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Diasporas and the MENA Region

Prospects and Struggles for Influence

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Over the last decade, revolutionary upheavals and civil wars have created new waves of exile and mass emigration across the Arab-majority world. What roles might these diasporas play in their home countries and social change therein? This paper discusses the different roles that diasporas have played in supporting social movements and humanitarian relief in their places of origin. Although diasporas are often ideally poised from the outside to induce changes at home, they face significant hurdles to promoting liberal change and relief from crises, such as COVID-19, across state borders. After discussing contemporary cases, including the diaspora's present challenges in assisting pro-democracy activists in Algeria, the paper concludes by discussing the policy implications for diaspora members' host-countries in Europe and beyond.

Background

The term “diaspora” conjures associations with those groups who have been forcibly expelled from their homelands in history, whether they be the Jews, Greeks, or Armenians. In the face of endless civil wars and rising authoritarianism, so too do diaspora members from countries across the Mediterranean region fit this imagery, having escaped religious, ethnic, and political persecution in their countries of origin. At the same time, social scientists today are increasingly using the term to a broader population, including emigrants seeking jobs abroad, students enrolled at foreign universities, and the children of first-generation immigrants who video chat with their grandparents and cousins from across state lines. The reason for this broader definition is important. Any person who attributes their origins to a particular home-country or homeland from another state has the potential to impact their home-country, no matter if they live in a neighboring state or further afield in places such as Germany and the United States. Whether we are referring to Algerians in France, Libyans in the UK, Moroccans in Spain, or Egyptians living in Lebanon, diaspora populations can have an enormous impact on their home-country economies, politics, and social movements. During times of crisis and conflict, they are further presented with a special set of opportunities to influence the outcomes of contentious politics and change.

This paper addresses the roles that diaspora members and their organized groups can play in their home-countries, the roadblocks that may prevent them from channeling badly needed support (such as charitable aid) to their homelands, and some of the ways in which diasporas are impacting their home countries in the Maghreb and Mediterranean-bordering Levant today. I conclude with policy recommendations for diasporas' host-country governments in responding to these transnational dynamics, including the need for increased protection of diaspora members working to combat the abuses of authoritarian regimes at home.

How Diasporas Matter

In recent decades, a growing body of research on diaspora lobbies, social movements, and ethnic communities has revealed a number of insights into how diasporas impact their homelands. The first and most notable impact is the sheer amount of remittances—in the form of cash and goods—that diasporas send to their families at home. These funds not only help pay the bills of households facing hardships or channel the latest name-brand technologies into the hands of eager teenagers. Diasporas

also make an impact at the *collective* level by fueling public works and development projects, such as schools, hospitals, and sanitation. During my fieldwork in Libya in 2013, I met a range of repatriated businessmen and former exiles working to do just that in Tripoli.

Diaspora members also literally do the work of nation building. They do so by purchasing bonds and funding government-sponsored projects, as well as by contributing to home-country religious institutions and charitable causes, such as repairing mosques, funding churches, and sponsoring orphanages. Because those living abroad often make far more income than those left behind—even if they remain truly disadvantaged by host-country standards—these patrons often gain influence and a say in how these funds should be spent.

Whether out of altruism or obligation, remittances now comprise a large part of many nations' gross domestic product, or GDP. According to data from the World Bank, Egypt, for instance, received 29.6 billion US dollars in 2020, amounting to 8.2% of the country's GDP; Morocco's diaspora remitted 7.4 billion dollars, amounting to a significant 6.5% of GDP.¹ Lebanon's figures amount to what may seem like a paltry 3.9 billion, but this amounts to a staggering 32.9% of the country's GDP.² This is despite an ongoing global recession, where many migrants abroad are struggling to find work. Without such remittances, it is clear that countries already dealing with political and economic fragility would collapse entirely.

