The Arab Spring in Tunisia and its Aftermath

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**The fall of Ben Ali and Tunisian Politics in the Aftermath**

This chapter analyses the policies of Ben Ali’s regime and summarizes the reasons behind his overthrow in 2011. But any history of Tunisia since independence must begin with Habib Bourguiba and the progressive, secular, nation he strove to create. Secondly, it summarizes the major policies of President Ben Ali’s regime. Third, it gives an account of the factors which lead to its fall. Lastly, it summarizes the overall challenges facing the new government.

**Tunisia under Bourguiba**

It is impossible to consider recent political events in Tunisia without touching on the legacy of Habib Bourguiba. Bourguiba is the founding father of Tunisia and led his country from French rule and transformed it into one of the most socially liberal nations in the Arab World. The administration and government which Ben Ali took over in his 1987 coup were created by Bourguiba and many of the policies remained unchanged. To understand contemporary Tunisia, the major policies and achievements of Bourguiba’s leadership must be examined.

Habib Bourguiba was born in Eastern Tunisia at the beginning of the 20th century. Bourguiba became a lawyer after receiving training in both Tunis and France. Early in his professional career, Bourguiba became involved in politics and joined the movement for Tunisian independence. French authorities imprisoned Bourguiba for sedition and fomenting unrest in the late 1930s. Ironically, German authorities released Bourguiba during the Second World War in an attempt to harness Tunisian nationalism for the Axis powers. However, Bourguiba was an uncooperative client and warned Tunisians against supporting the Axis
because it was losing the war. After the end of WWII, Bourguida continued his efforts for independence and was re-imprisoned by the French in 1952. Three years later Bourguiba was released as the French government began to reanalyze its colonial policies\(^1\).

Over the next decade, Bourguiba became the leader of the Tunisian independence movement. Taking control of the Neo-Destour party, Bourguiba coordinated low-level violence against both the French authorities and Tunisian political opponents. In 1959, the Tunisian constitution was ratified and Bourguiba was elected president with over 99% of the vote. While the legitimacy of this vote is questionable, since he was the only candidate, it is certain that Bourguiba successfully created a persona which inextricably tied himself to the independence of Tunisia. The Tunisian system of government did not include any meaningful system of checks and balances and Bourguiba ruled as de-facto dictator for the next 28 years\(^2\).

Habib Bourguiba rigged elections to prevent the emergence of serious electoral challenges\(^3\). The mechanisms of political control that the 2011 revolution overthrew were instituted during the reign of Bourguiba. Furthermore, religious expression was repressed by government policies against group prayer. At the same time, Bourguiba did champion what he considered to be women’s rights. The Personal Status Code, which Bourguiba passed in 1956, ended polygamy and gave women an equal status in marriage. Bourguida strongly favored birth control and used government programs to introduce it to the general population. Tunisia is also unique in North Africa for allowing abortion on demand. The Hijab was officially banned in 1981 from government institutions and Bourguiba publicly declared that it was an “odious rag.”

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national television. In summary, Bourguiba saw himself as a social modernizer and encouraged the growth of a secular culture in Tunisia.

Internationally, Tunisia was officially nonaligned during the Cold War and Bourguiba maintained his Arab credentials by giving sanctuary to the PLO after it was forced to flee Lebanon. Although Tunisia did experiment with some communist ideas, like farm collectivization, Bourguiba was seen as pro-Western. The Tunisian government encouraged industry, tourism, and oil exports to bolster the economy. Overall, Tunisia adopted liberal economic policies and attempted to foster commerce. Bourguiba’s ultimate goal was to modernize the Tunisian economy, just as he attempted to make society adopt secular values.

Bourguiba’s reign ended because of old age and a bungled re-trial of suspected Islamist terrorists. In 1987, Bourguiba ordered the retrial of several arrested Islamists and threatened their execution. This corroborated speculation that Bourguiba, already 84 years old, was becoming senile and unfit for office. Executions were also viewed as too harsh a sentence in a nation that typically simply imprisoned or exiled Islamist dissenters. Prime Minister Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali led a peaceful coup and Bourguiba was forced into retirement. Bourguiba would spend the remainder of his life in his hometown of Monastir, where he died peacefully 13 years later.

The life and work of Habib Bourguiba is essential to understand contemporary Tunisia. Bourguiba led Tunisia to independence and ruled as a dictator for thirty years. The policies that

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7 Ibid. 4 p.35
8 Ibid. 5
Bouruiba created, including political suppression, female empowerment, and government encouraged economic growth, would continue largely unchanged during the rule of Ben Ali. The Arab Spring in Tunisia forced Ben Ali from power, but the regime that was overthrown was actually the creation of Habib Bourguiba. Ben Ali’s personal corruption caused this system of government to collapse in 2011.

**Tunisia under Ben Ali**

President Zine Abidine Ben Ali was a true successor of Habib Bourguiba, and the fundamental governmental policies remained unchanged. However, it is worthwhile to summarize these practices and examine how they changed under Ben Ali’s rule. Overall, the most noteworthy change occurred in the repression of political dissent.

In managing the Tunisian economy, Ben Ali continued to foster trade and encourage tourism. Notably, Ben Ali privatized many government services and nurtured foreign investment. Gone were the flirtations with collectivization that Bourguiba attempted. Viewing the administration as a whole, Tunisia was rather successful economically. During most of Ben Ali’s twenty-four year rule the economy grew steadily, averaging five percent growth in GDP per year. Per capita income tripled and peaked in 2008 at $3,786 in 2008\(^9\). Income inequality grew during the early 1990s but then plateaued and remained stable through the 2000s\(^10\). This track record, while not comparable with the vast economic strides of nations like Brazil or China, demonstrates that Ben Ali’s regime managed the economy fairly well.

Political repression continued during Ben Ali’s tenure. The Socialist Constitution Party, which Bourguiba had founded, was reorganized as the Democratic Constitutional Rally. Major

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\(^9\) Ibid. 4 p.38  
\(^10\) Ibid. 6 p.19
trade unions were brought into the fold and Ben Ali won multiple elections with implausible support, garnering well over 90% of the vote\(^\text{11}\). The President offered lip service to democratic values and competitive elections, but prevented any real opposition from competing in national elections. Islamist parties, like the Renaissance Movement (Ennahda), were shut down in the name of security and women’s rights. The press was kept on a tight leash and the internet was censored. Email and phone conversations were monitored to prevent the effective organization of political opponents\(^\text{12}\). Overall, Ben Ali’s political strategy was to promise a transition to democracy while in reality strengthening the apparatus of political control over the nation\(^\text{13}\).

Many of these controls were created as part of Ben Ali’s counter terrorism campaign following the September 11\(^\text{th}\) attacks on the United States. A close American ally in the war on terror, Ben Ali had Islamists and other dissidents arrested, occasionally tortured, and exiled. Although these measures were harsh and undoubtedly violated human rights, they were comparatively mild in comparison to actions taken by other regimes in the region, like Egypt or Saudi Arabia. There are no reports of political opponents actually being killed by the government during this period\(^\text{14}\). It is important to remember that Ben Ali was able to seize power from Bourguiba partly because his predecessor had become too violent for the tastes of Tunisians. This helps explain why the Tunisian government remained relatively benevolent during the war on terror.

