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The UAE, the "Arab Spring" and Different Types of Dissent

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As the second anniversary of Mohamed Bouazizi's tragic self-sacrifice approaches, analyses of the Arab Spring's underlying causes and longer-term implications are starting to proliferate.[1] With respect to the six Arab Gulf countries, there are two dominant viewpoints as to why the ruling elites have thus far remained in place. First, all are monarchies based upon tribal, clan and family allegiances and thus do not currently face a crisis of legitimacy[2] (Bahrain, for sectarian reasons, being a partial exception[3]). Second, the social contract has thus far been capable of providing enough jobs and housing and has been malleable enough to expediently transmit a series of additional quick-fix packages since 2011. (In Oman, the protests focused on its social contract's not being generous enough; Sultan Qaboos's legitimacy was never questioned.[4]) The prognosis for the longer term ranges from the bleak — it is no longer a question of if, but when, the Gulf monarchies fall — to the only slightly less bleak — they will, from now on**,** be characterized by internal instability.[5] As we have previously argued in this journal, the outlook need not be so bleak; much still depends on the respective country's ability to renegotiate such contracts.[6] However, in addition to implementing a wide range of precursor economic and educational reforms, governments will now have to formulate policies and strategies capable of accommodating and dealing with dissent.

Initially there was some speculation over how far the Arab Spring would go and whether it would reach the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and, if so, in what form. It became apparent relatively soon, however, that there was little prospect of widespread popular demand for the kind of systemic political change occurring elsewhere. While, in March 2011, the Emirate of Abu Dhabi ordered the immediate (public-sector) employment of 6,000 national jobseekers,[7] and significant infrastructural development projects in the less affluent northern emirates (valued at USD 1.5 billion) were announced,[8] it appears that these initiatives were simply business

as usual, not a preemptive response to a potential Arab Spring contagion. Most citizens seemed content with the comparatively tolerant and liberal status quo and the socioeconomic reforms then underway.[9] Indeed, the government felt secure enough to resist calls to lower gasoline prices, which are the Middle East's highest after Syria and Tunisia.[10] Had it relented, it would have set back economic diversification plans and added to its fiscal burden, as to some extent had "creating" several thousand government jobs.

UAE authorities did, however, become increasingly concerned about a number of local Islamists who, emboldened by the ascent of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Tunisia and Egypt, started to become more politically active.[11] Initially, the MB movement in the UAE, Al Islah, sought to work with liberal pro-democracy activists, as had the MB in Egypt.[12] Yet, after sending off a petition in March 2011 to the president of the UAE asking for the Federal National Council (FNC) to be given more legislative powers, the liberals seemed to lose momentum — reportedly due, in part, to a lack of any grassroots support.[13] By December 2011, the Arab Spring had taken a more violent turn, seemingly morphing in the public perception into the "Syrian civil war." It was at this juncture that the MB increasingly sought to solicit help from the outside.[14] Few analysts considered the MB capable of threatening the existence of the state, as too few Emiratis subscribe to the doctrine. However, it was thought to have the potential to disrupt social cohesiveness and stability by challenging the progress made in various aspects of societal development. The MB, for example, vehemently opposes the reforms currently underway in the underperforming educational sector.[15] These reforms are contentious; increasing reliance on Western instructors and the dilution of Arabic and Islamic studies allows the MB to play on widespread fears that such changes will threaten the Emirati identity and traditional values.

Following the arrest of a number of MB activists during the spring and summer of 2012, international media attention began to grow. It was alleged that UAE authorities were exaggerating, or even manufacturing, the threat in order to postpone political reform and ward off any more publicly circulated petitions.[16] A perusal of leaked U.S. embassy cables, however, indicates that these concerns are by no means new. Nor did they appear only after the onset of the Arab Spring; they were documented as being genuinely felt, longstanding and frequently voiced.[17] That so little attention had previously been paid to the MB is in part due to the way homegrown Islamist dissent had been handled prior to the Arab Spring. The strategy then was one of "quiet marginalization" and support for reintegrating MB members back into mainstream society. Members of the ruling families often got personally involved in this process.[18]