Diaspora remittances also have an enormous impact during periods of crisis. From the 2008 global recession, to the calamitous explosion in Beirut in 2020, to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, diaspora members have sent aid homeward ranging from food and medicine to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Without these contributions, many countries' economies would simply collapse. As a means to attract this financial investment, home-country governments are increasingly wooing their populations abroad as constituents and party patrons. Across a number of nations, diaspora members hold dual citizenship, vote in elections from abroad, and even claim designated seats in parliament. In Tunisia, for instance, Ben 'Ali granted Tunisians abroad the ability to vote in referenda and presidential elections, which diaspora members exercised for the first time in 1989.³ After the 2011 revolutionary movement, the government granted 18 seats out of 217 to its diaspora, with specific seats designated for the larger communities in France, Germany, and Italy. This helped the Islamist al-Nahda party to dominate the Constituent Assembly.⁴

As influencers of social and political change, diasporas also famously (and infamously) play a role as subversives, revolutionaries, and foreign plotters against homeland regimes. Once displaced from their territories and Jordan, for instance, Palestinian fighters spread across the world, including in the Mediterranean region, to mobilize against Israel from abroad. Enemies of Muammar al-Gaddafi, such as the National Front for the Salvation of Libya formed in the 1980s, dispersed across Sudan and Egypt to the UK and the United States. Muslim Brothers active in the 1980s from places such as Egypt and Syria were forced into exile across the region and Europe, while communists often ended up in France. Today, new waves of exile have been spurred by the Arab Spring revolutionary movements of 2011 and their progeny, such as anti-authoritarian activism in Egypt, the Hirk movement in Algeria, and the ongoing anti-Assad insurgency in Syria. As the following section describes, activists abroad often gain notable opportunities to instigate change from outside. However, because they face numerous obstacles in doing so, their abilities to impact political change at home are highly contingent and often fleeting.

Diaspora Mobilization against Authoritarianism and Violence at Home

Upon occasion, populations residing outside of the southern Mediterranean host an outpouring of diaspora activism, such as demonstrations, vigils, and protests, in support of democracy and human rights. I experienced this as a PhD student in sociology living in southern California a decade ago, in 2011,

¹ These data are made available by the World Bank's online data tool by country for the year 2020: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=EG>.

² Ibid.

³ Brand, Laurie A. "Expatriates and Home State Political Development." *Mashriq & Mahjar* 5, no. 1 (2018): 11–35.

⁴ Ibid p. 20.

as Libyan Americans celebrated the fall of Gaddafi at a park in my neighborhood. A community celebration and picnic might seem like a relatively ordinary affair to those living in places where civil rights are guaranteed. They should not be taken for granted, forever. These anti-Gaddafi families and neighbors attested that such a gathering was only possible because of the revolution, as it brought Libyan Americans together in new ways. Such events signified a major shift in community relations and empowerment.

Inspired by events such as these, I went on to conduct a major study on how diasporas—including Libyans and Syrians living in the US and Britain—mobilized to support the revolutionary movements of the Arab Spring. As detailed in my recently published book on this subject⁵, I found that diasporas performed five major roles in anti-regime efforts during these bloody battles for liberation. The first was what I term *broadcasting*. Broadcasting refers to the dissemination of information about the home-country to outside audiences. During the onset of the Libyan revolution of 2011, for instance, members of the diaspora began to receive disturbing reports from their friends and families at home about regimes' attempts to crush protests. While many of these events in countries such as Egypt were broadcasted live day and night, in more repressive places, state censorship and repression in Syria, Libya, and elsewhere prevented outside media from reporting on the ground during early protests. In an effort to combat this censorship, diaspora activists gathered information through their contacts, translated it, and posted updates in real time on websites and social media platforms such as Twitter. They also held events to educate their communities and allies about ongoing events and compiled information into reports, which were distributed to government bodies and think tanks.

