1 TUNISIA: IGNITING ARAB DEMOCRACY

By Dr. Laurence Michalak, 2013

Nota Bene: At the time of publication, Tunis is experiencing large protests calling for the resignation of the current moderate Islamist Ennahdha government. The demonstrations follow on the six-month anniversary of the still-unsolved assassination of Chokry Belaid, and in the wake of the killing in late July 2013 of a second secular leftist politician, Mohamed Brahmi. The national labour union, Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT), has called on its hundreds of thousands of members to join the rally. Work on a new constitution and election law have been suspended. The constituent assembly has been suspended pending negotiations between the government and opposition, after 70 members withdrew in protest over Brahmi's murder. The demonstrations are the largest of their kind since the ouster of Zine El Abine Ben Ali in January 2011. Elections are scheduled for December 2013.

Tunisia is an instructive case study in democracy development because the uprising that began there in December 2010 has ignited an ongoing movement in the Arab world. Tunisia's movement is still evolving, but a summary of events to date is as follows:

- The Tunisian uprising was essentially homegrown, illustrating that democracy cannot be imported but must, in each country, emerge from the people themselves.
- France, the most powerful diplomatic presence in Tunisia, gave almost unqualified support to the autocratic President Ben Ali for nearly a quarter century, although the French Socialist government elected in May 2012 supports Tunisia's democratic development.
- The US supported President Ben Ali until the George W. Bush administration, but changed its approach to encourage democracy, a policy continued by the Obama administration.
- The Western democracies supported autocratic leaders in the MENA region because they incorrectly thought they had to choose between a secular dictator and violent Islamists.

- In a broad-based social uprising beginning in December 2010, Tunisians expelled an autocrat, dissolved a ruling party and chose representatives to draft a new constitution.
- Tunisia's main Islamist party, Ennahdha, won a 41 percent plurality of seats in the October 2011 election, allying with two secularist parties to form a coalition government.
- The Tunisian economy has worsened between 2011 and 2013, with increased unemployment, frequent strikes and high inflation. Tourism has been slow to recover, investment from abroad remains low and many foreign businesses have left.
- The delay in producing a new constitution (now approaching two years) and the continuing weakness of the economy have led to a steady decline in approval of the elected government.
- Tunisian public discourse has been marked by low-level violence and at least two serious incidents — the attack on the US Embassy and American School in September 2012 and the assassination of secularist leader Chokri Belaid in February 2013 and Mohamed Brahmi in July 2013.
- The misdeeds of the jihadist wing of Tunisia's Salafist minority are a problem for the moderate Ennahdha and its allies, who have been slow to condemn them.
- The most important assistance that diplomats and NGOs can provide is facilitating economic programs that create jobs to alleviate unemployment and regional inequality.
- Despite current difficulties, long-term prospects for democracy are good for Tunisians, who are unlikely to give up their hard-won rights to fair elections and free speech.
- Though many consider democracy to be a universal value that is European in origin, Tunisians are developing a style of democracy that has its own local characteristics.

INTRODUCTION: A MOVEMENT BEGINS

On December 17, 2010, in a rural city in the interior of Tunisia, a poor fruit and vegetable vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi doused himself with paint thinner and set himself on fire in front of the provincial government headquarters. He was reportedly protesting because a municipal official had slapped him and confiscated his wares for peddling without a licence. The incident ignited a series of demonstrations that spread throughout the country, finally reaching the capital city of Tunis, whose streets filled with thousands of protesters shouting "Dégage!" ("Get

out!" in French). On January 14, 2011, Tunisia's autocratic and corrupt President Ben Ali fled with his family to Saudi Arabia.

Since then, the uprising has developed into a true revolution which has spread throughout the Arab world, inspiring hope for democracy — especially among Arab youth, who have become more politically active through engagement with the Internet, social networks and media such as Al-Jazeera.

This political explosion caught almost everyone by surprise. The MENA region had been the least democratic and least politically engaged part of the world. Dictatorships had crumbled in other regions, such as Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, but the MENA region — and especially the Arab world — seemed to be the last bastion of autocracy. Some scholars spoke of a regional democracy deficit and speculated that features of Arab culture and/or Islam might be causal factors for this condition.

Recent events have decisively undermined such ideas, but they were once current and may have hindered scholars and diplomats from detecting signs of growing popular resentment in the region. Whatever the reason, Western democracies had, for decades, tended to soft-pedal issues of democratic governance and human rights when dealing with Arab dictators. The motivations for this policy were access to oil, geostrategic concerns and, in the case of the United States, support for Israel. In recent years, a new purpose was added: securing cooperation in the struggle against Islamism, which many viewed as synonymous with violence and terrorism.

In pursuing closer relations with the Mediterranean countries under the Barcelona Process, the European Union found that authoritarian regimes in the MENA region reacted unfavourably to suggestions of democratic reform. The conflict was especially acute with the Tunisian regime. Of the 10 subcommittees created to implement the European Neighbourhood Policy under the Barcelona Process, the committee on human rights languished.

Journalists and scholars still struggle to find appropriate terms to describe the movement that began in Tunisia. At first some called it the "Jasmine Revolution," perhaps implying a parallel to the "Velvet" and "Orange" revolutions of Eastern Europe. The term that seems to have stuck, at least in the West, is "Arab Spring" — like the "Prague Spring" in Czechoslovakia and the "Berber Spring" in Algeria. The analogy is weak, however, because both of these movements were crushed — one by the Soviets in 1968 and the other by the Algerian regime in 1980 — and neither historical context resembles that of the MENA region today. "Arab Spring" may be a problematic name for the movement but — like other imprecise terms, such as Islamic "fundamentalism" (a term borrowed from Protestantism), "Islamism" (which lacks the parallel constructions of "Judism" and "Christianism") and "Middle East" (a Eurocentric term) — it has persevered.

Examining the case of Tunisia, we address a number of questions. Why did a movement against autocracy begin there, and why in a rural area? Is it a true revolution? Is it democratic? How has the movement evolved? What is likely to

happen? And to what extent can we generalize from Tunisia to other countries of the region?

Especially relevant to the purposes of this *Handbook*, the last and most important question is: What lessons does Tunisia teach about how diplomats and NGOs from democratic countries can effectively support transitions to democracy? We ask this while bearing in mind that democracy and civil society cannot be simply imported, but must emerge in each country in culturally appropriate ways.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Precursory Conditions

Although its awakening surprised many, Tunisia has long been the Arab country most suited for democracy. As a semi-autonomous Ottoman province, Tunisia was the first country in the MENA region to adopt a constitution (in 1861) and the first to start a modern secondary school (College Sadiki in Tunis in 1875). Under the French protectorate that began in 1881, the Tunisian elite were quick to imbibe the principles of the Enlightenment and, soon after World War I, were calling on their colonial rulers to practice their own principles by granting independence.

Independence

In contrast to the brutal war of independence in neighbouring Algeria, where France had a large and long-established population of colonists and had annexed the country, Tunisia was able to negotiate a relatively peaceful independence beginning in 1956. In 1957, Tunisia abolished the Beylical monarchy, which had been in power since 1705. Independent Tunisia became a republic with a strong presidency, a weak Parliament and a progressive, Western-inspired code of law. The pre- and post-independence history of Tunisia has been characterized by several conditions that are propitious for the development of democracy. These include:

- A high level of education. In the 1950s and 1960s, independent Tunisia spent a third of its national budget on education, achieving high rates of school enrollment and literacy and fostering the emergence of a university-educated technical and professional elite. As a result, the population, despite decades of state-controlled media, has a sophisticated level of political discourse, avid recourse to the Internet and aspirations to democracy.
- A large middle class. Despite regional inequality, Tunisia is relatively well endowed with manufacturing, mining, agriculture and tourism resources. Although the Ben Ali regime inflated statistics on prosperity and underestimated poverty, Tunisia tripled per capita GNP between 1986 and 2008 and built an abundant consumer economy. A substantial middle and professional class

supports property and individual rights and transparency in governance, the ingredients of a stable democracy.

- An active civil society. Tunisia had the beginnings of civil society — trade unions and professional and cultural associations — although the government closely controlled these groups. Prior to the uprising, only a handful of organizations were truly independent. Many groups were denied permits to organize and chafed under authoritarian rule, especially in the later years of the Ben Ali regime. The revolution in Tunisia has removed most of these obstacles and eased a transition to democratic and pluralistic governance.
- Respect for women's rights. At independence, Tunisia abolished polygamy, gave women the vote, introduced free and effective birth control, and has gradually reduced the fertility to replacement rate. A concern with gender issues in Tunisia goes back to at least 1930, with modernist Tahar Haddad, and even to the eighth-century Contract of Kairouan, an interpretation of Islamic law that facilitated monogamy. Women make up more than half of university students and Tunisia has promoted the active participation of women at all levels of society. There is a higher percentage of women in Tunisia's Parliament than in those of France, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- A relatively homogenous society. Tunisia is by no means homogenous, and class and regional inequalities contributed to the uprising. However, Tunisia lacks the deep ethnic and religious cleavages — Sunni/Shia, Muslim/Christian, Arab/Berber — that characterize most other Arab countries. Tunisia is 99 percent Sunni Arab Muslim and has a history of religious tolerance and minimal social conflict.

Lost Opportunities

On at least two occasions, independent Tunisia almost took the path of democracy. Because of his far-sighted policies and because he had been imprisoned for a decade by the French, Tunisia's charismatic first president, Habib Bourguiba benefitted from prestige and legitimacy at the outset of independence. Like many popular first presidents, from George Washington to Nelson Mandela, Bourguiba could have left office after one or two terms. Instead, he monopolized power through a single hegemonic party and made himself "President for Life."

Another opportunity for democracy came in 1987, when Prime Minister Ben Ali deposed the by-then frail and senile Bourguiba. In his first speech, Ben Ali said that Tunisia was ready for democracy. He instituted both a two-term limit and an age limit for presidents. After this opening flourish and other early liberal gestures, however, he succumbed to the temptation of power, changing the constitution and clinging to control for 23 years. He "privatized" Tunisia by transferring ownership of many state companies to his family and their cronies, especially the numerous relatives of his second wife, Leila Trabelsi. The resentment engendered by Ben

Ali's corruption and nepotism, combined with economic hard times and the severe regional inequality that had existed since Bourguiba, fuelled Tunisia's broadly based popular uprising.

PROTEST

A Spark in Rural Tunisia

Mohamed Bouazizi, the vendor who sold fruits and vegetables from a wooden pushcart in Sidi Bouzid, was in many ways typical of the poor of the Global South who are unable to find real jobs. Many of them enter the inflated commercial sector and eke out a bare subsistence living as petty vendors. At least a produce peddler can eat what he doesn't sell.

However, because Bouazizi lacked proper permits, paid no taxes and had an unlicenced scale, local authorities confiscated his cart, his scale and his wares. Some sources say he attempted to obtain permits but was denied, and that the scale was borrowed from a friend. When the authorities would neither hear his appeal nor return his means of livelihood, Bouazizi, who was the sole support of his family, despaired and burned himself in protest.

Bouazizi became not only a national but an international hero. Even President Ben Ali felt obliged to be photographed at Bouazizi's bedside — although it was later reported that Ben Ali had actually been photographed with a different burn victim whose face was swathed in bandages. It was widely rumoured that Bouazizi had already died but that the announcement of his death was delayed to provide a photo opportunity for Ben Ali.

Overnight, Bouazizi's face appeared on placards and his name on walls throughout the country. After having ignored quiescent Tunisia for decades, the international press corps flocked to Sidi Bouzid to report the gruesome story. Only three months after his death, a biography glorifying Bouazizi was published in Tunis. In July 2011, the well-known Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun published another hagiographic biography of Bouazizi in the form of a novel, *Par le Feu* (By Fire). The mayor of Paris named a square in Bouazizi's honour. The European Parliament posthumously bestowed its Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought on Bouazizi. A mural dedicated to Bouazizi was painted on a wall in the Mission District of San Francisco. He had become an international martyr.

