DINA MATAR: More than six months after the first spark of the Arab uprisings, how would you define the stage in which these processes are at present? What do you foresee in such shifting situations?

GILBERT AHCAR: I do not think that it is appropriate to speak of one single stage when considering these uprisings. The regional process is uneven, which means different countries are at different stages, a normal fact since you have basically different states, histories, social and economic conditions, social and cultural pressures, standards of living, etc. At the moment, the countries experiencing upheaval and change are at different stages, let alone those that haven’t yet been deeply affected. This said, we can nevertheless reflect on the upheaval as a process unfolding at the regional level. It started in Tunisia, then reached a peak with the resignation of Mubarak, while the process acquired a regional scope because of the importance of Egypt. Hardly any Arab country escaped from political turmoil thereafter. Protest movements began in Yemen followed by Bahrain and Libya, and one month later, Syria. In Bahrain and Libya, the movement was met with very harsh repression, much harsher than what took place in Tunisia and Egypt, and this created the first shift in the regional process. We then had the foreign intervention in Libya starting from mid-March. We can say that these were important moments and turning points in the regional process, but none constituted a stage for that matter.

The two countries that started the process will be holding elections soon, so these two countries can be said to be at relatively similar stages.
But of course, their stories are very different from what is happening in Syria, or Yemen, or Bahrain. If in Libya they are now beginning to envisage the organization of elections, the movement is not over yet as the rebels are still confronting the remnants of the Qaddafi regime in various cities.

DM: Could you elaborate more on the regional and international implications of these processes? What role do you see for Turkey, for example?

GA: On the international level, Washington is keen on devising new policies in order to deal with the shifting situation. It is keen on adapting its old policies to guarantee its interests. One major change is Washington's return to playing the Islamic card: *the good Muslims versus bad Muslims discourse*. I emphasize *return* because this is not new, it existed before and was interrupted for several years. The bad Muslims comprise Iran, Hizbullah and Hamas. The good Muslims, or the new good Muslims, or the good again Muslims, are groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, with whom the United States had a close collaboration in the time of (former Egyptian president) Gamal Abdel Nasser. There are now attempts at renewing this kind of collaboration, as these groups have the advantage in Washington's eyes of having a real popular influence, unlike Washington's traditional friends of the past decades. New regional alliances are also formed and new players are emerging. Qatar played a huge and decisive role in fostering this turn of events. Turkey, too, is in the picture, but it has its own interests to cater to. It is not merely a US horse, although the United States of course appreciates the fact that Turkey, a NATO member, is playing an important role. But the key intermediary between Washington and the regional process is undoubtedly Qatar.

DM: How do you see this happening? And what tools are they using?

GA: Al-Jazeera is central in this respect. It has been a greatly successful investment for Qatar. It plays a huge role. Whatever Al-Jazeera costs Qatar—peanuts, when compared to its oil and gas income—its political role has been tremendous. Qatar for a long while now has replaced the Saudis as the main funder of the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Jazeera employs many MB members, though it remains under Qatari control. At the same time, there are real connections to the United States. The director of Al-Jazeera, Waddah Khanfar, is known to have Muslim Brotherhood connections, whether with the Jordan branch or with Hamas, and yet Wikileaks revealed recently that he also maintained connections with US