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ON REVOLUTION 2015 – ARAB REVOLUTIONS REVISITED

I. The Arab Spring – the nature of the Arab revolutions

After almost four years of the crisis in Syria, which began in March 2011, the solution to the internal conflict is as far away as before. With all the twists which saw the semantic upgrading of the conflict from the crisis to the civil war – and with subsequent other developments which saw the transformation of the Syrian National Council into the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces – the events on the ground have not produced any viable resolutions. To the contrary, by implicating more variables in the equation they have further complicated the situation moving the expected finale even further away.

On the whole, the Arab revolutions have not brought Arab societies to a better *dénouement* so far – Egyptian and Libyan cases are fitting examples. The words of Hannah Arendt about XVIII revolutions in Europe encapsulate well the current situation in the Middle East: 'In France the downfall of the monarchy did not change the relationship between rulers and ruled, between government and the nation, and no change of government seemed able to heal the rift between them. The trouble was that the chief difference between the nation and its representatives in all factions had very little to do with "virtue and genius", as Robespierre and others had hoped… The inescapable fact was that liberation from tyranny spelled freedom only for the few and was hardly felt by the many who remained loaded down by the misery'[1].

The proclaimed creation of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces during the meeting in Doha on November 12, 2012 did not help consolidate the opposition forces in the face of Bashar el-Assad's

[1] Arendt, H. 1987. *On Revolution*. Penguin Books, p. 74.

resistance and laid bare fragmentation and lack of 'a working concept' on the part of opponents-in-exile. No wonder that cyclical spectacles of wishful thinking in the West and the Gulf became an easy object of mockery in Damascus. The glib Information Minister in the Syrian government Mr. Omran al-Zoabi once cynically dismissed the opposition gathering as 'delusional ravings of people sitting in the lounges of five-star Gulf hotels'. Mr. Omran al-Zoabi's wry comments were not completely unfounded. It is now crystal-clear that the opposition groups have not won popular support within Syrian society. The opposition leadership have always attracted the same set of names – only reconfigured differently under diverse labels – and led by individuals too disconnected from the people on the ground in the country (the arguments used often against the Syrian National Council[2]) or too ailing to be considered seriously in terms of effective leadership on the ground (like in case of Mr. Riad Seif[3]).

Behind regime's minister cynicism lurked a well-founded irony about the awkward directions of the Syrian revolution, which in many respects copied the distorted features of the Egyptian, Libyan and Tunisian uprisings. It bore also, in some respects, the resemblance to the French Revolution – the mistakes of which it repeated. All of them had one thing in common – they all, as the saying goes, devoured its children, cost a lot in social and economic terms and turned the clock back as measured against the scale of people's 'pursuit of happiness'.

Like the French Revolution the Arab Spring movements have their own teleological sense probably better comprehended as seen in the conceptual framework of Hegelian historical inevitability, in other words, as part of necessity of facts fixed and immutable.

Hegel feared the French revolution, detested its violent character, despised its protagonists and therefore tried somehow to rationalise the outbreak of irrational hatred to make sense out of the chaos. As a believer in the rational progression of history (and idealist determinist) he strove to convince himself against all odds that: '…world history exhibits nothing other than the plan of Providence…. In the pure light of this divine Idea… the illusion that the

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2 Shaw, W. 2012. Syrian Opposition Council struggles for legitimacy. Disconnect from conflict on the ground saps confidence in overseas political movement. [Online] 5 July 2012. Available at: http://iwpr.net/report-news/syrian-opposition-council-struggles-legitimacy

3 Riad Seif – key opposition figure appointed to head Syrian interim government abroad in November 2012.

world is a mad or foolish happening disappears… Spirit does not toss itself about it…'[4].

Applying Hegel's way of understanding the history lets one appreciate better the logic of events in the Arab countries that have spiralled out of control and made average people's life worse off – either through sudden impoverishment or the death of relatives. Hegel's conception is comforting since it allows to come to terms with the fatalism of the situation – when it assumes the necessity for the historical processes to realise themselves. Unfortunately, the fatalism/destiny is good for history studied in academies (it allows it to realise itself) but not so much for an average individual.

It is worth reminding that in none of the Arab Spring countries, the (declared) progressive political goals of restoring the dignity to people, installing civil rights and liberties and making people happier were fully fulfilled. Are Arab revolutions a case of one merciless nepotism substituting another and a secular sham replacing religious exuberance? The Western media's coverage of the region show people cheated out of the victory and complaining – from an average businessman to a garbage collector. In order to identify what went wrong, for the sake of the research, the analysis will comprise Egyptian and Syrian revolutionary experiences.

II. What went wrong in Egypt

Something went wrong in the Middle East which affected the spirit of change and escapes any attempt for easy explanation. Structurally, a body polity has been transformed by bringing in new concepts of governments; ideologically, the new ideas have arrived in the form of new phraseology about freedom and liberties. However, from an axiological standpoint, the noble ideals seem to be more of a chimera than realities due to the simple fact that noble values have not followed the declaratory statements. These words on the French Revolution from Hannah Arendt's book *On Revolution* fit again the current condition of the Arab revolutions across the region: 'Thus the role of revolution was no longer to liberate men from the oppression of their fellow men, let alone to found freedom, but to liberate the life process

[4] Hegel, G.F. *Introduction to the philosophy of history*. Available at: http://www.class.uidaho.edu/mickelsen/texts/Hegel%20%20Philosophy%20of%20History.htm

of society from the fetters of scarcity so that it could swell into a stream of abundance. Not freedom but abundance became now the aim of revolution'[5].

The Arab revolutions released huge destructive energy (life process of society) – like in the case of the French Revolution before. They were in need of guidance but what they encountered instead was abundance hiding spiritual vacuum, intellectual chaos and often propensity for deception from all kinds of career-seekers. The drama of a Tunisian cart wheeler or the death of protestors on Tahrir Square served as a catalyst for a change awaited by one group of people to take power from another; and as such, regrettable to say, their individual deaths were meaningless and their sacrifice expendable – expendable in the face of historical processes in the Middle East.

They released energy that in turn was 'hijacked' by – using Hegelian terms – the immutable laws of history which were, in this case, the dictate of the most voluble ideology.

The first mayor controversy over the decree issued on November 22, 2012 by President Mohamed Morsi, who had limited the powers of judicial authority, revealed intentions of the Egyptian President and his cohort. After months of turmoil, the decision could be interpreted as appropriating popular enthusiasm to its own purposes. To many antagonists it amounted symbolically to the loss of revolutionary innocence and the betrayal of Egyptian revolution as a popular revolution of values. This move increased fears that the proposed 234 Article of the constitution could open way for a theocracy by moving the country closer to Sharia law – prompting Mohamed El Baradei to comment wryly '…(Morsy) put to referendum a draft constitution that undermines basic freedoms & violates universal values'[6].

While the protestors on the street in late November were replacing placards against Mubarak with the ones playing on Morsy's name: *Morsy beaucoup* (*merci* in French) the gloomy self-realisation was slowly making its way. But, it appears as legitimate to ask, who in the first place told El Baradei and, for example, Western observers that the implementation of 'freedoms and universal rights' in Egypt will be realised at all? The logic of history had suggested something to the contrary and this is exactly what happened in Egypt. The aspirations of religious leaders in Egypt were known long in advance and went beyond gaining mere political influence – the ambitions of religious (but also non-religious) organisations is to win spiritual leverage.

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5 Arendt, H. 1987. *On Revolution*. Penguin Books, p. 64.

6 http://www.cnn.com/2012/12/01/world/meast/egypt-protests/index.html?hpt=hp_t1

This is the spiritual power that infatuates followers and provides leaders with control over people's minds.

Significantly, the French revolutionaries, in order to gain popular acceptance, quickly created artificial God of the revolution by establishing the 'cult of the Supreme Being' (inspired by the last chapter of Rousseau's *Social Contract*) and winning quickly the army of devotees overflowing with enthusiasm: '… The true priest of the Supreme Being is Nature; his temple, the universe; his worship, virtue; his festivals, the joy of a great people'[7].

The Bolshevik and Maoist revolutions followed suit procuring religion-like devotion to Leninism and Maoism with the bureaucratic apparatus fashioned after the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church. These tactics are part of the 'revolutionary marketing' regardless of changing times, places and actors.

Given the above, it should not come therefore as a surprise that the group of 85 Egyptian members of parliament pushed through the legislative body their own project of the constitution and looked for ways to impose their own vision of Egyptian politics. At this stage of Egyptian experience it was as natural as, for example, the imposition by 56 white males (mostly lawyers) of the Republican Constitution on the United States in 1789 which defended the business interests of some oligarchs (like in Russia under Boris Jelcin 200 years later) and granted the rights to vote only to white property holding males – leaving everybody else in the society disenfranchised (women, poor white property-less males, black people and native Americans). In the American case, a narrowly conceived republicanism became a form of 'religion' – controlled and manipulated by a vibrant group of business leaders with vested interests (majority of them were lawyers).