Another role that diasporas can play in political upheavals is to serve as representatives of home-country causes from abroad. Some activists are deputized as formal delegates of opposition movements, as in the case of diaspora members and exiles who raced to join Syria's official opposition, the Syrian National Council, in 2012, from abroad. (This later became the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces). Others do so informally, protesting and lobbying on behalf of their counterparts at home. As representatives, diaspora members additionally serve as *brokers* between those inside the home-country and those outside. These activists are in many ways best positioned to perform this kind of work, since they often speak the languages of insiders and outsiders and have the network connections that facilitate communication between the two. During the Arab Spring, diaspora members put protesters and civilians on the ground in touch with outside journalists; facilitated the introductions of rebels and regime defectors to outside policymakers; and brought acclaimed activists and victims of regime atrocities on speaking tours to audiences across the US and Europe. Others facilitated connections between international NGOs and local ones, so that outside groups might provide funding for local civil society and relief projects.

Diaspora members also play a role in political change by remitting cash, goods, and other resources to insurgents and relief workers.⁶ This has made experts wary of their ability to become war-makers and prolong civil wars at home. The activists I spoke to about the Arab Spring, however, focused on remitting non-lethal aid to fighters, such as satellite phones, and sanitary items to women and children displaced internally and externally from the fighting. Importantly, diasporas are often the first responders to home-country crises and the last to leave, rivaling international organizations in their responses to disasters. The Syrian diaspora, for instance, has played a huge role in providing life-saving aid, such as medicine, shelter, and food, to the millions of displaced persons over the past ten years.⁷ Furthermore, diasporas can often remit aid to places that lie out of reach of international aid organizations, which are hampered by bureaucratic rules, corruption, and regime-imposed blockades. In places such as Syria, diasporas have smuggled in life-saving aid into regions that the UN and its partners have been prevented from

⁵ Moss, Dana M. (2022). *The Arab Spring Abroad: Diaspora Mobilization Against Authoritarian Regimes*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁶ Adamson, Fiona. (2002). Mobilizing for the transformation of home: Politicized identities and transnational practices. In N. al-Ali and K. Koser, eds., *New Approaches to Migration? Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home*. London: Routledge, pp. 155–68.

⁷ Svoboda, Eva and Sara Pantuliano. (2015). *International and local/diaspora actors in the Syria response: A diverging set of systems?* Working Paper, Humanitarian Policy Group. London: Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

distributing humanitarian supplies⁸. While we lack reliable numbers as to the quantity of these remittances, it is clear that many communities under siege have no other lifeline than that of their relatives and co-nationals abroad.

Diaspora members also return to *volunteer* in and around conflict zones, thereby facilitating anti-regime mobilization and relief delivery themselves. Some diaspora members join rebel groups; the Free Libya Army, for instance, attracted expatriates from all over the world to join in the struggle against Gaddafi. Others volunteer to help the needy, as when Libyans volunteered in camps for refugees and the internally displaced, and when Syrians from the UK and Germany drove ambulances into liberated zones in northern Syria. Diaspora members also travel homeward to serve as reporters and journalists, and to accompany foreign journalists to the front lines, all while acting as brokers and interpreters for the local population. Although these re-patriates cannot shift the tide of conflicts in-and-of-themselves, their efforts can nevertheless make a difference. By helping to externalize local conflicts, save lives, and reduce suffering in their home-countries, what scholars have referred to as the “brain drain” caused by outbound migration can become a “brain gain” during periods of crisis and opportunity⁹.

The Transnational Repression of Diasporas by Sending-State Regimes

Diasporas can be powerful forces for development, economic stability, humanitarian aid, and rebellious politics. However, not all diasporas are poised to intervene in home-country crises and conflicts equally. Several obstacles can stand in their way. First and foremost, diaspora members may be silenced by *transnational repression*¹⁰. This refers to the ways in which homeland regimes punish diaspora members and their family members at home for criticizing them from abroad. As MENA politics and migration expert Laurie Brand elaborates in her research¹¹, regimes in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria established *amicales*, or friendship societies, in European countries of destination such as France. According to Brand, the first such groups of Algerian origin were established to protect and integrate worker communities abroad. Yet, these *amicales* served a more nefarious purpose, which was to monitor the diaspora for any real or suspected subversive political activities.

