt.²⁸ Politically, China has none of the Western colonial baggage and may try to use its more neutral position to seek a role, as indicated during the visits to Beijing of Prime Minister Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu, respectively, in May 2013, where the Chinese president announced a four-point peace plan for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.²⁹

When the Arab uprisings started, China shared many of the same concerns as Russia. The uprisings triggered fears in Beijing of instability within China, including the potential ripple effect of social media as a tool of mass protest, and the government apparently sought to quell news about the uprisings including through the blockage of the words "Egypt" and "Jasmine" (associated with the "Jasmine Revolution" in Tunisia) in Internet searches. In line with its usual pragmatism, however, China has also realized when it was time to change sides and quickly moved to establish relations with transitional authorities in Egypt and Tunisia as well as Libya. Moreover, China is already investing massively in the countries in transition—one example is in Egypt where China has ambitious designs on the Suez Canal and is considering building a new billion-dollar terminal for Chinese-made goods, potentially placing itself as a major player at a strategic point in the heart of the Middle East.³⁰

26 Fiona Hill, "How Russia and China see the Egyptian Revolution," *Foreign Policy*, February 15, 2011.

27 Pavel K. Baev, "Moscow Does Not Believe in Change," in *The Arab Awakening*, ed. Kenneth Pollack (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2011), 291.

28 Jonathan D. Pollack, "China: Unease from Afar," in *The Arab Awakening*, ed. Kenneth Pollack (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2011), 300.

29 Tania Branigan, "China Welcomes Binyamin Netanyahu," *The Guardian*, May 8, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/may/08/china-welcomes-binyamin-netanyahu>.

30 Sanger, *Confront and Conceal*, 316.

Like Russia, China has disagreed openly with the West over the conduct of policy in Libya and Syria. China has to a greater extent than Russia tried to appear neutral in the Syrian conflict (for example, by inviting a broader variety of Syrian opposition groups to Beijing), but the outcome is the same and, through its actions in the UN Security Council, China has collaborated with Russia in avoiding tougher international pressure on Syria.

The question remains as to whether the difference between the approach of the West and China/Russia to the uprisings is more than a question of analytical differences about the attractiveness of the status quo versus the risk of radical Islam. Brumberg and Heydemann argue that there are indications that Russia and China are seeking to use the uprisings to consolidate their standing as a counterweight to the West in the Middle East by advancing alternatives to liberal democracy and seeking to forge new alliances in the region with governments equally interested in maintaining the status quo. With newly empowered citizens questioning the Western-led regional order, the worldview articulated by Russia and China seems attractive and creates new opportunities for these countries to exert influence.³¹ Moreover, they argue that Russia and China seek to use the Arab uprisings to mobilize support from democratic powers such as Brazil, India, and South Africa. As will be further explored below, the on-going changes in the region have brought to the forefront fundamental questions of state sovereignty and non-intervention which are being strongly disputed at global level between emerging powers and a declining West.

3.2 Other BRICS on the rise

The three remaining BRICS—India, Brazil, and South Africa—are slowly seeking a more active role on the international scene as part of their rise to global power, at times in cooperation under the IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) Dialogue Forum. Like BRICS, IBSA is an issue-based coalition rather than formal alliance, and periodically issues statements of common positions, for example releasing several statements calling for “an immediate end to violence” in Syria. All three are eager candidates for permanent membership in the UN Security Council and wish to show themselves both as responsible global players and independent from the West. This distinguishes them from Russia and China, who are already relatively established members of the current system. India and Brazil, in particular, are actively seeking to prove that they are more than regional powers and have had strong positions with respect to the Middle East peace process, as well as Iran and, increasingly, Syria, where both countries are more prone to share the Russian/Chinese narrative about foreign terrorists than the West’s about freedom fighters.

