

Tunisia's Foreign Relations before and after the Arab Spring

Relations with Major Powers

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Abstract—With China conducting a very active diplomacy around the world mainly in third world countries and the West crying foul over what they term 'China Threat' in Africa and the Arab world, Tunisia is reconsidering its positioning between East and West. Since its independence in 1956, Tunisia made the choice to be pro-western while keeping a certain degree of independence with a doctrine of critical support set up by "the father of the Nation" President Habib Bourguiba. In order to get independence from the French colonial power, Bourguiba played the US support card while being very active in the non-aligned movement. A small country, Tunisia decided from the beginning to never antagonize anybody and have a strong and balanced foreign policy, offering even to be a fair mediator in certain conflicts. That was the official policy of the country until after the Revolution of January 2011. Because Tunisia is first and foremost a North African and Mediterranean country, 80% of its trade was with Europe. But after the elections of October 2011 and the rise of the Islamist Ennahda party to power, the new post-revolution government tried to shift its alliances, mainly based on ideological grounds, thinking that looking east towards oil rich Arab Gulf countries and beyond will usher a new era of prosperity while moving away from the West. But this has put Tunisia's diplomacy to difficult tests every step of the way in its quest to make new international alliances while not antagonizing old partners. It was no easy task since the infamous Arab Spring¹ added a new twist to Tunisia's foreign relations, from the economic crisis to the elections to the constant protests and sit-ins, presenting a dilemma for many countries that dealt with Tunisia, in addition to the turmoil in neighboring Libya.

Keywords—Tunisia, Foreign Policy, Arab Spring, International relations

I. Introduction

Tunisia is still reeling from the blow of the revolution. It is currently in the quagmire of extensive protest movements that have also shaken the entire Arab world and ousted politicians as citizens' struggle for their dignity. Chaos and unrest started

after Mohammed Bouazizi² self immolation and whose plight became the symbol of injustice and economic hardship afflicting many Tunisians under Ben Ali's regime. Positively, Tunisia has, in March 2014, lifted a state of emergency showing that security was improving. This should bring back economic indicators such as visiting tourists and foreign investment to pre-revolution numbers assuring more economic stability. A stable economy will enable the Tunisian government to reform as international institutions and lender countries have demanded. Tunisia will hopefully go back to being exemplary and supported by the international community that showed clear commitments to help it in its democratic transition. Prior to the Arab Spring events, it was often praised for being a politically moderate country with sound economic performances and on the path of modernization in an unstable region. Today, its government leaders are selling it as Start-up in democracy. It is now seen as the lab for a new successful and modern Middle East,³ going beyond its Arabic, Islamic and African characteristics.

Before the 2011 revolution, Tunisia's successful economic performances and relative social progress muted international criticism of its human rights record. However, foreign policy making has not been untroubled. Cyclical economic or political crises hit Tunisia; and like all other countries, there were times were it had to make hard choices that were not always lucky. During the first Gulf war and the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein armies, President Zine Al Abidine Ben Ali, bowing to public pressure sided with Iraq, jeopardizing relations with the West and the Arab Gulf monarchies. Tunisia as a small country, finds itself caught up in the cobweb of the East versus the West, where bulldozer allies are first and foremost looking after their own interests, proving that foreign policy orientation and behavior are not focused only on ideology but the pragmatic pursuit of regime and state interests. Nonneman (2005) explains that these interests are essentially those of regime survival, state consolidation, and the acquisition of the political and economic means to ensure them. Despite all that, Tunisia managed to be laudable in the international relations discourse. Today, it supports international organizations, in particular the United Nations, which it has viewed as the protector of smaller states and the defender of

¹ Encyclopedia Britannica defines Jasmine Revolution as a popular uprising in Tunisia that protested against corruption, poverty, and political repression and forced Pres. Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali to step down in January 2011. The success of the uprising, which came to be known in the media as the "Jasmine Revolution," inspired a wave of similar protests throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Retrieved on March 18, 2014 from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1753072/Jasmine-Revolution>