The triumph of Muslim Brotherhood's political arm 'Freedom and Justice Party' in the legislative election and subsequent 'highjacking' of Egyptian revolution, from a historiosophical angle, was an inevitable consequence – considering that the conservative Muslims, as the most vocal group, constituted the 'optical' majority by employing combination of such factors as skilful political PR plus an aggressive and domineering approach. If we had added to this combination the political immaturity of people (exposed before to the prolonged time of oppression), the silent compliance of the 'non-optical' majority in the face of colossal challenges would not have surprised us.

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7 Quote from: Hembree, F. 1993. *The French Revolution*, p. 111.

Interestingly, the oppression of liberal revolutionaries by their conservative counterparts (the Muslim Brotherhood under President Morsi) in Egypt was not unlike the Jacobin cleansing of real or imagined enemies of the French Revolution at the time of the Great Terror. Ironically, the similar sentiments for the return of the old good times under *ancien regime* appeared across the region – repeating the history of the French restoration under Louis XVIII.

The case of the Egyptian revolution is a telling example of *ancien regime* coming back. The arrival to power of Marshal Fatah Al-Sisi after Islamic president Mohammed Morsi's downfall – who in the first place had appointed Sisi in an attempt to reclaim power from the army – and the restoration of the old military elites signified the repetitive cycle of revolutions gone astray. What is interesting, Sisi came to power with the support of several old prominent businessmen and the mainstream parties embodying the old order such as *al-Dawa al-Salafiya* (the Salafist Call), the Salafist *Nour Party*, the liberal Free Egyptians Party and the liberal New *Wafd Party*[8]. The case of Tunisia is not dissimilar. After a three year spell of Islamic *Ennahda* (Renaissance) the party in power in the October 2014 elections brought back the old cohorts of deposed president Ben Ali, syndycalists and leftists – all united under the aegis of the new movement called *Nidaa Tounes* led by 87 year-old Beji Caid Essebsi, the former minister of Bourguiba[9]. Similar narrative could be applied to the Libyan case where the dictatorship has been replaced by warlords and two acting governments.

Concluding, it seems that the excesses of the revolution are unavoidable until the thirst for bloodletting runs its course and the majority of population comes to their senses. So far the Egyptian revolution has been impressive as extravaganza – of beautiful language, lofty declarations, important statements and words; words which do not come true easily in the Middle East. In a sense, it has been a 'revolution completed' – in a semantic dimension – with antagonists ascribing their own meaning to the words, relativising them and, in a way, depreciating their value.

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8 *Egypt: Abdul Fattah al-Sisi profile*. BBC. [Online] 16 May 2014. Available at: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19256730 [Accessed: 20 July 2014].

9 En Tunisie, la victoire des laics. *Le Figaro* [Online] 27 October 2014 Available at: http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2014/10/27/01003-20141027ARTFIG00315-en-tunisie-la-victoire-des-seculiers.php [Accessed: 28 October 2014].

III. What went wrong in Syria?

The Syrian problem is another good case study – being part of a more complex problem inherent in the region. As a focal point for the analysis it can be extrapolated and universalised as an experience not unique to one location and one people. The Egyptian revolution, to some extent, is a finished entity, at least, at its first stage of development while the Syrian revolution is still an experience *in statu nascendi* – therefore more interesting from the epistemological standpoint as a subject of the analysis.

With all this fatalistic determinism in the Middle East is Syria doomed to the recurring cycles of endless violence and bloodbath? It is a very probable scenario given the synergy of two overlapping negative factors – the persistent problems and catastrophic impact of the external players. It can be examined by using sociological methods and foreign policy theorem.

1. Analyzing internal factors

A. What Syria needs is not a stash of arms but a kind of a moral revolution and a secular canon of ethical standards

As to the intrinsic nature of the thing, the inability of Syrians to find ways in order to reach compromise was striking. As an eyewitness to Syrian national 'reconciliation' I was awed by the amount of anger and distrust on the part of people involved in the political process. The politicking in Syria from the beginning took the form of a spectacle of emotions running high where buck-passing and name calling became more important than any substantial argument. Temperamental extremists, the Syrian were unable to overcome differences. The hot temperament so enticing for tourists when quarrelling with the merchants at the Damascus *souq* turned out to be a critical factor preventing any compromise at the round table. It transpired also that the idea of Syria as one nation unravelled fast.

Temperamental aspects aside, the major factor inhibiting chances for national reconciliation seems to be overpowering mistrust inherent in the Middle Eastern behavioural pattern. The negative legacy of distorted politics and business spawned the culture where taking advantage of one another, inflating stories or telling half-truths became commonplace.

Becoming involved in the meetings arranged to discuss new vectors of reforms in Syrian politics in May 2012 I was struck how lightly people

were appropriating statements only to depart from them minutes later. Not mentioning that the most outspoken participants defected soon after that, making the whole reform initiative a laughing stock.

Though it might be politically incorrect to admit it openly, however, the erratic behavioural pattern is a main inhibitor paralysing the political processes in Syria and beyond. On the one hand, it is one of the charming idiosyncrasies making the region so intriguing but, on the other hand, hindering political processes. Anybody making business or politics in the Middle East knows how tough the environment can be.

What is interesting, no part of the region is immune to it, including the Israelis. Politically counted into the Western zone of democratic tradition, where dishonesty in politics is expected to be punished by the voters at the ballot boxes, Israel follows the Middle Eastern pattern of lie. Israeli politics has been plagued by corruption in recent years, yet Israeli politicians know well that they are not going to be held accountable for excesses. To some extent, being well versed in political tradition of Morgenthau style, they adapt to the circumstances of the region – otherwise they would not have survived so long in such unfriendly environment. Manipulation is innate in the fabric of the societies in the Middle East – it is like a contagious disease.

Analyzing the anatomy of the problem the question arises what could be done to build trust among people. The solution for the region could arrive from un unexpected source. It could take the form of, to paraphrase famous sociologist Max Weber's words –'Islamic ethics and the spirit of modernity'[10]. Weber's one hundred year old studies on bureaucracy, Protestantism, capitalism and disenchantment of the world demonstrated how important in Judeo-Christian traditions of the West was the liberation of significant areas of human activity from religious oppression. It was like a 'Copernican revolution' in thinking and perception of the world. It was a point of emancipating Western Europeans from the feudal shackles intellectually, from religious infatuation and it was a point of encouraging open debate and creative thinking in neo-platonic sense. To some extent, it was a culmination of the secularisation process which had began in medieval times.

These were the ideas sewn from the time of Thomas Aquinas who separated the secular from the religious thus broadening epistemological horizons and breaking intellectual straitjacket of St. Augustine stiff tradition[11].

[10] Reference to Weber, M. 1993. *Protestant Etics and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Routledge.

[11] Read Redhead, B. ed. 1995. St Thomas Aquinas: the state and morality. In: *Plato to NATO. Studies in political though.* London.

The French Revolution, the Enlightenment and industrial revolutions only strengthened the secular tendencies in the West. And, what is interesting, the overcoming of religion did not happen outside or against the Judeo-Christian faith as Dr. Richard L. Rubenstein noticed duly in his book *The Cunning of History*: 'It must not be forgotten that the Protestant insistence upon the radical transcendence of a supramundane God, which was the indispensable theological precondition of both the secularisation process and disenchantment of the world, was biblical in origin'.

The emancipation of mind in the Judeo-Christian tradition allowed the creation of universal ethics understood as a secular set of values and principles valid universally and internalised by the majority of people. This, in turn, became the avenue to mutual understanding and social harmony in Euroatlantic geographical space.

The Arab world will have to face a similar revolution in thinking about the doctrinal concept of the state and society[12]. The discussion is not a new one and has accompanied from the beginning the public discourse with writings and preaching of such intellectuals as Sayid Qutb, Al-Banna or Abul Maududi where it was pointed that overzealous devotion to the one-sided (and distorted) politicised interpretation of the Quran/religion was a trap. At issue was, for example, the prominent slogan popular among conservatives that guided the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood: *al-islam dinun was dawlatun* (Islam is a religion and a state). The closer study revealed that the sentence was mentioned neither in a verse of the Quran nor was it quoted from a hadith. It was simply a 19th century invention appropriated by the Salafi movement that emerged to stop the Western influence in Egypt[13]. The damage to the interpretation had been done yet by inseminating peoples' minds with a wrong concept.

Characteristically, around the same time when Weber was pondering on the separation of the earthly economic pursuits from religious endeavours the Arabic ideologues of the Islamic State developed a doctrine of the state (*daula islamijja, hukuma islamijja*) which went in the opposite direction to the tendency which Weber demonstrated. For them (Rashid Rida) the political renaissance (*nahda*) signified the merger between politics and religion under the rule of the pious caliph.