Upon closer scrutiny, however, it became apparent that these initial reports were riddled with contradictions. At first Bouazizi was reported to be a college graduate who couldn't find a job, but it turned out that he hadn't finished high school. It was reported that he had been slapped and publicly humiliated by Faida Hamdy, a 45-year-old policewoman who was hastily jailed as a symbol of arbitrary authority and corruption; however, an investigation and trial found her innocent. There was even testimony that, on the contrary, it was Bouazizi who had insulted and harassed

Hamdy, and it seemed that President Ben Ali had tried to make this unfortunate woman into a scapegoat. Many began to question how Bouazizi could be considered a martyr, since suicide is strictly forbidden in Islam.

Other Tunisian protesters had burnt themselves to death, both before and after Bouazizi, including another peddler under similar circumstances in the Tunisian coastal city of Monastir in March 2010 — so why was Bouazizi's suicide the spark that set off the uprising? The answer is testimony to the power of social networking to create a mobilizing narrative and attract popular support.

A small group of astute activists in Sidi Bouzid organized quickly on the day of the suicide. Within an hour and a half, they had disseminated a shocking story and a horrible photograph of a burning man. Bouazizi's self-immolation was invested with the powerful message that Tunisians could no longer live without social and economic dignity — a message that resonated deeply throughout the country. A number of Sidi Bouzid activists later admitted that they had coordinated their version of the facts in order to arouse public opinion, exaggerating Bouazizi into a flawless hero and casting Hamdy as the villainess.

Underlying Factors

We will probably never know exactly how the incident transpired. Certainly, Bouazizi's suicide was not the cause of the uprising, but rather the incident that triggered it. Tunisia's revolt had been building for many years and was the outcome of a mix of deeper causes. In 2008, workers in the phosphate mines of the Gafsa region had gone on strike for six months; the regime brutally repressed the strike but it remained an open wound. Labour unrest spread throughout the country. The gap of regional inequality between the poor interior and the relatively wealthy coast and capital city widened. Since 2008, especially, the price of food had increased sharply, and the country's economic problems were compounded by world recession. Corruption and nepotism were rampant, led by the families of Ben Ali and his wife Leila, who controlled much of the economy. This was the fuel, and Bouazizi's suicide was the spark that ignited it.

The Geography of Protest

From the Interior to the Capital

Starting in Sidi Bouzid, the uprising spread rapidly throughout the interior and the south. Protesters attacked police stations and burned public buildings. Under Ben Ali's orders, the police reacted brutally, shooting to kill, arresting and torturing, but to no avail. After a successful general strike in Sfax, Tunisia's second-largest city, the demonstrations spread northward up the coast toward the capital.

On January 11, 2011, the revolt finally reached the capital city of Tunis. As it had begun in the poorest region of Tunisia, so also in Tunis, the uprising began in the poorest neighbourhoods, collections of grim high-rise housing projects on the

outskirts of the city. The people who lived there were part of a rural exodus from places in the interior like Sidi Bouzid. The protest attracted ever-broader segments of Tunisian society, including many with no prior experience of political activism.

Inside the Capital

In Tunis, the demonstrators congregated on either side of the medina, or old Arab city. At first, the main locus of protest was the Avenue Habib Bourguiba, which, under a series of changing names, has always been the main thoroughfare of the European city. The protesters gathered there, in front of the Ministry of Interior. The second locus for demonstrations was on the west side of the medina in the casbah, also called "Government Square," around which several ministries, including the prime minister's office and the Ministry of Defence, are located.

Several kinds of forces maintained order in Tunisia. These included the Presidential Guard, composed of 2,500 men under the command of Ben Ali intimate Ali Seriati. The national police and security forces numbered between 100,000 and 130,000, including the elite Brigade of Public Order (BOP), but they were unable to cope with the thousands of demonstrators who filled downtown Tunis, so the government called in the army.

Tunisia's army is relatively small (about 35,000) and well-disciplined, having earned international plaudits as a professionally competent UN contingent. The members of the officer corps, largely US-trained, are not allowed to join political parties and, unlike their Egyptian counterparts, they have no economic advantages. The officer corps had reason to resent the regime, since Ben Ali is widely thought to have engineered a helicopter crash that killed much of the army high command in 2002.

The decisive moment came when Ben Ali ordered General Rachid Ammar, the Tunisian Armed Forces chief of staff, to fire on the protesters. General Ammar refused, thereby aligning himself with other military professionals whose ethical principles had undermined autocrats in other settings, such as Kyiv, Moscow and Belgrade.

In a series of public speeches, Ben Ali tried to quell the protest. His first two speeches were stern proclamations in classical Arabic condemning "outside agitators." His third and last speech, however, delivered the day before he fled, was contrite. He spoke on television in Tunisian dialect, and the nation of spectators could see that his hands were shaking. "Ghaltooni!" pleaded the president — "They misinformed me!" Like Bourguiba and the Ottoman beys before him, Ben Ali tried to blame his lieutenants for the crisis. He dismissed several ministers and three regional governors, promising to address people's grievances, to create hundreds of thousands of new jobs, and not to stand for re-election. But it was too late.

The President Flees

On January 14, 2011, with the streets of Tunis packed with protesters, President Ben Ali, his wife and a planeload of family members fled the country, after which the army closed the airport. A second plane with more of the president's wife's relatives was detained and its passengers arrested. Apparently, Ben Ali had not intended to leave, only to send his wife and family away temporarily. He accompanied them to the airport to see them off, but at the last minute, at the urging of his wife and of his close adviser, Ali Seriati, he decided to leave with them. Ben Ali planned to return to Tunis the next day and instructed the pilot to wait for him, but the pilot disobeyed his orders and flew back to Tunis without him.

At long last, a movement for democracy had begun in the Arab world. The impact was felt next in Egypt, followed by major uprisings in Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Syria, as well as demonstrations in other Arab states. Aspirations to remove their dictators spread throughout the region, particularly among the young. Many were transfixed by the reporting of Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya and by blogs from Tunisian activists, while others used more traditional venues of organization, such as the mosque. Friday, the traditional day of Muslim communal prayer, became the favorite day of protest throughout the region.

From Uprising to Revolution

The term "revolution" is often used loosely, in cases when "uprising" would be more appropriate. Strictly defined, a revolution means a basic change — not just transplanted leadership, but the wiping away of an old order and its replacement by a new order that is fundamentally different.

For example, Egypt from the 1950s onward was run by a series of three generals — Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak. Even after the uprising of January 2011, the real ruler of Egypt remained the army, which oversaw elections but reserved most of the power, especially economic control, for itself. At one point, it even appeared that a military figure might be elected president. A good case can be made that until a civilian president took office and, in August 2012, dismissed the top generals and disestablished the military, Egypt had not yet had a "revolution." The coup of July 2013 underscored where the real power lay all along.

Tunisian democracy, on the other hand, was facilitated by the military, which refused to obey Ben Ali. From early on, it became clear that Tunisia was experiencing not just a short-lived uprising, but a movement with promise of systematic long-term change — a revolution.

Dismantling Autocracy

Since the flight of Ben Ali, Tunisia has been marked by contradictions — exhilaration and unease, order and chaos, optimism and pessimism. At first, there were violent attempts to reverse the uprising. Black-clad snipers fired into crowds

from the roofs of buildings in Tunis — but the protesters stood their ground, and within a few days these last remnants of repression had disappeared.

Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, Ben Ali's right-hand man since the late 1980s, announced that the president was "temporarily unable to exercise his duties" and that he himself had become acting president. During the brief time that he was president, Ghannouchi tried to placate the protesters by appointing a new cabinet. The Parliament, however, decided that Ben Ali had vacated the presidency and that, under the Tunisian Constitution, the position of acting president should devolve onto the elderly and sickly Speaker of the Parliament, Fouad Mbazaa. Mbazaa reluctantly accepted the presidency, and then disappeared almost completely from sight for the next nine months.

Continuing demonstrations forced Ghannouchi and every other minister to resign. The Parliament was dismissed, the ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally Party (RCD) was disbanded, and an interim government was formed with non-RCD ministers, many of whom had been vocal critics of Ben Ali.

THE MORNING AFTER

Tunisia enjoyed a period of celebration with cheering crowds who waved signs and chanted slogans, but it was brief. A major problem was that about 11,000 felons had escaped or been released from Tunisia's prisons. Some were political prisoners, but others were violent criminals. A crime wave spread across the country. In an encouraging sign of initiative at the grassroots level, Tunisian towns and neighbourhoods formed watch groups with checkpoints to protect themselves and their communities. The same thing later happened during the uprising in Cairo, where the police similarly disappeared from sight.

The Tunisian police, especially the BOP, had discredited themselves. In the interior, they had beaten, gassed, shot, tortured and killed demonstrators. The snipers were generally thought to be BOP sharpshooters or foreign mercenaries. People saw the police as villains and the army as heroes. Perhaps out of shame, the police were seldom seen in public in early 2011 and have been slow to reappear.

The immediate effects of the Tunisian Revolution were politically positive but economically negative. Between May 2010 and May 2011, the unemployment rate in Tunisia increased from 13 percent to 18.3 percent, leaving over 800,000 jobless in a country of only a little over 10 million. Those who did have jobs demanded salary increases to catch up with the cost of living. There were more strikes than before. Tourism, which had employed 400,000 people directly and another 300,000 indirectly, declined in 2011 by over 50 percent from 2010 levels. Tourism recovered slightly in 2012, but has flattened in the first third of 2013 due to foreign perceptions of insecurity.

Much of Tunisia's post-revolutionary economic decline was due to the uprising and civil war in neighbouring Libya, where hundreds of thousands fled across the border. These refugees from Libya included Libyans, Sub-Saharan African

expatriates and an estimated 60,000 Tunisians who had been working in Libya and fled home, swelling the ranks of the unemployed. Events in Libya also contributed to Tunisia's rising cost of living — especially rents and food prices — due to exports to Libya and an increase in the number of resident Libyans.

Tunisians were worried, especially about security. With the breakdown of law and order and the retreat of the police, young women were afraid to go out at night. Parents feared that their children would be kidnapped. People protected their houses and apartments with extra locks and reinforced metal doors and plastered the tops of their courtyard walls with broken bottle glass. Taxi drivers cursed the revolution as bad for business. Many quoted Al-Ghazali, an eleventh-century Islamic philosopher who taught that dictatorship is better than anarchy. As sometimes happens, satisfaction at getting rid of a dictator had given way to fear of the unknown and preoccupation with safety and security.

Interim to an Election

Tunisia's first task was to replace the old constitution, which had given nearly unlimited power to the presidency. The interim government appointed an electoral commission under Kamal Jendoubi, a widely respected human rights leader who had opposed Ben Ali, to organize an election for a constituent assembly that would then draft a new constitution. The commission scheduled the election for October 23, 2011, to choose 217 representatives through a proportional list voting system. They divided the country into 33 districts, including six for Tunisians living abroad. Each district would elect up to 10 representatives, based on population. Candidates had to be from the districts in which they were running. Parties would present lists in each district, with the progressive stipulation that each electoral list had to alternate men and women candidates.

Would members of the RCD be allowed to run for office? Anti-RCD sentiment was still strong and there was little spirit of reconciliation. The commission decided that members from the last decade would not be allowed to run, but that old Bourguibists and RCD members from before 10 years ago would be permitted. Those who had signed a notorious public letter encouraging Ben Ali to be a candidate again for president would not be allowed to run, although some claimed that their names had been used without their consent.

