



SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND POPULAR MOBILISATION IN THE MENA

Digest of Current Publications and Events

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TALKS & OTHER EVENTS

Rethinking Social Movements in the Digital Age: Activism, Dissent and Rebellion in the Post-Arab Spring

July 29, 2016

Venue: Orient-Institut Beirut

The pivotal and unprecedented role that digital technology has played in instigating, as well as documenting the Arab Spring has without a doubt renewed the interest in social movements beyond the traditional realm of the "physical". As the revolution in digital technology is slowly revolutionizing the way people communicate, debate existing norms and are exposed to other social and cultural practices and forms of governance worldwide, it is also providing new means for coordination and mobilization. In the advent of the Arab 'Spring' revolts throughout the region, digital technology has successfully pushed its way into politics: allowing people across borders, class, and formal venues of associations to debate, coordinate, and transform the 'digital' into the 'physical'.

Today, political leaders around the world utilize digital technology to communicate and debate their political agenda to and with the public. Twitter and Facebook have pushed their way to becoming pivotal venues of mediation in state-society relations worldwide. News sharing, debating, and critical collective views of governments across the world has given more 'power' and leverage to the 'people' in the framework of collective 'shaming and blaming' for exposing human rights violations, abuses and the denial of basic rights and freedoms. Employing satirical language in the critical reproduction of news, as well as developing cartoons and videos, digital activism has taken on a new face that bridges cultures and allows a wider public to engage in and relate to political, social, economic, and cultural debates. Examples from around the world can demonstrate how social media venues in particular are becoming a venue for dissent, activism, and campaigning for social, political and even economic causes.

Activism in social media has furthermore reflected existing social and political debates in societies around the world. During the Arab 'Spring' revolts across the region, it reflected not only the ideological, but also the political divides between people across various spectra. As the region witnessed the rise of political Islam, social media networks became flooded with debates on identity, religion, and politics and the rising polarities and peripheries of secularism and Islamism. This workshop aims to bring in contributions from scholars across disciplines and social media activists to shed light on the increasing role of the digital in mediating state-society relations, particularly during and after the Arab Spring revolts. Contributions can be theoretical in nature aimed at examining the role of the digital in rethinking social movements and the changing nature of activism, (political) dissent, rebellion and revolutions. They can also be empirical and examine particular venues of the digital or case-studies across the Arab region.

More information & registration [here](#)

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RECENT & FORTHCOMING BOOKS

The Fall of the Turkish Model: How the Arab Uprisings Brought Down Islamic Liberalism

Cihan Tuğal
2016 – Verso

Just a few short years ago, the “Turkish Model” was being hailed across the world. The *New York Times* gushed that prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) had “effectively integrated Islam, democracy, and vibrant economics,” making Turkey, according to the International Crisis Group, “the envy of the Arab world.” And yet, a more recent CNN headline wondered if Erdogan had become a “dictator.” In this incisive analysis, Cihan Tuğal argues that the problem with this model of Islamic liberalism is much broader and deeper than Erdogan’s increasing authoritarianism. The problems are inherent in the very model of Islamic liberalism that formed the basis of the AKP’s ascendancy and rule since 2002—an intended marriage of neoliberalism and democracy. And this model can also only be understood as a response to regional politics—especially as a response to the “Iranian Model”—a marriage of corporatism and Islamic revolution. The Turkish model was a failure in its home country, and the dynamics of the Arab world made it a tough commodity to export. Tuğal’s masterful explication of the demise of Islamic liberalism brings in Egypt and Tunisia, once seen as the most likely followers of the Turkish model, and provides a path-breaking examination of their regimes and Islamist movements, as well as paradigm-shifting accounts of Turkey and Iran.

