

Arab Spring: What's Next?

It's been nine months since revolutions began rocking the Middle East. A look at where things stand today.

BY PATRICIA SMITH

In Libya, after months of bitter fighting, rebels finally succeeded in ousting longtime ruler Muammar al-Qaddafi in August.

In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad has used both the army and the navy to attack demonstrators in an effort to crush a growing protest movement.

In Egypt, a largely peaceful revolution toppled the government of authoritarian President Hosni Mubarak in February, but already some Egyptians are frustrated by the lack of change and are taking to the streets once more.

And in Yemen, where a branch of Al Qaeda poses a significant threat to the U.S. and its allies, lawlessness is increasing as protests continue and tribal militias battle government forces.

It all began last December, when a 26-year-old fruit vendor in Tunisia set himself on fire in protest after being mistreated by police. News of the incident spread quickly via social media and spurred protests across the region. Now, nine months after the start of

what's become known as the Arab Spring, the Middle East remains in a state of upheaval (*see map*).

In Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya—the countries where longtime autocratic rulers were overthrown—it's still unclear what kind of governments will take their place. Other authoritarian regimes, like Syria, are digging in their heels or unleashing deadly crackdowns on protesters.

But one thing is clear: The Arab people are no longer resigned to being governed against their will.

"Arab politics has been fundamentally altered in a way that's irreversible," says Robert Danin of the Council on Foreign Relations. "The Arab people now have a voice in their own politics."

A few governments—Morocco for example—are allowing some democratic reforms. Others, like Saudi Arabia, are taking steps to prevent any protest movements before they start. The world's largest oil exporter and a key U.S. ally in the region is spending \$130 billion to

boost salaries and subsidies in an effort to head off protests. The government also tightened censorship of the Web and print media and is considering an "antiterrorism law" that would give it sweeping powers to arrest anyone for criticizing the king or "harming the reputation of the state."

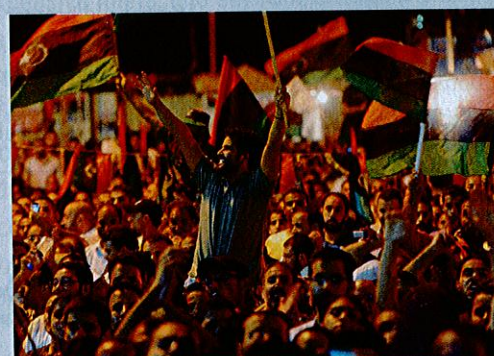
Mubarak on Trial

Despite all the uncertainty, one recent event was a powerful symbol of change.

In August, former Egyptian President Mubarak was wheeled into a Cairo courtroom on a hospital bed, placed in a cage for the accused, and put on trial

MOROCCO: King Mohammed VI agrees to constitutional changes giving elected leaders more power.

TUNISIA: Ruler was ousted last January; elections are set for October.



LIBYA: After months of civil war, Libyans celebrated the ouster of longtime dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi in August.

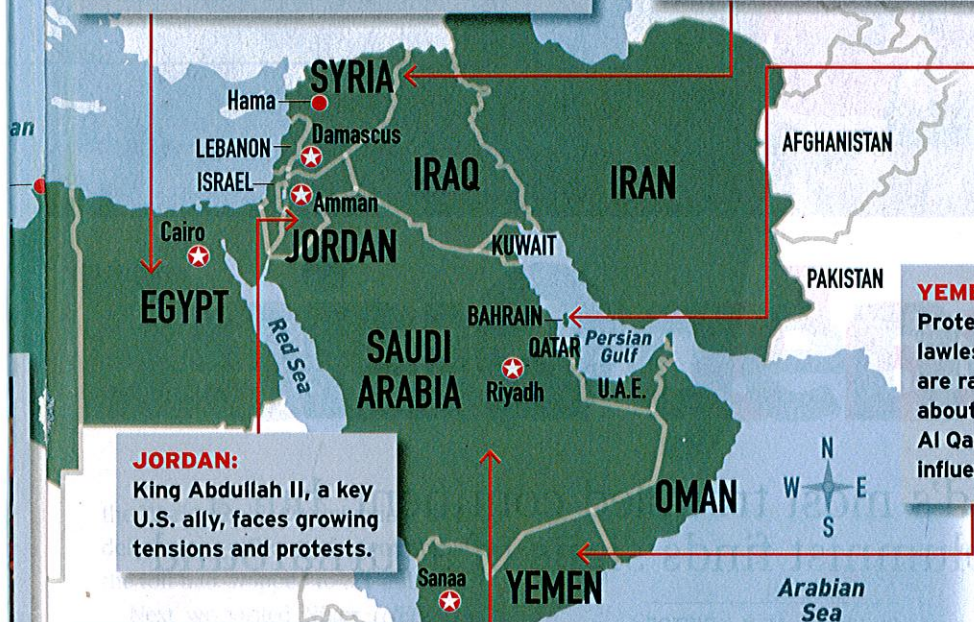


EGYPT: Former President Hosni Mubarak (in the defendant's cage at his trial) was ousted last February; parliamentary elections are set for this month.



SYRIA: Clashes continue between protesters and the military; more than 1,700 protesters have been killed.

BAHRAIN: With the help of troops from Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E., a violent crackdown on protesters has kept the king in power.



JORDAN: King Abdullah II, a key U.S. ally, faces growing tensions and protests.

YEMEN: Protests and lawlessness are raising fears about growing Al Qaeda influence.

several countries and spoken out sharply against the Syrian crackdown.

"For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside," President Obama said last month.

The upheaval in Syria—Iran's closest ally in the region—presents an opportunity for the U.S., says Elliott Abrams of the Council on Foreign Relations, "because it's a hostile country. If that

government falls, it really changes the Middle East, and it's a huge gain for moderation in the region."



SAUDI ARABIA: King Abdullah is using cash payments to try to keep people happy and has tightened censorship over the Web and print media.

unwilling to step down. But many Egyptians gathered outside the Cairo courtroom said Arabs should take the opposite lesson.

"All of the Arab world has to know that any leader who makes his people suffer will face this fate," said Fathi Farouk, a 50-year-old pharmacist watching the trial. "From today, history will never be the same."

While the U.S. has stayed on the sidelines militarily—with the exception of Libya, where it backed rebel forces by taking part in NATO airstrikes against the Qaddafi regime—it has provided diplomatic support for the protests in

Decades, Not Months

But in countries like Egypt, where the U.S. had close ties to the deposed regime, the U.S. now faces the likelihood of less friendly governments and the possibility that Islamic radicals could come to power—either by winning elections or hijacking the revolutions.

It could be a long time before the changes brought about by the Arab Spring become clear, says Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"When you have upheavals of this kind—driven by so many deep economic, demographic, and political factors—the consequences tend to play out over decades, not months," he says.

But one thing is clear to Cordesman: Despite all the talk about democracy, "none of these countries are going to rapidly become us." •