For even the casual Arab Gulf observer, recent media coverage of the "UAE-5" and subsequently the "UAE-7," "citizenship issues" and an instance of "deportation" is intriguing. The UAE is accused of arresting pro-democracy activists and human-rights lawyers, fostering a climate of "fear and loathing," and descending into a state of "oppression."[19] Emirati commentators, whether former members of Al Islah or self-declared pro-democracy advocates, present counterarguments. They claim that the UAE is dealing with a genuine security threat, acting within its sovereign laws, and not treating "pro-democracy" dissent in the same way it treats

"pan-theocratic" dissent.[20] This has now been exacerbated by senior figures within the Egyptian MB seeking to influence the course of events and even cause a diplomatic spat between Egypt and the UAE.[21] Nevertheless, it is the criticism in the Western press that has seemingly surprised many observers the most.

This article considers how the Arab Spring has affected the stability and reputation of the Middle East's de facto financial, logistics and transportation hub. As a matter of record, no street demonstrations have thus far occurred; the Arab Spring has taken no casualties in the UAE.

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POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The existing UAE political system is often referred to by Emiratis as "majlis-style" democracy.[22] Hereditary tribal sheikhs hold daily open courts, by way of which citizens are able to gain direct access to their leaders to raise concerns, make requests and discuss developments.[23] This is possible because there are currently just under one million citizens, half below the age of 20, and seven ruling families.[24] This system was in place before British colonial rule, remained in place and was proactively supported during that period. It has a unique achievement to its credit: the only state in the Middle East made up of previously separate emirates united peacefully, by way of negotiation. As was argued in the aftermath of the first Gulf War, when oil prices were at their nadir, "It would be a mistake to underestimate their staying power or to assume that the only support for their rule is due to the protection [given by] the USA."[25]

It has been argued that many in the UAE consider Western-style democracy to be divisive and destabilizing: it is considered to result in conflict and be synonymous with political instability.[26] It is claimed that in Kuwait the exercise of "interpellation is abused to the extent that it has lost credibility as an effective supervisory instrument"[27] and is all too often simply deployed to "score personal goals at the expense of national priorities."[28] Indeed, it has recently been argued that Kuwait remains the regional "outlier" in terms of moving towards diversifying its economy as its "participatory political system has delayed successive large-scale projects and plans for the past two decades."[29] Moreover, within the Arab Gulf generally, it is noted that there are many "social liberals" who are "political conservatives."[30] For example, politically liberal Kuwait has a heavily protectionist economic policy, while the politically conservative and monarchial UAE has opted for an open laissez-faire economic approach.

Since the foundation of the UAE as a nation-state in 1971, there has also been a significant degree of modernization and liberalization, not just in infrastructure and healthcare, but also in Emirati society itself. For several decades, male and female citizens have had equal access to free schooling, including higher education. It has taken considerable political will and determination to see this through, as the will for modernization often seems to be

stronger among the ruling elites than the populace. At the tertiary level, the instructional language is English. Both genders are, on academic merit, able to take generous scholarships to study in the UK or the United States. Today, the vast majority of Emirati students, both within the UAE and on scholarships abroad, are women. Upon graduation, almost all sections of the labor market are open to both genders, and on the books, gender-based pay discrimination is illegal.[31] Yet, it is the substantial infrastructural developments, especially in tourism and transport, and overseas investments, such as the acquisition of P&O and Manchester City FC, that have, on the one hand, integrated the UAE more deeply into the global economy and, on the other, raised its international profile and thus scrutiny of its actions.

While citizens of the UAE can by no means express themselves in public forums as freely as those of the UK or the United States, this is not new, nor is it becoming discernibly more pronounced. The UAE is also something of a hub for international media; CNN and Sky News both broadcast their MENA-based Arabic satellite channels from there. British broadsheets such as *The Guardian* are available unabridged, as is *The Economist,* both of which often carry detailed and revealing critiques of the UAE. *The Times* and *The Financial Times* are also printed there daily. Domestic media outlets, on the other hand, do operate within certain parameters and exert an often unhealthy level of self-censorship. And, as in many monarchies around the world, they never directly criticise members of the ruling families.

