



Middle East Studies

at the Marine Corps University

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Transition in the Arab World and Saudi Arabia's Role

by Adam C. Seitz

As the Arab Spring turns to winter a number of regimes engulfed by the wave of popular uprising rolling through the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are moving towards new phases of transition. It is with this in mind that Middle East Studies at Marine Corps University (MES at MCU) has dedicated its 2011-2012 Lecture Series to exploring the evolving situation and emerging realities in the Arab world.

The second lecture in the Series presented on 16 November 2011 by Dr. David Ottaway, Senior Scholar at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, was entitled "Revolution and Counter Revolution in the Arab World." Drawing on his extensive knowledge of and experience in the MENA region as a scholar and reporter, Dr. Ottaway focused on three points in examining the current uprisings: (1) the appropriateness of using the term "revolution" when characterizing the current uprisings; (2) the use of historical examples of revolutions and uprisings in the MENA region, as opposed to the color revolutions of Eastern Europe and some successor states of the Soviet Union, when considering the transformations taking place; and (3) the central counter-revolutionary role Saudi Arabia currently plays.

Are Arab Uprisings Revolutions?

Dr. Ottaway started off by questioning the use of the term "revolution" to describe the events currently taking place in the Arab world, arguing that labeling the current uprisings as "revolutions" has "obscured analysis of what is taking place." He went on to describe a revolution as not being a single event – i.e. the overthrow of an unpopular leader – but rather a process that involves "major shifts in the economic, political and social sectors." Thus, using the term "revolution" to describe the current uprisings in the Arab world is rather premature and "conflates this single event."

Moreover, this misnomer, he added, has "raised enormous expectations way beyond what is possible in terms of outcome," which is already leading to "frustration, disappointment and disillusionment" among the Arab populations with activists who already are asking "what happened to our revolution?"

MES Notes

MES 2011-12 Lecture Series

MES at MCU is hosting a Lecture Series throughout the 2010-2011 Academic Year entitled "Orienting our Sights on the Future: The Opportunities and Challenges of the Arab Revolts".

The next lecture in the series will take place on 12 January 2012 and will focus on Turkey.

Further information and resources are available at: <http://www.mcu.usmc.mil>, under the Middle East Studies tab or via Facebook at: middleeaststudies.mcu.

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MES at MCU Disclaimer

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the individual author and do not necessarily represent the views of either the Marine Corps University or any other governmental agency. Any references to this newsletter should include the foregoing statement.

TRANSITION IN THE ARAB WORLD... (CONTINUED ON PG 2)

Historical Examples

Dr. Ottaway explained that Arab pro-democracy activists continue to look to the color revolutions of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union for inspiration and comparison. These activists often ignore their own history of recent revolutions because revolutions within the MENA region have more often been “led by the military and ended with dictatorships led by the military or a single party.” However, Dr. Ottaway cautioned that comparing the Arab uprisings today to those in Eastern Europe during the fall of the Soviet Union “misses the fact that conditions were much different” and proposed the need to look for “comparison and precedence in contemporary Arab history” in discussing possible outcomes for the current transitions taking place within the region. He provided Egypt in 1952, Iraq in 1962 and Syria in 1968, as more relevant examples to refer to when analyzing the current transformations underway in the MENA region.

In looking to the transition taking place in Egypt, he asked, “Will there be a new civilian elite empowered by the uprisings? Or is Egypt’s Supreme Council of the Armed Forces taking on the role of leading what is seen as a counter-revolution?” When considering possible scenarios in Egypt and other transitioning governments in the region, Dr. Ottaway pointed to what he called the “Sudan governance model” of a series of civilian-led uprisings leading to short periods of civilian-controlled governments followed by military rule.

Saudi Arabia as Counter-Revolutionary

In the latter portion of his presentation, Dr. Ottaway discussed his views on Saudi Arabia’s counter-revolutionary role in the current uprisings, stating that Saudi Arabia is at the “center of the counter-revolution, preventing democracy from advancing in the Middle East.” Domestically, the Saudi government has responded to the current uprisings using a variety of methods – such as the religious establishment, state-run media, economic incentives, as well as promises of social reforms – to dissuade would-be demonstrators.