The Middle East (and the Arab world) in the process of undergoing renaissance, now like never before, needs dignifying ethos and everyday

12 Lewis, B. 2003. *The crisis of Islam. Holy war and unholy terror.* London.

13 For more details read Halliday, F. 2005. *100 Myths.*

ethics which would constitute the moral reference and set a criterion for judgements. It could solidify the backbone of societies and offer a platform for resolving differences.

The Syrian case of quarrelling leaders unable to overcome prejudices might be symptomatic of a bigger problem of the Middle Eastern reflecting deficiency in the ethical standards relating to politics and business, the lack of which undermine the fabric of trust indispensable in the process of modern state-building where decisions are made more through consensus than prevalence[14]. The inability of constructing a modern polity, in this case, is a result of temperament and distrust**.**

What Syria needs is not a stash of arms but a moral revolution and secular canon of ethical standards internalised and implemented in the social sphere. Syria needs, to remind Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski's words, *mathanoi* (a change of heart) and *katechon* (spiritual might). On the other hand, religion could play a very positive role in times of social changes. Kolakowski, professor of Oxford and committed secularist, wrote an interesting essay in the 1980s in which this religious sceptic emphasised the role of religion (any religion but Christianity in this case) as the moral cornerstone for civilisational progress. The religion for him represented the point of reference in the chaotic world guarantying the organised progression of peoples and societies through history and maintaining the ability to distinguish good from bad while preserving the superiority of natural law prescribing moral behaviour. By removing the natural law as a point of reference – the law externally anchored – we expose ourselves to the dangers of totalitarian whimsies and relativisation of moral categories. The instrumentalisation of religion by extremist forces in the Arab countries complicated the situation and made it harder to discover any moral common denominator.

B. The Polish case – Solidarity revolution scenario revisited

The Polish Solidarity revolution was one of the most successful metamorphosis which contributed to the radical change of the geopolitics of Eastern Europe. At the same time it was a bloodless spectacle bearing resemblance to a civil disobedience in India or in the United States respectively.

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[14] Fukuyama, F. 2004. *State building. Governance and world order in the twenty-first century*. Cornell University Press. It is worth pointing that Fukuyama believes that: '...good governance and democracy can not be easily separated...'

Studying this chapter of European history one can notice that all change was preceded by a moral transformation more than political or economic developments.

Growing incrementally the evolutionary process lasted for 10 years before it brought the expected fruits. The victory was also preceded by colossal mobilisation of intellectual forces in Poland – from the left and right side of the political scene – with huge role of the Catholic Church under the spiritual leadership of Polish Pope Karol Wojtyła.

After years of political debating the Polish revolution, instead of generating recommendations for an armed uprising, produced something unique under conditions of escalating national hostility of the beginning of the 1980s – it was almost intangible and took a form of a book of ethics by philosopher Józef Tischner *The Ethics of Solidarity*[15] which promoted moral consciousness, individual embetterment and propagated ethical dimensions in national transformation. Interestingly, though being a catholic priest and theologian, Tischner drafted a code of ethical standards – secular and religion-neutral in its spirit – serving the collective objective of national reconciliation and preparing fertile ground for the political revolution. The short quote from Tischner's book carries a potent message of universal value – timeless in its actuality despite time elapsed. Preserving what is quintessential about humans it could be applied to any revolution (including the Syrian one): 'We are living in an extraordinary moment right now. People are casting aside their masks, they are coming out of their undergrounds, they are showing their true faces. Out from under the dust and out of the oblivion their consciences are coming to light. Today we are such as we really are. Believers are believers, the doubtful are doubtful and non-believers are non-believers. It makes no sense to play someone else's role. Everyone wants to be called by his own name. What we are experiencing is not only a social or economic event, but, above all, an ethical one. The matter impinges on human dignity. The dignity of man is founded on his conscience. The deepest solidarity is the solidarity of consciences...'[16].

The moral revolution accompanying the social, political and economic grievances in Poland allowed for the creation of elites magnanimously capable of transgressing negative emotions of retribution and inclined to compromise. Despite General Jaruzelski's repressions and martial law, after

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15 Tischner, J. 2005. *The Ethics of Solidarity*. Kraków. Available at: http://tischner.org.pl/thinking_pliki/thinking_1/tischner_3_ethics.pdf

16 *Ibidem*.

only eight years, Poland was ready for the round table – which was a triumph of common sense and moderation over passions and cries for revenge. Without the self-consciousness raised to a higher level and accompanied by the spirit of respect, the peaceful transition of Eastern Europe from socialism to capitalism would not have been so smooth. It seemed that only when the moral reflection made deep inroads on all sides of the barricades of the conflict (the communists and the opposition) progress was possible. It is worth noting that similar intellectual undertones and moral sensitivity were reflected in other equally successful transition of countries of the region. For instance, the writings of the playwright Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia and the collection of essays *The Power of the Powerlessness* where he described citizens forced to live under lie in communist regime are a point in question.

The phenomenal achievements in Eastern Europe attempted for practical realisation of the theory of justice were projected by John Rawls in his famous book on ethics and politics *A Theory of Justice* in which the author envisioned theoretical state-building scenario[17]. It was an imaginary situation in which social/state institutions received the legitimacy through the application of common principles formulated in the 'original position' behind the 'curtain of ignorance' and approved by the majority of rational citizens.

Who knows if it had not been for moral consciousness that the chances for conflict resolution would have been bigger and the grounds for, to use Karl Popper's nomenclature, open society more fertile[18]. The intelligentsia, as a leading class and a vocal participant in public life as well as a natural avant-garde of political and social processes in the society, could help heal wounds. Deprived of more active debate the Syrians got stupefied hustling around everyday business.

The poor quality of education in social sciences worsens the problem by diminishing the ability of balancing the information inflow and sharpening the critical judgment. The Syrians suffer from the serious symptom identified by Hannah Arendt as – antipolitics[19]. They remain blinded to what real politics is being exposed to, to use Arendt's words, 'antipolitics informed by totalitarian tradition' marked by the culture of corruption, foul play and cronyism. It happens whenever there is no chance to work out, under conditions of free discourse, the critical thinking ability – so 'worshiped' by Immanuel Kant in

17 Rawls, J. 1971. *A theory of justice*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

18 Poper, K. 2013. *The open society and its enemies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

19 Arendt, H. 1985. *The human condition*. Chicago. Also read Arendt, H. 1973. *The origins of totalitarianism*. Harcourt.

his writings – understood as the ability to posit itself among the plurality of judgments and critically confronting it against all odds.

It is also worth reminding Kant's timeless observation on the paradoxical nature of democracy which – unlike the Western tradition often holds it – may not yet necessarily be the best of political systems. It might also not be deemed the best fitted option for the Middle East. Kant's reservation about democracy found expression in his support for the mixed form of government and in sober warnings against excesses of democratic governing: '...democracy is, properly speaking, necessarily a despotism, because it establishes an executive power in which "all" decide for or even against one who does not agree; that is, "all", who are not quite all, decide, and this is a contradiction of the general will with itself and with freedom'[20].

To some extent, the West fixed the problem highlighted by Kant by resolving the paradox of democratic deficit – present also in Rousseau's idea of *élan general* as a force subjugating the minorities. The western invention of representative and later participatory democracy with the extended system of legal guarantees for minorities created an acceptable version of democratic order overseen by such institutions as, for example, the European Court of Human Rights in Europe.

The oversensitivity and revulsion for honest soul-searching is another inhibitor of change in the Middle East. The suggestion about ethical inward inquiry should not be regarded as impingement on dignity. Unless the majority depart from the conviction that the systematic study of human society and behaviour is not un-religious menace – the diagnosis will not be possible and right solutions for modern challenges will never be found – neither in Syria nor anywhere else.

2. External factors – Syria let down twice by the West

The distrust toward the West prevailed in Syria – even among the Christians. The West was perceived as a cynical, egoistic player with a reputation mortgaged by the colonial past and its unequivocal ties to Israel. The United States' position is even worse given its strategic relationship with Israel – it is a reputation of being the imperialist minus colonial past.

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[20] Kant, I. 2003. *To perpetual peace: a philosophical sketch*. Hackett Publishing. Available at: http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=357&Itemid=27

It is worth noting that one of the main features of the Syrian mental makeup has been programmatic hatred of Israel, propagated from early schools days. The successful propaganda took its toll on Syrians sometimes in the form of a grotesque where the legitimate historical fact mixed with pure nonsense. Characteristically, the anti-Israelism and anti-imperialism is one of the few things capable of releasing emotions – verging on religious elevation escaping rational explanation. It is a result of exposure to prolonged subliminal conditioning of mind – illustrating detrimental effect when extreme emotions affect political judgment. No wonder, from an ideological point of view, anti-Israelism (called anti-Zionism) played a very useful role of a scarecrow solidifying a sense of national unity across the sectors of society – the fear being one of very few things – except for food – which multi-sectarian Syrians have shared in common.