Turning briefly to the social contract itself, it has been argued that it was the "vital" cushion for the transformational socioeconomic changes that "compressed decades of modernizing evolutionary change elsewhere into a single generational achievement."[32] If this is so, it is likely to be capable of doing the same for the current, equally systemic, transformation from an oil-dependent to a knowledge-based economy. The transition towards such a radically different economic structure carries profound implications for Emirati society as a whole in terms of culture and customs, such as the teaching of liberal-arts subjects in coeducational classrooms by professors of all ethnicities, from New York University to the Sorbonne. Concomitant changes to the political system, if too rapid, could well render society less stable. To rely on the social contract during the time it will take to see such a transition through may not be tenable for the Arab Gulf countries whose oil reserves are fast dwindling. For the UAE, however, even at the current extraction rate of 2.9 million barrels per day, its current reserve-to-production ratio is estimated at 80 years.[33]

DISSENT

Looking at the international coverage, it is surprising how little attention is given to the fact that there are actually two rather distinct types of "political" dissent. Pro-democratic activists are advocating a faster pace towards universal suffrage in elections for the FNC and for this advisory body to have more legislative powers. Pan-theocratic activists, like the international Muslim Brotherhood, would ultimately like to do away with nation-states and implement a pan-Islamic legal system based on one of the stricter interpretations of sharia law. The latter represent, if not all, the vast majority of those currently detained, and many commentators can see why they would want to be conflated with the former in the mind of the Western me-

dia — and also why the former might take offense. In a recent article that provoked much comment,[34] a leading MB figure portrays the decision of the UAE government to clamp down on Al Islah as typical of an "unaccountable" Arab Gulf country. Framed in the Zeitgeist of the Arab Spring, the article condemns these actions as nothing other than an attack on freedom of expression, a narrative subsequently reiterated in follow-up articles.[35]

While freedom of expression should naturally be permitted, irrespective of political flavor, it is difficult to ignore the fact that such articles (1) omit any mention of the connection between Al Islah and the MB, and (2) do not seem to fully appreciate the way in which the MB, at least from the perspective of many liberals in the Middle East, has hijacked the popular uprisings, which removed corrupt autocrats in many parts of the Arab World at great cost to human life. The MB has begun to introduce illiberal measures in places where they are in a position of power; where they are not, they often create a climate of fear and uncertainty.[36] We consider it either a deliberate oversight or a lack of critical perspective to conflate the two groups.

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PETITIONING FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

On March 8, 2011, the UAE government expanded the size of the electorate for "selecting" candidates for the FNC from 6,000 to 129,000. This may seem a rather small number despite the 21.5-fold increase; the total national population is just below one million, almost half under 18. Just under 30 percent of the adult national population were eligible to vote — admittedly, the selection process seemed quite strange — and the powers of the FNC are certainly quite limited. The announcement probably spurred activists to submit and publicize a petition soon afterward. Ibtissam Ketbi, the first of the 133 signatories on the list, told *The Wall Street Journal* that the petition simply asked that the FNC be reformed and "given more authority. It should have legislative powers as well as powers of accountability." She added that "elections should be a right of every citizen." It was also reported that a number of former FNC members signed the petition.[37]

Of the 133 signatories, one individual was arrested shortly after the petition was published, charged with "publicly insulting the federation's rulers," though it is important to note that this was not based on the petition, but on his writings elsewhere.[38] He and several other activists became known internationally as the "UAE-5." They had been conducting a more direct, online campaign via uaehewar.net, a now defunct website forum on which a large number of individuals openly discussed contemporary affairs in the UAE. Currently they are in the process of appealing their convictions based on these posts (all received a presidential pardon immediately).[39] One of the five, Nasser bin Ghaith, wrote in a blog post prior to his arrest, "They have announced 'benefits and handouts', assuming their citizens are not like other Arabs or other human beings, who

see freedom as a need no less significant than other physical needs."[40] This is rather more direct, going beyond the courteous and meticulously worded petition.[41]

One Emirati academic seen as sympathetic to those still seeking political reform sought, in a recent opinion piece, to provide a balanced view of dissent in the UAE. He points out that almost all of those who signed the petition were neither arrested nor penalized in any way and, along with other liberally-minded individuals, have continued to "advocate change in terms of political reform."[42] Nevertheless, after having submitted the petition, many appear to have become disillusioned, as they realized that there simply was not much grassroots demand or even support for a more representative political structure. One of the most articulate and prominent commentators (who did not sign the petition) is Sultan Al Qassemi, who writes "despairingly" that more often than not, whenever the topic is broached, it is, "either met with apathy or negative reactions."[43]