The Interim Government

Until the election for the constituent assembly, Tunisia had a caretaker government led by Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi, an 84-year-old politician who had served in the government in the 1960s, pressed Bourguiba for democratic reforms in the 1970s and then resigned. Under Ben Ali, he had served briefly as head of the Chamber of Deputies, but had not joined the RCD and had retired from politics with a relatively untainted reputation in 1994. Thus, Caid Essebsi had a reputation for

honesty, although some raised questions about events during his tenure as Interior Minister from 1965 to 1969.

In the new climate of free speech, Tunisians were critical of everything, beginning with the election plan. Some said that the constituent assembly was too large. Some criticized the voting system as complicated and confusing. Some argued that the election should be held earlier. Some deplored that people would be voting for parties rather than candidates. By the time of the election, 112 parties had been approved — a confusing alphabet soup of acronyms. People had trouble telling them apart. Some parties had only a handful of members.

There were criticisms of the interim government. Caid Essebsi had been appointed rather than elected, so he lacked legitimacy. When he took initiative, he was criticized for exceeding his mandate, and when he did not take initiative, he was criticized for inaction. For example, Tunisia needed to purge the judiciary of corrupt judges from the Ben Ali era, but the prime minister resisted because he knew that sorting honest from corrupt judges would be a controversial task. When criticized for inaction, he responded by delegating the task to a commission.

Many asserted that those running for office were opportunists interested only in drawing a salary. The most serious problem was that many Tunisians did not plan to vote, stating openly that they considered politics and politicians inherently evil. After decades of corruption and nepotism, they were skeptical that change was possible. As one lawyer said, "There used to be one Ben Ali but now there are 10 million of them."

A voter registration drive began July 11 but elicited little response. Polls indicated that more than half of Tunisians either were undecided or planned not to vote. The electoral commission extended the registration period and announced that Tunisians would be able to vote without having registered if they did so in the district listed on their identity cards. In the end, a little over half of the eligible electorate voted.

Due to distrust of the government-controlled press, Tunisia had always been rich in rumours and conspiracy theories. One rumour was that the ministers of the interim government had all been appointed by Kamal Letaief, a relative of Ben Ali who headed a small group of pro-French Tunisians who spent most of their time in Paris. A contradictory rumour was that Ben Ali's overthrow was a CIA plot, and that US Assistant Secretary of State Jeffrey Feltman had chosen the interim government during a visit to Tunis.

Tunisia's Main Islamist Returns

A pivotal event of the election campaign was the return from exile of moderate Islamist leader Rached Ghannouchi — not to be confused with Mohamed Ghannouchi, Ben Ali's long-standing prime minister. In the early 1970s, he helped found Tunisia's Islamist movement, which at that time, had been harshly repressed. Ghannouchi had been imprisoned under Bourguiba, but was later released by Ben Ali. Since overtly Islamic parties were illegal, Ghannouchi changed the name of his party from the Islamic Tendency Movement to Ennahdha ("Renaissance"). The

party was again refused approval. Ghannouchi fled to France and then to England, where he lived in London until the uprising. He credited Britain with values of tolerance and pluralism, which he said would be the hallmarks of Ennahdha's approach. Thousands of supporters turned out at the Tunis airport for Ghannouchi's triumphant return on January 30, 2011.

Ennahdha was approved as an official party in March 2011 and immediately became the front-runner in the polls by a small margin. The Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), a secularist party, was said to be a close second. Besides Ennahdha, four other major political parties emerged:

- The PDP, a secular and social-democratic party, was led by Nejib Chebbi and Maya Jribi. It had been legal but was repressed under Ben Ali and had boycotted the past two presidential elections. Generally considered the major party of the left, it hovered in second place to Ennahdha in pre-election polls but then began to decline. The PDP ran a high-profile campaign on a strongly secularist platform and was highly critical of Ennahdha.
- The Congress for the Republic (CPR), a nationalist and slightly leftist party, was led by Moncef Marzouki, a doctor with origins in the Tunisian south (although he was born in the Cap Bon peninsula). Marzouki had been active in Tunisia's much-beleaguered human rights movement. He had run for president against Ben Ali in 1994, but had been disqualified and imprisoned. After his release, he went into exile in France. A respected figure, Marzouki refrained from criticizing Ennahdha.
- The Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (DFLL), a secular, centre-left party led by Mustapha Ben Jafar, was another opposition party approved under Ben Ali; however, the party had never been allowed any seats and Ben Jafar had been disqualified from running for president. DFLL steadily gained in popularity over the course of the campaign and, like the CPR, did not criticize Ennahdha.
- The Popular Petition Party (PPP) was a populist conservative party led by Mohamed Hechmi Hamdi, a controversial Tunisian expatriate millionaire from Sidi Bouzid. Based in London, Hamdi had at one time been a member of Ennahdha. He founded a news magazine and two satellite television stations. Hamdi was suspect because he had run positive television stories about Ben Ali and was reputed to have accepted bribes from him.

No public opinion surveys were allowed in the last month of the campaign, in order to prevent the results of polls from affecting the election. It was predicted that Ennahdha would win about a quarter to a third of the vote, with PDP a close second. Half the electorate was undecided, however, and the polls were out of date, so the results of the election were highly unpredictable.

A Democratic Election

The Tunisian election had both international and Tunisian observers, including Tunisian NGOs that had organized for this purpose. According to the monitors, the October 23, 2011 election was peaceful, orderly and fair, with only minor irregularities. Many Tunisians had said they might not vote, but most of the eligible voters did. Optimists pointed out that 86 percent of those registered went to the polls. Skeptics retorted that, since only a little over half the eligible voters had registered, the real turnout was considerably lower; however, the turnout exceeded 50 percent of eligible voters. In the end, there was general satisfaction with both the turnout and the fairness of the election, especially considering that it had been organized from scratch in only a few months.

The Moderate Islamist Party Wins a Plurality

Ennahdha won a larger plurality than expected, with 41 percent of the seats. The secular-left PDP had been expected to finish second, but surprisingly won only seven percent of the seats. Clearly, many analysts had overestimated the appeal of Western-style secular parties against a well-organized moderate Islamic alternative. The two parties that had not demonized Ennahdha — CPR and DFLL — won 13 percent and nine percent of the seats, respectively, and joined Ennahdha in forming a three-party majority coalition.

After a low-profile campaign, the PPP finished a surprising third, but they were charged by the election commission with violating campaign regulations for illegal contributions, campaigning during the blackout period and one ineligible candidate. Nine of their elected assembly members were disqualified, but eight were restored on appeal, giving them 12 percent of the assembly seats. Because of the controversies surrounding the PPP, the leaders of Ennahdha did not invite any of its members to join the ruling coalition.

Women and Democracy

Women's participation is a benchmark of democracy and, as mentioned earlier, Tunisia has a history of support for women's rights. Women won 49 of the 217 seats in the Tunisian Constituent Assembly. By law, the party lists were required to alternate the names of men and women candidates, but since most of the electoral lists were headed by men and from most of these lists only one person was elected, men won most of the seats.

The exception was Ennahdha, the moderate Islamist party. In many districts, more than one Ennahdha candidate was elected, and many of the Ennahdha lists were headed by women. Out of the 49 assemblywomen elected, 42 were from Ennahdha; nearly half of Ennahdha's assembly members were women. By June 2012, some male assembly members had resigned to become ministers and were replaced by women, so the number of women in the assembly increased from 47 to 52, thus,

women made up 24 percent of the assembly — a greater percentage than in the United Kingdom, France or the United States.

Some might be surprised that women are so prominent in an Islamist party. Monica Marks, who has interviewed 51 Ennahdha women, notes that they tend to be assertive and well-educated. Many of them have endured arrests and prison terms, and often, they are the wives of Ennahdha men who spent years in prison, during which time these women became wage-earners and small-scale entrepreneurs, working to hold their families together. Now that their husbands have returned from prison, the women continue to play active decision-making roles in both the family and in Ennahdha.

Marks notes the sharp contrast between Ennahdha and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, which separates men and women. Ennahdha reaffirmed the Personal Status code of 1956-1957, which abolished polygamy and gave women broadly equal rights. In Ennahdha, men and women mix freely in offices, rallies and committees. Twenty of the 50 members of Ennahdha's policy-setting body are women. Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood is against the idea of a Coptic Christian or woman president, but Ennahdha has declared that it favours the full participation of women and minorities at all levels of government. In the case of Tunisia, Islamist does not mean anti-feminist. The contrast with Egypt shows that not all Islamist parties are the same.

A Government Is Established

After the election, the ruling "troika" (Ennahdha, CPR and DFLL) allotted the most important post in the government, that of prime minister, to Ghannouchi's second-in-command, Hamadi Jebali, and Moustapha Ben Jafar of DFLL became Speaker of the Assembly. Rounding out the troika, Moncef Marzouki of CPR became president of Tunisia. After two presidents in 55 years (Bourguiba and Ben Ali), Tunisia had now had three "acting" presidents, two of them unelected, in only nine months — Mohamed Ghannouchi (for one day), Fouad Mbazaa (for nine months) and now Moncef Marzouki. The task of writing different sections of the new constitution was assigned to different committees consisting of members from all parties. The assembly was given a year to complete its work, although they could (and did) vote to extend their mandate, drafting and debating the constitution well into summer 2013. A new election is not expected until late 2013 or perhaps even early 2014.

October 23, 2011, Tunis, Tunisia: Mannana Jarraya shows her ink-stained finger after casting her ballot during an election in Tunis. Jarraya is a 101-year-old Tunisian woman and has 11 children, who is voting for her first time in Tunisia's historic election. She says she has never voted before, because Ben Ali won no matter what, but today she is proud to be Tunisian. Ten months since the uprising forced the resignation of President Ben Ali, 81 political parties, as well as hundreds of independent candidates, competed in the countries first free election. 217 candidates will serve in the constituent assembly, which will rewrite the country's constitution and appoint a new government. The election could set the template for other Arab countries emerging from the Arab Spring uprisings. Photo credit: Benedicte Desrus / Sipa Press/ bdtunisia.046/1110241832 (Sipa via AP Images)

Economic Woes Deepen

The economic problems that were among the causes of the uprising have continued and, in fact, worsened. Tunisia's GNP declined by two percent in 2011, the first year of the revolution. In 2012, the GNP increased by 3.6 percent and is projected to increase to four percent in 2013. There are 820,000 unemployed, more than before. Strikes persist, many of them ill-considered. For example, in a factory with inflammable products, workers went on strike, demanding the right to smoke. In Jendouba, workers at Tunisia's only yeast factory announced a strike that would have deprived the entire country of bread (the army intervened to restore yeast production). Mining strikes have reduced the production of phosphate, one of Tunisia's major exports, by 80 percent, preventing the country from taking advantage of a large increase in the world price of phosphate. Faced with undependable supplies of manufactured goods from Tunisia, some foreign clients have begun to buy their products from other countries. Many French firms have left Tunisia, and because of continuing insecurity, foreign investment and tourism remain low.

Labour Relations

In February 2012, the municipal garbage collectors of Tunis went on strike and stinking refuse began to pile up in the streets. UGTT supported the garbage strike, leading some frustrated citizens (allegedly from Ennahdha) to pile garbage outside the doors of the UGTT office in Tunis. Near Bizerte, jobless locals organized a sit-in at an oil refinery and refused to move unless they were given jobs, which forced the refinery to shut down and suspend production.

Part of the problem is that ever since independence, Tunisian labour has lacked a strong voice in government, yet the labour union movement is almost as old as political parties in Tunisia. Mohamed Ali El Hammi founded the Tunisian labour movement in 1924, only four years after the founding of first Tunisian political party, the Destour (which later split and was succeeded in 1934 by the Neo-Destour, under Bourguiba). The trade union movement was resuscitated when UGTT was founded in 1946. UGTT leader Farhat Hached and Bourguiba were the two main political leaders of Tunisia until Hached was assassinated by French terrorists in 1952.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Bourguiba kept the UGTT under the control of the Neo-Destour (which changed its name in 1964 to the Destour Socialist Party). Bourguiba co-opted UGTT leader Ahmed Ben Salah into the government in the 1960s, then turned against him and had him imprisoned in 1969. When the union leadership called for higher wages in the 1970s, they were crushed in a bloodbath in January 1978, in which scores of Tunisians died.