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Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War

Robin Yassin-Kassab, Leila Al-Shami
2016 - Pluto Press

In 2011, many Syrians took to the streets of Damascus to demand the overthrow of the government of Bashar al-Assad. Today, much of Syria has become a warzone where foreign journalists find it almost impossible to report on life in this devastated land. *Burning Country* explores the horrific and complicated reality of life in present-day Syria with unprecedented detail and sophistication, drawing on new first-hand testimonies from opposition fighters, exiles lost in an archipelago of refugee camps, and courageous human rights activists among many others. These stories are expertly interwoven with a trenchant analysis of the brutalisation of the conflict and the militarisation of the uprising, of the rise of the Islamists and sectarian warfare, and the role of governments in Syria and elsewhere in exacerbating those violent processes. With chapters focusing on ISIS and Islamism, regional geopolitics, the new grassroots revolutionary organisations, and the worst refugee crisis

since World War Two, *Burning Country* is a vivid and groundbreaking look at a modern-day political and humanitarian nightmare.

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The Naked Blogger of Cairo

Marwan M. Kraidy

2016 - Harvard University Press

Uprisings spread like wildfire across the Arab world from 2010 to 2012, fueled by a desire for popular sovereignty. In Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere, protesters flooded the streets and the media, voicing dissent through slogans, graffiti, puppetry, videos, and satire that called for the overthrow of dictators and the regimes that sustained them. Investigating what drives people to risk everything to express themselves in rebellious art, *The Naked Blogger of Cairo* uncovers the creative insurgency at the heart of the Arab uprisings. While commentators have stressed the role of social media, Marwan M. Kraidy shows that the essential medium of political expression was not cell phone texts or Twitter but something more fundamental: the human body. Brutal governments that coerced citizens through torture and rape found themselves confronted with the bodies of protesters, burning with defiance and boldly violating taboos. Activists challenged authority in brazen acts of self-immolation, nude activism, and hunger strikes. The bodies of dictators became a focus of ridicule. A Web series presented Syria's Bashar al-Assad as a pathetic finger puppet, while cartoons and videos spread a meme of Egypt's Hosni Mubarak as a regurgitating cow.

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Arts and the Uprising in Egypt - The Making of a Culture of Dissent?

Samia Mehrez, Mona Abaza (Eds)

Forthcoming - American University in Cairo Press

The January 2011 Egyptian uprising had dramatic, far-reaching effects on cultural production in Egypt. It sparked new developments and transformations in content and genre and laid open challenge to the powerful role traditionally played by the country's ministry of culture in the field of artistic expression. The eight chapters in *Arts and the Uprising in Egypt* offer a timely and much-needed survey of key realms of cultural production in Egypt since January 2011. They show how this explosion of cultural expression was of a piece with the change in people's relationship to power and authority that took place after the uprising and yet how this cultural resurgence had its roots in political struggles that predated 2011. Editors Samia Mehrez and Mona Abaza argue that a binary discourse of utopian success and failure is inadequate to the task of describing the paradoxes, complexities, and irreversible processes that are the true driving force of revolutionary change. The chapters in this book detail the main areas where cultures of dissent are forming—cultural policy, photography, education, film, satire, music, the visual arts, and literature—providing rich insight into

the artists and initiatives that have played an integral role in the transformation of Egypt's public sphere since the fall of Mubarak. Arts and the Uprising in Egypt will be of interest to scholars of cultural production, revolution, and mass media in the Middle East, as well as art curators and critics, and music and cinema scholars.

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Egyptian Hip-Hop: Expressions from the Underground

Ellen R. Weis

Cairo Papers in Social Science Vol. 34, No. 1

This ethnographic study of the Egyptian underground hip-hop scene examines the artists who collectively molded the scene and analyzes their practices and explores how these artists have interacted with and responded to political and social upheaval and change. It reveals how rappers approached and reformulated the genre in times of revolution and stasis to reveal how rap acts as a multi-layered form of expression. More specifically, it examines the location of the art form within the broader history of oppositional cultural expression in Egypt, outlining the artists' oppositions to various hegemonic structures and critically deconstructing them to reveal that they often reflect dominant ideology.

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The Political Economy of the New Egyptian Republic

Nicholas S. Hopkins (Ed)

Cairo Papers Vol. 33, No. 4

A collection of studies looking at social and political changes following Egypt's 2011 Revolution. Egypt is a country of its people. What has been the effect on its inhabitants of the 2011 revolution and subsequent developments? In 2013, a conference held under the auspices of Cairo Papers in Social Science examined this issue from the points of view of anthropologists, historians, political scientists, psychologists, and urban planners. The papers collected here reveal the strategies that various actors employed in this situation. Contributors: Ellis Goldberg, David Sims, Yasmine Ahmed, Deena Abdelmonem, Dina Makram-Ebeid, Clement Henry, Sandrine Gamblin, Hans Christian Korsholm Nielsen, Zeinab Abul-Magd.