Given the Syrians' negative connotations about the West for the majority of their history the Western world was often stereotyped more as a promised land for *gestarbaiters* than any conceptual model of political arrangement to be mimicked. The brief overview of historical data illustrates the troubled relations.

From a distant past, the territory of present Syria was a battleground for the crusaders and Muslims. The monument of Saladin on the horse towering over the Old Town in Damascus testifies to the glories of the victory over Christian conquerors. In more recent history, the Syrians were left alone and betrayed unceremoniously by the West at least twice in the 20th century. For the first time it was after the fall of the Ottoman Empire – when the new world order was emerging in the wake of the First War; the second setback came with the current crisis.

Unlike in the case of the Central European peoples, such as Poles and Czechs, President Woodrow Wilson was less responsive to the calls for independence in the Middle East. Wilson abandoned Syrian aspirations to the logic of the treacherous Sykes-Picot agreement between the British and the French which partitioned the Levant into the zones of influence in red and blue shades on the map. What was worse the West violated the terms of Husayn – MacMahon correspondence in which the British High commissioner promised the recognition of the independent Arab kingdom under Sharif Husayn's Hashemite dynasty in exchange for the Arabs fighting assistance against the Turks (allied at the time with Germans). The Syrians helped to fight the Turks but promises were broken. The treaties signed over Syrians' heads during the war, such as the aforementioned Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration, were quite unequivocal about the future of this area leaving Syrian nationalists in the cold.

Ironically, though the Syrians defended their rights smartly using President Wilson's own idealistic slogans from *The Fourteen Points* about 'new age of open diplomacy with open covenants of peace proceeded frankly and in the public view'[21], their dramatic cries were left unanswered. The quote from the statement of the Syrian Congress gives a sample of frustrations: 'The fundamental principles laid down by President Wilson in condemnation of secret treaties impel us to protest most emphatically against any treaty that stipulates the partition of our Syrian country and against any private engagement aiming at the establishment of Zionism in the Southern part of Syria; therefore we ask for the complete annulment of these conventions and agreements'[22].

For the Syrians it marked the culmination of disappointment and a good lesson of *realpolitik* while for the Americans it meant the loss of face as a reliable potential partner – reputation that they will never quite recover. Years later, in 1945, the Americans will repeat exactly the same mistake in Vietnam turning deaf ear to the nationalist Ho Chi Min's borrowing Jefferson's words from the *American Declaration of Independence* and proclaiming a Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the presence of American delegation: '*We hold these truths to be self-evident. That all men are created equal*'[23]. Ho Chi Min, who originally looked for support from the US in the anti-colonial nationalist struggle against the French in Southern Asia, eventually, turned against them affiliating with the Communists and becoming a major source of woes for the American diplomacy. The 'Syrian scenario of 1919' will be repeated later with Fidel Castro after revolutionary Cuba looked in vain for US backing.

As to the French in the Middle East after WW I they persisted in ignoring further Syrian national demands which took the form of declaration of independence presented officially by the Syrian Central Congress in March of 1920. The declaration was based on the resolution delivered to the King-Crane Commission – which was set up by the Americans and whose recommendations supported Syrian efforts. The French refused also to recognise Sharif Husayn's son, Amir Faysal, as the king of Greater Syria encompassing territories of Palestine and Lebanon.

The final distribution of the Arab provinces took place in April 1920 at the conference of San Remo with the British annexing Iraq and Palestine and

21 Valone, S.J. ed. 1995. *Two centuries of US foreign policy. The documentary record*. Praeger, p. 56.

22 Roger, E. 2011. *The Arabs. A history*. London, p. 200.

23 Shi, T. 1992. *America. A narrative history*. New York, p. 1305.

the French grasping Lebanon and Syria. The famous battle of Khan Maysalun in July 1920 in the mountain pass between Damascus and Beirut in which a few Syrian nationalists – evoking the spectre of heroic Greeks at Marathon – fought a lost battle for self-determination against the prevailing French cohorts. This gloomy moment in Syrian history turned into a day which sealed the fate and relegated the province to the servile status of the colony.

The Syrians felt let down by some of the allied victors of the Great War and, before the Second World War, Damascus saw twice its recurring struggle for freedom finishing in bloodbath – it was bombarded twice by the French forces with a significant loss of life on the Syrian side[24].

The colonial historical experience conditioned the perception of the West by subsequent generations of the Syrians. It fuelled the mistrust though civilisationally the elites cultivated the cultural heritage of former colonial exploiters – what has manifested itself in education and many snobbish habits.

The Syrians were navigating choppy waters of the Middle East politics after the Second World War looking for new allies and new opportunities. The flirt with pan-Arabism resulting in a confederation project with colonel Gamel Abdel Nasser's Egypt was short-lived; but the Russian option – as an alternative to the American – seemed attractive. The Syrians did not like American intimate bond with Israel and resented the interference in the region's politics manifested by Mossadeq affair – followed by the control of Iran till 1979 (interestingly, the Russians had grabbed a chunk of Iran long before during the Russo-Iranian wars of 1804–1813 and later in 1826–1828; in this way they acquired the Persian province of Azerbaijan which became eventually a republic of the Soviet Union).

B. The West betraying moderates in Syria

After missed chances of currying favours with the Syrians at the Paris Peace Conference after the First World War it seems that the second major blunder arrived eighty years later – at the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011.

The West made a mistake by hurrying too quickly into taking sides in the conflict. Instead of giving itself more time to consider all viewpoints and weigh possible scenarios it pinned its hopes on only one antagonist – the opposition thus undermining instruments of diplomatic manoeuvring. Unfortunately,

[24] Read The climax of European power (1914–1939). In: Hourani, A. 1992. *The history of the Arab eoples*. New York.

the Syrian opposition turned out to be less reliable as a partner – than it was originally predicated – bogging down the country in a prolonged crisis which devastated the country and pauperised society. At the same time West's whole long legacy of weaving delicate network of relations with Hafez Assad and with the current government in power was lost irreversibly.

The United States and the European Union rushed into creating the vision of the future based on the wrong assumptions. For it took the French diplomacy quite a long time to realise the errors of judgment and, most importantly, admit them explicitly. It is worth quoting at this point a comment from an interview with one anonymous functionary from Quai d'Orsay which appeared in *Le Figaro*: '*La diplomatie française a sous estimé le régime syrien parce qu'on a bien voulu le sous estimer. On ne devait pas être surpris par sa capacité de résistance… Le Conseil national syrien (CNS) est en perte de vitesse sur le terrain. Nous avons soutenu un cheval perdant*'[25].

By brandishing enunciations of support for one side of the conflict while unceremoniously condemning the other, the tools at the disposal of diplomacy were relegated to the backburners only petrifying the hostile camps.

At the same time the Western policymakers' serious error seemed to be to ignore the most important protagonist in the crisis – the 'silent majority' of average Syrians comprising roughly 60% of the society. It is a significant segment of the population embracing the middle class of businessmen, shopkeepers, farmers, religious minorities, women and children. In other word, this is an apolitical and non-sectarian group bonded by a commonsensical interest and, at the same time, encompassing the most vulnerable elements of society. They were neither supportive of the regime nor negative about the opposition – like in every war and armed conflict they were just casual bystanders caring only about surviving. And like in every war and every conflict it was this people who were affected the most and who bore the biggest burden of violence. What is most important, the cross section of this group unveiled its universalist profile extending beyond simple religious and ethnic affiliation. The western world should have reached across the ethnic barriers and tried to make the 'silent majority' an addressee of its policies – as a moderate and prevalent segment of Syrian society. Instead,

[25] Malbrunot, G. 2012. Syrie: un diplomate français met les pieds dans le plat. *Le Figaro* [Online] 29 February 2012. Available at: http://blog.lefigaro.fr/malbrunot/2012/03/syrie-un-diplomate-francais-me.html. (English translation: The French diplomacy underestimated the Syrian regime because we wanted to underestimate them. We would not have been forced now to be surprised by their capacity to resist... The Syrian National Council is losing support on the ground. We supported the losing horse).

the recognition was hastily extended to the Syrian National Council (SNC), the representation based outside the country and dominated by a group with clear religious tag of the Muslim Brotherhood – reinforcing only the perception of the sectarian character of the crisis.

In this way the West squandered the occasion to win a potential loyal ally and lost the most valuable future asset installed inside Syria. The Western/American belief in controlling the Muslim Brotherhood and moderating more radical Salafis was delusional. The choice for attributing so much authority to them was startling remembering that there existed at least six distinctive ideological camps in Syria which left room for manoeuvre and alternatives. Picking up an ally from each camp and creating a conglomerate of forces swearing allegiance to progressive ideas of secular state was a better option. It would have prepared the groups for the adoption of ideas of fair governance and political pluralism – conditions for assistance from the West. Instead, the recognition was thrown behind the group dominated in two-thirds by the Muslim Brotherhood.