In terms of social policy, there were essentially no changes from secular goals created by Bourguiba. Tunisian women retained the rights created by the Personal Status code and the

\(^{11}\) Ibid. 6 p.18  
\(^{14}\) Ibid. 4 p.36
country remained one of the most progressive, from a western perspective, nations in the Muslim world. In contrast to regimes like Saudi Arabia, which intrude into the lives of their citizens to enforce morality, Ben Ali’s government was benignly uninterested. Even the LGBT community in Tunisia rarely faced prosecution from the government, although social discrimination is still an issue\textsuperscript{15}. On the whole, the government carefully controlled political expression but allowed Tunisians to enjoy freedom in their private lives.

In summary, Ben Ali continued the policies of his predecessor Bourguiba. Economically, Tunisia experienced steady growth and rising individual incomes. Political repression and one party rule endured, despite Ben Ali’s false promises for reform. If anything, Tunisians actually became more censored as the government expanded its control to new forms of communication like the internet. However, aside from political repression, the Tunisian government generally left the private lives of its citizens alone. This raises the important question of why the Tunisian revolution occurred at all. Essentially the same system of government had ruled Tunisia since independence in the late 1950s. This government had succeeded in raising the standard of living for ordinary Tunisians. What made the Tunisian people rise up in 2011 and why was the government unable to counter it?

**Long-term Causes of Rebellion**

In analyzing the causes of the 2011 revolution it is important to distinguish between long term and immediate causes of discontent. Many of the problems with the Tunisian government, political repression for instance, were very long established. These factors, while important, do not explain why the revolution came 2011. But these grievances are important for identifying

what the new Tunisian government will have to accomplish to attain stability in the future. The most consistent sources of discontent were political repression, economic stagnation, and the role of Islam in Tunisian society.

The most obvious long-term source of discontent that Tunisian’s rebelled against was political repression. Since Bourguiba defeated his rivals in the struggle for independence from France, there was never a truly open political discourse in the nation. There clearly was a desire for a more democratic government, as evidenced in Ben Ali’s rhetoric supporting competitive elections to placate this demand. However, Ben Ali’s promises lost their credibility after over two decades of his rule. Ben Ali acknowledged this grievance in his desperate attempts to maintain control in January 2011. The President promised that he would not run for reelection in 2014, and that he would allow the media freedom from government censorship. However, the desire for representative government alone is inadequate to explain the protests in 2011. If the Tunisians were single-mindedly determined to attain real democracy, why did they endure over fifty years of dictatorship?

The second important grievance against the Tunisian government is the inequality of development that the government created. Overall, Tunisia did maintain steady economic growth since achieving independence. However, the benefits from development are strongly concentrated along the coastal regions, with little benefits for the people living in the interior of the nation. Outside of the popular tourist destinations, the interior of Tunisia suffers from poor infrastructure and worse economic opportunities. The 2011 protests originated in the city of Sidi Bouzid, which is located in the interior of Tunisia, and then spread across the country and

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16 Ibid. 13
towards the capital. However, once again this is a long standing issue that has existed for a very long time. For example, Bourguiba’s initiative to collectivize farming primarily affected the interior and failed dramatically\textsuperscript{19}. The failure to promote effective interior development does not explain why the revolution happened in 2011 instead of 1977.

The third significant grievance that many Tunisians had against the government was the secularism that it promoted. Bourguiba set out to change societal norms in Tunisian society. This included improving the legal status of women, encouraging birth control, and banning cultural symbols like the Hijab. Going even further, Bourguiba publicly showed his opposition to Muslim religious duties like the Ramadan fast and group prayer. Regardless of the merit of Bourguiba’s and later Ben Ali’s policies, it is clear that they caused constant tension in Tunisia. For the past fifty years, the Islamists have been persecuted in Tunisia because they opposed these government policies. It is uncertain what role the Islamists played in the 2011 revolution. Some argue that the Islamists were uninvolved\textsuperscript{20}, while others claim that they played a role in the protests\textsuperscript{21}. It is certain, that the Islamist Ennahda (Renaissance) movement won the elections for the constituent assembly. The role of Islam in public life and law is a major issue in the contemporary Tunisian debate.

In conclusion, the problems of political suppression, regional economic underdevelopment, and the persecution of Islamists were long standing sources of unrest. All of these factors played a role in the revolution that occurred in 2011. The most important was the failure of the Tunisian government to successfully create economic opportunities in the interior of the nation. However, it is the persecution of the Islamists and their reemergence into the political spectrum that is dominating the current political discourse in Tunisia. But none of these

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. 2 p.?
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. 4 p.48
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. 18 p. 4
grievances explain why the revolution happened in 2011, it is necessary to examine the immediate causes of the rebellion.

**Immediate causes of Revolution**

There are two primary immediate causes for the revolution that occurred in 2011. The first, and most important, was the perceived illegitimacy of President Ben Ali’s regime. The second was the story surrounding the self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi, which awakened outrage and sparked protests across Tunisia. Together, these two factors explain why the people of Tunisia overthrew the political system which had governed their nation since independence.

President Ben Ali had multiple challenges to overcome to convince the Tunisian people of his legitimacy. The biggest challenge was that Ben Ali was not Habib Bourguiba. It is difficult to overstate the legacy of Bourguiba on Tunisia. To draw a comparison, Habib Bourguiba is honored in Tunisia as George Washington is in America. Despite the fact that Bourguiba was a dictator who challenged ancient Tunisian customs and suppressed political dissent, all this was outweighed by the fact that he led Tunisia to Independence. Bourguiba was the “supreme combatant” of Tunisian independence, which gave his government unquestionable legitimacy. Ben Ali could never achieve that status in Tunisia simply because he was Bourguiba’s successor.

Although Ben Ali could never measure up to the legendary status of his predecessor, it was the blatant corruption of his own family that truly dragged down the reputation of his government. Ben Ali and his family lived fabulously off the people of Tunisia. Their beautiful

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villas and lavish properties were among the first targets of the angry protesters\textsuperscript{23}. The problems this created for the government’s image is neatly summarized in this diplomatic cable to Washington:

\textit{“Although the petty corruption rankles, it is the excesses of President Ben Ali’s family that inspire outrage among Tunisians... a growing number of Tunisians believe that those at the top are keeping the benefits [of economic growth] for themselves\textsuperscript{24}.”}

These rumored excesses were given credence when diplomatic cables like this one were made publically available through WikiLeaks in 2010. This came at a time when average Tunisians were suffering from high unemployment in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. In light of the continued poverty in the interior, these indulgences offended the sensibilities of the people.

The outrage generated by the corruption of Ben Ali and his family remained impotent until it was harnessed by the self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi. Bouazizi was a young man who lived in the city of Sidi Bouzid and worked in the informal economy as a vegetable seller. When a police officer confiscated his vegetable cart, Bouazizi unsuccessfully appealed to the municipal authorities. Less than hour later, Bouazizi set himself on fire outside of the municipality building. Bouazizi lingered for two weeks before dying of his burns\textsuperscript{25}. In addition, stories about the incident claim that Bouazizi was insulted and abused by the police in the lead up to his protest.


\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. 6 p.19

Something about Bouazizi’s story captured the imagination of the Tunisian public. It may have appealed to the residents of his town because Sidi Bouzid is in a poor and undeveloped part of Tunisia. Regardless, it is certain that this act of defiance was the beginning of the Arab Spring. Protests spread across Tunisia and President Ben Ali fled in disgrace, less than a month after Bouazizi’s immolation. It is odd that Ben Ali left power so easily, ultimately unable to get the support of the army against the growing crowds of protesters. The military may have been unwilling to fire on unarmed crowds, or perhaps they felt that Ben Ali, already seventy-five, was simply too old to govern effectively. Like his predecessor Bourguiba, Ben Ali was only forced from power when he appeared old and incompetent.

