

Preface

“Everything must change for everything to remain the same”. This is a famous quotation from a famous Italian book, *The Leopard* by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, but it could apply to the North African region all the same.

Over ten years after the “Arab Spring”, the turmoil that swept across the region has taken many forms, bringing about change, although not always in a desirable direction. While Tunisia has embarked on a frail and uncertain transition towards democracy, Libya, just across the border, has plunged into a civil war that has left the country embittered and still unable to mend its open wounds. But the Arab uprisings have also brought about a surprising amount of “more of the same”. A decade on, the problems that plagued the region in 2010 have not gone away. If anything, chronic unemployment, corruption in the public administration, sectarian divisions, and radicalisation can be found in similar amounts across the region.

This report finds its biggest strength in refusing to dwell in the past, instead looking at the future of the region. It asks: what will North Africa be in 2030? When North African citizens in 2030 look back to the decade just passed, what will they see? Which direction could the region as a whole, and specific countries, take, and which challenges will they have to face?

In a sense, the temptation to argue that North Africa in 2030 will be very similar to North Africa in 2021 is strong. In historical terms, ten years are very little time for the region to become radically different from what it is now. And the 2011

Arab uprisings are further evidence that even radical events could bring about precious little movement on many fronts.

However, the challenges facing the region today are increasingly laid bare before our eyes. Hailing from within or outside the region, they are the result of structural trends that will necessarily need to be tackled, and will shape the future trajectory of the whole region. Take the green and climate transition. Ten years from now, global fossil fuel consumption will need to be much lower than it is today. The largest importer of North African oil and gas resources, the European Union, is looking to cut emissions by 55% by 2030 compared with 1990, further accelerating its move away from fossil fuels compared to the past two decades. For energy-poor countries such as Morocco and Tunisia, this may not be a problem, but for “rentier” states such as Libya and Algeria, it calls for careful planning and preparation. In a sense, the global energy transition might fuel regional instability.

This Report also serves as a stark reminder that the shape of North Africa in 2030 will have profound implications for European countries, and for the US as well. In the past few years, instability in the Sahel has frequently spilled over, reaching even core areas of North African countries, as security forces focus on domestic problems and divisions rather than on countering violent actors. This in turn poses a serious security problem for the Europeans. If the “arc of instability” continues to draw nearer to the Mediterranean shores, the EU will need to devote much more attention to North Africa than to other pressing foreign policy matters, including the rising US-China confrontation. Surely, the White House would prefer otherwise.

And the implications for Europe and the US are not only political, but also socio-economic. If North African citizens continue to believe that their best option is to move north, migratory pressures towards the EU will only increase, as they are already doing in the post-Covid period (the number of irregular crossings from North Africa to Europe rose from 40,000 in the year before March 2020 to 110,000 in the past twelve months).

This is why this Report is important. It allows readers to reflect on the future of the region, and requires every stakeholder to reflect on what they want the future of North Africa to be. Because maybe, and just maybe, for things to change in North Africa it is not always necessary “for everything to remain the same”.

Frederick Kempe
President and CEO, Atlantic Council

Giampiero Massolo
President, ISPI