The union continued to play a subservient role under Ben Ali. The union leadership was complaisant, but trade unionists in the interior and the south played an important role in the 2010-2011 uprising. Since the revolution, two new unions have sprung

up and the UGTT has had to compete with them. Labour will undoubtedly play an important role in wage and price policies in post-revolutionary Tunisia.

Secularism versus Islamism

This continues to be a main issue of political debate in Tunisia. Tunisia has fervent secularists in the tradition of Bourguiba who question whether Ghannouchi is a sincere democrat. Ghannouchi replies with reassurances that Ennahdha will not legalize polygamy, require women to veil or ban alcohol. Many secularists accuse Ghannouchi and the Islamists of "double discourse" — telling different things to different audiences. At the same time, the mixed legacy of Bourguiba is being challenged and reinterpreted.

A few Salafists (conservative Muslims) have disrupted university campuses, insisting that women be allowed to attend classes and take examinations wearing the niqab (full covering including the face). They also demand that women teachers be required to wear headscarves and that the universities provide prayer rooms on campus. Salafists have demonstrated against alcohol sales and legalized prostitution. They have also objected to the screening of two movies they considered insulting to Islam — *Laïcité Inch'Allah* by Nadia El Fani, a documentary advocating the freedom to profess atheism and agnosticism, and *Persepolis*, an animated film based on the work of Iranian director Marjane Satrapi, which includes an image of God and was shown on Tunisian television.

There is diversity among Tunisian Salafists. Some are associated with Ettahrir Party, the local branch of an international movement. Because they reject democracy, Ettahrir was not allowed to present candidates in the October 2011 election. Salafists insist that the Tunisian constitution be amended to acknowledge Islamic law as the main source of legal legitimacy, a position that Ennahdha rejects. Ghannouchi, the leader of Ennahdha, has suggested that Ettahrir can be legalized if only they disavow violence. Others, such as Radwan Masmoudi of the Centre for the Study of Islam and Democracy, would require that Ettahrir accept democracy before being legalized as a party. The more extreme Salafists support Al-Qaeda, condemn Ghannouchi as an apostate and boycotted the election, while more moderate Salafists form a conservative wing of Ennahdha.

Tunisia's secularists insist that there is no such thing as a "moderate Islamist." Despite Ghannouchi's protestations to the contrary, his critics warn that Ennahdha might enlarge the domain of Islamic law, which currently applies only to inheritance. In the October 2011 election, most Tunisians either supported or took a benign view of Ennahdha; however, as the main party in power, Ennahdha is held responsible for the country's doldrums. The popularity of Ennahdha and of the Constituent Assembly in general has steadily decreased. Former interim Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi has formed a new party, Nida Tounes ("Call of Tunis"), which, in spring 2013, pulled ahead of Ennahdha in the polls. The secular left has also reorganized and is attempting to form a unified party.

High Expectations and Impatience

Many Tunisians are demanding and impatient. When reminded that they are doing well relative to the rest of the Maghreb, they reply that they do not compare themselves with Morocco, Algeria or Libya, but rather with France, Italy or Germany. They expect improvement in their standard of living, despite the climate of world recession. The new Constituent Assembly had barely taken office when crowds began protesting outside the Parliament, calling for more jobs, higher wages, lower prices and development of the interior and the south.

TOOLS FOR SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY

Preliminary Observations

Against this background, we now address the question, "What have diplomats and NGOs done to support democracy in Tunisia?" Our answer is organized according to the template of tools described in chapter three of the *Handbook*. How have these diplomatic tools been used (and not used) in the case of Tunisia? Before answering this question, however, two preliminary contextualizing observations are necessary:

A Change in Historical Context

The question of how to promote democracy has changed after the Tunisian Revolution. Under Bourguiba, and especially under Ben Ali, the question was: "How does one promote democracy under conditions of autocracy?" The old regime has now been swept away, but the question of what diplomats and NGOs might have done differently is relevant because many autocracies remain in the world. Conditions have changed in Tunisia, and the form of the question is now: "How can the major world democracies best support a former autocracy struggling to consolidate its democratic beginnings?"

The Key Role of France

France has abiding historic, cultural, political and economic ties with Tunisia, which was a French protectorate for 75 years, from 1881 to 1956. Tunisia's second official language is French. There are 1,200 French companies in Tunisia, and France is by far Tunisia's main trade partner for both imports and exports. Nearly half a million Tunisians live in France, including 10 members of the Tunisian Constituent Assembly. France is consistently the European country that provides the largest number of tourists to Tunisia.

In the Tunisian narrative, therefore, French policy merits disproportionate attention, much as British policy once stood out with regard to South Africa, or US policy with regard to Cuba. No other country has comparable impact on the

behaviour of Tunisia. Under Ben Ali, the primacy of France meant that, in the absence of significant French initiatives, other diplomats were reluctant to support democracy and human rights in Tunisia. Why France turned a blind eye to autocracy in Tunisia is an important question to which we will return.

USING THE DIPLOMAT'S TOOL BOX IN TUNISIA

The Golden Rules

Listening, Respecting and Understanding

Clearly, in the years leading to the revolution, France did not do a very good job of listening to, respecting or understanding Tunisians. French Ambassador to Tunisia between 1995 and 1999, Admiral Jacques Lanxade retrospectively regrets France's lack of objectivity in Ben Ali's later years. As he told the *International Herald Tribune* after the Tunisian Revolution, "Since 2000, people saw the Tunisian regime closing itself into a semi-dictatorship, but we did not react. We continued public support of this regime because of economic interests, because we thought Ben Ali had a role in fighting Islamists" (Erlanger, 2011).

There were differences in Tunisian policy among France's three presidents during the Ben Ali years; however, it was during Ben Ali's last five years in power, while Nicolas Sarkozy was president of France, that public disaffection in Tunisia reached the boiling point. French foreign policy makers badly underestimated the strength of anti-regime sentiment. Mitterrand's and Chirac's public statements about Ben Ali had been positive, but Sarkozy's were even more supportive, despite the deteriorating human rights climate in Tunisia. The 2010-2011 uprising took the Sarkozy government completely by surprise. Even as the protests grew and spread, the Sarkozy government still mistakenly thought that Ben Ali would be able to maintain control.

Some of the most emphatic critics of French policy in Tunisia were journalists within France. For years, there had been critics of the successive French governments that had done nothing to promote democracy and human rights in Tunisia. One such critic was Nicolas Beau, who co-authored two bestselling books — *Notre Ami Ben Ali* in 1999 and *La Régente de Carthage* in 2009 — deploring French complicity in the misdeeds of Ben Ali and his wife Leila. Once Ben Ali was out of power, Sarkozy tried to make amends in his four remaining months in office, beginning with a forthright admission that he had "misjudged Tunisian popular sentiment."

Did other diplomatic missions understand Tunisia any better? Some countries — such as the United States (under President George W. Bush), Germany and some of the states of Northern Europe — took a more proactive human rights position

in Tunisia, but they had less to lose than France. Wikileaks has documented that, well before Tunisia's uprising, Canadian Ambassador Bruno Picard told fellow ambassadors from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy that the Tunisian authorities' claims that they did not torture accused terrorists were "bullshit" — an admirably candid assertion for a diplomat.

The European Union was heavily invested in the Tunisian regime, both politically and economically; yet, Ambassador Marc Pierini, a French national who was at the head of the European Union's representation in Tunis between 2002 and 2006, criticized the Tunisian government's authoritarian practices, even on local Tunisian TV. Unfortunately, there was no consensus among EU member states to press Tunisia on human rights. Pierini's successor as EU Ambassador, Adrianus Koetsenruijter, was instructed by officials in Brussels to be as "non-committal as possible," leading to criticism in the European press that he was "too cautious and consensual."

Since the revolution, French President François Hollande and his European counterparts have improved communications with Tunisia. Ambassador Koetsenruijter, with special responsibilities for Tunisia and Libya, has interacted extensively with the public and civil society to identify ways in which the EU can better listen, respect and understand Tunisians and address their expectations.

Sharing

Could diplomats have worked together more effectively during the Ben Ali era to coordinate support for democratic values? In Tunisia, as elsewhere, diplomatic affinity groups share information. The EU ambassadors and junior officials in Tunisia met periodically, but democracy and human rights were not major topics of discussion. Instead, EU efforts were centred on consolidating Tunisian government support for various Mediterranean partnership exercises. The aid provided by the EU went to the Tunisian government rather than to the people and civil society.

At least one European ambassador suggested privately that the topic of human rights was absent from the agenda in part because of the suspicion that there were Ben Ali informers among the EU ambassadors. Whatever the reason, EU authorities did not significantly support a human rights agenda. According to one critic, "The EU was a lot worse than neutral. Having been on the wrong side of history, they have a credibility problem to fix." The basic problem was that internal EU differences over how hard to press Tunisia on human rights meant that the EU was an unresponsive partner for related topics. For example, the EU could not manage to assemble common support for a joint protest of Tunisian Internet blockage. The Wikileaks cables noted that EU representatives acknowledged to US embassy officials that, because of resistance within the EU, joint protests of Tunisian behaviour would not be possible.

Admittedly, under Ben Ali there was little oppositional Tunisian civil society for the diplomatic community to support — only a handful of groups such as the Tunisian League of Human Rights, the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women and the lawyer's guild, plus a few brave figures, such as journalist Sihem Bensedrine, human

rights lawyer Bouchra Ben Hamida and PDP leaders Maya Jribi and Ahmed Nejib Chebbi. Since the revolution, these have been joined by many more democracy and human rights groups and have received extensive foreign aid, a situation making coordination essential.

Truth in Communications

Reporting

Diplomats prepare reports and analyses that help shape the foreign policies of their home governments. They often offered critical assessments of Tunisia but these were kept private, with the exception that the US Embassy posted human rights reports critical of the Ben Ali regime on its website. Another exception, albeit inadvertent, came in 2010 when Wikileaks made public confidential reports, especially those between 2006 and 2009 from US Ambassador Robert Godec.

One of Godec's leaked reports described the lavish lifestyle of Ben Ali's son-in-law, Sakher El-Materi, who was considered at that time to be Ben Ali's most likely successor. Godec noted that El-Materi kept a pet tiger and flew in desserts from Saint-Tropez. Other Wikileaks cables reported widespread corruption by Ben Ali's extended family. Wikileaks confirmed what Tunisians already knew, and added memorable images of decadence and excess.

Diplomatic missions in Tunis were small, with the exception of a few countries with major interests. The few available officers had to cover a wide range of topics, resulting in a lack of reporting about human rights in Tunisia. The Canadian mission actually cut the position of political officer, partly for budgetary reasons and partly because of an increasing emphasis on economic topics; however, the training and assignment of diplomats who monitor and support human rights is essential for all diplomatic missions. Wider acceptance of the axiom that strategic and economic partnerships can co-exist with frank communications about democracy and human rights is needed.

Informing

Supporting independent media is an important way to help promote democracy. The Ben Ali regime kept the media under close control. Tunisia's newspapers ran flattering pictures of Ben Ali on their front pages until the very day that he fled. The press agency Tunis Afrique Presse, staffed by RCD members, provided the government line that the local press dutifully parroted. Typically, 40 percent of television news broadcasts was devoted to reviewing the president's day. Democratic NGOs organized a few training programs to acquaint journalists and the emerging community of bloggers with free media standards, but these sessions had to be held outside Tunisia.

