Chapter 1

State of the Arab Liberation Tide
Origins, Features, Extent of Success
of Popular Uprisings, Implications,
and Future Prospects

An unprecedented tsunami of popular uprisings against despotic governance has been sweeping across the Arab landscape since the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. It promises, possibly for the first time after seven long centuries of stagnation and decay, a solid foundation for human renaissance in the Arab world through building democratic governance and paving the way for long-needed societal reforms. The fragrance of “Arab Spring” has been in the air for some time and spreading fast throughout the Arab domain and beyond.

Some despotic regimes in the Arab region have introduced reforms that would have been unthinkable just a few months earlier, replacing cabinets and piloting measures to liberalize government and society, all the while proclaiming, unconvincingly, that such steps were entirely unrelated to the Arab Liberation Tide (ALT).

For reasons that should become clear, I prefer the term “Arab Liberation Tide” to the aphorism “Arab Spring.” Indeed, some commentators have gone on to refer to the Arab autumn, if not winter. In brief, the Arab region has been facing a complex historic process of enormous significance to the region and perhaps to areas beyond, and it is not a pleasant and joyful short “season.” The pan-Arab character of this process is clear from the rapid succession of the onset of its popular uprisings throughout the Arab region. Such complex historical processes can suffer setbacks, hopefully transient, or even reversals as a result of counterrevolutionary actions.
Figure 1.1 shows the rapid succession of ALT popular uprisings confirming its character as a pan-Arab phenomenon (exact dates of eruption are given in Appendix 1).

This sweeping tidal wave of change will, in my opinion, most likely see an end to despotic governance in the Arab region eventually, though the resulting form of democratic governance may vary from one Arab country to another.

This is truly momentous, as, according to the Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) (UNDP 2002–2005), despotism has been the most serious impediment to human development in the Arab region. However, democratic governance, though necessary, is not a solely sufficient condition for human renaissance in the Arab region.

Such a far-reaching historical process is also prone to setbacks, stagnation, or even reversals as a result of the strength and resilience of societal institutions, in particular the political economy and governance infrastructures that it aims to overthrow.

This is only to be expected, as attaining the goals of this tidal wave of change requires the dismantling of political arrangements and political