North African regimes also repressed migrant political activity in the service of France; Tunisia, for instance, sought to keep its workers quiescent in an effort to maintain its reputation as a “source of reliable and compliant workers” for the receiving country¹². These efforts prevented migrant workers from advocating for their own workplace safety and fair wages. The *amicales* coordinated surveillance, as did these states’ consulates and embassies. My research on these dynamics also finds that states sent students to study abroad on scholarships as long as they promised to inform on one another. By operating as the “long arm of the Arab state”¹³, in the words of migration scholar Gerasimos Tsourapas, embassies and consulates operated as outposts of the home-country security apparatus.

Regimes from the MENA region are often quite effect in suppressing dissent or driving it underground by deploying agents and informants to report on the diaspora. Among Libyan NFSL insurgents-in-exile, the threat of being assassinated or unlawfully renditioned back home was real enough to keep members on the run or in hiding abroad. Over the course of the Assad regime’s hold on power, Syrians abroad

⁸ Issa, Philip. (2017). “Hunger at Damascus’ door as Syrian government blocks aid.” AP News.

<https://apnews.com/article/syria-ap-top-news-hunger-geneva-international-news-c27d926607734d0188eb03962e78e452>.

⁹ Okeke, Godwin S.M. (2008). “The Uprooted Emigrant; The Impact of Brain Drain, Brain Gain, and Brain Circulation on Africa’s Development.” Pp. 119-140 in *Trans-Atlantic Migration: The Paradoxes of Exile*. Edited by Toyin Falola and Niyi Afolabi. London: Routledge; El Ouassif, Amal. (2021). *The Challenge of the Youth Bulge in Africa and the Middle East: Migration and the Brain Drain*. NSD-S HUB & Policy Center for the New South.

¹⁰ Moss, Dana M. (2016). Transnational repression, diaspora mobilization, and the case of the Arab Spring. *Social Problems*, 63(4), 480–98; Moss, Dana M. (2018). The ties that bind: Internet communication technologies, networked authoritarianism, and “voice” in the Syrian diaspora. *Globalizations*, 15(2), 265–82; Moss, Dana M. (2022). *The Arab Spring Abroad: Diaspora Mobilization Against Authoritarian Regimes*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

¹¹ Brand, L. (2006). *Citizens Abroad: Emigration and the State in the Middle East and North Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

¹² Ibid, p15.

¹³ Tsourapas, Gerasimos. 2020. “The long arm of the Arab State.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 43(2), 351–70.

have been terrorized by threats and violence. Today, Egypt is also taking the transnational repression of its diaspora to new heights. This campaign to surveil and repress exiles is “tightly connected to its brutal domestic crackdown” against the Muslim Brotherhood and followers of the previously-elected president Mohamed Morsi.¹⁴

The Sisi regime has unlawfully rendered many dissidents and worked with local authorities to arrest and detain these individuals, including from countries such as Lebanon. A recent report on these practices by Freedom House describes how “at least one of the men handed over” to the Egyptian authorities from Kuwait was captured “on the basis of a conviction for participating in a protest in Egypt in 2016, even though he had not been in the country during that time.”¹⁵ According to Freedom House, Egypt “accounts for 42 physical incidents” of violence against exiles between 2014 and 2019, and these figures account for only the most publicized cases.¹⁶ The government also abuse Interpol’s Red Notice system, requesting that host-countries detain and deport asylum seekers, refugees, and peaceful political dissidents. Even though Interpol is supposed to be politically neutral and does not issue arrest warrants per se—as is commonly but erroneously believed—many local law enforcement agencies use Interpol Red notices as the means to arrest and deport those needing sanctuary. Syria has just been readmitted to Interpol, which promises to pose renewed threats to the regime’s opponents and refugees as well.

Many exiles abroad also report that their non-activist family members in the home-country have been threatened and imprisoned for their activism. The coercion and repression of family members at home in order to intimidate, silence, or coerce exiles to return home to face incarceration is what I and my colleagues have dubbed as “proxy punishment.”¹⁷ These threats, while condemned by NGOs and international bodies such as the European Union, are exceedingly difficult for host-country authorities to prevent from the outside. Furthermore, the threats posed by transnational repression are often insidious and hard to track. Only recently have revelations from researchers and reporters demonstrated how sophisticated and effective the use of corporation-generated software, such as the Israeli NSO-created Pegasus program, has been in tracking and monitoring dissidents in a largely undetectable fashion.