² He was an unemployed 26-year-old, who protested government corruption by setting fire to himself outside a municipal office in the town of Sidi Bouzid in central Tunisia on December 17. Bouazizi, who had been supporting his family by selling fruit from a cart, was enraged when local officials repeatedly demanded bribes and confiscated his merchandise. Retrieved on March 18, 2014 from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1753072/Jasmine-Revolution>

³ Jerry Sorkin (2001). The Tunisian Model. The Middle East Quarterly. Vol3, Number 4. Retrieved on March 18, 2014 from <http://www.meforum.org/107/the-tunisian-model>

international law.⁴ Its approach to handling political crisis birthed by the revolution has positively earned it accolades from foreign admirers as it distinguished itself in two areas: the sound management of its transition process and its rational, systematic approach towards democratization. As countries throughout the region struggle to establish new social contracts, they are keeping in mind Tunisia's lessons.⁵

This paper seeks to study Tunisia's relations with relevant major powerful nations. It is an accepted fact that the Arab spring affected Tunisia's international cooperation or relations. Its spark set Tunisia ablaze, and its domino effect rolled into the whole Arab region with political upheaval in the wave of revolutions; in the weeks following the uprising in Tunisia, countries like Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Jordan and Algeria experienced significant mass protest marches demanding change of country leadership. This made Tunisia the cradle of the Arab revolutions.

II. Relations with Major Powers

A. Overview

We badly need the help of our friends in Europe, in the United States, because Tunisia is now a kind of lab — the whole Arab world is watching" - Moncef Marzouki

Nonneman (2005) is of the view that the international environment presents a range of resources (economic, military, and political) as well as challenges and constraints (threats, dependence). When the Soviet Union disintegrated, it left the US as the sole superpower dominant in world politics that reduced the ability of any country's ability to maneuver, with Tunisia included. 'Good governance' became the new hegemonic discourse both of the West and international organizations. At the same time principles of economic restructuring and liberalization became increasingly forcefully propagated. The terroristic nature of the events of September 11, 2001, did put further pressure on foreign policy elites in the Arab region. Nonetheless, the ever increasing hold of globalization presents another pole of influence in the world. The rise of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) offer states resisting forced compliance with US policy preferences alternative opportunities as far as foreign relations are concerned.

The main powerhouses US and Europe are of recent distracted by Syria, Iran and now Ukraine with Iraq on the 'new' cards, it seems their sights have been shifted from Tunisia but to elsewhere in the region where their interests seem at stake. Reasons are many; it could be that Tunisia is relatively calm and its transition going fairly smoothly compared to its neighbors. 2012 and 2013 were important election years in the US, Russia, France, China, Japan, South Korea and these countries had to go through power transfers. During the election years,

these countries focused on their domestic agendas, while Tunisia was going through a defining moment. However, since new governments in these countries have brought new changes to their diplomacies, there is still a certain amount of uncertainty in relations between the major powers. Russia, Japan or India have invested so little in Tunisia and their attitude toward the Arab Spring has been cautious, so this study will not dwell on them. However, U.S and European countries relations have a significant impact on Tunisia since they maintained a steady position of support for the Tunisian people from the beginning of the revolution.

B. European Union

*"...so our people are very open to Europe. But at the same time, our people are very keen to preserve its Muslim identity"*⁶ - Rachid al Ghannouchi, head of Ennahdha Islamic party