Historically, and for geographical reasons, none of these countries has had strong links with the region. In recent years, however, India has sought to strengthen ties with the region partly due to its growing energy needs and the large number of Indian migrant workers living in the area. The region annually accounts for 63 percent of India’s crude oil imports and USD 93 billion of trade, and has a population of six million Indian expatriate workers who remit over USD 35 billion every year.³² With this background, the Middle East is the strategically most important region for India outside of its immediate neighborhood. The growing importance of the Middle East for India may help explain the cautious stand of the Indian government to the Arab uprisings, which simply put is dependent on good relations with both Iran and Saudi Arabia. The dilemma was expressed by India’s national security advisor Shiv Shanker Menon when he allegedly said in 2012 that “The Western developed economies can now afford the chaos that the so-called Arab Spring is bringing to the Middle East. They can actively encourage regime change in the area. The main victims of uncertainty in supply will be emerging economies like China and India who are still looking to diversify their sources of supply into long-term flexible contracts with others outside the region.”³³ India’s cautious policy has been clear from a number of steps taken since the beginning of the uprisings. Most recently, in March 2013, (then) President Morsi visited India on one of his first foreign trips, and, during the same month, India also received President Assad’s primary foreign policy advisor, thereby showing India’s independent (from the West) line on this issue. The visit was in accordance with India’s position throughout the Syrian conflict, which is mainly determined by India’s traditional policy of non-alignment and its concerns about Kashmir. Most recently, in May 2013, India abstained on a UN General Assembly vote on the situation in Syria, arguing that finding

31 Daniel Brumberg and Steven Heydemann, “Global Authoritarians and the Arab Spring: New Challenges for U.S. Diplomacy.” *The Changing Security Architecture in the Middle East Series 1* (Washington D.C.: Wilson Center-USIP, 2013): 1-2. Brumberg and Heydemann define Russia and China (together with Iran) as the core group of the “Global Authoritarians,” who are hostile to pluralist democracy and seek to restructure international institutions to enhance their influence in the matters of global governance.

32 Sunil Khilnani et. al., *Nonalignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty First Century*, (New Delhi: National Defence College and Centre for Research Policy, 2012), 22.

33 Adith Charlie, “Decoding India’s Response to the Arab Spring,” *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, January 25, 2013.

a settlement to the conflict is up to the Syrians themselves and should not be imposed from outside.

Throughout the last decade, Brazil too has increasingly sought to assert its influence in the region.³⁴ Brazil has mainly used its soft power, presenting itself as a neutral player with no colonial background. But the fact that a large number of Brazilians are of Middle Eastern descent³⁵ has also played into the narrative. During the presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Brazil opened a number of new embassies in the Middle East, appointed a special Middle East envoy, became the first Latin American observer to the Arab League, and established the Summit of South American-Arab Countries (ASPA) to strengthen ties between the two regions. The most high-profile policy was Brazil's joint initiative with Turkey in 2010 to broker a nuclear deal with Iran, which was later rejected by the United States. Brazil has also put out feelers to see if it could play a role as a mediator in the Middle East peace process, but so far to no avail.³⁶ Given Brazil's recent history, the country was expected to support the democratic uprisings in the region, but has somewhat surprisingly carried out a very cautious policy towards the uprisings, leading to some criticism.³⁷ Like India, Brazil has been skeptical about the West's policies in the case of Libya and Syria. More specifically, this led Brazil to join an IBSA ministerial visit to Damascus in August of 2011 to assess if there would be a role for IBSA as mediator in the conflict. The visit took place just days before the EU and the United States publically called for President Assad to step down and illustrated the lack of coherence in the international community's handling of Syria, a split that has been aptly exploited by the Syrian regime.³⁸ More recently, in January 2013, Brazil abstained from signing a 57-country Security Council petition to refer the Syrian crisis to the ICC, causing much outrage among Brazilian human rights NGOs.

Both India and Brazil can be expected to focus more on the Middle East in the future, partly due to interests, partly as a way to show their growing importance on the international scene. Despite being democracies, they have endorsed much of the Russian/Chinese criticism of Western dominance, and their reading of events can vary considerably from the West's, in some cases leading to conflicting policies. While both countries strongly support human rights on generic issues, they tend to be more cautious of criticizing individual countries, and are both wary of Western-led interventions. This does not mean, however, that they will necessarily follow the policies and/or agree with fellow BRICS members China and Russia. India and Brazil both have longstanding traditions for independent stands on foreign affairs and could be seeking alternative policies that neither corresponds with the policies of the West nor China and Russia. As argued by Brazil's permanent representative to the United Nations, Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti after the Syria vote in 2011: "... we do provide a third option [as opposed to national sovereignty and interference]. It's not a matter of protecting national sovereignty, it's a conviction that we should develop efforts to promote political solutions rather than going immediately into coercive measures."³⁹ Given their emerging power status, in the case of Libya and Syria, the position of the IBSA countries has been important, as will be further discussed below.

