

**RELEASE EMBARGO DATE: April 22, 2014 at 9:00 AM**

**Panel:** Back to Winter in the Middle East? (G2)

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, April 22, 2014 / 13:00-14:15

**Talking Points for:** Diederik Vandewalle, Dartmouth College

FROM THE ARAB SPRING TO A WINTER OF DISCONTENT: THE RESILIENCE OF  
AUTHORITARIANISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

After much exuberance in the West about the possibility of reform in authoritarian Middle Eastern and North African countries since 2010, the actual record of liberalization and democratization has been highly mixed.

Egypt and Tunisia provide contrasting cases of unsuccessful and successful cases of political liberalization, with Libya still somewhere stuck in the middle. Syria remains a quagmire while Iraqi politics have seen a severe downward trajectory into sectarian politics. Much of the Arab Gulf remains seemingly immune to real reform; on the other hand, two other kingdoms in the region—Morocco and Jordan—have pro-actively adopted liberalization measures that prevented serious unrest and provided a heightened sense of legitimacy.

In explaining how the Arab Spring has morphed into a winter of discontent, we must focus on how our misunderstanding of what has transpired in the Middle East relates to the kind of ideas the West has held about authoritarianism and its resilience in the region, about its hoped-for demise as globalization engulfed the region, and about our convictions that political reform in all areas of the world will follow the rational models we in the West see as indispensable to creating modern democracies.

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