Conclusions

The flight of Ben Ali to Saudi Arabia marked the end of the government which governed Tunisia for the previous fifty three years. This government was created by Habib Bourguiba and continued fundamentally unchanged under Ben Ali. This regime was defined by its fairly successful economic policies and a Western social and political orientation. However, this government was a dictatorship that created enemies through political repression, the failure to promote economic growth in the interior, and by challenging Islamic customs. Ultimately, Ben Ali’s personal corruption destroyed the legitimacy of this regime and the defiance of Mohammad Bouazizi sparked the protests that overthrew it.

Tunisia now is in a state of transition. The defining governmental policies of the old regime are up for debate and the exiles have returned. The most important of these exiles is Rachid Ghannouchi, the Islamist leader of the Ennahda movement. Ennahda dominated the elections for the 2011 Constituent Assembly and it is the most important political party in Tunis.

[^26]: Ibid. 18 p.3
The question facing Tunisia is how the Islamists and the other newly freed political parties will govern, now that they have been freed from the dictatorship which suppressed them.
A Snap Shot of Tunisian Politics

Tunisia is in a state of anticipation. Following the overthrow of Ben Ali, the 2011 elections brought the Renaissance Movement (Ennahda) to power in the interim Tunisian government. Since that point, political progress has stagnated. No new constitution has been ratified and months were spent dividing power between Ennahda and its political opponents. Violent actors emerged and infamously assassinated the liberal politician Choukri Belaid. The opposition has become more vocal and frequent demonstrations are held in the capital. All of this happens in the back drop of the uncertain Tunisian economy and the upcoming summer elections. This chapter examines the issues facing Tunisia and the political parties that must respond to these challenges.

The Summer Elections

Every political group in Tunisia is preparing for the summer elections. This election promises to be the second free election in Tunisian history and will be a referendum on the administration of the Ennahda party. Ennahda won by a landslide in the 2011 elections and for all intents and purposes governs the nation. Forty-seven percent of the seats on the Constituent Assembly are held by Ennahda, along with the Prime Minister’s office. However, it is uncertain if Ennahda will win an equivalent level of support in the upcoming election. Some analysts argue that the party’s showing in 2011 was simply a demonstration of respect by the voters, rather than a victory for Ennahda’s platform. This explanation is plausible since the Muslim Brotherhood affiliate had endured severe persecution under the old government.

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Regardless of the reasons for Ennahda’s success in 2011, the situation has changed dramatically in the intervening years. To understand the actors and their motivations, it is necessary to first analyze the challenges confronting the Tunisian government.

The Economy

There is no more universally important issue to Tunisian voters than the economy. The 2011 revolution was partially caused by economic stagnation spreading from the rural hinterland to even the traditionally prosperous capital. On this front, there is good news for Tunisia. The economy quickly rebounded from the post-revolutionary recession in 2012. Vitally, there was close to 30% growth in both the agriculture and human services sectors. This is important since agriculture is the economic foundation of the interior provinces. Nationwide, GDP increased by 2% in 2011, 2.7% in 2012, and it is projected to rise to 3.3% this year. While somewhat lower than the average 5% annual growth typically experienced under Ben Ali, it parallels the economic performance of the years towards the end of his administration.

The economic performance of the Tunisian economy is a strong indicator that the nation can function without autocratic rule. However, the question for the political parties is how average citizens perceive the economy. Last month, angry Tunisians protested cuts to the government’s fuel subsidy program. While necessary to balance the budget, this kind of decision.

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is not domestically popular\textsuperscript{31}. Can Ennahda win support by communicating the overall economic picture, or will the citizens turn to opposition groups?

\textbf{The Threat of Terrorism}

The most alarming development in Tunisia is the specter of terrorism. In the Tunisian political discourse, these zealots are referred to as “Salafist Jihadists”. Salafists Jihadist groups have the goal of instituting their rigid interpretation of Sharia law on a nation that has been secular, from the standpoint of government policy, since Tunisia gained independence. These religious radicals are an outgrowth of Habib Bourjuiba and his successor Ben Ali’s suppression of religious political activism and aggressive secularization policies\textsuperscript{32}. Now that they have more freedom, Salafist Jihadists are determined to seize the initiative and take control of their nation.

The threat of terrorism has loomed large over Tunisia in recent months. In February, the liberal politician Choukri Belaid was assassinated by men with ties to Ansar Al-Sharia, which literally means “The followers of Sharia law”. This is immensely troubling because it demonstrates the willingness of Salafist Jihadists to use deadly force against fellow Muslims in the pursuit of their goals\textsuperscript{33}. There was a tremendous outcry against Belaid’s murder, and widespread protests and unrest shortly followed. Essentially every political party condemned the attack with Ennahda leading the call for calm and stability\textsuperscript{34}. This example of universal condemnation is encouraging and expresses the determination of the Tunisian people not to be

intimidated by violence. The government has taken action and the Ministry of the Interior with the military launched a campaign to counter the Salafist Jihadists and armed groups generally\(^\text{35}\). However, the issue has yet to be decided and there is always the possibility that the terrorists will succeed in silencing their political opponents.

**The Quest for Legitimacy**

In this backdrop of economic uncertainty and political violence, the Tunisian government desperately needs to create the sense legitimacy. The government was overthrown only two years ago, and all the peaceful political parties share an interest in getting Tunisians to respect their new democratic system. At the same time, it is not clear that the government has actually changed in practical terms. In the absence of a new constitution, the political structure is officially the same, although political power is now concentrated in the Constituent Assembly and the Prime Minister instead of the Presidency. Beyond that change, there has been no overarching reform of the bureaucracies or security establishment. The citizens that fought against governmental corruption in 2011 may still have many of the same legitimate grievances. Stability demands that all Tunisia government effectively “sow trust in democratic institutions and society”, or risk future chaos\(^\text{36}\).

**The Political Parties**

The political scene in Tunisia is divided between Ennahda and everyone else. While its partners are comparatively insignificant, Ennahda has formed a government with two of the largest competing parties. The ruling coalition is made up of three groups: Ennahda, The

\(^{35}\) Al-Jazeera (2013). "علي الجريدة... المشهد السياسي بتونس." Retrieved 4/10/2013, from http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/pages/f4fa7ad2-ab9a-4db3-be35-e26b76a34ef6

Conference for the Republic (CPR), and the Democratic Coalition for Work and Freedom (Ettakatol). Then there is the incredibly diverse opposition, which ranges from Marxist communists to Salafists who believe that Ennahda is insufficiently Islamist. I have chosen to examine the Nidaa Tunis as the primary representative from the opposition groups. This is because the leader of Nidaa Tunis is Beji Esibi, who served as the interim prime minister between the fall of Ben Ali and the 2011 elections. In addition, it holds enough seats in Constituent Assembly that it is comparable in influence to CPR and Ettakatol. Esibi is an important enough politician that his opposition group is likely to remain significant. This analysis could be inaccurate, but I am certain that at least the Ennahda party will continue to be a major player after the upcoming summer elections.