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OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Good Enough for the Middle East?

Ece Temelkuran

Review of: Cihan Tuğal, *The Fall of the Turkish Model: How the Arab Uprisings Brought Down Islamic Liberalism*, Verso

New Left Review 99, May-June 2016

If Cihan Tuğal's book was filmed as a political thriller, the pre-credit sequence would go something like this: George Bush, against the backdrop of the Bosphorus Bridge, delivers a speech announcing the discovery of a cure for radical Islamism to the 2004 nato summit in Istanbul. As Commander-in-Chief of the 'war on terror', Bush has a flattering message for his Turkish hosts: 'Your country stands as a model to others, and as Europe's bridge to the wider world. Your success is vital to a future of progress and peace in Europe and in the broader Middle East.' The 'Turkish model', showing the perfect match of moderate Islam with American-style democracy, would prevent a dangerous fundamentalism from taking hold. The camera would pan back to show the audience of Western leaders eagerly applauding Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan, whose government epitomized the nato-friendly Islamic liberalism which they hoped would take root in the Middle East. At this point, the screen would darken and the words, 'Twelve Years Later . . .' would appear. In the next scene, the same world leaders would be seen sneaking into a monstrously flamboyant palace to beg an autocratic President Erdoğan to block the wave of Syrian refugees fleeing the war that the 'democratic face of Islam' had been stoking, with Western collusion, for the past five years. The screen darkens again and the movie's title is emblazoned across it: 'Falling Bridge, Rising Wall'.

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International Social Agents and Norm Diffusion: the Case of LGBTQ Rights in Morocco

Merouan Mekouar

POMEPS Studies 21

On June 2nd 2015, two French members of the feminist collective Femen organized a gay kiss-in front of a mosque located in Morocco's capital city, Rabat. After inviting a group of local journalists, the two women removed their shirts and showed their naked torsos on which pro-gay slogans were written. For one of the two activists, the purpose of the "shock-action" was to spark a conversation on LGBTQ rights in the country by creating an "iconographic platform that would speak to people both within and outside Morocco (E., personal interview, May 3, 2016)." ... This essay attempts to

examine the following question: can foreign social agents nourish learning (Richter and Bank 2016) and induce norm diffusion? If so, what characteristics do they need to have in order to exert an impact on the general public? Using the case of transnational advocacy networks that attempt to promote and defend Western LGBTQ norms in Morocco, the first part will show that, in line with Massad (2007), actions taken by social agents deemed foreign or culturally alien are largely misread by the general public and are often counterproductive. The second part will show how international actors can actually enact norm diffusion if perceived as legitimate or culturally close by the general public. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Transnational Diffusion and Cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa: A Conceptual Note

Thomas Richter and André Bank
POMEPS Studies 21

The Arab uprisings of 2011 and their aftermath were significantly shaped by transnational processes. Three prominent examples of these processes are the rapid diffusion of opposition demonstrations, protest repertoires and slogans from Tunisia to Egypt and on to other countries; the sequential use of similar regime reactions in policing, repression, and counter-insurgency; and the spread of almost identical sectarian discourses across the Middle East, including to countries without Shi'a populations. In addition to these often indirect but supposedly interdependent mechanisms, there have also been significant direct and coordinated interventions as well as concrete moments of cooperation by states, groups of states, and transnational movements to either support or suppress protests. Even though such a transnational perspective encompassing diffusion processes and cooperation patterns is not completely new to the study of Middle Eastern politics more broadly, it has only rarely been employed to understand crucial current political dynamics such as those that followed the Arab uprisings. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Diffusion Mechanisms as Stepping Stones: Qualitative Evidence from Syria