AL ISLAH AND REFORM

The individuals who make up the UAE-7 (some of the detainees currently being held) had their citizenship revoked in early December 2011**;** just days after the UAE-5 were released. The seven are all self-declared Islamists and acknowledge active membership in Al Islah.[44] They gained their appellation in part from the international media coverage surrounding the confiscation of their passports by the authorities — a decision that at face value seems draconian. This incident, coupled with the decision of one of the UAE-5 to go into exile, precedes the subsequent detention of more MB members and the involvement of the Egyptian Brotherhood in part via the UK-based and MB-funded satellite channel "Al Hiwar." Suffice it to say that, with respect to the detainees, there are "allegations" and "counter-allegations."[45] According to an Emirati commentator, himself a former Al Islah member,

> No one is in a position to comment authoritatively on the results of the investigations, although media reports have suggested that the investigations may have uncovered evidence that the detainees had created a clandestine military organization, and that money was sent to support Al Islah activities from overseas.[46]

With respect to the one individual who has left the country and received considerable press attention and sympathy, he was one of the UAE-5, convicted of "insulting the rulers of the UAE." He was rearrested shortly after being released following the presidential pardon. His activism centered on the issue of stateless people "Bidoun," many of whom were born in the UAE but are not citizens.[47] While reports state that he was forced into exile, he actually elected to leave the UAE for Thailand — another country that does not tolerate direct criticism of the monarch — in preference to awaiting trial in detention. He traveled on a new passport issued by the African state of the Comoros Islands; he had never had UAE citizenship and thus no passport.[48] While this was mishandled, from both a humanitarian and a public-relations standpoint, it needs to be seen in perspective: the man did not have citizenship in the first place. The UAE-7, by contrast, were naturalized citizens (they had previous citizenship or did not hold documents from their countries of origin). As part of the naturalization process, individuals pledge specifically not to do certain things and will forfeit citizenship

rights if they do; this is similar to laws in many EU countries.[49] The seven individuals are currently appealing the decision in the UAE courts; however, the attorney general has been reported as saying that the Ministry of Interior had the right to do so on "grounds of national security."[50]

The case of Mohammed Al Roken, one of the detainees and a UAE national, has also received considerable attention. He has become a cause célèbre, invariably portrayed as a "human-rights lawyer," despite being prominently mentioned in United States embassy cables as "an avowed Islamist."[51] The cables also mention his removal, at full pay, from a professorship at a federal university as part of a "sweep of potential extremists from positions of influence in the aftermath of 9/11."[52] In 2006, he was recorded as saying, with reference to the inaugural FNC elections, "The Muslim Brotherhood could win seats if direct elections were held."[53]

While the local chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood (Al Islah) is largely made up of Emirati citizens, the MB itself is a pan-Islamic organization. Following what was considered the "success" of the Iranian Revolution, it has been argued that the MB transformed its political theory closer to a Sunni version of Khomeini's theory of an Islamic State.[54] In terms of interpretations of Islamic law, they are noted to be particularly conservative.[55] Today, the MB is considered to be a highly centralized political machine, with clear hierarchies but only limited practical policy proposals, which, taken together, appear to be skeptical of economic modernization and — naturally — secularization in particular. Its 2007 "Platform of the Party of Muslim Brothers," for example, called for the formation of a Council of Clerics (*majlis ulama*) that would be tasked with ensuring the compatibility of all decisions of legislative and executive branches with the sharia.[56] According to its own literature and manifesto, the MB opposes, in theory at least, the very concept of the nation-state. It instead advocates the idea of one pan-Islamic community, the creation of a theocratic metastate. For instance, in April 2011, Khairat Al-Shater, the deputy guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, stated,

> We have learned [to start with] building the Muslim individual, the Muslim family, the Muslim society, the Islamic government, the global Islamic State and reaching the status of Ustathiya with that State.[57]

Al Islah members in the UAE argue that, while they share a similar ideology with the MB in Egypt, they are not directly linked to it[58] (authorities have not actually banned the organization outright). However, given the highly centralized, autocratic structure of the MB, this claim is questioned by many. For instance, when in 2003 a declaration by a senior MB member in the UAE that Al Islah no longer pledged allegiance to the General Guide in Cairo, according to one commentator,[59] this only confirmed Emirati suspicions of the strength of the relationship.