It is paramount to look into the Tunisian foreign policy towards the EU's particular importance and position in the international environment, because of its continuing impact. The European Community's formal relations with Tunisia started out with an early form of economic and association agreements in 1969 and 1976 which later were co-opted into the Mediterranean policy⁷. While globalization continues to meet more resistance in the Middle East than elsewhere, notably in the region's evasion of full economic liberalization, Tunisia sees it as an opportunity for increased investment and markets. In 1995, Tunisia associated with the European Union in an agreement which provides extensive trade liberalization and cooperation in a variety of sectors. An agreement with the European Union, which came into effect in 1998, also tied Tunisia's economy and security to the Mediterranean community. The decision to join the European Economic Association is the latest economic step that might lead to yet greater trading opportunities with Europe. Tunisia exports close to 70 percent of its products to Europe and in turn Europe invests heavily in Tunisia. Additionally, Algerian gas reaches Italy through a pipeline that links Tunisia's Cap Bon peninsula with Sicily. Although Europeans are often seen placing greater importance on the issue of Tunisian immigration to Europe, Tunisians as well have long relied on Europe as a destination for higher studies or short periods of training. As far as the Arab Spring is concerned, Italy and Germany opted for silence while the USA and the EU welcomed a new era of democracy in Tunisia. In the past recent years, Tunisia has been promised billions of dollars⁸ in aid from the World Bank and IMF, joined the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and signed onto multi-million dollar deals with European investors. Overall, Tunisia stands out as one of the success stories of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

⁴ <http://www.britannica.com/topic/609229/history>

⁵ Ibrahim Sharqieh (Sept 2013), Tunisia's lessons for the Middle East: Why the First Arab Spring Transition Worked Best. Retrieved on March 20, 2014 from <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139938/ibrahim-sharqieh/tunisias-lessons-for-the-middle-east>

⁶ he said at meeting at the U.S. Institute of Peace. Rachid al Ghannouchi argued that Tunisia's experience proves that democracy can flourish in the Arab world retrieved on April 1, 2014 from

<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/islamists/article/ghannouchi-tunisia%E2%80%99s-new-political-order>

⁷ Read more on the Mediterranean Policy at http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/index_en.htm

⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-13528968>

C. France

"Giving more value to our mother tongue (Arabic) has nothing to do with keeping a distance from France"- Hssine al Jaziri; Islamist government minister

It is interesting to know what level of autonomy Tunisia has, or can carve out – including how and under what conditions it has been able to do so. First, France considers Tunisia still to be in its sphere of influence. Second, Foreign relations between the two have never been based on the historical 75 year period of the French colonizing Tunisia. So, ties have left a strong nationalistic feeling, a legacy of personal, linguistic and economic connections that still play out today. Even where nationalistic struggles had undermined the colonizer, the regimes that ended up running the state have retained strong links to the former colonial ruler. The complexities and closeness of France-Tunisia relationship are due to historical and economic reasons. Facts reveal that France is Tunisia's leading economic partner and a critical export market for many French products.⁹ The Tunisian community in France numbers in hundreds of thousands including students in French universities. There are many French businesses with subsidiaries and tens of thousands French citizens living in Tunisia. About 3,000 French companies operating in Tunisia remain the cornerstone of Tunisia's trading partnerships. According to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs¹⁰, between 2006 and 2010, France allocated 950 million Euros to Tunisia in loans and grants. Moreover, for 2011-2012, the government decided to release 350 million Euros worth of loans through the French Development Agency.

After October 2011 and the new Islamist elect government, Tunisia has drifted away from Europe, and France. This estrangement is based partly on European support for Ben Ali, but also on Ennahda leaders disdain for the West and the attraction to the Middle East and Gulf states. In the late 1990s, as the Ben Ali government intensified its crackdowns on political dissent, and the French press and human-rights groups responded with a vociferous campaign against it, the French government's foreign policy began to shift. French took a tough stance towards the Tunis government. This shift came to an abrupt end with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on Sept 11, 2001. French foreign-policy priorities demanded that every effort be made to combat Al Qaeda, the Taliban and Islamic terrorism worldwide. The French government considered Tunisia's support in the fight against terrorism far more important than concerns over human rights and freedom of the press under Ben Ali. The two countries announced that they would "combat terrorism in all its forms and intensify their consultations to achieve this end."¹¹ Relations cooled between the two governments as French officials criticized, albeit discreetly, Tunisia's actions. Support from Ben Ali and other "moderate" Arab governments were considered crucial.