Wendy Pearlman
POMEPS Studies 21

At the macro-level, the sudden and rapid spread of protest across the Middle East in 2011 leaves little doubt about the importance of transnational diffusion in the making of what came to be known as the Arab spring. At the micro-level, however, questions remain about the mechanisms through which that diffusion occurred. In this essay I pull upon original interviews with Syrian oppositionists

to call attention to mechanisms that are emotional or behavioral more than strictly rationalist and thus encourage us to think about diffusion as operating through gradualist processes other than rationalist updating. This argument diverges from a conventional approach to protest cascades that focuses on how early risers make available new information that alters followers' utility calculations. Applied to the Arab uprisings, this perspective suggests that the forced resignation of an authoritarian president in Tunisia led citizens elsewhere to rationally rethink the probability that anti-regime protest could be mobilized and/or succeed in their own countries. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Iraq: Thousands defy ban to protest against corruption

Al Jazeera, 15 July 2016

Thousands demonstrate against corruption despite decree that said rally would be treated as "terrorist threat". Thousands of Iraqis have defied a protest ban and rallied in the heart of the capital, Baghdad, to demand an end to sectarianism and corruption. The demonstrators massed in Tahrir Square on Friday, holding placards reading "Yes, yes to reform. No, no to sectarianism. No, no to corruption". The protest went ahead despite the security forces warning late on Thursday that the rally called by the influential Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr was "unauthorised" and would be treated as a "terrorist threat". *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Protesters gather in Baghdad to demand reform

Middle East Online, 3 June 2016

Around 1,000 demonstrators gathered in central Baghdad Friday to demand an end to corruption and a government reshuffle, in the latest in a long string of weekly protests. Unlike the previous week, no violence erupted between the massive deployment of security forces and the protesters, most of whom are supporters of cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. "We must keep up the pressure, this is the only way of getting the intended result: ending corruption and giving Iraq back to Iraqis," said Ali Chasseb, a taxi driver who came from the southern town of Amara for the protest. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Lebanon's municipal elections offer first hope of political renewal

Lina Khatib and Bassem Deaibess
Middle East Eye, 9 May 2016

On Sunday Lebanon witnessed its first round of elections in four years with the holding of municipal elections. They were a landmark event because this was the first time a technocratic list of independent candidates not belonging to any political party (called the "Beirut Madinati" or Beirut My City list) contested the municipal elections in the governorate of Beirut in an attempt to challenge the status quo. Beirut Madinati did not win a single seat, and the prevailing list in Beirut was called the "Beirutis" representing the dominant political parties in Lebanon. What is notable about the "Beirutis" list is that it brought together candidates from Lebanon's two main political camps - March 8 and March 14 - that hitherto had been arch rivals in elections. Politics in Lebanon has been frozen for years, which gave municipal elections - in the past given little importance in Lebanon - a newfound importance, as they were people's only chance to exercise their voting rights in current conditions. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Western Sahara: The Forgotten Conflict at Risk of Re-escalation

Claire Spencer
Chattam House, 16 May 2016

The Western Sahara conflict has eluded resolution for so long that the principles underlying United Nations-led efforts to seek an enduring outcome have become muddied almost to the point of cancelling each other out. Forty-one years since its inception, diplomatic language rather than arms has become the medium for the continuation of the dispute. The annual highlight is the renewal of the UN Security Council's peacekeeping and monitoring mission to the region at the end of April, which in the words of the US permanent representative to the UN, Samantha Power, was particularly 'challenging and contentious' this year. For many, this is the forgotten conflict that pitches the defence of the right of self-determination of the Sahrawi people against the de facto restoration of Morocco's sovereign control over territory formerly subject to a colonial-era Spanish protectorate. There is no obvious meeting point between these positions without a creative compromise, and the urgency of finding one has been mitigated by the absence of armed struggle since a ceasefire was implemented in 1991. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Can We Think in Transition? Reflections from Tunisia