Occasionally, the authorities would seize a publication or jail a journalist, but most press control was exercised through self-censorship. As one of the post-revolution

ministers accurately and succinctly described the behaviour of the Tunisian press, "For 50 years the only time they ever opened their mouths was to go to the dentist."

The first crack in the propaganda wall came with satellite television. Increasingly, Tunisians were turning to satellite news, beginning with Al-Jazeera, founded in Qatar in 1996, which was followed by other outspoken Arabic stations in Lebanon and the Gulf, such as Al-Arabiya. The regime tried to suppress parabolic antennas in 1994, but this proved both unpopular and unenforceable, so they turned instead to harassing foreign reporters, seizing objectionable publications and concentrating on controlling the media within Tunisia. When there was a foreign television program critical of Ben Ali, occasionally the authorities would even shut off electricity throughout the country until the program was over.

Tunisia's post-revolution landscape has exploded with new media. A dozen new newspapers have sprung up and applications for new radio and television licences flow at a rapid pace. Bloggers are ubiquitous. "Tunisia Girl" Lina Ben Mhenni, who began blogging and tweeting while Ben Ali was in power, has continued her blog and published a popular book. Blogger Slim Amamou, jailed and tortured under Ben Ali, was appointed Secretary of State for Youth and Sports in January 2011 (although he later resigned). New faces are entering journalism and new voices are being heard.

Tunisians have been exercising press freedom with a vengeance, and much of the media have been hypercritical of the interim and constituent assembly governments. They criticize the assembly members' monthly stipend of 2,300 dinars (US$1,432) as excessive. The media inaccurately reported that the assembly voted in April 2013 to increase their basic monthly pay to over 4,000 dinars, following which a crowd gathered to shout "Shame on you!" and pelted assembly members with tin five-millime pieces.

The stipend of the assembly members is indeed high relative to the incomes of most Tunisians; however, all but the few members from Tunis have to maintain two residences and they have heavy travel expenses for commuting to their home constituencies. Mabrouka Mbarak, for example, a CPR representative of Tunisians in the US, has to contribute 15 percent of her stipend to the party (for Ennahdha the figure is 25 percent). She shares a small apartment in a suburb of Tunis with two other women, has childcare and research assistant expenses, has been away from her husband and son in the US for all but six weeks of the past year and has to pay US taxes on her Tunisian stipend. Radwan Masmoudi, an unsuccessful assembly candidate from the US, told me that he was relieved, frankly, that he lost the election, because if he had won, he would have had to leave his job and family and move to Tunisia — only to be denounced as an opportunist, one might add.

Tunisian journalists try to outdo each other in the ferocity of their muckraking. One newspaper ran a daring cartoon insulting the Ministry of Interior, portraying the building in the form of a naked man with his anus as the entrance to the building. This hardly seems fair to the new Minister of the Interior, a man who had been tortured in that very building under the old regime. It is true that there were honest journalists

who suffered in the past, yet there are other journalists who have gone from fulsome praise of Ben Ali to ferocious criticism of the new government. Perhaps this is a way of trying to restore their credibility.

In the post-revolution era, diplomats and NGOs have increased their support for Tunisian journalism and independent media through travel scholarships and seminars and have helped new media start-ups, such as the English language website TunisiaLive. Canada and the EU have put support for freedom of expression and information as one of their top priorities.

There have been a few protests about police brutality toward reporters and a few instances of censorship for religious reasons. The head of Nesma Television, the station that showed the movie *Persepolis*, was arrested for blasphemy, found guilty in May 2012 and fined US$2,870, but at least he did not have to serve jail time. In February 2012, an editor whose newspaper ran a photo of a Tunisian soccer star in Germany with his hand over a naked woman's breast was arrested but freed after eight days and had to pay a US$665 fine.

A serious instance of censorship arose in April 2012, when two Tunisian atheists were sentenced to prison terms of seven-and-a-half years each for posting caricatures of the Prophet Mohamed and documents critical of Islam on the Internet. The draft Tunisian constitution currently includes an article that will criminalize such religious offences. As Monica Marks has reported, this measure has elicited little debate, since Tunisians (and Muslims generally) tend to feel strongly that free speech does not include the right to insult Islam. They point out that all societies place limits on free speech (such as laws against "hate speech" in the US) and that laws against blasphemy currently exist in European countries such as Greece, Poland and Ireland (and until recently in England, although only blasphemy against the Church of England was considered illegal).

Working with the Government

Advising

After an uprising, the leaders of clandestine movements are not uniformly successful in consolidating democracy. New ministers, chosen for being untainted, often have no experience running a large government office. Having spent years in prison may enhance their moral standing, but it does nothing for their administrative and planning skills.

Since the revolution, each ministry has had a succession of two or three (or even more) ministers, with the prospect of yet another set of new ministers, once the new constitution is completed and new elections are held. Understandably, the civil servants who have worked in these ministries for years tend not to take the new ministers seriously because they know they will be gone soon. As in all bureaucracies, the safest course is to avoid taking any initiatives at all.

Friendly governments and NGOs can help build capacity for democratic governance through training programs which increase capacity of newly democratically controlled government institutions and promote civil society alike. Prior to 2011, such programs — information technology training, for example — had to be held outside Tunisia. The Tunisian government blocked conferences on sensitive topics, such as a European-sponsored (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung) conference on labour issues. Officials of the IRI and the NDI describe how, before their flights back to Tunis, Tunisians at overseas programs would throw their training materials into the trash for fear that customs agents back in Tunisia would consider them subversive and arrest them.

Beginning in 2011, capacity-building programs could finally be openly conducted in Tunisia. Tunis now abounds with uncensored conferences, debates, round tables and training programs. An example was a major conference in March 2012, organized by the Paris-based Institut de Recherche et Débat sur la Gouvernance.

Since the ouster of Ben Ali, several democracies have provided support for the electoral process, voter registration, campaign management and election observation. Before the election, various groups (including IRI, NDI and the foundations of five different German parties) held seminars open to all political parties about how to conduct effective election campaigns and win votes. Not all the advice was good. For example, the PDP was criticized by the Tunisian press for conducting a campaign featuring large posters of Nejib Chebbi, which some viewed as a throwback to the cult of the leader.

Dialoguing and Demarching

There was little opportunity to engage in dialogue about democracy with Ben Ali, a secretive man who kept his contacts with the diplomatic community to a minimum. British Ambassador Alan Goulty, who served in Tunisia from 2004 to 2008, reports that he met Ben Ali in a collective presentation of credentials by new ambassadors. After that, apart from rare visits by high British government officials, he had no opportunity for substantive conversation with Ben Ali, although there were meetings about democracy and civil society at lower levels between British and Tunisian officials. The regime tried to keep the British on the defensive about human rights by demanding that they suppress Tunisian "terrorists" such as Rached Ghannouchi, who lived in exile in London at the time. UK Ambassador Christopher O'Conner, one of the more experienced European diplomats in Tunisia, having served there since 2008, has ensured that human rights are at the top of his mission's agenda. Cooperation with Tunisian security agencies for counterterrorism continues, though security priorities no longer trump human rights.

The French had exceptional access to the highest levels of Tunisian government but apart from rare interventions to assist high-profile political prisoners such as journalist Taoufik Ben Brik, they avoided raising issues of democracy and human rights. The EU, as discussed above, was hamstrung by resistance from the French.

The US was reluctant to deal with Tunisia's human rights record until an unproductive dialogue with Ben Ali in Washington finally led to a change in policy. NGOs fared no better. The Ben Ali regime harassed the Arab Institute for Human Rights for over a decade, at one point freezing their assets and even arranging for their president to be denied a chequing account in Tunis. Since the revolution, Tunisia's long-delayed dialogue on democracy has finally begun.

Today, it is possible for governments to work through official channels to address human rights problems, but under Ben Ali, such efforts were futile. The regime legalized a few opposition parties, but severely restricted their operations. Like Egypt, Tunisia was theoretically a multi-party state but, in fact, a one-party regime with window dressing. Under both Bourguiba and especially under Ben Ali, those in opposition were ferreted out, tried for sedition and sentenced to death, life at hard labour or long prison terms. A few Islamists were freed after Ben Ali deposed Bourguiba in 1987, but the most active opposition leaders soon had to flee the country.

After January 2011, opposition parties and human rights groups that had previously been hobbled were revitalized. More than a hundred new political parties and hundreds more civil society groups have been granted permits. Tunisians can now dialogue with authorities about human rights without being arrested. However, questions remain, especially regarding the law that disallows religious or ethnic parties. Ennahdha was legalized after the revolution, while Hizb Ettahrir, the main Salafist party, has been allowed to organize but was not permitted to participate in 2011 election.

Reaching Out

Connecting

Despite deterrence, there was nevertheless a certain level of civic dialogue among Tunisians under Ben Ali. Tunisian bookstores such as Ars Libris held events at which Tunisian political and cultural leaders lectured and presented their books. The most daring of NGOs during this time was the Temimi Foundation that, despite government threats, held public symposia on controversial topics such as censorship, Bourguiba's legacy, the Black Thursday riots of 1978 and the 1961 assassination of Bourguiba's rival Salah Ben Youssef.

Under Ben Ali, diplomatic missions and foreign NGOs were able to sponsor events where Tunisians could connect about cultural and quasi-political topics. The Embassy of the Netherlands in Tunisia, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the French Institut de Recherches sur le Maghreb Contemporain, and the American Center for Maghreb Studies in Tunis all held lectures and conferences about cultural and political topics that pushed the boundaries of censorship.

At one time, the Ben Ali regime tried to restrict contacts between foreign representatives and Tunisian civil society organizations. Norwegian Vice Consul in Tunis, Reidun Breivik Andersen, reported that embassies could have contacts

with NGOs without informing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but if they gave funds to an NGO, it had to be reported. Finnish Ambassador Laura Reinilä ignored this regulation, with the ludicrous consequence that there were "no flowers on the Finnish independence day" and no medal from Ben Ali when she departed Tunisia at the end of her ambassadorship.

An example of the change in connecting since the revolution is El Taller, an international NGO headquartered in Tunis since 1992. Among other activities, El Taller has organized international "Courts of Women" for connecting about women's issues. Previously, none of these events could be held in Tunis. Tunisia's Minister of Women's Affairs explained to Corinne Kumar, the head of El Taller, that "women had achieved equality in Tunisia and had no need of such programs." In 2008, El Taller applied more than a year in advance to hold a conference in Tunis, even providing the names of all the participants, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs never responded. The event had to be moved to India, where it took only two weeks to receive approval and organize the conference. El Taller now holds events in Tunisia for Tunisians and others to connect on social issues.

Convening

Before the revolution, Tunisia had some diplomatic successes at bringing together adversaries to try to resolve their differences. Having achieved independence with minimal bloodshed, Tunisia cultivated a reputation as a moderate Arab state, able to convene disputing parties for bridging differences. In a famous speech in Jericho in March 1965, Bourguiba counselled the Palestinians to recognize and negotiate with the Israelis, though he was severely criticized by the Arab League and others for doing so. In 1970, Tunisia attempted mediation between the Jordanian monarchy and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). In 1982, Tunisia provided an exit for the PLO leadership from Lebanon, hosting them in Tunisia for a decade. Throughout its history, Tunisia has made efforts to convene leaders from Arab countries for mediation.

Tunisia has been less successful at resolving its own internal societal conflicts, especially the conflict between UGTT and the national party (the Destour Socialist Party, later the RCD). Social and political divisions have occasionally erupted into violence — for example, the Black Thursday riots of January 1978, when the UGTT and the Party clashed in the streets of Tunis, and the bread riots of January 1984, sparked by increases in the price of food. Tunisia is a relatively peaceful country, but the Tunisian Revolution has not been without violence, especially in Kasserine and Sidi Bouzid provinces, where Tunisians used firearms and burned police stations.