⁹ <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/11/13/tunisian-foreign-affairs-france-shifts-positions-ennahda-copes/#sthash.JOM91Gkv.dpuf>

¹⁰ Read more at <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/tunisia-286/france-and-tunisia/economic-relations-5170/>

¹¹ Agence France Press, October 1, 2001.

France's actions following the uprisings in Tunisia have been quite negative and supportive to the dictatorship. French Defense minister Michelle Alliot-Marie's name remains a symbol of France's close ties with deposed dictator Ben Ali. At first protected Ben Ali's dictatorship in order to preserve its interests. While reports were circulating that Tunisian police were firing live rounds at demonstrators, the then-French Foreign Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie offered to dispatch a team of French Special Forces to Tunis to assist in putting down the uprisings. President Nicolas Sarkozy was also slow to react to the situation in Tunisia; he waited more than a week before admitting that he had underestimated the crisis. Not surprisingly, as the criticisms mounted foreign relations with France became inconsistent and shifty. France faced challenge of reorganizing its diplomacy and security ministries".¹² Sarkozy fired Alliot-Marie. As a result, the Tunisian government accused France of conducting a malicious campaign to discredit it.¹³ Prominent coverage by the Tunisian press was given to denunciations of France.¹⁴ In addition, before the 2011 October elections, France did not think Ennahda would win over one fourth of the Constituent Assembly's seats. However, after the elections, Sarkozy surprised the world with his straightforward reaction to Ennahda's big win. He promised "*Paris will be watching and supervising how well human rights and democratic principles are applied and respected.*"¹⁵ This did not make it right with the Tunisian masses who saw a directing meddling from a foreign power in Tunisia internal affairs;

It was enough for Tunisians of all political stripes to question its "special" relationship with its former colonial ruler. This came at the same time, a wave of are frustrated by what they consider to be increased Islamophobia in Europe. This has strained ties between the countries even further. As a result, Tunisia's Islamist government has made it a priority to reduce study of the French language and to expand relationships beyond the traditional colonial relationship and this shows a strong trend in the country to look away from Europe. While this may have been part of Ennahda's long-term plan, in the short-term, this was simply unrealistic because critical issues tie Tunisia with Europe immigration and commercial ties between the two countries remain important.

When President François Hollande was elected a relationship that had been at best cool, between Tunisia's transitional government and the Sarkozy administration has been reset. President Francois Hollande visited Tunisia in a bid to mend relations with the Ennahda-led government in July. He said Tunisia was a model for the region, which proved democracy and Islam were compatible¹⁶. NPR quoted Marzouki as having said, "*We badly need the help of our friends in Europe, in the United States, because Tunisia is now a kind of lab — the*

¹² Christian Fraser (Feb 2011). BBC retrieved on March 21, 2014 from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12599831>

¹³ Middle East International, May 5, 2000, p. 8.

¹⁴ Ibid., February 9, 2001.

¹⁵ Retrieved on April 9, 2014 from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/11/13/tunisian-foreign-affairs-france-shifts-positions-ennahda-copes/>

¹⁶ <http://blogs.aljazeera.com/blog/africa/geopolitical-changes-weigh-tunisia%20>

*whole Arab world is watching.*¹⁷ He continued that after the revolution, the "level of expectation is very, very high" on his government and "people are waiting for everything for a miracle." This means that the Tunisian door is open, as Marzouki's statements show, for Tunisian politicians to engage with France without losing political credibility. French Minister Alain Juppé was also widely quoted in the media saying, "the saying that Islam and Democracy don't go hand in hand is not right." He explained the change of position by saying, "In France, we have an exceptional view of secularism.... But many other countries refer to religion in their ordinary life."¹⁸ International relationships remain based on complex political interests and Tunisia's relationship with France might take long to change with a new French administration as their historical relationship remains complex.