The threat of transnational repression can prevent diaspora members from using their civil rights and political freedoms to advocate against human rights abuses at home. Those exiles and emigres who have already born the costs of speaking out are unlikely to be deterred, but they are typically a minority in the larger diaspora. Any person who seeks to return home and to ensure the safety of their families in an authoritarian homeland will think twice before making a political statement abroad. This is, in part, why much of the anti-Assad Syrian opposition have died off in recent years. As the regime and its allies have regained control over most of the state’s territory, so too have Syrians’ family members been subjected to the threat of proxy punishment. During the revolution, regime agents and loyalists have also issued death and rape threats against activists abroad online, which signaled to the broader diaspora that the regime was monitoring their political activities. With the resurgence of authoritarianism across the MENA region and the globe, accompanied by the rise of technologies that facilitate global state surveillance, these practices are likely to increase in scope and severity.

Conflict Transmission in National Diaspora Communities

Diasporas are not homogenous entities. Whether they are subjected to the threats of transnational repression or not, their ability to mobilize on behalf of home-country causes can be undercut by another obstacle that I call *conflict transmission*.¹⁸ Conflict transmission refers to the ways in which political,

¹⁴ Schenkkan, Nate and Isabel Linzer. 2021. “Out of sight, not out of reach.” Freedom House, p. 50. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/transnational-repression>.

¹⁵ Ibid, p50.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Moss (2016); Adamson, Fiona B. and Gerasimos Tsourapas. (2020). “Perspectives on ‘Everyday’ Transnational Repression in an Age of Globalization (pp. 9-13), Freedom House; Moss, Dana M., Marcus Michaelsen, and Gillian Kennedy. Unpublished manuscript. “Going After the Family: Transnational Networks, Proxy Punishment, and the Repression of Dissent in Middle Eastern Diasporas.”

¹⁸ Moss, Dana M. (2022). *The Arab Spring Abroad: Diaspora Mobilization Against Authoritarian Regimes*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

ethnic, religious, regional, and other types of conflicts travel abroad to diasporas through members' biographical and identity-based ties. Put another way, the kinds of factionalism that plague people in the home-country influence the diaspora as well, and particularly when home-country conflicts have forced different politicized and opposing groups abroad into the same community. Syrian refugees in Germany, for instance, have found themselves living among some of the very same people who abused them in their home-country. These divisions and traumas can make it exceedingly difficult for diaspora communities to act in solidarity.

Conflict transmission can undermine a diaspora's ability to work for democratic change and support humanitarian relief at home in numerous ways. If members identify with opposing social movements—e.g., communists versus the Muslim Brotherhood—then their competitiveness and mistrust are likely to carry over to their places of exile. Extraordinary events, such as those that took place during the Arab Spring, can temporarily unify former foes and create broad coalitions opposed to a common enemy. However, these coalitions are often forged for the sake of convenience. Such alliances tend to re-fragment along old fault lines as soon as the common object of their animus disappears, as in post-Gaddafi Libya. In cases where home-country movements are plagued by identity-based conflicts, resource shortages, and terrible losses, so too are they and their allies abroad likely to turn against one another, as during the Syrian war of the 2010s.

Positive changes in the homeland—such as increased representation and political freedoms for previously marginalized groups—can also stoke conflict transmission in the diaspora. Minority groups, whether they be the Amazigh of northern Africa, Copts from Egypt, or Druze from Syria, may feel marginalized in Arab-majority diasporas and in anti-regime social movements. When these groups come out at home and abroad to promote their visibility and voices, majorities may recoil, accusing minorities of attempting to usurp the nationalist cause. So too do generation differences come into play. I observed during the Arab Spring that younger generations—most of whom were born in the MENA region but were raised in the US and Britain—frequently experienced social conflicts with elites and older emigrant generations. Some of these activists found their demands over human and women's rights ignored by elder men; others felt that their efforts overshadowed by wealthy elites, leading to the marginalization of the lesser-privileged. Although diasporas have been accused of being self-serving “long-distance nationalists,”¹⁹ their subnational and transnational commitments shape their intra-group differences and the extent to which they are willing to work together.