The refurbishment of the Syrian National Council in November 2012 and renaming it into the Syrian National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces did not change the situation substantially. The New National Coalition's 27 of 65 seats were still controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood and the new organ was headed by Ahmed Mouaz al-Khatib, former Imam of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, known for his anti-Semitic and anti-Western remarks. He is also quoted as an admirer of the Qatar-based Muslim Brotherhood preacher Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi[26] and remains ideologically attached to Islamism of the Brotherhood's Damascene branch – associated with Issam al-Attar, a former spiritual guide of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria[27].

It is worth mentioning that the National Syrian Coalition includes also other Islamists, domineering thus the opposition body slated by the West as the representation of the reform forces of future Syria. By supporting the organ identified with one option the West squandered an occasion to create a truly pluralist representation composed of the moderates without religious affiliations – at least at the head of the organisation. With all due

[26] Rubin, B. Proof of a scandal: U.S. policy is making Syria into an anti-Western, anti-Semitic Islamist State. [Online] Available at: http://www.gloria-center.org/2012/12/proof-of-a-scandal-u-s-policy-is-making-syria-into-an-anti-western-antisemitic-islamist-state/

[27] *Ahmad Mouaz al-Khatib al-Hasan.* [Online] Available at: http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=50017

respect to the figure of Damascus Imam the question arose why, having so many alternatives from amongst the secular silent majority, the West put its trust in the religious cleric from the Damascus Mosque affiliated with the Islamic movement. Appointing the imam as head and spokesperson of the revolution would have been like placing a priest at the helm of the Polish solidarity revolution, in which the Catholic Church was heavily involved. If it had happened it would have probably affected the credibility of the movement. The activities of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt provoked the question about the organisation's 'hidden agenda' and real intentions.

Another big blunder of the West was channelling arms to groups dominated by Islamists – some of them very shadowy. Upon closer inspection it seemed that their main source of legitimacy qualifying for the cash flows was manifesting open opposition to the Assad government. Though the Free Syrian Army was nominally anti-sectarian and proclaiming to fight in the name of freedom, in fact, it was backed by Islamic forces. The new joint military council formed by the fighters in Antalya at the end of 2012, which led the battle for Syria, reflected exactly the same logic of lopsided composition as the Syrian National Council in the past and Syrian National Coalition nowadays. The Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic forces account for two-thirds of 263-member military body overseen by US and Turkish advisers and financed with Saudis and Qatari money. Though the frontman for the military council was reputed to be a moderate – his deputies, Abdel-basset Tawil of Idleb and Abdel-Qader Saleh of Aleppo Governorate – were linked to the Salafi movement.

Another mayor deficiency in the Western strategy towards the Syrian opposition was the absence of a clear set of conditions under which the aid could be transferred – at least such terms were not revealed to the public. The Syrian opposition as a beneficiary of the patronage benefits should have presented in unambiguous words the contour of the future political social and economic arrangement. Taking their public statements about freedom at face value was a naiveté – the history of former allies turning their weapons against former sponsors should have served as a warning. A formal document – something like a 'memorandum of understanding' – should have been outlined as a road map plan for Syria. Any help should be conditioned on the honest reporting of how the situation develops, on delivering on the promises and implementing all terms of such an agreement. The opposition – whether its civilian government or the military arm – should be morally and politically obligated to respect the preliminary arrangements and only upon acceptance of the strings attached, the world should sponsor the fighters inside the country and their representation abroad as government-in-exile.

The current system of security guarantees for 'after the crisis' is vague and the clandestine deals between the Western intelligence organisations and all sorts of locally operating groups within Syria may bring further destabilisation into the region. The channels of communication remain shadowed from the public and provoke legitimate questions about the future security implications. Keeping in mind that the opposition is led by Islamists – regardless of their specific affiliation – one may wonder what will be the end effect of such an approach. Exactly such a clumsy strategy and the absence of strong security and control mechanisms contributed to the loophole which conceptually trapped Americans in Afghanistan and helped to create a breeding ground for the emergence of the Taliban forces. In this case, the American intelligence services, in the most expensive covert operation in the history of the CIA called 'Cyclone', channelled weapons and money with the assistance of Pakistan only to wake up in the face of the 'beast', well armed and with honed military skills, which turned the weapons against its former patron after the elimination of the short-term Russian obstacle. The famous photo of the CIA chief William Casey passing Stinger missiles to the mujahideen on the Afghan-Palestinian border via Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence took later a symbolic meaning – after their former protégés had facilitated successful terrorist operations against US interests around the world and… set in motion events that led to 9/11.

The transparency issue is becoming an urgent matter especially now in the critical moment of Islamic terrorists regrouping and rebranding activities. The lack of thereof may result in the sinister entrapment to be regretted for many years to come. The current trend among jihad groups point to the tendency of giving up on a unique name (such as for example al Qaeda) and unified command and adopting, increasingly, different names in different geographical locations. The old world of unipolar jihadism is being thus replaced by the fragmented multipolar jihadosphere composed of many separate groups but unified by the same ideology. What connects all those organisations is the same Arabic name *ansar al Sharia* (supporter of Islamic law) and unbridled enthusiasm for the adopted cause (*dawa*) of manifesting missionary zeal and imposing 'happiness' on people in the form of religious regime. The trend started in Yemen, when al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al Qaeda's branch, set up the front group Ansar al-Sharia in Yemen in April 2011[28] and continued with the emergence of sister organisations

[28] Aron Y.Z. 2012. Know your Ansar al-Sharia. *The Washington Institute for the Near East Policy*. [Online] 21 December 2012. Available at: http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/know-your-ansar-al-sharia

around the Middle East and in Africa (in Libya, in Tunisia, in Morocco and Egypt). The additional boost to this process came in the form of a special 'blessing' from famous jihadi ideologue Shaykh Abu al-Mundhir al-Shinqiti.

Unfortunately, the terrorist groups linked to Al Qaeda have penetrated into Syria making the transfer of weapons to this country possible. The group Jabhat al-Nousra, presented as the most fearsome Syrian rebel fighting force, is the prime driver behind coordinating jihadist actions there and sends a warning signal about the directions the West-sponsored revolution might be taking if not properly supervised[29]. It is symptomatic of a major potential problem awaiting Syria after the crisis. The reply of one of its leaders to the question about designating the organisation as terrorist by Obama's government should be heeded with attention: 'It's not a problem… We know the West and its oppressive ways. We know the oppression of the [U.N.] Security Council, the lies of the international community. It's not news. This means nothing to us'[30].

Keeping in mind the assumed long-term strategy of al-Qaeda and its local affiliates, and assuming those activities are coordinated between different groups, the presence of this terrorist group in Syria is ominous. The developments in northern Mali as of January 2013 – being a consequence of the successful entrenchment of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb which copied *modus operandi* of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi – should serve as a lesson[31]. Jabhat al-Nousra followed in the footsteps emerging as another nightmare of the West.

The absence of a balanced and creative approach on the ground was reflected in the West's wishful thinking and futile speculations based on oversimplifications. The text which appeared in 2013 on the website of the American think tank 'Council on Foreign Relations' and on the opinion pages of the *New York Times* disclosed such a tendency. It was tangible evidence

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29 Jabhat al-Nusra military successes are transforming it into Syria's main rebel force. *War News Updates* [Online] 12 January 2012. Available at: http://warnewsupdates.blogspot.com/2013/01/jabhat-al-nusra-success-is-transforming.html

30 The interview with an official of *Jabhat al-Nusra*, Syria's Islamist militia group. *Time* [Online] 25 December 2012. Available at: http://world.time.com/2012/12/25/interview-with-a-newly-designated-syrias-jabhat-al-nusra/

31 Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, led by university mathematics graduate Abdelmalek Droukdal, fought Algeria's secular government in the 1990s. It changed the name from the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in 2007. Read more in Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. *The New York Times* [Online] 17 January 2013. Available at: http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/organisations/a/al_qaeda_in_the_islamic_maghreb/index.html

of (well-intentioned) strategic thinking based on old axioms of the American diplomacy (being part of the imperial mindset) and archaic perception of the world rooted in the past experience – completely detached from the realities on the ground (the scenario repeated despite the Vietnam, Iraqi and Afghanistan experience which turned out to be the longest US conflict in history – 15 year-long).