**Ennahda**

The Ennahda Movement rules Tunisia, with some input from the rest of the political organizations. Every other political party must respond to the actions of Ennahda and its leader Rachid Ghannouchi. This section articulates the perspective of Ennahda, its leader, program, and interactions with other political parties.

For Ennahda, the history of modern Tunisia begins in a prison cell. In Arabic, Ennahda means “Renaissance” and the party was created in 1981 to bring back the common man’s understanding of Islam into the public sphere. This idea was harshly opposed by presidents Habib Bourguiba and his successor Ben Ali, and Ennahda’s leaders faced imprisonment and exile. This is a living memory for Tunisia’s rulers, both Prime Ministers Hamadi Jebali and Ali Laarayedh were imprisoned for their beliefs. Now that it is free and in control, Ennahda plans to
bring about a true renaissance in Tunisian society by making Islam the basis of their governmental policies.\footnote{Ennahda (2013). "تعريف." Retrieved 4/8/2013, from http://www.ennahdha.tn/%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81}

Rachid Ghannouchi is Ennahda’s President and arguably the most politically influential man in Tunisia. First and foremost Ghannouchi is a religious writer, as evidenced by his membership in the Union of Islamic Scholars. Rachid is well educated and holds a doctorate in philosophy. Looking at the body of his work, Ghannouchi has attempted to write on all the major issues facing Islamist political movements, ranging from the Palestinian question to public freedoms within the framework of Islam. Ghannouchi’s political life begins when he joined Ennahda in 1981. From 1990-2011 Ghannouchi was exiled by Ben Ali but he continued to write an extensive body of literature.\footnote{Ennahda (3102) "رئيس الحزب" Retrieved 4/8/2013, from http://www.ennahdha.tn/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8} As the current leader of the Ennahda Movement, Ghannouchi is the source of the party’s intellectual firepower and there has been no significant dissent from his ideological positions.

The political program of Ennahda up to now has been fairly moderate. While passionately asserting Tunisia’s Arab Islamic identity, little has practically changed in the government’s regulations affecting life styles of ordinary people. Instead, Ennahda rejected the establishment of Sharia law as the basis of legislation in the new constitution. This may be because of the party’s commitment to “democratic freedoms”\footnote{Ibid 36.} or more mundane considerations like Tunisia’s large alcohol industry.\footnote{Shehab, A. A. (2012). "حزب النهضة واستبعاد الشريعة." Retrieved 4/8/2013, from http://www.alarabiya.net/views/2012/03/29/203907.html} Regardless, the rise of Ennahda ended the restrictions on Muslim religious expression that existed in the old regime. For instance, in the US there is a
movement to require gun owners to register their firearms with law enforcement. In Tunisia, men who wanted to grow a long, Islamic style, beard had to register at the local police station. Needless to say, beard registration is no longer required in Tunisia.

Interacting with other political parties has been Ennahda’s greatest difficulty. Until the assassination of Choukri Belaid, Tunisian politics generally was trapped in circular debates over control of the “Sovereign Ministries”. These are the ministries of the Interior, Justice, and Foreign Affairs and represent the balance of power among the political parties. Because of its majority in the Constituent Assembly, Ennahda demanded the leadership of these vital agencies. However, this objective was impeded by the necessity of persuading a few rival parties to form a coalition government with Ennahda. Tunisian’s witnessed discussion after unproductive discussion over whether these ministries should be governed by technocrats or led by Ennahda.

The murder of Choukri Belaid sparked a crisis among the leaders of Ennahda. The people of Tunisia were outraged by the death of Belaid, and massive demonstrations rocked the capital. The Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, also a member of Ennahda responded by adopting the opposition’s position, calling for technocratic administration of the Sovereign Ministries. Ghannouchi initially rejected, but then embrace this position after Jebali announced his resignation. Tunisia is now led by Prime Minister Ali Laarayedh in a ruling coalition with the Conference for the Republic and the Democratic Coalition for Work and Freedom.

In conclusion, the Ennahda movement is a uniquely Tunisian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. Like their colleagues throughout North Africa, Ennahda sincerely believes that

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Islam is the solution to the Tunisia’s woes. Under the aggressively secular government of Ben Ali, Ennahda leaders suffered imprisonment and exile for their beliefs. Since gaining control, Ennahda has struggled to create a functioning government. The death of Choukri Belaid was the impetus needed to convince Ennahda to compromise with its rivals and make the Sovereign Ministries independent. Based on its record, Ennahda appears to be exactly what it claims to be, a moderate Islamist party attempting to guide Tunisia’s transition to democracy.

The Conference for the Republic (CPR)

The Conference for the Republic stands out for its similarities with, and stark contrast against the Ennahda Movement. Like the Ennahda, it was banned by the repressive government of Ben Ali. Moncef Marzouki, the party’s leader, was exiled for twenty years in the same manner of Rashid Ghannouchi. Although these men share similar experiences, what they stand for is completely different. CPR is a distinctly secular party. Unlike Ennahda, it does not appeal to Tunisia’s “Arab Islamic” identity. Instead, CPR’s rhetoric platform is based on secular positions like the need to protect human rights, institute democratic processes, and the project for overall government reform.

The positions of CPR are very in-sink with American democratic ideals. In the Judiciary, CPR advocates combating corruption and moving away from the French legal system that was inherited from Tunisia’s colonial experience. Economically, CPR stands for harmonious development, increasing GDP while maintaining stability between the different classes of Tunisian society. Out of the political parties in the ruling coalition, CPR is the only one with an explicit environmental policy. In contrast to Ennahda, which rarely devolves into specifics, the

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CPR has articulated a detailed leftist platform on everything from relations with the EU to sports programs.\textsuperscript{45}

One of the fascinating differences between Ennahda and CPR is the target linguistic audience. Almost everything on Ennahda’s website is written in Arabic, while CPR’s literature is divided between Arabic and French, with some tendency towards French. This reveals the intellectual roots of both parties. Ennahda reaches out to Tunisia’s Arab character while CPR is clearly influenced by French culture and ideas. CPR’s ideals are easily understandable to a Western audience and represent the kind of outcome the U.S. would like see from the Arab Spring.

In conclusion, CPR lacks the ability to implement its agenda. In comparison to the huge delegation from Ennahda, there are few CPR representatives in the Constituent Assembly. This difficulty was increased by internal dissension. Last year, the already small organization lost twelve representatives in a dispute over party leadership.\textsuperscript{46} While Moncef Marzouki is Tunisia’s President, real power resides with the Prime Minister. The upcoming summer elections will determine if the secular message of CPR can appeal to a large proportion of the population. At least the Conference is in a position to get its message out.

**The Democratic Coalition for Work and Freedom (Ettakatol)**

Ettakatol was founded in 1994 and is the only ruling party that was not banned under President Ben Ali. This makes Ettakatol a different creature from both Ennahda and CPR, if only because its leadership has not been through the experience of exile. The lack of persecution


To read more about these issues see the articles listed under "البرنامج الانتخابي" on the main webpage

may be attributable to the message of the party, which highlights its support for the electoral process and peaceful political activities. At the same time, Ettakatol opposed the previous regime and consistently supported human rights, the separation of powers, and other democratic practices\textsuperscript{47}. Like CPR, Ettakatol is secular, but it is also explicitly socialist\textsuperscript{48}.