3.3 Disagreements between the West and the BRICS: Libya and Syria

While the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt took everyone by surprise, they led to drastic changes so fast that many countries were still scrambling to develop policy responses when the two countries' authoritarian leaders were toppled after brief periods of strong popular protests. Consequently, most countries from outside the region chose to express their support to the new leaderships even if, privately, they may have had more reservations. As for Bahrain and Yemen, all major powers seemed to agree that those uprisings were best dealt with regionally, either for reasons of interests or in acceptance that there was not much outside powers could do when faced with the Gulf states' clear resistance to outside intervention.

34 Guy Burton, "Emerging Powers and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Case of Brazil and Venezuela," *Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs Working Paper 15* (May 2013)

35 10-12 million Brazilians are of Arab descent, and Brazil has the largest Lebanese-Syrian community outside the Middle East.

36 Celso Amorim, "Brazil and the Middle East," *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs 2* (2011): 51-56.

37 Matias Spektor, "The Arab Spring, seen from Brazil," *New York Times*, December 23, 2011.

38 Most recently in President Assad's interview on April 2, 2013, with Turkey's Ulusal TV where he thanks the BRICS for being on Syria's side. Ulusal TV, *Interview with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad* (Transcript of Interview with Bashar Assad, April 2, 2013), <http://www.voltairenet.org/article178069.html>.

39 Barbara Plett, "UN Security Council middle powers' Arab Spring dilemma," *BBC*, November 8, 2011.

Things became more complicated when it came to Libya and Syria, in particular after the situation in those two countries developed violently and the question of possible international interference became pertinent.

The situation revived the debate of the 2000s about the question of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the attempts, mainly by Western powers, to have clearer international guidelines for when the international community should be able to intervene in sovereign states' internal affairs in case of gross human rights violations, genocide, etc. The report of the independent panel carrying out the background work for the UN debate on the issue ironically finished its work only a few weeks prior to September 11, 2001, which put the recommendations of the panel in a somewhat different light.⁴⁰ Moreover, the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq made many in the non-Western world wary of whether the new guidelines were mainly to be followed when it was in the interest of the West.

The developments in Libya in February/March 2011 brought to the forefront the relevance of R2P after Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi openly threatened the citizens of Benghazi and there was fear of a potential massacre against the inhabitants of that city. This was enhanced by calls from both the Libyan opposition and the Arab League for the Security Council to act. The Security Council on March 17, 2011 approved UNSCR 1973 aimed at ending the attacks against civilians with impressive speed, for the first time putting R2P into action. The apparent international unanimity on this issue, however, was somewhat deceiving. While the resolution was adopted with a vote of 10 in favor and no votes against, there were five abstentions, four of them being Russia, China, India and Brazil, who in a strange BRICS moment all happened to be on the Security Council at the same time. As the only BRICS member, South Africa voted in favor of the resolution, but quickly after showed remorse and distanced itself from the resulting NATO-led airstrikes.

As noted above, the displeasure of Russia with the resolution became firmer as the intervention in Libya developed from the imposition of a no-fly zone into what critics believed was an active role of coalition forces to assist the opposition in overthrowing Gaddafi. This feeling was shared by other BRICS members who believed that the West had overstepped its mandate and that UNSCR 1973 had become a "slippery slope" for regime change. The developments even led Brazil to put forward a competing concept to R2P in the Security Council in November 2011, the so-called "Responsibility While Protecting", arguing that without limits on what the powerful may do, the emerging norm of humanitarian intervention could turn into a tool of foreign manipulation.⁴¹

Libya had profound consequences for the international community's dealings with the Syria situation. It can be argued that the concept of R2P was severely bruised after the Libya-operation and that the implementation of UNSCR 1973 effectively blocked any international action on Syria. Three attempts by Western powers in the Council to adopt resolutions increasing the pressure on the Syrian regime were met with vetoes from Russia and China.⁴² India, Brazil and South Africa all abstained on the first vote in October 2011, causing great frustration among Western members of the Security Council. The explanations for the vote used by Brazil and India mirrored those of Russia and China, and focused on the principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention. Notably, however, India voted in favor of the two Syria-resolutions vetoed by Russia and China in 2012, ostensibly due to important Western concessions during the negotiations and draft resolutions that were weaker in content than the one of October 2011, although some commentators argue that the need for India to maintain its stakes in the Gulf countries also played a role.⁴³

40 Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun, "The Responsibility to Protect - Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty," *International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001).