Within the region, Dr. Ottaway cited Saudi Arabia’s involvement in Bahrain as a prime example of Saudi Arabia’s extending its counter-revolutionary policy beyond its own borders. The shift in the regional sectarian balance as a result of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq was too much for the Saudis, who have made it clear that they will not allow a Shiite-dominated government in Bahrain, he added. Thus, Bahrain has essentially become Saudi Arabia’s “red line,” and Riyadh will do what it must to protect the current monarchy and maintain the status quo in the island nation, Dr. Ottaway stated. To this end the Saudi government has also worked to bolster the rest Arab monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Not only has Saudi policy bolstered the Arab monarchies to maintain the status quo of the Gulf regimes, it also has allowed Saudi Arabia to take the opportunities presented by the Arab Spring to bring about changes in regional republics that will favor the Saudi kingdom in the long run, even if the changes bring about democratic systems. In his presentation, Dr. Ottaway went case by case in examining Saudi policy vis-à-vis the Arab republics. In Yemen, he explained, that the Saudi government worked to remove President Saleh from power by providing money to various tribes. Its motives were not to inspire democratic change in the country, but rather to advance its own security interests by maneuvering to bring about a post-Saleh government in Yemen that was friendly to Riyadh and the rest of GCC. Similarly, in Egypt, Dr. Ottaway pointed out that, despite being unhappy with the U.S. response to the uprising in Egypt, Riyadh has pledged over four billion dollars to Egypt’s transitional government in an attempt to protect its interests in Cairo. Finally looking to Syria, Dr. Ottaway argued that Riyadh has shifted its policy to one of seeking regime change as the prospect of a Sunni-led government, and by extension the potential to reduce Iranian influence, has presented itself.

Dr. Ottaway’s presentation provided a theoretical framework for examining the Arab uprisings and discussed the counter-revolutionary role of Saudi Arabia. As this environment continues to evolve, such PME opportunities provide the Marine Corps with the ability to discuss and prepare for the emerging realities in the MENA region. The remaining lectures in this series run through April 2012 with focus on Syria, Turkey, Bahrain, Egypt, and Yemen.

Pakistani Extremist Group In Focus After Unprecedented Attack On Afghan Shia

by Abubakar Siddique, RFE/RL

As Afghanistan recovers from a deadly and unprecedented attack on a Shiite shrine in Kabul, the finger of blame is pointing directly at a Sunni extremist group with a long history of carrying out such attacks in neighboring Pakistan.

MES Notes (cont.)

15 October 2011

Dr. Tarzi presented a talk entitled "Is the Green Movement Dead: Political Dissent Iran," at Foreign Policy Research Institute, Philadelphia, PA.

18 October 2011

Dr. Tarzi presented a lecture entitled "The Historical Relationship Between State Formation and Judicial System Reform in Afghanistan" to the Air Force JAG's Keystone Leadership Summit, New Orleans, LA.

17 November 2011

Dr. Tarzi presented a paper entitled "The Lasting Legacy of the Great Game: 'Pashtunistan' through an Afghan Lens," at a conference entitled "Great Games? Afghan History through Afghan Eyes," hosted by UCLA Program on Central Asia, Los Angeles, CA.

At least 55 people were killed and more than 160 wounded in the December 6 suicide attack, which occurred as Shiite worshippers were assembled outside the shrine to commemorate Ashura, a Shiite religious holiday. A separate attack near an Ashura procession in the northern city of Mazar-e Sharif killed at least four people.

Shortly after the midday attack in Kabul, a man claiming to be a spokesman for Lashkar-e Jhangvi al-Alami contacted Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (REF/RL) Radio Mashaal to claim responsibility on behalf of the Pakistan-based militant group.

It was impossible to independently verify the claim made by the man, who identified himself as Qari Abubakar Mansoor.

The man first contacted a Radio Mashaal correspondent in Pakistan who covers the western Kurram tribal district, where the group is believed to be headquartered. A man going by the name of Qari Abubakar had previously contacted Radio Mashaal to provide information regarding the Lashkar-e Jhangvi al-Alami. Following RFE/RL's report tying the group to the attack in Afghanistan, various media reported receiving similar claims from the same spokesman.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who cut short a European trip and returned to the Afghan capital to deal with the crisis, appeared to accept that the attack was carried out by Lashkar-e Jhangvi al-Alami. While visiting survivors of the attack in the hospital, he was quoted as telling reporters that "we are investigating this issue and we are going to talk to the Pakistani government about it."