Many of Ettakatol’s demands are similar to those of CPR’s. Both parties stand for greater separation of powers and stable democratic governance. The primary difference is a matter of degree in the area of economics. The Coalition explicitly warns against trusting in market forces and the necessity of carefully planning development\textsuperscript{49}. This message may be appealing to Tunisians, especially in the light of recent economic turmoil. Like Ennahda, Ettakatol does not focus on explicitly describing its future policies. Ettakatol equally reaches out to both the Arab and French linguistic groups and divides its website accordingly.

In summary, Ettakatol is the only significant political party with a history of legal participation in the old regime. Predictably, Ettakatol shares the secular mindset that Ben Ali promoted. Ettakatol has had only one major victory, the establishment of the technocratic control over the Sovereign Ministries which that they championed after the death of Belaid\textsuperscript{50}. Regardless of whether Ettakatol’s Socialist message is appealing to the US, in reality they have very little control over the political situation. Ennahda is the giant in the room and both Ettakatol and CPR are the equivalent of gad flies.

\textbf{Nidaa Tunis}

The selection of Nida Tunis as the primary representative for the opposition is somewhat arbitrary. Outside of the ruling coalition, there is a myriad of opposition groups attempting to gain widespread support. The political situation is very fluid, and it is not at all clear that any of them will succeed. However, Nida Tunis should be examined if only because its leader is Beji Esibi. Esibi is a very old hand at politics, currently eighty-six years old, and he served as the Prime Minister after the fall of Ben Ali. Nida has the real possibility of appealing to a wider audience because it avoids the exclusively secular rhetoric used by the CPR and Ettakatol. Like Ennahda, the Nidaa party acknowledges Tunisia’s Islamic Arab identity. Furthmore, Nidaa writes towards an Arabic speaking audience.

The ideas of Nidaa likely originate from the long term perspective of its founder. Nidaa essentially tells the story of the continuing quest for freedom in Tunisia, beginning with Independence from France and entering a new phase now. This is the only story that I have encountered when examining the various political parties that can compete with Ennahda’s. It provides a sense of national journey and much more optimistic than Ennahda’s and CPR’s persecution narrative. Aside from this description of Tunisia history and future, there is little that is differs between Nidaa goals and those of other political parties. Nidaa seeks to help create a truly democratic state, resolve youth unemployment, and promote national economic development. No public figure in Tunisia is opposed to this message.

Esibi has a very difficult task ahead of him in winning significant popular support for the Nidaa party. However, it is possible that his message of continuity and progress will appeal to the voters. Like all of the other political parties, Nidaa desperately needs to successfully challenge Ennahda in the upcoming summer elections.

52 Ibid
Conclusions

Politics in Tunisia since the 2011 elections is the story of Ennahda. Absolutely dominating the Constituent Assembly, Ennahda has over three times as many seats as its nearest rival. In real terms, Ennahda’s power has increased as many of the smaller parties have further fragmented into a very disorganized opposition. At this point it is certain that Ennahda will be a deciding player after the summer elections. Unless one of the opposition parties manages to attract much more support than they appear to have, Ennahda will control the future of Tunisia. This situation is not implausible, especially in light of the massive protests surrounding the assassination Choukri Belaid. These protests directly challenged Ennahda and forced to make the Sovereign Ministries apolitical.

However, Ennahda dominating Tunisian politics is not necessarily a bad outcome. Thus far, Ennahda appears to be a genuinely moderate Islamist party. It is highly unlikely that the kinds of problems seen in Egypt with minority rights will appear in Tunisia, given its much more homogenous population. At this point, the rule of the Islamists appears to be approximate to the governance of Ben Ali in the later years of his administration. This analysis of Tunisian politics reveals an underlying consensus. Every relevant political party supports the development of democratic institutions and sustainable economic development. This shared aspiration will hopefully be realized in the upcoming years.
The U.S. Relationship with Tunisia

For the past sixty years, the US government has enjoyed a friendly and mutually beneficial relationship with the Tunisian government. Now America’s longtime partner Ben Ali has disappeared from the political scene and new players determine the future of Tunisia. This chapter examines the history of United States’ interactions with Tunisia, the motivations of the American government, and what has changed since the Arab Spring. What emerges is the reality that America has viewed Tunisia through the prism of two major conflicts, first the Cold War and secondly, the War on Terror. The question for US foreign policy is how to deal with an entirely new government that has displaced the traditional rulers.

The Beginning with Bourguiba

In the 1950s, US policy towards Tunisia and the rest of the Maghrib was confused because America simultaneously pursued mutually exclusive goals. During this period the Maghrib was moving towards independence from French colonialism. First, the American government generally opposed colonialism. This position was based both on America’s historic commitment to democracy and a preoccupation with not allowing the Soviet Union to gain influence in the region. The popularity of the independence movements, throughout the Middle East and North Africa, caused US policy makers to fret over the possibility that they would be co-opted by Communist forces. Simultaneously, the relationship with France was a vital priority because of its role as a major NATO ally. Concerned with antagonizing France, America was generally neutral in the early stages of Tunisian independence\(^4\).

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American foreign policy changed directly because of Habib Bourguiba’s excellent marketing of his nation’s quest for independence. Bourguiba understood America’s fixation with the Cold War, and successfully cast Tunisia as a model for colonial nations seeking independence. This approach is evident in Bourguiba’s 1957 Foreign Affairs article, “Nationalism: The Antidote to Communism”. In this article, Bourguiba brilliantly portrays Tunisia as siding with Western liberalism against Communist Materialism. In it, Communism is portrayed as unpopular, un-Islamic, and certainly not in Tunisia’s best interests. Furthermore, Bourguiba intentionally played to Washington’s hopes for post-colonial relations, promising that Tunisia would pursue friendly and mutually beneficial relations with France. All of this combined to make Tunisia appear to be a shining beacon of Arab Nationalism.

Washington bought Bourguiba’s portrayal of Tunisia. President Eisenhower met with Bourguiba and left with the impression that the Tunisian leader was good for American interests. The United States formally established friendly relations with the new nation. More importantly, the US agreed to sell arms to Tunisia, demonstrating its faith in the government. But both Bourguiba and the Eisenhower were given a new set of challenges by the French-Algerian war. This conflict was especially difficult because of unique French claims over Algeria. The Algerian conflict was perceived as a civil war. Algeria was as much a part of France as the province of Alsace-Moselle. The French believed that vital national interests were at stake and treated the conflict differently from the Tunisian or Moroccan independence movements. This bitter conflict placed both Tunisia and the United States in a very difficult position.

Bourguiba naturally sided with the claims of the Algerian rebels. Both nations had been colonies of France and wanted to end the colonial experiments in North Africa. However,

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56 Ibid 54. p.75-6
Tunisia was militarily weak and its primary aid came in the form of moral support and international opposition to France. This situation was escalated in 1958, when French forces bombed the border village of Sakiet Sidi and killed some eighty Tunisian civilians. Both Great Britain and the US mediated the resulting diplomatic estrangement between the Tunisia and France. Eisenhower, although sympathetic to Tunisian claims, ultimately deferred to French territorial interests.\(^{57}\)

The election of President Kennedy heralded a change in American foreign policy to Tunisia. Kennedy had criticized the policies of President Eisenhower, specifically the deference to French colonial interests. Instead, Kennedy argued that the United States should support the cause of Algerian independence. Equivocation had only lowered American moral authority and earned it the distrust of all parties. It is certainly debatable to what extent Kennedy actually followed through on these arguments, which he made while a senator.\(^{58}\) However, Kennedy certainly did initiate a new era of cooperation between the US and Tunisia. During Kennedy’s administration, the US began sending economic development aid.\(^{59}\) Ultimately, the US maintained productive relations with Bourjuiba throughout the rest of his tenure.