Conflict transmission may also impact relief efforts. If groups do not trust that their remittances will go to “their” people or allies at home, then they will be unlikely to one another to fairly and equitably distribute resources on their behalves. As a result, the transfer of remittances for humanitarian causes can be undercut by fraught relations between members. Mistrust, in combination with poor infrastructure and corruption in the home-country, can majorly hamper the transformation of remittances into collective projects for public welfare.

The Importance of Host-Country Political Support

Diasporas have gained infamy in places like the United States for swaying policymakers and meddling in foreign policy decision making. The case of Ahmed Chalabi, an Iraqi exile and lobbyist who helped justify the George W. Bush Administration's plan to invade and occupy Iraq, is just one case in point. Activists and scholars alike have since viewed “ethnic lobbies” as major potential drivers of Cold War antagonisms, sectarianism, and hawkish policies against home-country states.²⁰

Yet, such characterizations often miss the fact that diaspora lobbies and social movements do not become powerful international actors on their own, or as a direct result of their resources. Rather, their influence in policy and diplomacy is driven by the support of their home-countries and other geopolitical

¹⁹ Anderson, B. (1998). *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*. New York: Verso.

²⁰ Collier, P. and Hoeffler, A. (2000). *Greed and grievance in civil war*. Policy Research Working Paper no. 2355. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Collier, P., Elliott, V., Hegre, H., Hoeffler, A., Reynal-Querol, M., and Sambanis, N. (2003). *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*. Washington, DC: World Bank and Oxford University Press.

actors. Chalabi was not a rogue mastermind of Hussein's downfall, but rather a CIA- and State Department-funded influencer whose "evidence" was rendered consequential because of longstanding government support.²¹ For every repressive campaign and authoritarian government forges thousands, perhaps millions, of anti-regime exiles like Chalabi. The few who gain influence and attention, however, are those with whom policymakers share ambitions and sympathies. These individuals must be invited to share a seat at the table by power holders before they gain a voice in political decisions. Accordingly, the extent to which activists in exile from contentious hotspots such as Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria gain a say in the policies of their host-country governments take place in a highly selective fashion.

The challenges of gaining the support of host-country governments has numerous implications for movements struggling for democracy, survival, and recognition. In Algeria, the HIRAK movement that mobilized valiantly to eject Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the country's longest serving president-dictator, faces a significant lack of support in the international community. As journalist Ilhem Rachidi writes for the Carnegie Endowment:²² "once Abdelaziz Bouteflika departed the presidency in April 2019 the military as well as the international community apparently decided that was enough." Outside nations are reticent to push Algeria's military to institute real democratic changes. As an oil producer and western ally in the so-called "war on terror," they prefer the current status quo of stability over change. Of course, such policies may actually incite further instability as grievances increase from escalating regime repression under the military-backed government of Abdelmajid Tebboune.²³ These dynamics also have major implications for the diaspora. Without external support for real regime change, supporters of the HIRAK and other opposition groups are likely to be ignored abroad. Even if they gain opportunities to hold demonstrations, speak at think tanks, or speak to policymakers, governments are unlikely to act in response to their calls for pro-democracy pressure on Tebboune.

Another obstacle is that policymakers may not trust HIRAK supporters to provide a viable alternative to Algeria's current ruling regime. HIRAK was comprised of a broad coalition of youth and the elderly, Islamists and secular feminists, and many other groups. But while such coalitions are often effective at pressuring government leaders to step aside, they are not necessarily effective builders of new governments—particularly when a powerful military stands in the way. Furthermore, the longstanding groups populating Algeria's political scene are often seen as part of the old guard who lack popular support. Others are only weakly organized, and their leadership decimated by escalating repression. Anti-government groups tend also to be torn amongst themselves over a gamut of issues, from the role of religion in the state to women's rights. These conflicts are likely to transmit to the diaspora, splintering anti-regime actors, producing infighting and competition, and demoralizing once-hopeful volunteers.