D. United States

The Tunisia-US relations span over 200 years and the independence liberation struggle garnered US support with the America becoming the first great power to recognize the sovereign state of Tunisia.¹⁹ Modern U.S. policy towards North Africa got underway during World War II, when American troops found themselves liberating the region from Nazi rule on their way to the invasion of Italy (Herf, 2009). This relationship blossomed strictly economic in nature. USAID (US Agency for International Development) made available billions of USD in loans, grants, technical assistance and sales in Tunisia. Tunisia also became the first Arab country to request for Peace Corps in a program that existed for many years. Concerning trade, the two concluded a bilateral investment treaty in 1990 and an agreement to avoid double taxation in 1989. In October 2002, they signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), and in October 2003 held the first TIFA Council Meeting in Washington, DC (Tunisia Business Law book, 2013). Tunisia remains largely unknown in American eyes, thus limiting its ability to attract US foreign investment. Investors look for political stability in a country and tourism growth is often commensurate with the perceptions of security, stability, and a positive country image. According to data published by the National Institute of Statistics²⁰ with regard to the development of foreign trade, in 2012 trade exchange did not exceed \$772.4 million in imports and \$317.7 million in exports.

Concerning international security relations, the two have an active schedule of joint military exercises. US security assistance historically has played an important role in cementing relations. It is the norm; the US-Tunisian Joint Military Commission meets annually to discuss military cooperation, Tunisia's defense modernization program, and other security matters. Mostly, the US has supported the Ben Ali dictatorship

and his campaign against the Islamists even after the Sept 11 events; he was one of the first Arab leaders to declare publicly his support for the US and his willingness to assist in the fight against terrorism. Today, Tunisia finds itself in the region which remains one of Al Qaeda's most hotspots of operations and unsubstantiated rumours have been doing rounds that Tunis could host the US' Africa Command military base (Africom).²¹

The government-controlled newspaper La Presse argued that Western European governments allowed numerous terrorists to live in their countries, which happen to be US allies. In particular, it accused the leader of the banned Islamist Ennahda party, Rached Ghannouchi, who was given asylum in London previously, of supporting international terrorism and having links with Osama bin Laden.²² In early 2014, the US designated the Ansar al Sharia as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and the Tunisian officials declared it both illegal and a terrorist group immediately in efforts to counter terrorism. This Tunisian group was reported to have been part of the attack on the US Embassy and American school in Tunis on September 14, 2012. This incident came three days after the attacks in Benghazi, Libya even though there are no concrete suggestions to link them together.

During the Arab spring, the US maintained a steady position of support for the Tunisian people from the beginning of the revolution. However, the US Department of State's released a report on the Tunisian election results that diplomatically noted that "while observers agree that the outcome of the elections generally reflected the will of the electorate, the campaign and election processes greatly favored the ruling party and there was wide disregard for the secrecy of the vote."²³ This is despite the overwhelming support shown by market poll results for Ben Ali.²⁴ The US supported for regime change in Tunisia to advocate liberal ideas as well. To imagine sophisticated policies of this sort, to think in terms of long-term possibilities, and not just short-term goals, ought not to be so difficult.²⁵

In short, Tunisia can be regarded as just a US friend, even though cautious, closed and distant. The US' top diplomat based in Tunis, Jacob Walles, has described the relationship between the two countries as 'atypical dynamic'. He has put it that the US has faced challenges similar to the ones Tunisia is facing today, "an early beginning without a constitution, a phase of major security instability and a series of economic

¹⁷ <http://www.npr.org/2012/06/07/154430397/tunisia-leader-activist-exile-and-now-president>

¹⁸ Retrieved on April 9, 2014 from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/11/13/tunisian-foreign-affairs-france-shifts-positions-annahda-copes/>

¹⁹ <http://tunisia.usembassy.gov/tunisian-american-relations.html>

²⁰ See more at <http://www.ins.nat.tn/indexen.php>

²¹ See more at: <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/06/12/why-tunisia-could-host-the-u-s-militarys-african-headquarters/#sthash.feNOAxNn.dpuf>

²² La Presse de Tunisie, December 6, 2001.