The MB were in fact present within the Emirates prior to the formation of the UAE. Many of the teachers that the rulers of the various Emirates recruited for their nascent schooling systems in the 1960s were Egyptian MB members fleeing from Nasser. Following independence, the MB, along with UAE national students who had returned to the country after completing tertiary education in Egypt, established "Jam iyyat Al-Islah" (Society of Reform) in the early 1970s. Since its inception, activists have made efforts to attract academ-

ics, teachers and students. By the 1980s, the MB was very influential in the federal education system and, through the Ministry of Education, carried significant weight in decisions on curriculum content and who would be hired to teach. As will now be discussed, the MB in the UAE is particularly opposed to the sorts of reform the UAE authorities have been trying to implement in the educational sector.

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EDUCATION BEGETS DISSENT

The 2003 UN Arab Human Development report, compiled by Arab scholars and widely praised by economists internationally, stated that the Middle East needed to open up and "immerse itself in the knowledge stream... and constructively engage with the new world." To do so, it recommended that regional governments encourage "cognitive learning, critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity."[60] In essence, these are the very measures that liberals within the Gulf saw as being the necessary precursors of economic diversification.

The UAE, more than some, seemed to take this advice to heart. It has embarked on a range of systemic reforms, major investments in research and science-based innovation, and the construction of a new cultural and educational district that will feature branches of the Louvre and Guggenheim museums and an even larger campus for NYU, as well as the now completed Masdar Institute of Science and Technology, built in partnership with MIT. Nevertheless, the country's capacity to take advantage of the knowledge economy depends on how quickly it can adjust its capacity to generate and share knowledge. In addition, an even more radical overhaul of government schools and institutions of higher education is taking place — more radical because it affects all citizens with children of school age. According to *UAE Vision 2021,* it wants the coming generation of nationals to have an "appetite for risk-taking" that will be "fuelled by a vigorous entrepreneurial spirit."[61] Yet, the extent to which true academic freedom — *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit* — to choose what to teach and what to learn[62] will be permitted by the region's ruling elites and "tolerated" by the MB and conservative elements of society remains open to question. There is something of an irony here: the most prestigious Western universities demand a degree of academic freedom that requires tolerating almost any (nonviolent) dissenting opinion.

While we accept that, in the regional context, the concept "knowledge-based economy" is overused, it is nevertheless central to the policies of many Gulf countries. For the UAE, the *Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030* (2008) and the *UAE Vision 2021* (2010) are probably the most ambitious structural and transformative plans since the foundation of the UAE in 1971, comparable to the fundamental societal transformations that were part of forming a nation-state.

Shortly after *Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030* was launched in 2008, around 80 Emirati teachers were relieved from active teaching roles, but not sacked. Most,

if not all, were affiliated with Al Islah or a reportedly even more radical organisation set up in 2004, the harmless-sounding Emirates People's Rights Organization.[63] Its founder was a trained accountant and "self-proclaimed" political activist and "human-rights advocate." According to U.S. diplomats who saw the organization's website before it was closed down by UAE authorities, it had "Islamist views and was vociferous in its criticism of the UAE Government." It was especially opposed to the idea of "allowing Western universities (particularly American ones) to establish local campuses, a trend that it claimed corrupted Emirati youth and diluted Emirati culture" and "regularly referred to non-Muslims as 'non-believers.'" This, according to the diplomat's accompanying commentary, "runs against the grain of the UAE Government's desire for a tolerant image."[64]