In summary, the U.S. relationship with Tunisia began in the context of the Cold War. America viewed the issue of colonial independence ambivalently, torn between supporting its French ally and the right of self-determination. Bourguiba persuaded America’s leaders that Tunisian independence would help counteract the influence of Communism in the Arab world. President Eisenhower embraced Bourjuiba, granting recognition and supplying military hardware. His successor Kennedy went further and provided economic assistance to the

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\(^{58}\) Ibid 54. p.74-5  
\(^{59}\) Ibid 57. p.162
impoverished nation. The US continued in this role for the next thirty years, convinced that Tunisia was an ally in the Cold War. This assessment was accurate; Bourjuiba was certainly pro-Western, although his commitment to democracy was questionable. Ultimately, democracy was a very small consideration in weighing US interests with Tunisia in the midst of the Cold War.

**Partnership with Ben Ali**

When considering the American relationship with Tunisia, it is vital to be aware of the importance of time. Bourguiba ruled Tunisia for approximately thirty years, ending in 1987 when Ben Ali peacefully forced him into retirement. During that time, Bourguiba saw the American presidency change hands six times and dealt with personalities as diverse as Nixon, Kennedy, and Reagan. Throughout this period, America’s fundamental international objectives were tied up in the overarching Cold War conflict. Given the static nature of US policy toward Tunisia, it appears that the fundamental analysis of American leaders remained the same: Tunisia was an ally against Communism. Once Bourguiba had sold this perspective to American policy makers, he enjoyed fundamentally stable relations with the US. In contrast, Ben Ali was presented with a much more challenging situation. Coming to power at the end of the Cold War, Ben Ali saw US interests change dramatically. Eventually, Ben Ali successfully sold Tunisia once again to an American President, this time as an ally in the War on Terror.

Ben Ali’s career began during the Cold War and he formed vital contacts in the United States. America played a vital role in Ben Ali’s education, instructing him in military tactics at Fort Bliss and intelligence gathering at Fort Holabird, Maryland. Ben Ali proved his value to the US when, during his ambassadorship in Poland, he functioned as an intermediary between the
CIA and the Polish dissidents. This history of cooperation with the United States served Ben Ali well when he forced Bourguiba into retirement. American leaders felt that they had a leader who they understood and could work with. US-Tunisian relations did not suffer as Bourguiba finally was pushed into retirement.

The coup that Ben Ali staged against Bourguiba 1987 has many connections to the issues currently facing Tunisia. Several members of the “Islamic Tendency Movement”, were suspected to have carried out hotel bombings in Tunisia’s Sahel region. President Bourguiba was angered by the light sentences given to the defendants and demanded a retrial, this time targeting the head of the party, Rachid Ghannouchi. This decision turned out to be a mistake. Ghannouchi gave a successful defense of the movement and presented it as fundamentally democratic. A small splinter group was responsible for the attacks and Ghannouchi argued they did not represent the party. The government was embarrassed by the trial and it lowered Bourguiba’s prestige sufficiently for Ben Ali to move against him. Additionally, the nation was suffering an economic downturn, and it was questionable whether the elderly President was capable of handling these challenges.

Ben Ali quickly gathered a group of doctors who ruled that President Bourguiba was unable to carry out the duties of his office. Following the constitutional procedure for succession, Ben Ali took control of the government. There are a number of parallels between the issues that lead to Ben Ali’s ascension in 1987 and his overthrow in 2011. In both cases, Tunisia

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62 Translating الاتجاه الإسلامي” as the “Islamic Tendency Movement” is somewhat comical. Given Islam’s profound place in Tunisian society, essentially every Tunisian has some Islamic tendencies. A better translation would be “The Islamic Way”. But I have used this version since it is most commonly cited in English literature.
was experiencing a stagnant economy. Furthermore, the Islamists played an important role in both cases. In 1987, Ghannouchi inadvertently destroyed Bourguiba’s credibility, and in 2011 his rebranded Ennahda party dominated the post-revolutionary landscape. Lastly, both coups emphasized respect for law. Ben Ali took control constitutionally and the nation had a fairly law abiding transition in 2011.

Returning to the US response, it was fairly positive. Ben Ali was viewed as a useful partner with the United States. There does not seem to be any dramatic shift in US foreign policy towards Tunisia. This was completely warranted by subsequent historical events. Ben Ali did not significantly depart from the policies of his processor Bourguiba. The Tunisian state remained pro-Western in the Cold War and there was essentially no change in domestic policy. Arguably, Ben Ali simply represented a natural generational shift in leadership. The regime and policies remained generally unchanged, except that Ben Ali did decrease governmental involvement in the private sector. This move would only have been welcomed in Washington.

**Between the Cold War and the War on Terror**

Moving to President Bush’s “War on Terror”, this account of US governmental policy towards Tunisia leaps forward fourteen years from Ben Ali’s takeover in 1987 to the September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001. It is worthwhile to give account of how the US viewed Tunisia in the intervening period. When Ben Ali emerged as Tunisia’s President in 1987, many Western observers viewed his takeover positively. Ben Ali was perceived as a democratic actor, opening up the political forum and working with a broad coalition from both the established party and the
opposition. This view of Ben Ali showed him providing stability and a gradual transition to real democracy.\textsuperscript{64}

Ultimately, these hopes were dashed by the reality of Ben Ali’s authoritarian rule. Ben Ali quickly consolidated power and the promised reforms were essentially dismissed. Winning repeated reeelections, Ben Ali officially garnered close to 90\% of the vote. By 2004, the Congressional Research Service had reached the conclusion that Tunisian elections were uncompetitive.\textsuperscript{65} It is difficult to identify strategic difficulties or new partnerships that emerged between the 1990 through 2001. Tunisia did not participate in the First Gulf War, unlike many other Arab nations such as Saudi Arabia, but it did ‘graduate’ from the USAID development program in 1994.\textsuperscript{66} It is possible that the “graduation” of Tunisia was related to the end of Cold War and a reanalysis of American spending objectives, with less priority given to supporting old allies. However, the Tunisian economy had developed substantially and arguably the development aid was no longer necessary.

The reality of US-Tunisian relations during this period is that there is fairly little material to analyze. Enjoying favorable relations, the American diplomatic history with Tunisia is much less turbulent than with other less friendly regimes, like its neighbor Libya. Even in terms of promoting democracy, a theoretically long standing objective of US policy, there is little information about serious disputes with Tunisia’s rulers. This is because of Tunisia’s relatively low priority in the minds of policy makers. President Nixon succulently summarized this view when describing the nations that were essential in preventing the Soviets from gaining control over the Middle East. In the titanic battle for access to the region’s oil reserves, Tunisia was too

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
weak to really matter\textsuperscript{67}. Overall, Tunisia has not been an important calculation in US policy making. Once it was determined that the nation had favorable leadership, US policy has essentially left the country on the back burner.