By contrast, the electoral campaign leading to the election of October 2011 was relatively civil. The Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy was among the groups active in convening the competing parties at public forums to discuss their party platforms, debate issues and air their differences. Since the election, there is promise of a new order for conflict resolution and national reconciliation — a process which outside diplomats support.

Since the revolution, Tunisia's vocation for convening countries has resumed: in March 2012, Tunisia hosted a major international conference of the "Friends of Syria" to seek ways to attenuate the conflict and promote democracy there.

Facilitating

It is important for governments to promote cooperation to advance democratic outcomes, including exit strategies. For example, in accepting Ben Ali, Saudi Arabia performed a useful service. Tunisia has judged and condemned Ben Ali to decades in prison and appropriately huge fines, and has asked that Ben Ali be extradited. If he had remained in Tunisia and fought to keep power, there would undoubtedly have been far more bloodshed, thus Ben Ali's departure helped Tunisia to avoid the same problems that Egypt (where they had to decide what to do with Mubarak), Yemen (where the exit of Ali Abdullah Saleh took a year), Libya (where Gadhafi fought an eight-month civil war) and Syria (where a popular revolt against the Assad regime is now well into its third year) had done. There were 338 deaths in Tunisia's uprising, compared with 846 in Egypt (although this represents a higher casualty rate in Tunisia because Egypt has eight times Tunisia's population). The uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt have been far less costly in lives than the uprisings in Libya (15,000 dead) and especially Syria (estimated as being more than 100,000 by the UN in late July 2013, with more than four million internally displaced and 1.9 million driven outside Syria). Over the long run, none of the Arab countries has matched Tunisia's slow but steady institutional progress.

Problems of corruption were not limited to Ben Ali's family. To varying extents, the police, the banks, the judiciary, the media and especially the RCD collaborated in the regime's corruption. A commission was set up to review 5,000 dossiers of alleged corruption, to bring charges against those who misused public office and to seize ill-gotten gains in Tunisia and abroad. The many Tunisian companies that belonged to Ben Ali and his family have been placed in government receivership and caretakers have been appointed to run them.

Not all RCD members were corrupt, so the electoral commission had to devise rules to determine who would be allowed to run as candidates for the new Constituent Assembly. Not only RCD members, but also many others had been tainted by complicity with the regime to different degrees. The leadership of the national labour union in Tunis (but not the rural union officials) had collaborated with Ben Ali. Among judges and lawyers, some were complicit and others not. As in South Africa and Chile, Tunisia has recently decided to create a truth and reconciliation commission to heal wounds and promote national unity, although the scope and time range of its activities have not yet been defined. Unfortunately, the wounds of the Ben Ali era are still fresh, making it difficult to reintegrate and reconcile with those who are perceived as having benefitted from Ben Ali's regime.

Financing

Tunisia has a rule against political funding from outside the country, but no effective financial disclosure procedures. During the election campaign, questions were raised about possible outside funding by several groups: Ennahdha was accused of receiving financing from Qatar; there was speculation about how the PDP was able to afford an expensive campaign (for their 260 offices alone, they reportedly spent 900,000 dinars, or US$560,000); and the PPP was rumoured to have received funding from former RCD members. Of course, all swore that their funding came exclusively from legitimate contributions within Tunisia.

After the election, a minor controversy erupted that focussed not on Tunisians, but on foreign NGOs. It followed an incident in Egypt in December 2011, when police arrested 43 people (15 of them Americans) from 10 NGOs, accusing them of working for illegal organizations, fomenting unrest and spying. Following this, the Tunisian newspaper *Le Temps* published an article suggesting that "international NGOs and their affiliates operating on Tunisian soil" might be "antennas of espionage."

Unlike Egypt, the authorities in Tunisia have never bothered foreign NGOs, although they require them to register. The controversy is, however, a healthy reminder that foreign NGOs should be alert to local sensitivities and transparent about their funding sources and activities. Foreign NGOs have generally eschewed involvement in domestic partisan politics, limiting their activities to technical support that is not overtly political.

Showcasing

Showcasing means presenting examples, models or solutions for democratic development suitable for local application. An indication that Tunisians are eager to learn from the experiences of other countries has been their attention to the post-authoritarian experiences of countries such as Spain and Portugal. Tunisians identify with countries where dictatorships were followed by the formation of many new political parties. Tunisians are alert to best practices. Post-uprising, the EU showcased best practices by bringing speakers and organizing seminars about the post-authoritarian democratic experiences of other countries.

In an interview in early 2012, Assemblywoman Mabrouka Mbarak noted an example of showcasing. The EU brought a panel of members from different European parliaments to Tunisia to offer advice to the newly elected members of the Constituent Assembly on how to be effective legislators. Mbarak recalls that a member of the British House of Commons advised them to make friends with the members of other parties "so that later you can get them to support your legislation." After that, Mbarak says that she noticed her colleagues becoming friendlier with members of opposition parties.

Defending Democrats

Demonstrating

Maya Jribi of the PDP recalls that in September 2007, the authorities tried to evict her and her colleagues from their party headquarters building in Tunis. She and Nejib Chebbi protested by going on a 30-day hunger strike. They appreciated that US Ambassador Robert Godec demonstrated support for their rights by paying them a public visit, and they also appreciated that some embassies invited them to official dinners and receptions, despite the displeasure of the Ben Ali regime. Jribi said that while to some these embassy invitations might seem a small thing, to her they conveyed the message, "You are not alone."

French journalist Nicolas Beau reported that Admiral Jacques Lanxade, the French Ambassador to Tunisia from 1995 to 1999, avoided opponents of the Ben Ali regime. The explanation probably lies in the more traditional diplomacy practiced by some European foreign ministries, which see the ambassador as a link with the local authorities, as opposed to the dual-purpose missions of countries like the US, Holland, the Czech Republic or Norway, whose ambassadors practice a diplomacy of simultaneous outreach to civil society.

Another example cited by Beau is that US Ambassador Robert Godec had "multiple contacts with dissidents" and invited Tunisian opposition educator Mohamed Bouebdelli to the US Embassy, complimenting him on his courage and assuring him of US support. France, on the other hand, has preferred private diplomacy. Beau quotes a letter that Bouebdelli received from a French official explaining, "I think that it is better not to make public my evaluation of the situation in Tunisia, which would render much less effective the aid that I can provide to activities such as yours."

To what extent do US, French and other diplomats simply follow their home offices' directives about promoting human rights? Robert Godec reports that, while the State Department sets the parameters within which ambassadors operate, in Tunisia he was given the discretion to promote democracy and human rights as the embassy's highest priority. This range of discretion varies, however. Because Egypt looms larger than Tunisia in US foreign policy, it is likely that the US Ambassador in Cairo had less discretion in setting priorities.

Verifying and Witnessing

Sending diplomatic observers to political trials shows support for the rights of dissent and due process. Under Ben Ali, the US, UK and Germany sent observers to trials, but the French did not. As Tunisian dissident lawyer Radhia Nasraoui reported, "The day of my last trial, several Western embassies sent representatives to the Palace of Justice. It was a clear signal addressed to the regime to tell it that not everything was permitted. There was nobody from the French Embassy."

Observing elections is another form of witness. After years of rubber-stamp elections, Tunisia held its first truly democratic national election on October 23, 2011, observed by over 7,000 Tunisian volunteers and 533 international monitors from the EU, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the non-governmental Carter Center. They reported instances of inefficiency, long voting lines and the potential for abuse (for example, when illiterate voters were assisted at the polls). Ennahdha was criticized for providing social services that bordered on vote-buying. The consensus was that there was room for improvement in future elections, but that overall, Tunisia's election had been free and fair.

Protecting

In the modern history of Tunisia, the most significant instance of protection of a political prisoner by a diplomat probably came when US Consul Hooker Doolittle intervened with the French Resident General at the end of World War II on behalf of independence leader Habib Bourguiba. Bourguiba credited Doolittle with saving his life.

During the Bourguiba years, Tunisia sheltered Arab political refugees. In 1982, Tunisia took in both the PLO leadership and its fighting forces from Lebanon. This was a risky gesture, since the PLO presence had previously destabilized first Jordan, then Lebanon. As a consequence, Tunisia suffered in 1985 when Israel bombed the PLO headquarters in Bordj Cedria, just outside the capital city of Tunis. Tunisia suffered again in 1988 when a squad of Israeli commandos infiltrated Tunisia and assassinated PLO leader Khalil Al-Wazir. The PLO was headquartered in Tunis until the early 1990s when they were permitted to return to the Occupied Territories, under the Oslo Accords.

As mentioned earlier, during the Ben Ali years, the French occasionally intervened discreetly to protect dissidents. France also gave asylum to political figures such as Ahmed Ben Salah, a labour leader and economic planner whom Bourguiba scapegoated for problems in the cooperative movement of the 1960s. Ben Salah escaped from a Tunisian prison and fled to Algeria and from there to Europe. France was not so hospitable in 1989 when they gave in to pressure from Ben Ali and refused to renew Islamist Rached Ghannouchi's visa. To their credit, the British provided asylum to Ghannouchi for two decades, rejecting Ben Ali's argument that that Ghannouchi was an Islamic terrorist.

The US record of protecting dissidents is mixed. The State Department gave Rached Ghannouchi a visa for one lecture tour in the US, but turned down a subsequent application. Beginning in 2004, the US refused a visa to Islamist moderate Tariq Ramadan, a Swiss citizen of Egyptian origin, to teach and lecture, finally relenting and allowing him into the US in 2010.

How Have Different Countries Used Diplomatic Tools in Tunisia?

Turning from the tools of diplomacy to the countries that have used them, how have the tools in the *Handbook* been used by the diplomats of various countries? We attempt a historicized comparative account of the approaches of various national, regional and international entities to Tunisian autocracy and nascent democracy, beginning with the most important case, France, and proceeding to other selected other countries' policies toward Tunisia, and then to regional and international organizations.

French Policy toward Tunisia

Ben Ali's sudden accession to power in 1987 took the French by surprise. At first, the French government was cool toward Ben Ali. They had come to like Bourguiba, who had been a moderate independence leader and an unabashed francophile. While Bourguiba had lived in France and studied law there, and his first wife was French, Ben Ali had no such ties. The French distrusted Ben Ali because he had received security training in the US (although he had also received military training at St. Cyr in France) and they suspected that Ben Ali might be under the influence of the Americans.

The French quickly warmed to Ben Ali, however, especially after he entrusted to them the sensitive task of training and equipping Tunisia's extensive security forces, while he delegated the training and equipping of the smaller and less strategically important Tunisian Army to the United States. For the next two decades, first Mitterrand and then Chirac maintained close ties and positive relations with Ben Ali, and there were periodic visits exchanged by heads of state and top ministers between Paris and Tunis.

Taking office in 2007, Sarkozy was even more effusive than Mitterrand or Chirac in his support of Ben Ali, but the Tunisian uprising spelled disaster for this policy. Sarkozy's Foreign Minister, Michèle Alliot-Marie, paid a badly timed holiday visit to Tunisia in late December 2010, at the very moment that the uprising was spreading. As the guest of a wealthy Tunisian business associate of Ben Ali, she flew in a private plane that passed over the very region of Sidi Bouzid and Kasserine while the uprising was at its most violent point. Back in Paris after the holidays, she compounded her gaffe by offering France's "savoir faire" for putting down the uprising. Sarkozy reversed policy only when Ben Ali had already fled Tunisia. After having been Sarkozy's good friend, Ben Ali had suddenly become *persona non grata*.