²³ 1999 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (Washington, D.C.: The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, Feb. 25, 2000), p. 14.

²⁴ According to recent polls conducted by Transparency International and Tunisian market research firm 3C Etudes, 35 percent of Tunisians regret the downfall of Ben Ali retrieved on April 9, 2014 from <http://rt.com/op-edge/tunisia-arab-spring-democratic-transition-579/>

²⁵ Paul Berman (2011). The Ambiguous Revolt. Retrieved on March 22 from

<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/politics/magazine/82221/Tunisia-Ben-Ali-Middle-East-Uprisings-USA>

crises."²⁶ Moreover, President Obama's new tone and policies may create a window of opportunity.²⁷ We remember that Tunisia objected to US intervention following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. So, Tunisians have been deeply angry over the war in Iraq and perceived US bias towards Israel, however, most still admire "the American dream." In any case, it is true that greater security cooperation between Tunisia and the U.S. can serve both countries well and Obama has stressed the ongoing and unconditional support for the Tunisian revolution. Tunis Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa has, in assurance to the US, underlined his determination to achieve the democratic transition as soon as possible and within the required conditions and he is yet to honor Obama's invitation to Washington to consolidate bilateral ties for more peaceful and prosperous future.

E. China

Tunisia is China's friend- Hong Lei, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson

Tunisia's attempts to diversify trading links led to closer ties with the East and Southeast Asia in particular. Strong ties with China that began in 1964 solidified it as a stable, reliable, and moderate state. Since then, this friendly cooperative relationship could only grow in leaps and bounds in all fields. The two countries have since exchanged high-level visits and other cooperative partnerships. China has sent medical teams to Tunisia since 1973. On education, China and Tunisia have exchanged students since 1976. The two governments signed an agreement on cultural cooperation in 1979 with China participating in activities like art festivals and film weeks in Tunisia. They also signed agreement on exchanges in sports field and summary of talks. China began to send table tennis and gymnastics coaches to Tunisia in 1984. In turn, Tunisia sent teams of table tennis and gymnastics for training.

Diplomatically, foreign ministries of the two countries even set up the periodical political consultation mechanism in December, 1996.²⁸ Tunisian Foreign Minister visited China in May 1999, and signed The 7th Executive Program of 1999, 2000 and 2001 in accordance with the Agreement on Cultural Cooperation between the two governments. During President Jiang Zemin's visit to Tunisia in April 2002, the two countries signed 'The 2002, 2003 and 2004 Plans for the Execution of the Agreement between the Chinese and Tunisian Governments on Cultural Cooperation'.

It is clear that Tunisia though leaning mostly towards the West, shares and supports common views with China on many important international issues and affairs. So far as China is concerned, the political turmoil in the Arab world poses grave challenge to its national interests including personal security of the Chinese citizens in those countries. Luckily for China, it does not have important commercial and trade ties with Tun-

isia, however, Chinese diplomacy worked quietly behind the scenes to insure that it maintained its interests. China was notably silent in the early stages of the Tunisian uprising and fell back on its traditional public support for stability, national sovereignty and non-interference. That had to change as Ben Ali left Tunisia and China had to speak. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei said that "*Tunisia is China's friend*" and that "...China is concerned with what is happening in Tunisia and hopes stability in the country is restored as early as possible."²⁹ What comes on top are the political, economic, military and diplomatic measures that China pushed forward in protecting her national interests in Arab countries that were in turmoil. China subsequently dispatched Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun to Tunis to reinforce close ties with the new government. Zhai Jun said China respects the choice of the Tunisian people and wants to develop its traditional friendship with Tunisia. He also announced a donation of \$6 million for a development project to be defined later.³⁰

China seems to have made a successful transition from the Ben Ali government to the interim post-revolution governments. This demonstrates that China is able to move quickly and successfully when regime change occurs in Africa.³¹ China has shown that it is willing to strengthen political exchanges with Tunisia, expand mutual cooperation and enhance coordination on international and regional issues so as to protect the common interests of developing countries. Bilateral trade has been growing with China providing certain amount of economic aid to Tunisia since 1959. China mainly exports tea and light industrial products while imports phosphate fertilizer. From 1984, Chinese companies of labor service entered Tunisia's construction, agriculture, and industrial sectors etc. It is evidently possible that over time Tunisia will fully orient itself eastwards; perhaps this will take time and significant exogenous changes (if the Euro economy collapses. In other words, we will not be sure until it happens.)