C. Foreign nations' proxy war in Syria

The foreign involvement in the Syrian crisis is the most dramatic dimension of the conflict. The conflict deteriorated fast in 2011 not so much out of its own internal impetus but because of the outside interference[32]. Everything started with precocious side-taking when American ambassador – Robert Ford and the French ambassador – Chevalier openly condemned the government in Damascus. The articulated support for opposition forces and its military branch of the Free Syrian Army, no doubt, have contributed to the escalation of the conflict informed by the proxy war logic. On one side the United States aligned with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar while on the other the Shiite-ruled neighbours of Iran and Iraq meddled in the fray sending Hezbollah fighters and Iraqi militiamen to Assad's rescue. It was a critical point when the situation worsened adding the strong religious undertones to the political rivalry. Syria became the playground for the old regional rivalry between Shiite Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia – pivotal states in the struggle for regional hegemony. The command headquarters for the operation were established in Istanbul under the guidance of Qatari operative embedded in border the town of Adana which previously armed rebels in Libya (and toppled Gaddafi). At the beginning things looked easy for the opposition and the financing of rebel fighters in Syria went smoothly. But calculations were misplaced and the popular support for Assad in Damascus allowed him to survive. This was the moment when the unity in Western coalition camp frayed. The Saudis and the Turks started to finance Muslim fighters of all colours – officially they were moderate and more effective – although money ended up in radical Muslims' stash arms as it turned out. The situation spiralled out of control making the United States force Saudi Arabia to replace Prince Bandar bin Sultan as the head of Saudi intelligence with

[32] Foreign nations' proxy war in Syria creates chaos. *The Washington Post* [Online] 2 October 2014. Available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/david-ignatius--foreign-nations-proxy-war-creates-syrian-chaos/2014/10/02/061fb50c-4a7a-11e4-a046--120a8a855cca_story.html [Accessed: 5 October 2014].

more transparent Interior Minister Mohammed bin Nayef. But the damage had already been done. The conflict escalated and the weapons proliferated. In this way, the western coalition unconsciously helped to create favourable conditions for the Islamic State. The Turks undertook even the oil trade with the IS allowing intermediaries to transport cheap oil trucks over border – everything with intention to finance fighters in Syria. At the same time the Turkish priorities slightly changed from fighting Assad's government to destroying Kurdish resistance on the Syrian-Turkish border. The unwelcome spill-over effect, like in the case of Afghanistan in the past, was once again a result of strategic intentions disengaged from a thorough intellectual analysis.

D. The Russian factor – the sources of Russian conduct towards Syria

The Russian strategy towards Syria, which stands in stark contrast to the Western policy, does not come as a surprise. Its approach is another disclosure of the old instinctive distrust of the West manifested so many times before in history. George Kennan, when posted in Moscow as a diplomat, encapsulated well this psychological streak in Russian thinking about the world outside when writing his famous *Long Telegram*. In what turned later into the analytical essay *The Sources of the Soviet Conduct* and published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1947 Kennan wrote: 'At the bottom of Kremlin's neurotic view of world affairs is traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity. Originally, it was insecurity of a peaceful agricultural people trying to live on vast exposed plain in neighbourhood of fierce nomadic peoples. To this was added, as Russia came into contact with economically advanced West, fear of more competent, more powerful, more highly organised societies in that area. But this latter type of insecurity was one which afflicted rather Russian rulers than Russian people'.

The fear of nomadic threat embraced such purges as the Mongol invasions while the fear of the West was manifested after the Polish occupation of Moscow in the wake of the successful battle of Kłuszyn of 1610 where the Russian tsar Vasil Shujski was unable to stop systemic deterioration of the Russian princedom.

Psychologically, the Russians do not think about Syria in terms of freedom, human rights and political pluralism which were now openly declared by insurgents (those looking for Western backing) as the goal of the uprising and promoted in the Western mass media as justification for the support for them.

Those values are irrelevant for the Russians and historically foreign to their cannon of values. The Russians think in traditional geopolitical way seeing in the Western engagement a plan to impose the control on an insubordinate country, which from the beginning of Assad family's rule, gravitated to the Russian-controlled sphere of interest. In other words, the Russians do not conceptualise the crisis in terms of the 'humanitarian intervention doctrine' (R2P – responsibility to protect) which is a Western invention, but perceive the region in the spirit of 'the Sykes-Picot agreement' which almost one hundred years ago saw the West secretly dividing the region into zones of interest betraying Arab indigenous aspirations. What is more, the Russians believe that the West is implementing this clandestine stratagem to extend influence into Syria exactly to vitiate the Russian influence in the area traditionally bonded to them. Measuring up against the actions of others by their principles of *realpolitik* they view world politics – to quote from Hans Morgenthau's *Politics among Nations* – as the realisation of 'national interests perceived in terms of power'. This comes natural to the Russians whose code of norms in foreign policy is not embedded in any system of values (liberalism, individualism and 'enlightened altruistic interest') but based on the terms of a zero-sum game.

The other reasons behind Russian idiosyncrasies are economic and strategic. The monopoly on relations with ostracised Syria is simply a very good **economic business**, given the violations of sanctions, and creates promising business perspectives for the future trade relations – after Syria enters the stage of post-war reconstruction and development. Sentiments apart, the war is always a good business for sanctions breakers hence the intense contacts between Moscow and Damascus in military, trade and financial domains. It is reported that Damascus is sending its staple products such as vegetables and fruit abroad through Russian operated port of Tartus and buying wheat from them. Some sources suggest the illicit trade is also going in sanctioned oil and other products. In addition, the Russian banks such as VTB, Vneshekonombank, and Gazprombank are actively bankrolling the Assad government despite the Western financial institutions cutting ties with the government in Damascus[33].

The filling in of vacuum by Russians and Iranians' helping hands in forlorn Syria is documented by some circumstantial evidence and provides, to

[33] Peel, M. 2012. Syria and Russia's 'special relationship'. *Financial Times* [Online] 9 July 2012. Available at: http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/e64a3076-c9b2-11e1-a5e2-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2IWcINLjh

some extent, an explanation behind Assad regime's long stay in power despite foreign and domestic pressures. The military contracts form a significant chunk of the Syrian cake to be grabbed. According to the analytical reports from *Oxford Analytica* the Russian military transactions in 2010 accounted for 6% of the total Russian arms exports and 5 percent of Russia's global arms sales in 2011 while the outstanding accounts show about 4 billion worth of contracts for future military deliveries – as of 2012[34]. Though the numbers are not mind-boggling the statistics speak for themselves and reveal hard facts behind Russian calculations. In addition, given Russian savings in military spending in certain areas and the tightening arms trade market due to growing international competition the Syrian crisis becomes a golden opportunity to cash quick money from the pinched Syrians and secure employment and smooth operation for its industrial-military complex[35]. The Russians also make up for the losses incurred in the wake of the Western sponsored sanctions against Iran and Libya which were reputed to cost Russia respectively about 13 billion and 4.5 billion dollars in lost arm deals contracts. In addition to lucrative arms deals, Russian companies also invested roughly 20 billion dollars in various projects including energy sector investments – comprising a gas production facility and pipelines.

More important for Russia's involvement in the crisis are **strategic** motives. After the disintegration of the Soviet zone of influence during the decade of Yeltsin at the helms of the state and arrival – according to Charles Krauthammer – of the so-called 'unipolar moment' in history[36], the Russians under Putin's regime undertook an elaborate task of rebuilding old

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34 O'Toole, J. 2012. Billions at stake as Russia backs Syria. *CNN* [Online] 10 February 2012. Available at: http://money.cnn.com/2012/02/09/news/international/russia_syria/index.htm. Also read Paraszczuk, J. 2012 Russia supplying arms to Syria under old contracts. *The Jerusalem Post* [Online] 26 November 2012. Available at: http://www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=293520

35 Syria is reported to be well furnished with Russian-made military stuff – though details show unconvincing record in the field of military-technological cooperation. Syria obtained over time – assisted by Russian technoloogical back-up – up-to-date weaponry which include rockets S-300 (mobile anti-aircraft missile system – the delivery of which has recently been halted), MiG-29 SMT plane fighters, four MIG 31E fighter planes (eventually contract cancelled after protests from Israel), Pantsir S1E air-defense systems, Iskander tactical missile systems, Yak-130 aircraft, Amur-1650 submarines.

36 Krauthammer, Ch. The unipolar world. *Foreign Affairs* [Online] vol. 70, no. 1. Available at: http://www.comunicazione.uniroma1.it/materiali/14.34.27_Charles%20Krauthammer%20The%20UnipolarMoment.pdf

strategic outposts in the world. One of the lost assets was influence in the Middle East region. They still think of old grandness, cherish old imperialist sentimentalism and will not let pass any occasion to restore old outposts – ethically questionable means are welcome.

Since Russia has never judged political decisions by ethical standards (and wholly alien was to them the concept of 'ethical foreign policy' introduced to the diplomatic lexicon by British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook in 1997 – and nicknamed quickly 'Cook's ethical bombshell' by broadsheet newspapers[37]) the opportunity to support Damascus is viewed by them merely in strategic terms. Practically, the port of Tartus does not represent any impressive prize for the Russian Navy, consisting only of a few floating moorings, warehouses and decrepit barracks (similarly to the port of Latakia). What really counts is a symbolism of bringing 'boots' to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea which have been a coveted prize for them since immemorial times (efforts to obtain control over Bosporus and Dardanelle date back to the 19th century).