Recalling that dissent essentially means expressing opinions that are at variance with those commonly held — whether academic, commercial, intellectual or political — it becomes clear why such traits are essential for "innovative" human-resource capital. Horibe's premise is that business organizations wishing to innovate must learn to accept and listen to dissenters. Dissenters are often the first to notice when a given business practice or product is becoming outdated — "spotting new trends"[65] and "looking beyond the horizons."[66] In addition, organizations are likely to come up with more original ideas if they consider those of dissenters.[67] Acquiring technical knowhow from overseas is one thing, but in order for it not to quickly become obsolete, indigenous human capital must not only learn how to use it (the "knowledge trap"), but also how to adapt it. It is contended that "dissent stimulates creativity and divergent thought"[68] and, so the theory goes, will result in such adaptations. In order to move away from the incumbent oil-based distributive economic structure, UAE authorities will need to foster such an environment. Only when the economy is less "rent-dependent" and enough productive job opportunities are created can the social contract be realistically reformulated.

THE (EMIRATI) ARAB STREET

The FNC elections on September 24, 2011, passed without incident. A total of 468 candidates 85 of them women, filed to run for the 20 seats up for election. Although only one was elected, it is significant from a gender-equality, human-rights perspective that the government appointed another six.[69] Anwar Gargash, the minister responsible for the FNC, made several noteworthy points. First, too many voters were simply casting ballots for family members, as opposed to considering each candidate's policy priorities. Second, turnout across the UAE was a disappointingly low 28 percent.[70] According to some academic research, Kuwait's parliament is considered to have become more socially conservative, more ideologically fundamentalist, and more sectarian and tribal than it was prior to 1990.[71] UAE leaders have always argued that any elections, even those for a legislature or other representative body, would inevitably aggravate long-dormant schisms among tribes and clans, potentially causing Islamist factions to become more radical.[72]

In a 2012 Pen Schoen Berland survey of young adults 18–24 in the Middle East, a striking observation was that, despite the regime changes in Egypt and Tunisia, and Lebanon and Kuwait's incumbent parliamentary systems, the country that the vast majority of those surveyed wanted

their own country to emulate was the UAE (ahead of both France and the United States).[73] Moreover, they considered the UAE to be the country where they would most like to live (40 percent). Young adults feel most strongly that they would like their country to be like the UAE (50 percent), and 48 percent of young Libyans agree. When asked which country was a model of growth and development, the sample as a whole again put the UAE first (27 percent). Interestingly, if young Emirati adults had to choose a country that the UAE should emulate, 30 percent said France, 30 percent said the United States and only 8 percent said neighboring Saudi Arabia. Emirati young adults were the second-least likely (after those in Egypt) to think that the Arab Spring would continue this year. The positive sentiment towards living and working in the UAE was also observed among expatriates in the Middle East in a YouGov (2010) survey: the top two "desirable cities to live and work in" were Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The same survey in 2012 found similar, if not better, sentiment toward the UAE. Abu Dhabi and Dubai were again ranked first and second, respectively, while Sharjah had moved from third to sixth place.[74]

With regard to sentiment towards the detainees, one of the few balanced and insightful commentaries currently available was once again penned by Sultan Al Qassemi. He reports that there is more widespread consensus regarding this than on any other contemporary national issue. Gauging the sentiments of a cross-section of society, both liberals and conservatives were overwhelmingly firm in their stand against the detained activists. Many could not understand why they would want to "destabilize one of the few secure and tolerant countries in the region."[75] While the more conservative segments of Emirati society might even agree with the religious viewpoints of the MB — though not with their politics — we should not forget that in a close-knit, tribal society it remains unacceptable to seek external support, whether of the MB headquarters in Cairo or the British media. Subsequently, even these segments might sympathize with the crackdown on such grounds alone. As was argued to be the case in Libya when liberals received more votes than the Islamists, most Emiratis consider themselves sufficiently devout not to need political Islamists to offer them guidance on how to live and work.

