

Crisis in Middle East and North Africa: US-UK Encroaching on Conduct of Elections in Libya. Interview with Journalist Martin Jay

By [Martin Jay](#) and [Steven Sahiounie](#)

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The deal signed in China on March 10 was a surprise to the US and their western allies. They didn't see that coming, as years of secret talks culminated in a successful restoring of full diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

This new relationship has the potential to change the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The global center of power is shifting towards the east, and the west may be left behind.

Steven Sahiounie at MidEastDiscourse interviewed veteran journalist Martin Jay to get his take on the region that he knows so well. Jay is a British journalist who is currently living in Morocco, working as editor in chief of Maghrebi.org

Previously, Jay was based in Beirut where he recently won the UN's prestigious Elizabeth Neuffer Memorial Prize (UNCA) in New York in 2016. He works on a freelance basis for a number of respected British newspapers as well as previously Al Jazeera, TRT, RT and Deutsche Welle TV. Before Lebanon, he worked in Africa and Europe for CNN, Euronews, CNBC, BBC, Sunday Times and Reuters. @MartinRJay

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Steven Sahiounie (SS): The President of Tunisia, Kais Saied, has been trying to reform the country in an effort to distance the government from direct involvement from the Muslim Brotherhood. In your opinion, have the Tunisian citizens responded well to this?

Martin Jay (MJ): I'm not sure if Saied really is reforming the country, and has he really distanced himself so far from the Brotherhood? I think if that were the case, the UAE would have helped him financially as they did with Sisi originally. Saied, in my view, is confused about geopolitics and is unsure who to align himself with. He shocked the Moroccans by welcoming Polisario officials which ruined a relationship which went back decades. It seems

that he is destined to move closer to the sphere of Russia, China and Iran. Whether that will work for him though, as he struggles to keep on close relations with the West, is unclear.

SS: There are tensions between Algeria and Morocco. According to media reports recently, Israel has been feeding the tensions. In your opinion, will other Arab countries intervene to stabilize the situation?

MJ: Tensions between Morocco and Algeria are nothing new. The Ukraine war has certainly raised the stakes though given that Algeria has just bought \$12 billion worth of Russian arms, and wants to conduct military trials on the border with Morocco, which was averted at the last minute. I'm quite positive that the new relations between Iran and KSA will have a knock on effect to Morocco and Algeria, although it wouldn't surprise me to learn that Israel has been stoking the tensions. Like a lot of players who have invested in Morocco, they would gain by heightened tensions as they are keen to be the chief benefactors of an arms race between Rabat and Algiers.

SS: Libya is long overdue for a Presidential election. How do you view the political situation in Libya, and do you see a potential for Saif al-Islam Gaddafi playing a role?

MJ: Libya is stuck for the moment due, largely, to Joe Biden's moronic foreign policy and his limited grasp of the events in the MENA region as a whole.

He has signaled through his own CIA chief that the Americans and British do not really want presidential elections to go ahead as this would probably result in Saif al-Islam Gaddafi winning which would be like blowing your own foot off with your own shotgun - given that the West's intervention was such a dog's breakfast in the first place. The thinking seems to be "just how much more can we f**** it up?"

No way we can let Gaddafi's son take over, even through elections!" The Americans have a useful tool though to use to create a smokescreen to make it look like they welcome elections as soon as possible: the UN. Recently, though it looks like the UN chief overlooking events there, a Senegalese, proved to be the useful idiot he was expected to be, as his own comments about elections have backfired. This is perfect for the UK and US, who will wait and see if they can meddle in the internal politics and create their own republic with their own son-of-a-bitch as president. Problem is, that there is no one to fill those boots at the present time.

SS: The Egyptian economy is collapsing. Will other North African countries be affected by this situation, and will we see Arab Gulf countries come to the Egyptian rescue?

MJ: Egypt's economy spiraling is a lesson to many MENA despots: this is what happens when you bite the hand that feeds you, from a big brother GCC country. Sisi has fallen out with the UAE and KSA. The Muslim Brotherhood may well have to come back to power in Egypt just for the Gulf States to give a lesson to elites there. Ironically, it may well be Erdogan who might offer a helping hand. Other Arab countries? Unlikely.

SS: The Chinese brokered agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran surprised the world. In your opinion, will we witness something similar in the Arab world, such as between Egypt and Ethiopia, or others?

MJ: I really hope that the first steps of reconciliation between KSA and Iran will be important

ones, which are both taken seriously, and done well. The reopening of embassies is really just a symbolic thing but it's important. If both these countries can move forward, then for sure there is a real chance together they can end the war in Yemen, and start on reconstruction. Iran also is advanced in many areas that KSA really could benefit from; especially nuclear energy, so if there can be peace between these two, and they stop spending hideous amounts of money on defense, and plough that into job creation and education, then it's win-win. There should be a knock-on effect to the whole MENA region, in places like Lebanon, where both these countries play a big role in local politics, and deciding on who should be the next president, but also in Morocco and Algeria where we really do need something to kick start a cooling off process and dialogue.

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Steven Sahiounie is a two-time award-winning journalist. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

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