Jocelyne Dakhliya
Jadaliyya, 30 June 2016

... I do not wish to speak of transition because I have made the choice of revolution. Certain political temperaments were stirred five years ago, almost immediately after the Revolution. Aside from a minority of outspoken political militants, many Tunisian citizens, even those who were with the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), were in a kind of fog regarding their own political tropisms. Even for those who had a clear and unequivocal engagement, for which they largely paid the price, the Revolution created a new reality, a new test in light of the facts (*épreuve des faits*). Thus, at the intersection of multiple paths, in January 2011, two options seemed to arise: the reformist option of democratic transition or the more radical option of revolution. Certain political temperaments were thus revealed. These positions were sometimes unexpected and, for the first time, it was necessary to position oneself even when choosing which terms to use. Transition or revolution? When a work by my friend and colleague Kmar Bendana came out, for example, titled “Chronicle of a Transition” (*Chronicle d’une Transition*), the author also seemed to be expressing a political sensibility, one that we never had the chance to discuss. From the first weeks of 2011, there was a pervasive debate in order to establish whether we were experiencing a revolution, or a series of revolts, or an uprising. Transition was generally a political way of responding to this discussion that was distinct from revolution. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Normalizing Extreme Violence: The Israeli Case

Lisa Hajjar
Jadaliyya, 29 May 2016

On 15 February 2016, Amitai Etzioni, sociologist and professor at George Washington University, published an op-ed in Israel’s *Ha’aretz* titled “Should Israel Consider Using Devastating Weapons Against Hezbollah Missiles?” Quoting, first, an unnamed Israeli official who claimed that Hezbollah has one hundred thousand missiles which pose a major security threat, Etzioni asserts that most of these missiles are located in private homes, citing Israel’s chief of staff. Sending Israeli ground forces to destroy the missiles “would very likely result in many Israeli casualties—as well as Lebanese civilians,” Etzioni suggests; another option he discusses involves using Fuel-Air Explosives (FAE) to “disperse an aerosol cloud of fuel which is ignited by a detonator, producing massive explosions...[capable of flattening] all buildings within a considerable range.” He concedes that even if people living in targeted areas were forewarned, civilian casualties would be inevitable. Therefore, he argues, because “Israel may be forced to use FAEs,” foreign military experts and public intellectuals, “who are not known to be hostile to Israel,” should fashion a response to these missiles’ impact—in the hope, Etzioni writes, of generating “a greater understanding, if not outright acceptance, of the use of these powerful weapons, given that nothing else will do.” *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Amnesty International: Forced disappearances integral to Egyptian state policy

Mada Masr, 13 July 2016

Hundreds of Egyptians have been forcibly disappeared since 2015, with many having been subjected to severe torture and unfair trials, according to an Amnesty International report published on Wednesday. Based on 70 interviews with victims, families and lawyers and documenting 17 cases of forced disappearances, the report does not only expose the brutality that children and adults are forced to endure, but attributes responsibility for the disappearances to Egypt's security forces and judicial authorities. Amnesty states that forced disappearances began in March 2015 with the appointment of Interior Minister Magdy Abdel Ghaffar, marking a return to the practices of the now defunct State Security Investigation Services under former President Hosni Mubarak and which are now being repeated under the National Security Agency that superseded it in 2011. Egyptian authorities have repeatedly denied that forced disappearances occur in Egypt. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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June 30, 3 years on: State efforts to depoliticize universities falter

Mai Shams El-Din and Pasha Magid

Mada Masr, 30 June 2016

Universities have been a battleground for political engagement throughout Egypt's history, and with the eruption of the January 25 revolution in 2011, universities took on a significant role in the ongoing political debate taking place both on and off campuses. The events that followed June 30, 2013, drastically transformed universities from traditional spaces of political engagement to a main component in the political standoff between the ousted Muslim Brotherhood and the state. Shortly after the bloody dispersal of two pro-Muslim Brotherhood protest camps, the Islamist organization used universities as one of its primary strongholds in its confrontation with the military-backed government, leading to an unprecedented wave of violence on campuses, with Azhar University leading the battle. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Questions about June 30: Who were we and what were we thinking?