From the leaked U.S. embassy cables (which only go up to early 2010, prior to the Arab Spring), it seems that UAE government officials considered their country's sociopolitical structure to be "both Islamic and modern," and the MB movement in the UAE to be the "standard bearers for an essentially foreign ideology." The accompanying diplomatic commentary opined that, while "elsewhere in the region the issues of modernizing versus traditionalist Islamism have been resolved with considerable violence," in the UAE it is being resolved by their "quiet marginalization."[76]

CONCLUSION

In the immediate future, the UAE will need to clearly articulate and distinguish between "pro-democratic" and "pan-theocratic" dissent in order for its actions to be more clearly interpretable, for both its citizens and outside observers. The recent opinion pieces on the subject by prominent Emirati intellectuals seem to be an initial attempt to do so. In reputational terms at least, much will hinge on the way in which the UAE handles the forthcoming trials of those among the detainees who end up be-

ing formally charged. It remains to be seen how the UAE legal system will cope with a highly politicized trial under international scrutiny, not least because, domestically speaking, the atmosphere in which these trial will take place is not expected to be ideal: the rhetoric on both sides is already over amplified.[77]

It seems likely that, in the longer term, the UAE will increasingly have to accept and accommodate dissent. In large part, this will manifest itself as a direct result of the systemic socioeconomic changes that UAE authorities have elected to implement. These are changes and reforms that most economists and social scientists, be they from the somewhat pejorative and deterministic "rentier-state" school or elsewhere, consider essential. Many reform challenges, in addition to education, lay ahead: moving towards greater financial accountability; implementing more transparent strategies for wealth preservation for future generations; and assisting the less affluent northern Emirates with economic diversification suited to their own comparative advantages. Of critical import will be the transformation of the labor market; in most instances, the Arab Spring seems to have rendered such reform an even more distant prospect. In political-economy terms, the MB (based on its manifesto and on the policy actions/announcements thus far made in Egypt and Tunisia) does not seem to offer a viable alternative path to economic diversification. Its reactionary nature is not thought likely to either encourage FDI or retain domestic capital locally. In societal terms it would endanger progress made with regard to the empowerment of women, religious tolerance and progress made towards the nascent knowledge economy.

While potentially disruptive, the aforementioned challenges and reforms by no means represent the first that Emirati society have faced and traversed in recent history with the incumbent political structure: the "majlis-style" consultative system in place since before the commercial extraction of oil began in the 1960s. It is a structure that has not only facilitated and survived the major changes of the past four decades, it appears to be as strong and popular now as it was prior to December 2010.

[1] Yusri Hazran, "The Arab Revolutions: A Preliminary Reading," *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 3 (2012): 116-123; Nicholas Kitchen, *After the Arab Spring: Power Shift in the Middle East?: The Contradictions of Hegemony: The United States and the Arab Spring* (London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012); Mohammed Ayoob, "The Arab Spring: Its Geostrategic Significance," *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 3 (2012): 84-97; Chas W. Freeman, "The Arab Reawakening: Strategic Implications," *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 2 (2011): 29-36; and Michael Herb, *The Arab Spring and Political Science* (The Project on Middle East Political Science, 2012).

[2] Herb, *Arab Spring and Political Science*.

[3] Justin Gengler, "Ethnic Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf" (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2011).

[4] James Worrall, 'Oman: The "Forgotten' Corner of the Arab Spring," *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 3 (2012): 98-115.

[5] Christopher Davidson, *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of the Gulf Monarchies* (Hurst & Co. Ltd., 2012); and Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "The UAE: Holding Back the Tide," Open Democracy, August 5, 2012.

[6] Ingo Forstenlechner and Emilie Jane Rutledge, "Unemployment in the Gulf: Time to Update the 'Social Contract,'" *Middle East Policy* 17, no. 2 (2010): 38-51; and Ingo Forstenlechner and Emilie Jane Rutledge, "The GCC's 'Demographic Imbalance': Perceptions, Realities and Policy Options," *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 4 (2011): 25-43.
[7] "Abu Dhabi's Job Move 'Historic': Writer," *Gulf News*, June 18, 2011.
[8] "Dh5.7bn Allocated for New Water and Electricity Projects in Northern Emirates," Emirates 24/7, March 2, 2011; and *UAE Vision 2021*, (Federal Government of the United Arab Emirates, 2011).
[9] Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi, "Setting the Record Straight on Al-Islah in the UAE," Al-Monitor, October 15, 2012; Sultan Al Qassemi, "Will Egypt's New President Rebuild Ties with the UAE?," *Gulf News*, June 27, 2012; and *Arab Youth Survey 2012: After the Spring* (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, May 2, 2012), arabyouthsurvey.com.
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