Today, Tunisia—hailed as the Arab Spring's only success story—is facing a related crisis. After President Kais Saïed seized broad powers for himself, fired the Prime Minister, and suspended the parliament on July 25, 2021, he has not given clear signs as to when or how democracy will be restored. While some Tunisians welcomed this move, others worry that their country is back on the road to dictatorship.

What role might the diaspora play in this crisis? According to a recent Reuters report²⁴, "ambassadors from the G7 group of rich democracies urged Saïed to appoint a government and return Tunisia to a constitutional order." This may present pro-democracy Tunisian diaspora groups with newfound opportunities to lobby their elected representatives to pressure Saïed on the restoration of the democratic process. At the same time, their host-countries are bogged down with a range of other crises, the COVID-19 pandemic notwithstanding. In order to make Tunisia a foreign policy priority, they need to argue that democracy, and not dictatorship, is key to stabilizing their home-country in ways that serve

²¹ Roston, A. (2008). *The Man Who Pushed America to War: The Extraordinary Life, Adventures, and Obsessions of Ahmad Chalabi*. New York: Nation Books.

²² Rachidi, Ilhem. (2021). "Helpless HIRAK? Democratic Disappointments in Algeria." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/84739>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Amara, Tarek and Mcdowall, Angus. 2021. "Tunisian president plans to change political system, suspend constitution -adviser." Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/tunisian-president-plans-change-political-system-suspend-constitution-adviser-2021-09-09/>

foreign policymakers' interests. The question of whether foreign powers will listen, however, remains an open one for now.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Diasporas can play a major role in homeland affairs in different ways. Some engage in routine financial support and institutional politics, such as voting and holding seats in home-country parliaments. Others become patrons of charitable relief and development, or even auxiliary forces for revolutionary movements, insurgencies, and democracy. These have made diasporas a constituency to be wooed by home-country governments, as well as a subversive force to be feared. But as this paper points out, diasporas may also be disempowered to affect change owing to threats posed by transnational repression and due to internal divisions over political and social differences. They may also lack the host-country political support needed to gain influence in the foreign policymaking process. In any or all of the above situations, however, diasporas' potential to impact their home-countries make them a notable topic of interest. For their host-country governments, I have several recommendations.

The first is for governments to take increased measures to protect exiles and refugees from the threats posed by transnational repression. This includes such measures as (1) educating their security sectors about the appropriate use and application of oft-abused Interpol Red notices; (2) providing police protection to diaspora members when they believe their lives to be at risk; (3) strengthening sanctions against governments who use their consulates, embassies, and agents to threaten diasporas and their families. Given the increase in harassment, surveillance, and even violence wielded against diaspora dissidents, this is an urgent issue for promoting democracy and the rule of law abroad.

My second recommendation is the need to accept more refugees and asylum seekers fleeing violence and persecution from authoritarian countries such as Syria, Egypt, and Algeria. This is particularly important in the current climate of rising authoritarianism across the MENA region and the globe more generally. The pandemic also put a stop to the acceptance of these populations, including those who have already been approved by their new host-countries to resettle abroad. This backlog is putting many people in danger unnecessarily. Now more than ever before, regime critics need places of sanctuary abroad to do human rights and pro-democracy work, and host-countries should embrace that obligation as a meaningful gesture of their commitment to these principles.

Third, diaspora activists and their movements deserve to be heard and incorporated into decision-making processes, including NGO-run efforts aimed at addressing humanitarian emergencies. Diaspora volunteers often possess the network ties, language skills, and insights that outsiders lack. Accordingly, they can make international interventions into situations of war and climate change-induced disasters more effective. The caveat is that such inclusion must represent the diversity of the diaspora, including its youth, women, and religious and ethnic minorities. If policymakers only listen to those diaspora actors who are older male elites, they will only get part of the story and address part of the solution. Recognizing the heterogeneity of a given diaspora will make for more balanced and effective policymaking and foreign aid implementation on the ground.

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