Part 1

Mada Masr, 8 July 2016

Just before June 30, 2016, we gathered a group of Mada Masr's opinion writers to ask them about June 30, 2013, what we were thinking then, and what could have been done differently. Researchers Amr Abdel Rahman and Ibrahim al-Houdaiby, writers Amr Ezzat and Belal Alaa, and activist Elham Eidaros were present. The conversation started with an urge to define "who is the revolution" but the question was adjusted to "who is Egypt's democratic movement," peeling away its elusive nature by going back to its recent history and reaching to the moment of choice on June 30. In asking this question, the group rationalizes the pro-democracy movement's position on that day. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Egyptian students protest against 'oppressive' educational system

Jihad Abaza

Aswat Masriya, 27 June 2016

Hundreds of Egyptian high school students protested on Monday in front of the Ministry of Education in Cairo against what they see as an "oppressive" educational system. The protest was triggered by a ministerial decision to postpone exams, after successive exam leaks.

An eyewitness told Aswat Masriya that the students demanded that the minister of education "leave", and chanted, "We will not leave, he will leave" and "The students are not thugs."

A large number of mothers also attended the protest with their children. One of the students told Aswat Masriya that the exam leaks are the responsibility of the ministry, and that students should not bear the leaks' consequences. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Egypt's press union calls for end to 'violations against journalists and media'

Ahram Online , Tuesday 28 Jun 2016

Egypt's press syndicate has called for an end to violations against journalists and media workers following recent violations against reporters and the arrest and Monday's deportation of a popular Lebanese talk show host. In a statement released Tuesday, the journalists syndicate's Freedom Committee condemned "security violations" against freedoms, namely freedom of press. The union deplored reported police assaults on journalists who were covering Monday protests by Thanaweya

Amma high school students against a government decision to cancel and postpone some of their end-of-year exams. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Egypt: Judging the protest law

Ziad Bahaa-Eldin

Ahram Online, Monday 20 Jun 2016

It finally looks like the state intends to amend the protest law number 107 of 2013. The human rights committee in parliament has already begun soliciting proposed changes from the government, MPs, and the National Council on Human Rights. This is good and should be welcomed. A gross error right from the beginning, the law restricted the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of peaceful protest, split the ranks of the June 30 coalition, and sent youth who clung to the right of expression to prison. My objection to the law is not new. In fact, its issuance in late November 2013 ultimately prompted me to resign from the government in January 2014, after all attempts to amend it failed. So I'm pleased the law and the havoc it wreaked on our political trajectory are being reconsidered, even at this late date. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Jordanian police clash with unemployed protesters south of Amman

Middle East Eye, 23 June 2016

Jordanian police clashed with young unemployed demonstrators south of Amman early on Thursday, with injuries reported on both sides, officials and witnesses said. Police said three of its officers were "shot and wounded during a raid on a group of outlaws in the Dhiban region" of Madaba, 70 kilometres from Amman, with demonstrators using "automatic weapons to fire directly" at police. Witnesses said the confrontation broke out after police intervened to forcibly dismantle a tent being used for a sit-in by the young demonstrators calling for jobs, better economic policies and regional development. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Dozens protest rising fuel prices in Syria capital

Ahram Online, 19 Jun 2016

Dozens of protesters gathered in Damascus on Sunday for a rare demonstration in front of Syria's parliament against a 40 percent hike in fuel prices announced last week. As lawmakers met inside the parliament building, protestors carried signs reading "No to corruption!" and "Parliament -- stand with the people, say no to raising prices!" "No to rising prices, people are starving to death," another read. The demonstration appeared to be tolerated by Syria's authorities, with about a dozen riot police stationed near parliament allowing the protest to go ahead. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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Turkey's new dirty war

Laura-Maï Gaveriaux

LeMonde Diplomatique, July 2016

When the AKP lost its majority in the June 2015 election, President Erdoğan tried to discredit the successful HDP, and win nationalist votes, by declaring war on Turkey's Kurds and ending the peace process with the PKK. Sunlight flooded the main square of Silopi, a town in the southeast of Turkey, less than 15km from the borders with Iraq and Syria. Between December 2015 and January 2016, Turkish security forces heavily assaulted its 80,000 inhabitants, and fighters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is calling for democratic confederalism and demanding autonomy for areas with a Kurdish majority. The fighting was out of public view: Silopi, like other towns, was isolated for 37 days by curfews. *Continue reading [here](#)*

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