**The War on Terror**

The September 11th attacks galvanized the United States to reanalyze it’s priorities in the Middle East. President Bush drew clear lines in this new conflict stating that “You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror.”\textsuperscript{68} Much like the Cold War, the World was divided again into two opposing camps and Tunisia would be compelled to pick a side. Given the Tunisian government’s pro-Western history, it is unsurprising that Ben Ali chose to side with America.

President Ben Ali’s took several important steps to ensure that Tunisia aided America against the terrorist threat. First, Tunisia offered intelligence unconditionally. This offer even extended to allowing the FBI to interrogate suspected terrorists held in Tunisian prisons\textsuperscript{69}. Secondly, Tunisia increased its domestic efforts against terrorist networks, largely in response to an attack targeting the local Jewish community. In addition, Tunisia cooperated with international efforts focused on closing the revenue streams supporting terrorist groups\textsuperscript{70}. Lastly,

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid 60. p.47
high level meetings were held between US and Tunisian leaders to coordinate regional objectives and counter terrorism operations\textsuperscript{71}. These measures paid off for both Ben Ali and Tunisia.

In 1957, Bourguiba had sold the Tunisia to the President Eisenhower as newly independent country that embraced progressive nationalism and rejected communism. Ben Ali repeated this feat when he convinced President Bush’s administration that Tunisia was “an important ally, a moderate Arab, Muslim state, and a partner in the global war on terror.”\textsuperscript{72} Between 10-11 million dollars of foreign assistance was provided to Tunisia annually between 2006 and 2008, mostly for military purchases\textsuperscript{73}. This happened despite US awareness of the serious human rights abuses perpetrated by the Tunisian regime. However, President Bush was very willing to do business with his North African ally. Meeting with Ben Ali in 2004, President Bush praised him for his nation’s commitment to Women’s rights and cooperation in the War on Terror. The repression perpetrated by the Tunisian government was only indirectly mentioned when Bush expressed the desire to discuss the need for a free press and open political system\textsuperscript{74}.

In summary, the War on Terror strengthened the US-Tunisian relationship. American funding to the Tunisian military increased and the nation was an important regional ally. The militaries of both nations continue to meet regularly and participate in joint training exercises. NATO uses Tunisia as a port of call when it conducts operations in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, Tunisia is a partner in US regional programs like the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership and the Middle East Partnership Initiative\textsuperscript{75}. In the eyes of the

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid 65. p.6
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid 65. p.7
Bush administration, Tunisia’s value as an ally far outweighed any concerns about the just
treatment of political dissidents.

The Arab Spring

The Tunisian-US relationship has not altered significantly with the change of
administration from President Bush to Obama. The Congress continued to authorize substantial
allocations of foreign aid, while administration officials occasionally expressed concern over
human rights abuses. The regional partnership between Tunisia and the US remained on a firm
footing. Little indicated that the longstanding partnership with Ben Ali would end in 2011.

It is not now clear how the Obama administration responded to the demonstrations that
led to President Ben Ali’s overthrow. Some news reports indicate that the US was caught off
guard. President Obama reportedly angrily demanded his advisors to explain why they were
“flat-footed”, and surprised by the developments in Tunisia. Secretary of State Clinton did
issue a statement on January 11th, 2011 that Middle Eastern leaders needed to provide a
“positive vision” or risk extremism taking hold in the youth. President Obama stepped into the
fray only after Ben Ali had fled and “applaud[ed] the courage and dignity of the Tunisian
people.” Based on this analysis of events, it would appear that the US was unprepared for the
Arab Spring and only decisively supported the Tunisian revolution after it ousted Ben Ali.

However, there is an interesting report from a French news agency that American generals

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http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/161570.pdf
http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/13/us-usa-arabs-idUSTRE70C1YA20110113
prevailed on their Tunisian counterparts to abandon Ben Ali.\(^8^0\) It is an interesting idea and would help explain why the revolution won so quickly. Unfortunately, the documents on the Obama administration’s initial policies will not be available in the near future.

Regardless of the Obama administration’s response while the revolution was unfolding, the US has been clearly supportive in the aftermath. This policy is exemplified by a press conference held two-weeks after the revolution by the US ambassador to Tunisia. Throughout the conference, the ambassador presented the image that the US was pleased by the results of the Tunisian revolution and supports a new, democratic government. Furthermore, the American representative explains at length that the US was uninvolved in the revolution and will not interfere in the internal politics of Tunisia.\(^8^1\) In 2011 the US committed 350 million dollars to Tunisia’s governmental transition and assisted with the elections. This summer, America will again provide support to Tunisia’s electoral system.\(^8^2\) While, the US was very willing to work with dictators like Bourguiba and Ben Ali, it appears to be equally supportive of Tunisia’s nascent democracy.

**Conclusions**

The US has enjoyed a successful partnership with Tunisia since it gained independence from France in the 1950s. In large part this is due to Tunisia’s leaders, Bourguiba and Ben Ali, who aligned their nation with American foreign policy objectives. Throughout the Cold War,
Tunisia defined itself as a pro-Western nation and steadfastly insisted that its version of nationalism was antithetical to communism. This was probably a comfort to the US when many of the larger nations in the region were perceived to be under Soviet influence, notably Egypt and Syria during President Nasser’s life time. Later, Ben Ali once again provided support in President Bush’s War on Terror. While Tunisia has never been viewed as a critical nation in US foreign policy, it has always been an ally. This has led to a consistently positive relationship over the last sixty years.

The Arab Spring appears to have surprised US policy makers. While there were longstanding causes of discontent, it is surprising that Tunisia’s multi-generational dictatorship would be brought down in a series of protests started by a fruit vendor. America does not appear to have taken a strong stance in the period leading up to the flight of Ben Ali. Afterwards, the Obama administration apparently saw an opportunity to advance America’s goal of nurturing democracy throughout the world. The US is supportive of the new government, and the US-Tunisian relationship has not changed significantly. Although Tunisia did not support the NATO operation against Muammar Gaddafi, this is not a new development because Tunisia also remained uninvolved in both Gulf Wars. Many Americans have expressed concerns about the type of leadership the Tunisian people chose in 2011, when they elected the Islamist Ennahda party. However, the official line of the Obama administration is that it supports the legitimately elected government. Secretary Kerry, reiterated this view when he described the Arab Spring revolutions as motivated by the desire for economic opportunity, rather than an Islamist takeover.83

It is impossible to predict how America’s relationship with Tunisia will develop in the future. It will significantly depend on the outcome of the upcoming summer elections. While the US tolerated a democratic facade, when presented by a secular dictator, it may be less tolerate if an Islamist party like Ennahda attempts a similar takeover. So far, the US has preserved its historical relationship with Tunisia.
Looking Forward

This concluding chapter lays out my thoughts on the future of the US-Tunisian relationship and the culmination of my research. I begin by predicting what I consider to be the likely outcome of the upcoming summer elections. Secondly, I analyze US priorities, both directly towards Tunisia and the Maghrib as whole. Lastly, I lay out areas of partnership that I believe will benefit both nations.

What will happen this summer? Ennahda wins the Elections

Predicting the future is a perilous endeavor. In the 2011, the Arab Spring surprised America and the entire world. Given this track record, any analyst should be hesitant to postulate on the future. Still I believe that I can provide a reasonable estimate of the situation and its likely outcome. Ennahda will win re-election in the summer elections. While this victory may not be as massive as its success in 2011, the Islamist movement will still be the single largest party in Tunisia.

