



AMR MOUSSA

Former Secretary General of the League of Arab States

Volker PERTHES, Chairman and Director of *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)*

Thank you very much. I would imagine that the world is no longer so anti-capitalist and accepts more that companies make profits and, at the same time, they invest. People want companies to make profits in their country and invest in their country.

I think that it is useful that you have broached the broader region. You were talking about Libya and Syria and I would like to turn to Amr Moussa, who has been the Secretary General of the Arab League for so long. It is interesting that basically you were in your job in the last couple of months and the Arab League seems to have undergone a total role reversal, as it were. We used to say that the Arab League could only be as good and sometimes we said that it could only be as bad as the member countries that are represented in it and it has usually not intervened in the domestic affairs of countries. Now it seems that the Arab League is at the forefront and is sometimes ahead of the United Nations Security Council in imposing sanctions on countries that crack down on human rights with their boots, you might say. Is it all about human rights and a new value orientation of the Arab League or is it actually playing geopolitics through the Arab League? Can you explain this to us a little bit?

Amr MOUSSA, Former Secretary General of the League of Arab States

I would like you to know that the drive for change started seriously - and it is very well documented in the debates, summits and other levels of discussion - in 2004 when, as Secretary General, I introduced a proposal to the Tunis Summit in March 2004 on change, modernisation and reform. I urged the summit to adopt a basic document that highlighted the necessity to promote change and modernisation, education, the rights of women, economic and social development and transparency in politics in actions and debates, where voting should not be by unanimity or only through the building of a consensus, but through a majority, which we did with Libya and Syria. Some countries opposed the sanctions, but through the majority we decided in favour of them.

The Arab League therefore believed in change and the necessity of change. Something that is known in Egypt and a number of Arab countries but which I wish to repeat here is that a week before the revolution in Egypt, on 19th January in Sharm El Sheikh, we had an economic and social summit. As Secretary General, I spoke very bluntly in saying that things could not continue in that way and that people were fed up. Entering the hall of heads of state and myself as Secretary General, a young journalist asked President Mubarak 'What about Tunisia?' The President said 'Tunisia is one thing; Egypt is another'. I started speaking and said 'Mr President, Distinguished Heads of State and Government, the revolution in Tunisia is not far away from this hall. The people are fed up. Oppression, poverty and mismanagement have become the order of the day in several Arab countries and that is going to change. That is going to change.' This was broadcast live because they did not expect my intervention to be like that and an investigation took place later. However, I insisted that change was coming and a week later it came. What I said was the reflection of many of us that felt that the end of the regime was coming.

Since 2004, the Arab League has introduced a lot of changes.

Volker PERTHES, Chairman and Director of *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* (SWP)

However, the big changes came this year.

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Yes, indeed, and they came through revolution, with Tunisia, Egypt and then the rest. Will this be the order of the day? I would say that it will indeed be the order of the day and it will affect all countries, with those differences that I was talking about. The Arab world will not be the same again. There will be no dictatorships. We cannot live with them and we should not live with them. We have to move towards democracy and build a different society by changing our education system and caring for the people themselves. There are a lot of things that can be done with not a lot of money - we do not need financial help for all the actions that we take. We have to act quickly and immediately. Even this Government, which was formed a couple of days ago and is a temporary, transitional Government, has a lot that it has to do, at least as regards services for the people.

That is one thing. At the same time, the Arab people and the Egyptian people, of course, care about what is going on in the region. I met with so many groups of young people – the revolutionaries in Tahrir Square – when I was Secretary General. They used to come in scores. They talked about education, poverty and so many things pertaining to the internal situation. However, no group of the many people I met ended without asking me about Palestine. When a number of colleagues – who were Ministers, especially European or Western Ministers – conveyed to me that they had heard an observation in Israel that went ‘You see. The revolution did not come because of Palestine; it came because of poverty and mismanagement and so on.’ I said to them ‘Look. This is what is happening. You will hear Palestine being spoken about very soon unless the Israeli leadership, the Israeli Government, realises that the Middle East and the Arab world are changing and they too have to change their policy and point of view.’ Here comes the point that every revolution, be it Tunisian, Egyptian, Syrian or whatever, has its own domestic reasons and internal elements, but in the end we need to have a peaceful region. We need to have a different region and a new regional order. This will help change and change will help the order.

One thing, or at least one important basic thing will continue to hinder is the Palestinian issue. That is why it is in all our interests to have a fair solution. Unanimity is now building up all over the world that this has to come to an end.

The other thing, especially in a society like this, is the Middle East regional security system. This will have to be discussed and promoted and then negotiated and at least drafted and agreed upon. We have to bear in mind that this change which is taking place in the Middle East is paving the way for a new regional order – an economic, security and political regional area. There are then the two rules. There is either the positive rule of cooperation, openness, open borders, joint economic projects and everything else, which is possible, or we continue to do the same as before. I believe that it is for all of us to promote and work for the first option. The Middle East has to change and you have to help us change the Middle East into a new order where all the old, chronic problems will have to be tackled, especially as we know how to tackle them and the obstacle is known. A regional change is therefore needed and the role of the big powers will also need to change.