III. Conclusion

Foreign policy formulation and execution is no easy task for any country, especially in an unstable context. Tunisian foreign policy under study epitomes changes in internal and external scenarios. It does not suffice how Tunisia has derived the benefits of foreign policy to alignment or non-alignment, but what is clear is that the revolution has proven more costly as internal politics still cannot result in peaceful actions but rather have created an atmosphere for possibilities of foreign meddling. It is not quite clear too how relative autonomy versus dependency thinking have played out in the Tunisian foreign policy. This is so because it resulted in frequent squabbles, coups and changes of governments that culminated in a showdown over power with the larger populace suffering as a result.

²⁶ Tunis Jacob Waller, the United States has faced challenges similar to the ones Tunisia is facing today: an early beginning without a constitution, a phase of major security instability and a series of economic crises. Read more: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/business/2014/02/tunisia-us-economic-ties-potential.html#ixzz2xoQxURwT>

²⁷ <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/tunisia/forrel-us.htm>

²⁸ Read more at <http://www.embassyof tunisia.com/index.php?id=41>

²⁹ BBC, January 15, 2011

³⁰ Xinhua News Agency, March 7; Tunisia Online, March 8

³¹ North African Revolutions Challenge Chinese Diplomacy As retrieved on March 28, 2014 from <http://www.intelligencequarterly.com/2011/04/north-african-revolutions-challenge-chinese-diplomacy/>

The Arab spring has been the major recent factor that has totally changed the Tunisian FP landscape but it is worthy to note that Tunisia has not been transfixed with the Arab Spring and has been dealing with its own issues, trying to get its house in order. The violence, anarchy, and destruction that has characterized other Arab revolutions and disturbed their FP was virtually absent in Tunisia even though it was introduced to new phenomenon of Islamist terrorism and Jihadi ideas spreading through a web of radical mosques, bringing uncertainty in how to deal with radical and violent Islam without reviving the bad undemocratic methods used by the Ben Ali regime in crushing the Islamist while weakening opposition forces. This has created enormous obstacles to the construction of a new political order with huge democratic hopes from the Tunisian population. This has also brought a healthy public debate and opposite opinions which are vital for foreign policy.

Tunisia has long played a moderate role with the intention to get along with everyone. It struck a balance between a pro-Western vision and its identity as an Arab country. While it had been forced to align its foreign policy to that of great powers, it was able to carve out a very significant relative autonomy from most. Tunisian officials' recent visits to the U.S., Germany, Japan, and China are a welcome change in Tunisian foreign policy. Seeking new strategic alliances even though it will irritate France is necessary for the future government. From all the literature reviewed, it is evident that the future of foreign affairs of Tunisia with the rest of the world will only get better. No signs show whether Tunisia will temper any of their current foreign relationships, but will expand its international economic scope and continue to cooperate as long as its interests and its counterpart's interests are served.

In conclusion, we believe that Tunisia has successfully, formulated and implemented policies that have maintained its national independence without much external disturbances, while safe guarding the integrity of the republic. Tunisia possesses a strong and promising foundation for a real democracy in the Arab world. This, if adjusted and adapted to situations happening in and outside its borders right now, will place Tunisia as a promising actor in international politics and can only take to a higher level of credibility and stability thank to its pragmatic policies. No doubt that current and future foreign policy makers in Tunisia can learn from the lessons of their predecessors for Tunisia a truly unique case that will remain an enduring topic of interest to students of International Relations.

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