41 United Nations, "Responsibility While Protecting: Elements for the Development and Promotion of a Concept," (Letter dated 9 November 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, November 11, 2011).

42 On October 4, 2011, February 4, 2012, and July 19, 2012.

43 Monish Tourangbam, "Syria Crisis: Why India Voted," Sarikatel.com, February 10, 2012.

While some would argue that the disagreement in the Security Council has been rather convenient for the West, which has been reluctant to get involved in Syria, the issue in fact goes deeper than military intervention and has blocked all real action on the Syria file, including humanitarian and economic measures. From the outset of the crisis the emerging powers had a notably different interpretation of events in Syria than the West. While there are various reasons for this, three seem to be of primary importance. First, some countries, notably Russia and China, felt that the Arab uprisings posed an indirect threat to their own countries or to countries in their near periphery and that the popular movements could potentially be imitated among disgruntled citizens outside the Middle East. Second, Russia, China, as well as India, to a large extent saw the opposition in Syria as illegitimate freedom fighters or terrorists seeking independence, not unlike similar separatist movements in their own countries. Moreover, all three countries have significant Muslim minorities and fear the rise of radical Islam, particularly in Chechnya, Xinjiang province, and Northeast India respectively. Thirdly, both the BRICS and other non-Western powers had some suspicion that the West somehow contributed to the spread of the uprisings as a means to undermine authoritarian regimes at a time when these were no longer deemed of value for the West, and fear what is seen as Western-promoted regime change by military means.⁴⁴

The united opposition of the emerging powers to a question of such importance to the West would have been almost unthinkable just ten years ago, when lack of unanimity in the Security Council would most probably have led to Western-led action without a Security Council mandate, as was the case in former Yugoslavia in 1999 and later in Iraq in 2003. The fact that the Western powers, in particular France and Britain, chose to bring these issues to the Security Council in spite of the continued resistance, may reflect the declining influence of these powers on a global level as well as the difficult financial situation in Europe. Notably, it has been the European permanent members of the Council, rather than the United States, who have pushed most aggressively for the Security Council to deal with these issues, including tabling most of the Syria-related draft resolutions.

The struggle over Syria has illustrated the growing difficulty to obtain agreement among leading powers in the emerging global order. For the time being, the existing 'global governing board', in the shape of the UN's Security Council, is increasingly being seen by the emerging powers as non-representative, while at the same time the present permanent members and their right of veto power make it increasingly difficult for the council to act efficiently.⁴⁵ The war in Iraq, the "war on terror, and the relative decline of traditional powers and rise of new powers have made this problem much more pertinent, and the Syria situation gave the emerging powers a chance to demonstrate their unhappiness with the current system. As commentator Ian Bremmer puts it: "...the new players want more than a seat at the table; they want to make new rules."⁴⁶ The clash between the West and the emerging powers over Libya and Syria in both the Security Council and outside have illustrated both the malfunctioning of the global governance board as well as the underlying struggle to define the norms and institutions of the emerging global order. In this light, one could argue that the first real clash of this new world order is taking place right now in the Middle East.

44 As expressed recently by South Africa's Deputy Minister of International Relations: "South Africa rejects any calls for regime change and external military interference or any action not in line with the Charter of the United Nations... and notes, with concern, the decision by the United States to arm the Syrian Free Army." Ebrahim Ebrahim, "Statement by the Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Mr Ebrahim Ebrahim, on international developments" (Statement, OR Tambo Building, Pretoria, June 21, 2013).

45 This was obviously often the case pre-1991, too, but the end of the Cold War gave the impression that ideological differences would be less damaging for the Council's work, and for a few years, this seemed to be the case.