The Russian new military and security doctrine – outlined by Russian decision makers in recent years – only facilitates institutional conditions for recreations of a system of client states in, to use Kennan's words, 'geographically shifting points' in order to reposition itself while building a new international security system and exert pressure on the West. The new 2010 military doctrine ('Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation Until 2020'), which replaced the one from the year 2000, designated NATO as a source of potential military danger and redefined terms of nuclear deterrence (by not ruling out the option of preventive nuclear strikes in situations vital to Russian national security, even in small-scale, local wars like that in Georgia in 2008[38]). This is exactly the approach George Kennan had in mind seventy years earlier when dissecting Russian mentality[39]. Various international and regional arrangements under Russian auspices serve this purpose, such as

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37 Wheeler, N. J., Dunne, T. *Moral Britannia? Evaluating the ethical dimension in Labour's foreign policy*. The Foreign Policy Centre. Available at: http://www.kms1.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/.../Moral_Britannia.pdf. Also read Labor conference: ethical foreign policy and wars. *BBC.* [Online] Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-19784597

38 Tsypkin, M. 2010. What's new in Russia's new military doctrine? *Radio Free Europe* [Online] 27 February 2010. Available at: http://www.rferl.org/content/Whats_New_In_Russias_New_Military_Doctrine/1970150.html

39 'Advancing democracy abroad through iron and blood doesn't work…Russia opposes Western influence… or … puts a stick in the spokes of Western-initiated projects not out of spite, but because advancing democracy through iron and blood just does not work'. Quote from *Lavrov: 'West's policy of iron and blood doesn't work'*. [Online]

the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Union which form a geopolitical net of concentrated circles on the map – all this to re-establish the Soviet style sphere of influence[40].

D. 'Syrian experience' – was George Kennan wrong or right – is the 'Kremlin's neurotic view' of the West justified?

Putting the tradition of Russian foreign policy in a sharp focus one can conclude that many features fuelling neurotic suspicions of the West were not totally unfounded. The aforementioned 'Sykes-Picot agreement' is one of the examples of power politics where the pursuit of strategic gain replaced the moral considerations of Western policymakers. In this case the aspirations of Arab peoples were sacrificed at the altar of big politics inevitability. The Bolshevik government, not out of magnanimity but driven by the desire to affect the image of Tsarist government, revealed the evil nature of secret arrangements (such as the Sykes-Picot document) in order to disclose the Western politicians' duplicity.

Another act of the play was the 'Yalta agreement' – whereby the allies in Eastern Europe were 'sold out' – following Stalin's 'divide and rule' logic in which the Western powers acquiesced. The event petrified a great powers pattern of behaviour sealing the fate of subjugated peoples for the whole Cold War period.

With the expiration of the Soviet Union in December of 1991, the old world habits in the international politics did not disappear but were replaced by other more subtle ways of gaining influence. The new trend took the appearance of dignified moralisation under the cloak of various concepts such as 'unilateral interventionism', 'doctrine of human rights', 'humanitarian intervention' or the most in vogue now – 'responsibility to protect (R2P)'[41].

The NATO's armed intervention against Serbia in 1999, over loud protests from the Russians and the Chinese and without a UN Security Council resolution (so in violation of the existing regime of international law laid

24 December 2012. Available at: http://www.americanoverkill.com/lavrov-wests-policy-of-iron-and-blood-doesnt-work/

40 Pyrkalo, S. 2012. *Customs union, Kazakhstan and Belarus is first success in CIS, Says EBRD*. European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. [Online] 7 November 2012. Available at: http://www.ebrd.com/pages/news/press/2012/121107a.shtml

41 Bajoria, J. *The dilemma of humanitarian intervention*. Available at: http://www.cfr.org/human-rights/dilemma-humanitarian-intervention/p16524

out by article VI and VII of the UN Charter), fuelled the theory of West's ulterior motivation. The support for the Kosovars' secession alerted Russia and was interpreted not as a humanitarian solution, but as part of encircling ploy to undermine their influence in the Balkans (the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy did not help to ease fears).

Also, the recent examples of blatantly broad interpretation of the resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council in the case of the Iraq and Libya crisis and their subsequent direct violations (according to the Russian and French position) only hardened the Russian neurotic perception of Western intentions. For them that Western phraseology amounted to creative devices to justify 'postmodern expansionism' behind the veil of altruism. Judging by its own foreign policy standards, it did not matter much whether interventionism was interpreted in terms of 'right to intervene', 'responsibility to protect' or 'peace enforcement & building'. Strictly, from the legal (not moral) point of view, their arguments were not baseless.

This was the case, for instance, of famous resolution 1441 adopted unanimously in November 2002[42]. The vague language of resolution 1441 – calling for 'serious consequences' in case of Iraqi non-compliance with disarmament obligations – was treated with suspicion from the beginning by the Russians, Chinese and French. It was viewed as purposefully ambiguous to offer a pretext for launching military intervention[43]. As it turned out later, the distrust turned out justified after the Americans alongside with the British, despite prior vehement denials of the existence of any 'hidden automatic triggers' inside the text, employed skilful *exegesis* (exceeding the commonplace interpretation of the language) to warrant an open attack (based on the sexed-up evidence about WMD in the first instance).

Similar misgivings on the part of the Russians (the Russians and Chinese abstained) accompanied the vote in the UN Security Council on resolution 1973 adopted in March 2011 in the context of the Libyan crisis[44]. The resolution allowed merely for establishing a 'no-fly zone' and for the use of 'all means necessary short of foreign occupation to protect civilians'. Again, also in this case, the broad exegesis of the 'innocent language' of the resolution

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42 *UN Resolution 1441*. Available at: http://www.un.org/depts/unmovic/new/documents/resolutions/s-res-1441.pdf

43 As The Iraq Survey Group report confirmed in the US in the aftermath of the war (and similar commission in Great Britain), the evidence material on WMD was intentionally 'sexed up' to serve the political purposes.

44 Libya UN Resolution 1973: text analysed. *BBC* [Online] 18 March 2011. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12782972

went beyond understanding of some agreeing parties (or abstaining parties like the Russians). Special forces from Great Britain, France, Italy and other allied countries intervened on the ground raising Russian objections as to the legality of the operation and a possible breach of the resolutions' spirit. From Russian perspective, all this verbal sophistication was redundant since it merely hid ulterior motives of traditional power politics disguised in the idealist verbalisation of humanitarianism[45]. The overbroad interpretation of the legal documents set also dangerous precedent for relativising international law – as a result the Russians mimicked the West's behaviour intervening in Georgia's provinces of Northern Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The critical look on the above-mentioned resolutions in the context of the Syrian conflict allows to contextualise slightly differently the Russian international perspective on the crisis and, to some extent, understand the obstinacy of Moscow on Syria during the votes in the UN Security Council. Given the Russian tradition of foreign policy-making – based on the tenets of a realistic paradigm and in the absence of any even remote idealist background – along with the ambiguous record of the Western powers' 'unprincipled' behaviour outlined above, one should not expect any radical face-about in Kremlin's declared strategy in near future.

IV. Conclusion

The above analysis leads to several conclusions:

1. The 'pact on Syria' with the opposition should be signed first

The assistance offered to the Syrian opposition should not be unconditional. Any help should have been preceded by the 'sworn promise' to implement the system of governance based on universally tested, secular principles which lay groundwork for the future government. Those non-negotiable, 'technical' principles include: the rule of law – not of men, judicial review, separation of powers and (considering multiethnic character of the Syrian state with the Kurdish factor) federalism.

Those ideas have been already tested around the world and fit best the multiethnic and multisectarian societies. There is no other political solution

[45] Goodman, R. *Humanitarian intervention and pretexts for war*. Available at: http://www.law.harvard.edu/faculty/rgoodman/pdfs/RGoodmanHumanitarianInterventionPretextsforWar.pdf

which can make people confident apart from those commonsensical and practical arrangements. Past experiments with building states on religious or non-religious ideologies of different kinds did not work appearing oppressive and very costly either in socialist societies or theocratic regimes. Only under such terms the true 'majority of Syrians', including the 'silent majority', will back up efforts for reforms and a real change in the war-torn country.

Whether one calls this set of operational principles: liberal democracy, Islamic democracy Syrian style or Syrian democracy does not matter – what matters is the substance of the pursued politico-economic model.

In the case of Israel, for example, political scientists commonly associate the term 'ethnic democracy' to describe the existing political regime. Being a political system with many imperfections and deficiencies, it is still rooted in the Western tradition guarantying basic rights to people and allowing the peaceful rotation of political groups at the helms of the government through free elections. Israel is held responsible for oppressing the Palestinians but, at the same time, it provides the administrative framework for fair judicial litigation (domestic and abroad), for allowing political representation in the parliament and for religious freedom. It creates thus a hope for eventual peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Any other model of governance would not permit such favourable conditions. Although it, like the Arab countries, faces the problem of religious fundamentalism (with the *Haredi* Jews questioning even the basic right of the state of Israel to exist) the existing system of universally recognised principles allows Israel to function smoothly as the only democracy (or 'ethnic democracy') in the Middle East capable of providing the majority of people with economic well-being and political instrumentality.