In defence of French policy, one should note that times changed during Ben Ali's reign. The events of the 1990s seemed to vindicate Ben Ali's hard line against Islamists. Algeria fell into the throes of a civil war between the Islamic Army Group and the Algerian government and Muslim extremists committed terrorist bombings in Europe. Early in the new millennium, there was the 9/11 attack in New York City,

bringing Islamic terrorism to the forefront of international attention. The French had no desire to see the Eiffel Tower, which had already been the target of one terrorist attempt, go the way of New York's Twin Towers. Thus, French diplomacy saw the autocracy of Ben Ali as the alternative to Islamic extremism. Denis Jeambar, director of the French newspaper *L'Express*, accurately captured the main idea behind 25 years of French policy with the phrase, "Better Ben Ali than Bin Laden." With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the French were wrong, but they were not alone.

Immediately after the Tunisian Revolution, an anonymous Quai d'Orsay official retrospectively rejected criticism of French policy during Ben Ali's reign as "inaccurate and unfair," arguing that "if France had criticized Tunisian policy, the same press which today is expressing its outrage would have accused us of interference and neo-colonialism." This assumes that a country can represent only one interest at a time, and such a view still characterizes many ex-colonial powers toward their former colonies.

The French Ambassador to Tunisia between 2001 and 2005, Yves Aubin de la Messuzière, reported after the revolution that he and other diplomats in Tunis had warned their home countries about "the decay of the Ben Ali regime and the discontent among Tunisian youth long before the Revolution started." He stated, "I and my ambassadorial colleagues of the United States and European capitals personally shared information and sent reports to our governments about corruption and bribery, nepotism and illicit enrichment of Ben Ali's close associates at a time while the exasperation and discontent of the Tunisian youth [were] spreading," although he adds that "no one expected Ben Ali's regime to end the way it did." This suggests that the failure was not so much on the part of the diplomatic corps to report accurately from Tunis but rather on the part of the home governments to respond appropriately to the reports they received from the field.

After Ben Ali's fall, Sarkozy tried to correct his foreign policy and make a fresh start in Tunisia. In late February 2012, he appointed Alain Juppé as his new foreign minister. Earlier in the month, he had chosen a new Ambassador to Tunisia, Boris Boillon, a young diplomat fluent in Arabic and with experience in Algeria, Libya and Iraq. But Boillon got off to a terrible start, inviting the Tunisian press to the French Embassy, challenging their objectivity with intemperate language and then apologizing on Tunisian television that same evening. Tunisians demonstrated in front of the French Embassy with signs demanding that, like Ben Ali, Boillon should "get out!" French-Tunisian relations soon calmed, but popular distrust toward France remains.

Elected in in May 2012, French President Hollande has committed France to assisting Tunisian democracy. To a Tunisian interviewer who brought up France's record of lenience toward Ben Ali, Hollande pointed out that, as a Socialist opponent of both Chirac and Sarkozy, he had long criticized French policy toward the Tunisian regime. Hollande noted that under his leadership, the French Socialist Party had participated in the expulsion of Ben Ali's party, the RCD, from the Socialist International. Nonetheless, Tunisians have been slow to forgive past French support

for Ben Ali and many feel that Hollande's strong reaction to the assassination of Chokry Belaid, a fellow socialist, has slowed French tourism. They also note that Hollande's reciprocation of Marzouki's visit to France has been slow to come. Hollande did replace the erratic Boris Boillon with a more solid diplomat, François Gouyette, as ambassador. France and Tunisia now both have new leadership and are working to mend their relations. They have too long and deep a history of close interaction and too much of a mutual investment to quarrel for long.

US Policy toward Tunisia

US presidents Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton all kept cordial relations with Ben Ali's Tunisia and offered low levels of military aid combined with periodic expressions of public approval. At first, George W. Bush continued this policy, but Ben Ali persisted in resisting democratic reforms and the Bush administration gradually became more critical. The US had little leverage on Tunisia, however, since they had already sharply reduced American economic aid and closed down the USAID and Peace Corps offices in Tunis. All that remained was a sacrosanct military and intelligence cooperation program for suppressing terrorism.

A telling moment came at a joint press conference with the younger Bush and Ben Ali in Washington, DC on January 12, 2008. Bush administered a public rebuff to Ben Ali, suggesting that he should consider granting greater press and political freedoms. Bush's criticism at the press conference became a popular Internet clip among Ben Ali's Tunisian critics.

As mentioned earlier, Robert Godec, US Ambassador to Tunisia from 2006 to 2009, made human rights the top priority of the US Embassy. He posted Tunisia's negative human rights record on the Embassy website in Tunis, which is standard State Department policy, but went beyond this, in privately raising democracy and human rights issues with Ben Ali. Godec also publicly met with Tunisian dissidents and invited opposition leaders to the embassy. His visit to Maya Jribi and Nejib Chebbi during their hunger protest was perhaps his boldest gesture. The response of the Ben Ali regime was to restrict the movements of the ambassador and his staff, harass the American-run International School, curtail the Fulbright program and refuse permits for American scholars to do research in Tunisia.

In contrast to the French government, when the Tunisian uprising broke out and deaths were reported, the US State Department criticized Tunisia's violent treatment of protesters, affirming the importance of respecting freedom of expression. Authorities in Tunis responded by summoning US Ambassador Gordon Gray, Robert Godec's successor, lodging a formal complaint about Washington "meddling in Tunisia's domestic affairs." In July 2012, Jacob Walles, an experienced career foreign service officer, took over as US Ambassador to Tunisia and has continued the pro-democracy policies of his predecessors.

Public opinion polls suggest that, for Tunisians, the recent positive aspects of US policy have been overshadowed by its support for Israel and its military interventions

in Iraq and Afghanistan. Periodic incidents of US Islamophobia are widely reported in Tunisia and have taken their toll. In September 2012, an amateurish video produced in the United States went viral on the Internet. The video, which contained images denigrating the Prophet Muhammad, led to an attack on the US Embassy and the burning and looting of the American School in Tunis. Although the demonstration was expected, the embassy was only lightly guarded by the Tunisians. President Marzouki responded quickly to a call from Hillary Clinton, sending the Presidential Guard. Two of the violent demonstrators were shot and killed, 29 were wounded and 60 people, mostly Salafists, were arrested and imprisoned (one of them has died after going on an extended hunger strike). Following closely on the assassination of the US Ambassador to Libya, the State Department responded by evacuating American diplomatic families, reducing the embassy to a skeleton staff, cancelling a project to bring back the Peace Corps to Tunisia and issuing a travel warning.

From the pre- to the post-revolution, US support for democracy and civil society in Tunisia exhibits continuity. During the revolution, US President Obama was quick to deplore Ben Ali's use of violence and he applauded the "courage and dignity" of Tunisian protesters. Since the revolution, the United States has joined Europe in supporting the new government and shoring up the beleaguered Tunisian economy. American aid includes a short-term US$100 million cash transfer through USAID and long-term plans for US$300 million in loan guarantees, as well as expanded Middle East Partnership Initiative funding and several private sector funding initiatives.

Italian Policy toward Tunisia

Italy, Tunisia's closest European neighbour, has loomed large in Tunisian history, and has been second in importance only to France in modern times. From France's seizure of Tunisia as a protectorate in 1881 until World War II, the largest foreign population in Tunisia was Italian. In 1987, Bettino Craxi and the Italian military secret service played a key role in Ben Ali's deposing of Bourguiba, after which Italy was unequivocally supportive of Ben Ali. Prime ministers Craxi and Berlusconi were especially close to Ben Ali, rewarding him for his efforts to curb illegal migration. With Ben Ali's help, Craxi fled to Tunisia in 1994 after an Italian court sentenced him to 27 years in prison for corruption. Berlusconi had important financial investments in Tunisia and continued to defend Ben Ali even after he had fled to Saudi Arabia. Since the mid-1980s, illegal migration has been a sore point in Tunisian-Italian relations. In the year after the revolution, an estimated 25,000 Tunisians attempted to flee to Italy on small boats, many of them drowning. Those that were intercepted were interned on the island of Lampedusa under terrible conditions. Tunisians continue to criticize the Italian government for this, contrasting it with the extensive hospitality of Tunisians toward refugees from Libya.

EU Policy toward Tunisia

Because of Europe's geographical closeness to Tunisia and the magnitude and coordination of European aid resources, the EU constitutes a formidable bloc; however, this diplomatic potential was not effectively realized in Tunisia. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, or Barcelona Process, created in 1995, was generally acknowledged to be a disappointment by the time of its failed summit meeting in 2005. The much-publicized Union for the Mediterranean, an idea of Sarkozy's in 2008, was similarly inconsequential, reaching a low point when the organization failed to hold summits in 2009 and 2010.

Europeans have dealt with Tunisia primarily through bilateral relations with individual countries, rather than as a unified bloc. As noted elsewhere, the United Kingdom, Germany and other Northern European countries made some modest attempts to encourage democracy in Tunisia. This was true on occasion for the EU representation in Tunisia, despite internal disagreement on the subject of Tunisian human rights.

Illegal immigration from Tunisia and other North African countries has long been a sensitive issue for the EU. Right-wing parties in France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Spain and Holland have made the growing European presence of Arabs and Muslims into a major political issue. Some leaders tolerated Ben Ali, in part because he kept his pledge to work hard at curtailing illegal migration. The economic downturn that followed the uprising, accompanied by the suspension of Tunisia's maritime controls, has led to a huge increase in attempts at illegal migration. In March 2011 alone, Italy intercepted 78 boatloads of would-be migrants fleeing Tunisia.

Since the Tunisian Revolution, the EU has been supportive of the Constituent Assembly and of Tunisian civil society through multiple technical, economic and governance aid programs. For the period 2011–2013, the EU earmarked €400 million in donations and €3 billion in loans through the European Investment Bank and other EU organizations.

Turkish Policy toward Tunisia

Turkey has long been, and still remains, a powerful model for Tunisia. Bourguiba borrowed many of his ideas from Mustafa Kemal Ataturk — including, unfortunately, Ataturk's undemocratic reluctance to cede power to a successor. Unlike Bourguiba, Ataturk stopped short of having himself declared president for life, although in practice he ended up being just that. Ennahdha leaders have cited Turkey's Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi ([AK], the Justice and Development Party) as an exemplar of moderate Islamist policies. Ennahdha would no doubt love to emulate the AK's economic record. Between 2003 (the year after the AK was elected) and 2012, Turkey has averaged a 5.1 percent growth rate. Although the rate slipped to 2.2 percent in 2012, this is a remarkable achievement. Yet Turkey differs from Tunisia in important respects. The Turkish Army, for example, plays a much stronger

political role than the Tunisian Army. Turkey also officially separates Islam and the state, while Tunisia's constitution proclaims Islam as the religion of the Tunisian people.

Regional Organizations

Tunisia is a member of the Arab League, which was headquartered in Tunis from 1979 to 1990, during the time that Egypt was ostracized for Sadat's separate peace with Israel at Camp David. The Arab League, however, has not been a force for democracy. Other Arab states have been even more autocratic than Tunisia and the Arab League has, for the most part, been little more than a forum. Tunisia is also a member of the Maghreb Arab Union (along with Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria and Libya), but Moroccan-Algerian animosity has rendered the Union ineffective and, like the Arab League, it offers scant lessons for democracy.

Tunisia is a member of the Organization of African Unity, however, unlike Libya, Algeria and Morocco, Tunisia has neither borders nor important relations with sub-Saharan states. This is unfortunate, since Burkina Faso and especially Senegal — a country which is 94 percent Muslim, but whose first president was a Christian — offer models of Muslim majority countries that have separated religion and the state. Finally, Tunisia has been a member of the International Organization of Francophone Countries (OIF) since its inception in 1970, but the OIF's commitment to democracy is only nominal; its members have no review mechanisms for governance nor do they have sanctions for violations of human rights, permitting regimes like Ben Ali's (and some with worse records) to coast along in confidence.

Policies of the IMF and the World Bank

IFIs, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, constitute a special category of organizations that contributed to Tunisia's human rights predicament by awarding high levels of aid without criticizing the regime. During the years leading to the uprising, the annual reports of IMF and World Bank underestimated Tunisia's problems, focussing narrowly on economic factors and ignoring or downplaying autocracy, corruption and human rights violations.