46 Ian Bremmer, *Every Nation for Itself: Winners and Losers in a G-Zero World* (Portfolio/Penguin, New York, 2012), 20.

4. The Future of the West's Relations with the Middle East and the New Regional Order

The Arab uprisings are fundamentally changing the regional order of the Middle East and challenging traditional actors and alliances. For now, the Islamist (Sunni) revival adds to the increasingly powerful narrative of a Sunni-Shia divide in the region, possibly redefining old alliance structures according to sectarian lines with a new "Sunni front" challenging the "Shia Crescent" of the 2000s. Other possible axes could be revolutionary governments versus status quo regimes, seculars versus Islamists, or Muslim Brotherhood versus salafists. What emerges from this very complicated picture appears to be a regional order with less obvious alliance structures (typically various alliance structures for each state or within each state) or maybe even no order at all, as the region is experiencing changes in all dimensions.⁴⁷

In this emerging (dis)order, the role of outside powers in the region is still unclear. The uprisings have accelerated on-going processes of power transition and power diffusion and opened the field for a range of new (and old) actors to jockey for influence. For the moment, all is in flux, and the transition will probably take years. This creates opportunities as well as threats for the region. On the one hand, the developments could lead to a situation where the countries of the region themselves shape the future regional order without the active meddling from outside powers. On the other hand, however, the power vacuum could also mean that outside powers will try to gain further influence.

While the structural power of the West in the Middle East in terms of military might and economic power is still large, in recent years the actual ability for the West to translate that power into influence has declined, and it appears that this trend has continued since the uprisings began.

Decline of Western influence in the Middle East is not necessarily bad; on the contrary it could prove positive for the region and even serve the long-term interests of the West. While it may mean diminished Western ability to shape the new order and work to further democratization, it may also lead to a more "natural" relationship between the West and the Middle East, which could eventually be less conflict-ridden than before. The more the new governments in the region take responsibility for forming their own future rather than perceive that policies are being imposed by the EU and the United States, the more likely there could be a change to develop a healthier and more balanced relationship between them (although recent events in Egypt suggest that even Western attempts to stay neutral can cause criticism).

The BRICS is still an emerging structure, and its real impact can be questioned, in particular as its individual members are facing growing domestic problems (as illustrated by the mass demonstrations in Brazil and clashes between citizens and police forces in China in June 2013), and all have had difficulties living up to expected economic growth rates. Moreover, one can be skeptical about the real influence of the geographically and culturally different BRICS-powers in the Middle East. In contrast to the West, however, the BRICS seem to have been clearer on their preferred outcome of the uprisings, being wary of changes that risk the stability of the region. The individual BRICS-members are increasingly able to offer political support as well as economic assistance and investments, and, occasionally, to act as a united political force on issues deemed of common interest, which may be the case in the Middle East. This is not only attractive for the countries in transition, who desperately need funds to accommodate the high expectations of their populations, but also for status quo regimes such as those in the Gulf who have been burnt by the West's disposal of old, autocratic allies. As Bremmer notes, Saudi Arabia does not have to worry that "Beijing will suddenly support a popular Arab uprising".⁴⁸ In this sense, the BRICS may provide attractive complements to the West as future partners for the both the new power holders and those status quo regimes who manage to stay in power. Moreover, countries such as Brazil and India may be able to put forward alternative solutions that are seen as less partial than the perceived methods of the West or even Russia and China in the region.

47 Rami G. Khouri, "New rules for an evolving Arab order," *The Daily Star*, May 15, 2013.

48 Bremmer, *Every Nation*, 114

While a closer relationship between the new governments in the region and the individual BRICS countries could be beneficial, the tendency of the BRICS to favor status quo in the region over change seems not to be in sync with popular demands. Clearly, the popular uprisings of 2011 were spurred by a demand for change and a wish for democratic freedoms and citizens' rights. While some extra-regional powers' wish to nurture the status quo and reject outside intervention may be attractive for the regimes still in power as well as for some of the new ones, this does not seem to be in accordance with the wishes of most people of the region. If these status quo forces gain traction, the region could choose a path very different from the one called for by the popular movements in the spring of 2011 and reaffirmed in Egypt in June/July 2013.

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