Ties to Al-Qaeda, Taliban

Farzana Sheikh, a Pakistan specialist at the Chatham House think tank in London, says the group evolved from the Anjuman-e Sipah Shaba Pakistan, an extremist political party intent on transforming Pakistan into a Sunni state. One of its splinter groups, Lashkar-e Jhangvi (LeJ) was considered the most deadly sectarian militia in the South Asian state in the 1990s.

Lashkar-e Jhangvi al-Alami is now considered a splinter group of the LeJ, which was banned in Pakistan in 2002 because of its role in the killing of thousands of Shia.

PAKISTANI EXTREMIST GROUP... (CONTINUED ON PG 4)

HRH Prince Turki Al-Faisal Visits MCU

On 8 October 2011 the Marine Corps University and Marine Corps University Foundation hosted His Royal Highness Prince Turki Al-Faisal of Saudi Arabia as part of The General Graves B. Erskine Distinguished Lecture Series. In his address to MCU HRH Prince Turki Al-Faisal discussed "The Underlying Causes and Impact of the Arab Spring on Security in the Gulf."

"Its roots really lie in southern Punjab [Province], in the district of Jhang, from where they have clearly spread to other parts of Pakistan," Sheikh says, "but particularly the [southwestern province of] Balochistan, where they have been responsible, and indeed claimed responsibility, for a series of murderous attacks against Shia Hazaras."

Sheikh says that the group once enjoyed close links to Pakistani intelligence agencies. This, she notes, enabled LeJ to maintain bases in Taliban-controlled Afghan regions because of Islamabad's relationship with the Taliban regime. However, the LeJ's Shia-killing campaign made it a prime security threat for Pakistan, according to observers.

The demise of the Taliban regime forced LeJ back to Pakistan. But observers say its uneasy relations with the government led it to become a surrogate for Al-Qaeda in Pakistan's tribal areas. The group is also believed to have influenced the Pakistani Taliban, which has former LeJ members among its key leaders.

The LeJ and its off-shoot Lashkar-e Jhangvi al-Alami have been involved in fierce attacks in Pakistan. It was held responsible for the 2008 bombing of the Marriot Hotel in Islamabad, which killed more than 50 and injured hundreds. Its March 2009 attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team -- in which six police escorts and one civilian were killed -- shocked the cricketing world and has prevented Pakistan from hosting international cricketing events to this day. The group has taken responsibility for killing some 600 ethnic Hazaras in Balochistan since 1999.

Sheikh says the LeJ might now be attempting to precipitate a much wider conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Relations between the two neighbors have been tense since the September assassination of former Afghan President Buhannuddin Rabbani. Islamabad recently boycotted an important international conference on Afghanistan's future in Germany and suspended supplies to NATO forces though its territory after accusing the alliance of killing 24 of its troops in a border attack.

"If it is shown that this group has been responsible for this attack, it will not only further inflame relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan but, of course, it also for many spells the possibility of widening the conflict in Afghanistan, which until now has been political and ethnic," Sheikh says.

One Objective: Sectarian War

Pakistani journalist Azmat Abbas has been tracking LeJ's evolution for the past two decades. He says LeJ today is a transnational organization with mostly Pakistani membership. Abbas claims the group provided Al-Qaeda with some of its first suicide bombers to foment a sectarian war in Iraq after the U.S.-led invasion of the country in 2003. LeJ was also instrumental in propping up Jundallah -- a Sunni extremist group responsible for several large-scale attacks inside Iran.

Abbas says that despite its history of cooperation with the Taliban, the two groups have distinct objectives. "Lashkar-e Jhangvi's declared agenda is to target the Shia. They have never said that they want to establish an Islamic state [in Afghanistan] or want to drive U.S. forces from it. Their only agenda is to target the Shia. And their choice targets are the places where the Shia live."

The Afghan Taliban has rejected government claims that it orchestrated the December 6 attacks. A statement attributed to their spokesman called the attacks "savage acts" whose aim was to divide the Afghan people.

Chatham House's Sheikh says that bombings showcase the "Pakistan-ization" of the Afghan conflict, as sectarian conflicts have been rare in Afghanistan. "If the current trends are to go by, it is an extremely disturbing development," she adds.

This piece was originally published on 7 December 2011 by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Abubakar Siddique is a senior correspondent for RFE/RL covering Afghanistan and Pakistan. RFE/RL Radio Mashaal correspondent Abdul Hai Kakar contributed to this report. Reprinted with permission of RFE/RL.