The aid awarded by the IMF and the Bank, which in turn instilled confidence in other international donors, was based on distorted metrics. For example, according to IMF and World Bank statistics, in 2010, Tunisians below the poverty line accounted for less than four percent of the population. However, this is true only if one defines "the poor" as those whose annual income is below 400 dinars (US$250) per person per year — a very low standard. If the poverty level income is increased to 600 dinars, this yields a more realistic estimate of about 12 percent of Tunisians being poor.

Another example is that, again according to the IMF and World Bank, the percentage of non-performing loans was only moderately high; however, this masked the fact that a disproportionate share of bad loans were to the president's

family. What the IMF and World Bank viewed as "privatization" was, in reality, the purchase of state companies at bargain prices by members of Ben Ali's entourage with money borrowed from banks that could not refuse to loan to them. Ben Ali's allies then did not even bother to make payments.

In fairness, one should note that the Tunisian economy performed well in Ben Ali's early years and that the downturn after 2008 was due in part to the world recession and record increases in the prices of food and fuel; moreover, IMF and World Bank officials in Tunisia, as elsewhere, are more vulnerable than other diplomats, since local appointments are subject to host country approval and receive a high degree of continuing review.

Everyone knew there was corruption in Tunisia, but many reasoned that all countries have corruption in different forms and to different degrees. Some suspected that stories of corruption were exaggerated or attributable to misogyny toward the president's wife. Unfortunately, it turned out that the magnitude of corruption of the Ben Ali-Trabelsi clan was far greater than anyone had thought.

After the flight of the president and his family, a national commission began tallying their ill-gotten gains and placing companies in receivership. Transparency International estimates that the president and his family controlled about a third of the Tunisian economy, including whole sectors of activity. This avarice was enabled in part by the IMF and the World Bank — a complicity that was no doubt unintentional, but nevertheless misguided and disastrous.

Comparing Policies

Events since the beginning of the Tunisian uprising might, at first glance, seem to reflect better on US than on French diplomacy, with other European states at various points in between. However, the United States did not begin criticizing Ben Ali until he had been in power for over a decade and a half. Not a single country in the world consistently pressed Tunisia for democratic reforms. The few entities that can claim this distinction include Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Federation for Human Rights, whose President Souhayr Belhassen is a distinguished Tunisian dissident.

Comparing policies toward Tunisia is difficult, in part because of the variation in countries' political systems and the latitude permitted each one's representatives. The French president, for example, has more foreign policy leeway and less legislative scrutiny than his US counterpart. France's ambassadors tend to see themselves as representing the French government to the Tunisian government and dealing through discreet contacts, rather than also representing of the French people to the Tunisian people.

Another historic difference is that, to a certain degree, France tends to follow the European diplomatic tradition of open and unapologetic pursuit of its own national interest. This contrasts with the US practice of engaging in policies that promote US national interest while clothing them in the garments of high principle (such as "democracy").

As the former colonial master, France had a complex relationship with Tunisia that led the French to be less critical. The United States, on the other hand, had both less leverage on Tunisia and less at stake. There is an analogy here with Egypt, where the United States had a major continuing commitment and a lot at stake, and was therefore reluctant to criticize Mubarak. By comparison, France had less involvement and less at stake in Egypt — although President Mubarak was co-chair of a much-vaunted Europe-Mediterranean partnership. US policy fared poorly for democracy in Egypt, in comparable ways and for comparable reasons that French policy fared poorly in Tunisia.

When Many People Stir the Pot

Turning to the post-revolutionary period and looking at the overall ensemble of embassies and NGOs, one notes the sudden flood of advice and assistance into Tunisia. This was a positive development, but one which paradoxically created a new set of problems. Soon after the dictator fled, embassies and NGOs began organizing scores of training programs and conferences on diverse topics for the newly liberated Tunisians. In an April 2013 report evaluating this expert assistance, the Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT) described the result as "event overload." Indeed, much useful help was provided, but there were too many one-size-fits-all events. Some trainers knew little about Tunisia and lacked language skills.

The IFIT report (2013) suggests that the diplomats and NGOs discussed in this Tunisian case study constitute more than the sum of their parts. That is, diplomats and NGOs offer important and useful services, especially for the promotion of democracy and civil society. They work best, however, when they work together (and, in post-autocracy situations, with the host country government) to avoid scheduling conflicts and duplication, to tailor assistance to local needs and to provide coordinated and sustained services with follow-up.

CONCLUSION: DEMOCRACY WITH A DASH OF HARISSA

Tunisia's political landscape is taking on greater definition as events unfold. The major political parties, whose platforms in the October 2011 election tended to be vague, have been forced to take specific positions on issues in the Constituent Assembly. It has been especially interesting to see what positions Ennahdha adopts, because Islam provides no real guidance on issues such as unemployment, worker-management conflicts, job creation and debt management. Some parties have disappeared or split while others have merged, and new parties continue to emerge.

Some aspects of Tunisia's future are fairly predictable. The new constitution will no doubt delegate more power than before to the legislature and less to the president. It will resemble France's constitution in some respects but it will mention Islam. Debate on the first draft of the constitution began in mid-September 2012 and

three drafts were completed by spring 2013. The Tunisian public is understandably impatient. Completion and approval of the constitution was not completed at the time of publication (August 2013), with new elections in late 2013 or early 2014. These will be preceded by a campaign that will no doubt be strident, but hopefully non-violent. Given the popular unrest and suspension of the process at the time of writing, this has been thrown into doubt. Tunisia's political future is unclear.

Tunisia's democratic achievements are not likely to be reversed in the near future. Tunisians will not easily give up their hard-won freedoms of speech, press, assembly and open elections. Tunisians of all political stripes remain vigilant for any signs of backsliding to autocracy. The Tunisian experience has already shattered myths, the most insidious of which is that Arabs are somehow culturally incapable of democracy.

Both inside and outside Tunisia, some have become pessimistic about the future. They warn that public impatience and frustration over the economy may erupt into yet another uprising. Outsiders who once spoke of the authoritarian tendencies of Arabs dismiss Tunisia's accomplishments and speak of the Arab Spring as devolving into an Arab Winter.

There is cause, however, for guarded optimism in the long term. Although there are still security concerns in Tunisia, the crime rate is falling. With greater security, tourism will recover, which will help reduce unemployment. The corrupt ex-president — who, in 23 years is estimated to have looted the equivalent of half a year's GNP — is gone, so more money will remain in the economy to be reinvested. Banks will no longer be forced to give bad loans to the parasitical entourage of the president.

The brakes on Tunisian entrepreneurship are lifting. The Constituent Assembly has been working on programs to address poverty and regional inequality. The next Parliament, freed of the burden of writing a constitution while governing at the same time, will have an easier task. They will appoint ministers who will stay for more than a year and who will be taken more seriously. The international community is providing aid to promote democracy and to help the economy. Thus there are good reasons to believe that in the long term, the economy will improve, although much will depend on the European and world economies to which Tunisia is tied.

But the short term has been difficult. Tunisian civil society has become increasingly uncivil — characterized by intemperate discourse, increasing crime, school riots, juvenile delinquency, a high suicide rate, soccer hooliganism, market conflicts and even bank robberies. Debate is shrill — and becoming more contentious with the demonstrations beginning in early August 2013. But apart from the US Embassy riot and the assassinations of Chokry Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, the level of violence has remained low to date.

Tunisia is not only drafting a new constitution, but also working out its national identity, resuming a debate on Islam that was interrupted for half a century. Until 2011, a dominant secularist ideology of national identity had been imposed by a succession of regimes — the Ottoman beys, the French protectorate, and

presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali. Much will depend on how successful Tunisia is in integrating an Islamic component into its national identity, rising above sterile binary oppositions of secularism and Islamism.

Tunisia's moderate Islamist party, Ennahdha, has shown its willingness to compromise and seek consensus. Ennahdha was, for many months, tolerant toward the Salafists, who smashed the windows of theatres that showed films to which they objected, attacked bars and brothels, blocked access to the university and, in some rural areas, attempted to set up local "mini-caliphates," where they enforced dress codes and other "Islamic" rules. Ennahdha has finally begun to crack down on these Salafist extremists and have even received a public warning from Al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb for this. Some Tunisian Salafists profess to support Al-Qaeda, but as yet they have not embraced its methods. In general, the Tunisians have managed to avoid the kinds of deadly violence that are all too common elsewhere in the MENA region.

Labour relations continue to be a serious problem for Tunisia. Strikers and militant job seekers have shut down factories. The Tunisian economy keeps shooting itself in the foot. As of summer 2012, 170 foreign companies had closed. The UGTT has been engaged in what the press calls an "arm-wrestling match" with Ennahdha over strikes. Some describe the UGTT as "the Salafists of the left."

Tunisia must find a way to make peace between workers who want higher wages and the unemployed who want work, to stimulate the entrepreneurs who have long been kept down by nepotism, and to help the poor, especially those in the rebellious interior and the south, who all too often see no way out except through suicide or attempts to flee across the Mediterranean to an unwelcoming Europe.

Much of Tunisia's current incivility is linked to its struggling economy. Ultimately, the success of democracy in Tunisia will be closely tied to economic performance. The poor economic conditions that were a major factor in causing the revolution worsened at first, and the long-awaited recovery has been slow in coming. A basic problem is the continuing weakness of the world economy, and especially the economy of Tunisia's Mediterranean neighbourhood. Self-inflicted wounds, such as strikes, have disrupted mining and manufacturing. Self-immolations continue, but have become so common that they receive only brief press comment.

The fragility of the economy and the slowness of recovery are the main difficulties that Tunisia's nascent democracy faces. As Radwan Masmoudi of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy points out, much is at stake. Masmoudi worries that if the seeds of democracy do not take root in Tunisia, the country where the "social soil" is most propitious, then democracy will be set back indefinitely throughout the Arab world. The Egyptian corollary to "If the Tunisians can do it, so can we," is "If the Tunisians can't do it, then maybe we can't either."

The help of democratic governments and international NGOs is crucial. Perhaps the most important form of assistance is promoting programs that generate jobs — such as marketable skills training, improved job placement, investment in new enterprises and providing microcredit loans to small- and medium-scale businesses.

Tunisians are well-known for their entrepreneurship, but they lack capital. Tunisia is filled with people who have gone abroad, worked, saved, returned with hard-earned capital and started small businesses, but the low levels of capital that come from temporary migration and self-exploitation are not sufficient.

Western democracies, despite their own hard times, must work together to help Tunisia's economy. Priority should go to helping Tunisians create their own wealth, without depending on their government for everything. One way to do this is through attracting more investment from the large Tunisian expatriate community. Another way is to attract funding for new company start-ups by insuring investors against losses (the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and Eximbank offer models for this). Microcredit organizations such as Enda Inter-Arabe have proven very successful. Tunisia's success is very much in the interest of the West. The alternative — standing by and watching Tunisian democracy founder because it has come onto the scene at an economically difficult time — will be far more costly in the long term.

Tunisia represents an example and a model — albeit a turbulent one — for democratic evolution in the Arab world. It is to be hoped that Tunisia's relative inclusiveness and tolerance will offer solutions especially to those Arab countries that are religiously and ethnically pluralistic.

Many take it as axiomatic that democracy is a universal value, though some contest Europe's paternity claim — that democracy emerged during the Enlightenment and continues spread from the West to the rest of the world. Whatever its origins, Tunisians are adapting democracy to their own cultural setting. In important respects, each democratic system must grow from within. The homegrown political system that Tunisians are cooking up, like the national cuisine, will no doubt have its own special flavour. So far, the local spice in Tunisian democracy appears to be harissa, the national hot sauce made from red peppers.

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