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## The struggle for democracy in the Middle East and Africa

### June 2011

[Karl Sharro](#) will introduce this discussion of recent developments and asking whether the Arab movements can survive western intervention?



The uprisings in Arab countries came as a surprise to most; even President Obama questioned US intelligence agencies' failure to predict events. Those uprisings are driven by genuinely popular democratic movements, but their outcomes are still unclear. Following the early successes in Tunisia and Egypt, the fate of the uprisings in Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and Syria is now far from certain. Given the lack of traditional forms of political organisation spearheading those uprisings, how will events unfold and who are the main players determining the outcomes?

The UN-sanctioned NATO intervention in Libya has revived support for 'humanitarian intervention', but Western leaders appear very reluctant in leading this intervention. In the absence of a coherent US and Western policy, regional players are stepping up to fill this vacuum with Saudi Arabia sending its troops into Bahrain to help crush the uprising there, and Turkey attempting to orchestrate the outcomes in countries such as Syria and Libya.


Will this mean an end to the post-cold war order in the region? What do we make of calls from foreign ministries for an 'orderly transition', especially in light of Western powers' history in the region? What do those revolts mean for the balance of power in the region, and for American hegemony?

The uprisings put paid to the idea that democracy is exclusively Western, and show it is a universal aspiration. Yet the reaction from Western elites has been ambivalent at best: Can Arabs bring about a 'stable democracy'? Can the peoples of North Africa and the Middle East keep control of their movements in light of those external interventions? Might their revolutions be taken away from them?

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**Listen again (not miked so variable quality)...**

**Karl's introduction - click on the  Play button:** {mp3}middle-east-africa-speaker-intro{/mp3}

**Early discussion - click on the  Play button:** {mp3}middle-east-africa-early-discussion{/mp3}

**Middle discussion - click on the Play button:**

{mp3}middle-east-africa-middle-discussion{/mp3}

**Final comments - click on the Play button:** {mp3}middle-east-africa-final-discussion{/mp3}

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## Background readings

[Egypt's Bumbling Brotherhood](#) , by Scott Atran, The New York Times, 2 February 2011

[The Egyptian uprising: on the universal aspiration for freedom](#) , by Karl Sharro, 4 February 2011

[The Egyptian uprising: 'why now?' and 'what next?'](#) , by Brendan O'Neill, Spiked-Online, 8 February 2011

[A revolt for whose benefit?](#) by Kenan Malik, 10 February 2011

[Middle East protests bigger than oil](#) , by Daniel Ben-Ami, 28 February 2011

[Of Revolutions, Regime Change, and State Collapse in the Arab World](#) , by Marina Ottaway and David Ottaway, Carnegie Endowment Commentary, 28 February 2011

[Why Tunis, Why Cairo?](#) , by Issandr El Amrani, London Review of Books, February 2011

[The No-Fly Zone in Libya: Hijacking the Arab Uprisings](#) , by Karl Sharro, Karl reMarks blog, 18 March 2011

[Preliminary Historical Observations on the Arab Revolutions of 2011](#) , by Rashid Khalid, Jadaliyya website, 21 March 2011

[After the Arab Spring](#) , by Steve A Cook, The Atlantic, 28 March 2011

**\*\* *Listen again* to Karl's comments from a discussion earlier in the uprisings by clicking on this [Leeds Salon](#) link \*\***