The West should support only those forces which openly favour political model of, like in the case of Poland, 'friendly separation between the state and the church' (the French developed the system of so-called 'strict separation between the state and the church') Any attempt of blending religion into the institutions of the state should be nipped in the bud as sectarian aberration place Syria on the path of the assured conflict which eventually, to recall Norman Podhoretz's slogan, would guide the state to 'religious fascism' which would backfire in the future in a way the Munich Agreement did before WWII.

2. Moral revolution should be encouraged

The successful transformation in Syria and other Arab countries is an uncertain outcome. Like in the case of the Polish solidarity revolution, which preceded the economic and political transformation in Poland, without ethical *katharsis* the propensity for corruption and lack of transparency would not have been eradicated. Only self-cleansing and rising ethical awareness might help in building civil society. The improvements in international ranking on the corruption and transparency in Poland are the crowning argument on behalf of efforts aimed at moral embetterment as a condition *sine qua non* accompanying the construction of a well functioning state.

Without ethical changeover in Syrian mentality (and in other Arab spring countries) the overthrow of President Assad's government will only see the replacement of one corrupted group by another.

3. Assad regime should be engaged

Ostracism of Assad's government and explicit support lavished on the opposition was an error. The Assad's government should have been engaged and pushed for the reform from the beginning. General Jaruzelski's regime was also obstinate and repressive but changed over time. Helping the unprepared and disintegrated opposition resulted in the bloodbath and senselessly multiplied civil victims exposed to the military revenges. Encouragement for the uprising in Syria provoked the situation of putting civilians against tanks and planes. Ironically support came from the former colonial power of France which persecuted Syrians only eighty years ago and from Turkey which was always in constant dispute with Syria over territorial delimitation and water. It only legitimised the violence which eventually spiralled out of control. Applying the scenario in Syria to the Polish revolution one might wonder what would have happened if the West had armed Polish opposition for the armed confrontation.

There is no doubt that the response of General Jaruzalski's regime would have been a violent retaliation (assisted with potential Soviet intervention) and the country would have got stuck in the protracted bloody civil war – considering Polish character and martyrdom proclivities. The events in Budapest in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968 laid bare the resilient and ruthless nature of the dictatorships which have no scruples to mercilessly decimate enemies of the system. The Western world protested (it even encouraged freedom fighters in Budapest through the broadcasts on the waves of the Radio Free Europe)[46] but

[46] Read: The upheavals of 1956: Hungary. In: Crampton, R.J. 2003. *Eastern Europe in the twentieth century – and after*. Routledge, 2003, pp. 288–303.

did nothing, or almost nothing, to practically help prolong the hopeless upheaval as if suspecting tragic consequences of this act. This attitude saved civilian lives allowing the majority of Hungarians to live relatively peaceful lives (for forty five years) under communist oppression waiting patiently for the political solution to appear at the right historical moment (Hegel's idea comes to mind again).

In the Polish case, the introduction of the martial law in December 1981 resulted in very few victims (still over one hundred people died) only because there was no national rebellion led by irresponsible anticommunists. In places where the resistance took place (like the protests at the Wujek Coal Mine) the regime fired back at people. The peaceful transition through the martial law period was a result of self-limitation by the opposition, European political tradition, moral self-reflection, influence of the church authorities (which called for moral crusading and not for the armed revenges). Also well developed political consciousness, respect for human life embedded in the tradition and the mitigating approach of the Western countries played a role.

Unfortunately, the Syrian crisis has proceeded according to a completely different scenario. Though one has to take into account the changed geopolitical circumstances, in comparison to situation in Poland thirty years ago under the conditions of Cold War bipolarity, still the Western approach surprises with its inordinate proclivity to arm the Syrians. The cornered regime fights back well aware that, in the culture of the Middle Eastern region, one cannot count on mercy if defeated. The West, knowing this mentality, and still sending arms, to some extent, is contributing to more violence for civilians trapped in the conflict.

Given the poor record of human rights and little respect for the value of human life in the Middle East tradition, in comparison to the Western world, the conditions created in Syria by the world could not be more unwelcome. The reports circulated in the Western media calling for referral of the Syrian crisis to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and bringing President Assad before justice – prepared for him allegedly in the Hague – only throw more wood into the fire[47].

The existing situation provokes several questions. If the justice be always done, like the human rights activist see it in Western world**,** why was General Jaruzelski spared in the Hague and engaged as a reliable partner for the

[47] Russia against Hague trial for Syria. *Rianovosti* [Online] 15 January 2013. Available at: http://en.ria.ru/world/20130115/178794483.html; Albright, M., Muasher, M. 2011. Assad deserves a swift trip to The Hague*. The Financial Times* [Online] 28 June 2011. Available at: http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/e591a260-a1bb-11e0-b9f9-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2IWcINLjh

West instead? He also maintained the corrupted regime propped up by force, jailed the opposition leaders while the regime condoned the killing of several activists in Poland. He agreed to reforms only after the complete economic bankruptcy of Poland when longer staying in power would have created only more problems than benefits (this is also the case of the Soviet Union)

Also, why was Werhner von Braun – Hitler's henchman, member of Allgemeine SS and creator of rocket technology V2 which killed thousands of civilians in London – never put on trial? Instead he was rewarded with many privileges and employed by the United States' government after the war to supervise the moon exploration program (developed Saturn 5 booster rocket).

The Syrian crisis is a collective failure of the Syrian leaders and international community. The demolition of Syria was chosen by big powers over diplomatic resolution of the conflict and national reconciliation. It happened so because the conflict is taking place in the Middle East, in other words, in the part of the world considered inferior by Western decision-makers. This situation revealed the double-standards to the extent that the West would have never armed and encouraged fighting of the Flanders against the Walloons or the Basque against the French (similarly to not sending weapons to the Poles against the Russians in 1981, and to the Hungarians against the Soviets in 1956) fearing the resultant disruptive consequences for the Euroatlantic zone.

In this aspect, the current approach of the Western world towards Syria, with total disregard for human life in the Levant, can be considered racist, discriminatory and irresponsible.

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On revolution 2015 – Arab revolutions revisited

Summary

The article critically examines the general features of the so-called Arab revolutions which began several years ago in the MENA region leaving vast areas unravelled. The author attempts to understand why the region has never had any luck with the peaceful solutions by dissecting external factors as well as internal sources. By looking into the transition failures of societies in turmoil such as Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria more generalised observations are attempted with view of identifying crucial obstacles inhibiting the progress of peace initiatives. In the process, the author recreates the images of past revolutions in the world in order to find universal similarities and differences. It leads him to the need of underlying the role of ethical standards in politics and everyday life of societies as one of the key factors which was indispensable in the successful state-building by referencing to the reform experience in Eastern Europe between 1989–1991. Also, the distrust of the Arabs towards the West is explored in the framework of a geopolitical and historical analysis which recalls the past blunders of Western powers and explains why manoeuvres of Russians win today sympathy with regional players such as Syria or Iran.

Rewolucja 2015 – powrót do arabskich rewolucji

Streszczenie

Artykuł opisuje główne przyczyny sprawcze fali rewolucji, która ogarnęła kraje arabskie Bliskiego Wschodu, analizując fiasko transformacji poprzez odniesienie się do zewnętrznych i wewnętrznych źródeł konfliktów w wybranych krajach regionu, takich jak Egipt, Tunezja, Libia oraz Syria. Analizie systemowych problemów służy odwołanie do rewolucyjnych doświadczeń przeszłości, takich jak transformacja ustrojowa w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w latach 1989–91. Pozwala to na dostrzeżenie i zrozumienie różnic między Arabską Wiosną a na przykład doświadczeniem transformacji w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej, gdzie istotną rolę odegrały również aspekty etyczne rewolucji – co przygotowało grunt pod przemiany systemowe. Artykuł ukazuje również błędy, jakie kraje zachodnie popełniły na Bliskim Wschodzie, przyczyniając się wydatnie do obecnej nieufności klasy politycznej i pomagając nieświadomie Rosji w umacnianiu jej geopolitycznych wpływów na tym obszarze.

Революция 2015 – возврат к арабским революциям

Резюме

В статье рассматриваются главные причины революционной волны, которая охватила арабские государства Ближнего Востока. Анализируется неудачное проведение трансформаций через обращение к внешним и внутренним источникам конфликтов в отдельных государствах региона, таких, как Египет, Тунис, Ливия и Сирия. Анализу системных проблем служит обращение к революционному опыту прошлого, в частности, к политической трансформации в Центрально-Восточной Европе в 1989–1991 годах. Это позволяет заметить и понять различия между Арабской Весной и, например, опытом трансформации в Центрально-Восточной Европе, в которой существенное значение имели также этические аспекты революции – что подготовило почву для системных изменений. В статье указаны также ошибки, которые западные государства допустили на Ближнем Востоке, значительно повлияв на возникшее недоверие политического класса и неосознанно помогая России в укреплении её геополитического влияния на этой территории.