The Arab Revolutions: The Emergence of a New Political Subjectivity

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**Introduction**

Now is the time of the furnaces, and only light should be seen.¹)

Over the past year the Arab World has witnessed regime change in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya; Arab citizen revolts are underway in Syria, Bahrain and Yemen; and different levels of reform initiatives can be found in Morocco,²) Algeria³) and Jordan.⁴) These processes

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²) The new Moroccan constitution, replacing that of 1996, supposedly represents a further step in the direction of establishing a liberal-democratic system and does indeed contain provisions to that effect. For instance, there is now explicit recognition that Morocco is a ‘parliamentary constitutional monarchy,’ that national identity is pluralistic and not simply Arab and Muslim, and that, crucially, the figure of the king is no longer ‘sacred,’ but simply inviolable. In
cannot be captured by Orientalist terms such as ‘Arab Spring,’5) ‘Arab unrest’ or ‘the Facebook Revolution.’ These labels do not account for the radical transformation in politics and values that the Arab World is undertaking. The ‘Arab revolutions,’ as people in this region opt to call them, have already inspired protests in Israel, Mexico, Afghanistan and beyond. The fate of these popular uprisings remains in the balance, but it is all too clear that they have produced the most dramatic changes in the region since the mid-twentieth century, which marked the end of the colonial era.

3) Pressure from protestors in Algeria led to the lifting of the state of emergency in February 2011 as part of a package of concessions by the government.
4) The reform consists of the following. (1) The establishment of a constitutional court to monitor the constitutionality of laws and regulations. (2) The establishment of an independent commission to oversee elections instead of the Ministry of Interior which has previously been in charge of the electoral process. All electoral contestations will be referred to the judiciary instead of parliament. (3) The enhancement of civil liberties, including the criminalization of any infringement on rights and public freedoms or on the sanctity of Jordanians’ private life; the prohibition of torture in any form; and a declaration that all forms of communication between citizens shall be treated as secret and not subject to censorship, suspension or confiscation, except by judicial order. (4) The limitation of the government’s ability to issue temporary laws during the absence of parliament, a practice that governments exercised at will in the past. (5) The limitation of the State Security Court’s jurisdiction to cases of high treason, espionage and terrorism, with citizens being otherwise tried in civilian courts; this includes ministers who were previously tried by a parliamentary high tribunal. (6) The limitation of the government’s ability to dissolve parliament without having to resign itself Marwan, Muasher, Jordan’s proposed constitutional amendments—a first step in the right direction (The Carnegie Middle East Program, 2011).