This estimate is based on several facts. First, it does not appear that Ennahda’s base of support has significantly diminished. The voters who brought Rachid Ghannouchi and his colleagues to power appear to remain loyal. Secondly, there is no strong opposition party. The CPR party’s influence has waned because of internal power struggles. Ettakatol is well established, but it is unlikely that it’s Socialist message will succeed in gathering significant support. While it is possible, especially in light of the difficult economic situation, socialist ideology does not appear to be on the rise. Lastly, Nidaa Tunis is an unknown, and Esibi will have major challenge in establishing a viable national brand. At least in the short term, Ennahda has a lock on the Tunisian political system. It will be interesting to observe whether one of these
parties emerges as the primary representative of the opposition, but they will still be dealing with an Ennahda government.

After Ennahda wins reelection, it will be confronted with the same basic set of challenges. The economy is by far the most important. Ennahda needs to recreate the steady, approximately 5% annual GDP growth that Ben Ali typically provided. This is necessary to satisfy the Tunisian public and reconcile it to the cuts in government services. Furthermore, the interior needs significant development to rectify the capital’s longstanding neglect. On a smaller scale, the new democracy must find a way to deal to with the Salafist Jihadists. The assassination of Chokri Belaid in February proved that these groups pose a threat and are willing to use violence to enforce their will. Lastly, there is the challenge of creating an effective new constitution. The Arab Spring in Tunisia cannot be viewed as fully complete until a new governmental framework has been chosen. This is especially difficult since the bureaucracy remains fundamentally unchanged from the period of President Ben Ali.

**The Splintering of the Islamist Coalition**

Besides these secular issues, the Ennahda Movement must consider what it means to fulfill their group ideology. Ennahda is the Tunisian version of the Muslim Brotherhood, and like Brotherhood parties everywhere they passionately believe that “Islam is the solution”. But after two years in power, it is difficult to point to concrete measures that they have instituted to achieve this goal. The barriers on religious expression and political thought have been destroyed, but is that adequate? Ennahda has avoided making Sharia law the basis of new legislation. Is this outcome tolerable for its steadfast supporters, who often endured imprisonment by Ben Ali’s government for their beliefs?
Tunisia is experiencing the fracturing of the Muslim Brotherhood coalition. Under President Ben Ali, anyone who believed that Islam should have a role in political life faced sanctions from the government. This brought together a very diverse group, ranging from peaceful demonstrators to terrorists. In 1987, this problem came to light when Rachid Ghannouchi was accused of participating in terrorist bombings. Ghannouchi argued that terrorism was not part of his party’s ideology and that instead it was the action of a small splinter group. This event highlights the reality that Bourguiba’s and later Ben Ali’s repression lumped extremists and moderates together in the same category. The violence perpetrated by terrorist groups in recent months shows that the extremists are not satisfied and that they are working to undermine the moderate Islamist government.

It is reassuring that the Ennahda movement has condemned the violence and enhanced security efforts against the “Salafist Jihadists”. This represents a larger battle for the meaning of Islam in the MENA region. Ennahda and the Jihadists both agree with the broad statement that “Islam is the solution”, but they are driven apart by their differing interpretations and methods. This division will grow as Ennahda shoulders the responsibilities of governance. The influence of terrorist groups will hopefully wane as passionate Muslims have the opportunity to express their views non-violently in a more tolerant political space. Tunisia will be less secular, but it will likely be more democratic and stable.

American Priorities

One strength of the US-Tunisian relationship has been the stability of US objectives. American priorities continue fundamentally unaltered from the policies of the Bush administration. First, the United States wants regional allies working against terrorism. While
the term “War on Terror”, is not used in the Obama administration’s lexicon, it continues in all real senses. Secondly, the US seeks to promote democracy in the region. These fundamental policy objectives are unlikely to change in the near future.

The Maghrib is a crucial battleground in the struggle with terrorist groups. Al-Qaeda and affiliated groups have used the break down in governmental authority to expand their operations. This is most evident in Libya, which has returned to an essentially a city-state model, with different militias controlling the various towns and villages. The dangers of this situation manifested themselves most recently in Malia, where Jihadist insurgents moved men and arms out of Libya and brought their fight to the south. This is a regional problem; the south of Tunisia also lacks effective governmental control. America needs to limit the ability of non-state actors to use the North African Sahara.

In terms of democracy, Tunisia is an excellent place for the US to nurture a new government. Immediately following the Arab Spring, Congress authorized a significant aid package to help the nation transition to democracy. It is easy to criticize America for not promoting representative governance when a friendly dictator was in power. But at least the United States is willing to work with the new and hopefully more democratic government. American leaders would be thrilled to see a real democracy emerge from the Arab Spring. Tunisia is the most likely candidate, given continuing violence and chaos within Egypt, Libya, and Yemen.

Together, anti-terrorism and democracy promotion will be the foundation of United States policy towards Tunisia for the next several years. Other issues will certainly be discussed, ranging from water management and economic development, to women’s rights. But security and democracy will be the core of America’s agenda.
Opportunities for Cooperation

Given the objectives of the US and Tunisian governments, there are three major opportunities for cooperation. First, they should collaborate in nurturing civil society and democracy in Tunisia. Second, both nations have a stake in regional stability and the dismantlement of terrorist groups. Third, the US should help Tunisia develop the interior. Many of these projects are already being partially pursued, and it is important to consider whether they should be expanded.

Promoting democracy is one area that the US and Tunisia are already cooperating effectively. The US government immediately authorized a large loan to help Tunisia manage its transition. In 2011 American officials partnered with local NGOs to monitor the elections, as it will again this summer. Furthermore, there have been numerous small events, like Justice Ginsburg meeting with Tunisian law students in 2012. The US should explore the possibility of working with the Tunisian government to tackle corruption. Corrupt governance contributed to the Arab Spring, and it would be beneficial to share best practices and oversight techniques.

Terrorism in the Maghrib is a major concern for both nations. Recent events have prompted the Tunisian government to take the issue more seriously. Ideally, the US and Tunisian intelligence agencies can reach the same level of cooperation that existed under Ben Ali. Given the legitimate anger directed at Tunisian security services in 2011, it is likely that these organizations are less effective than they were before the Arab Spring. America should work to rebuild these agencies, while attempting to spread respect for the rule of law. Given this unique challenge, the FBI might be best suited for working with the Tunisian intelligence agencies, especially since they were permitted to interrogate suspected terrorists under Ben Ali.
The military relationship between both countries appears unchanged, and they should cooperate in countering the influence of terrorist groups in the Maghrib.

The final major opportunity for cooperation is spurring economic development in the interior. Tunisia developed since it gained independence in 1957, but this is concentrated in the coastal areas and the capital. The interior remains very poor and was the genesis of the 2011 revolution. USAID is active in Tunisia, but its projects are focused on creating small businesses and boosting the IT sector. The interior would receive the greatest benefit from agricultural projects, still the mainstay of the local economy. USAID should focus on sharing technology, water management principles, and investing in infrastructure. This will target Tunisia’s biggest development failure and help ameliorate a major cause of unrest. The Tunisian government is almost certain to welcome this kind of program, given that so far they have not refused any American aid.

In conclusion, the US-Tunisian relationship can be strengthened by cooperating in the areas of democracy promotion, security, and development. These programs will enhance and maintain the historical friendship between both countries. The US can advance its regional objectives and help the Tunisian government create the stability and opportunities that their citizens deserve.