

Revolt of the Global Middle Class

Will the Current Global Wave of Revolutions and Protests Lead to a Total Surveillance Society?

By Mathew Maavak

One World, One Pain

The global economy, battered by the sub-prime-induced crashes of 2007 and 2008, was expected to maintain its sluggish recovery in 2011. Optimism was in the air.

Hardly anyone suspected that the self-immolation of a Tunisian street vendor on December 17, 2010, had lit the spark for a tectonic political upheaval throughout the Middle East and beyond. Mohamed Bouazizi's suicide led to the overthrow of several governments and will likely induce more regime changes in 2012.

Tent cities sprang up in Israel; a paroxysm of violence engulfed the United Kingdom in August; and there is talk of an imminent "Jasmine Revolution" in China. Currently, an Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement is diffusing pandemonium into the citadels of democracy.¹

An Arab Spring of hope has led to a Global Winter of discontent, and multi-seasonal uncertainties beyond. Social media tools like Facebook and Twitter were initially hailed as the new cyber-tipped spearheads against the barbed wires of tyranny. Perhaps, Francis Fukuyama was right after all. The post-Cold War system would inevitably lead to the "evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."²

By summer, those illusions were disabused.

New ICT tools could democratize repressed societies; it could also unleash repressed atavism. The repressed began to cooperate across borders, under the rubric of One World, One Pain.

Protestors in Cairo's Tahrir Square began ordering pizzas for Wisconsin workers who were concurrently besieging the State Capitol. Governor Scott Walker contemplated resolution through a mobilized National Guard.³ The message was unmistakable: The global middle class was uniting in anger.

A Lost Generation

The United Kingdom, arguably, encapsulates the hopelessness felt by the global middle class.

British graduates are "more likely to work in low-skilled jobs as postal workers, hotel porters, and cleaners compared to over a decade ago." The UK Office for National Statistics revealed that the "number of degree students ending up in low to lower-skilled jobs" had "grown from 9% to 17% over the past 18 years."⁴

The prospects are similarly grim across Europe. A superb education no longer guaranteed social ascendancy. The travails of Italian graduate Francesca Esposito, who has a law degree and a master's as well as proficiency in five languages, captures the middle class despondency: "I have every possible certificate. I have everything except a death certificate."⁵

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Table 1: European Youth Unemployment (H2 2011)

Country	Youth Unemployment (% of Population)	Total Unemployment (% of Population)
Ireland	28.6	8.3
United Kingdom	20.0	7.7
Sweden	24.0	7.7
Belgium	21.1	7.7
France	20.6	9.5
Portugal	27.8	12.6
Spain	44.3	20.7
Italy	28.6	8.3
Greece	36.0	15.9
Germany	8.1	6.2

Source: *The Telegraph*⁶

As Table 1 shows, Germany sticks out somewhat as an anomaly as its steady employment rates are bucking the EU trend. However, only 10 years back, its education system was deemed inferior to and less versatile than its British counterpart.⁷ The British economy then was levitating on a hydra of innovative financial and service sectors. British graduates became picky. Indian teachers had to be recruited to “teach English to the English.”⁸

While EU economies embraced a post-industrial offshored world, Germany prodded its workforce up a zealously native high-tech chain. Offshoring was for outmoded German product lines.

Germany eventually beat staid forecasts and emerged as the second largest exporting nation in the world. Perennial value-additions rendered product duplications costly and untenable. A made-in-Germany kitchen cabinet in Mumbai was costing as much as a BMW rolled out of Leipzig.

Berlin is now the undisputed capital of Europe—something Adolph Hitler failed to achieve

via military means only 70 years back. A weaker euro has helped German exports in a way a strong Deutsche mark would have not.

What has set Germany (as well as Scandinavia) apart from the sinking pack? Did the extraordinary powers vested with regional governments and the community play a defining role? Bavaria can veto EU bailouts worth billions in a way that Yorkshire and Normandy cannot!

Were national foresight programs deliberately manipulated in more laissez-faire, finance- and service-oriented economies? If events in the past 36 months had taken the developed world by surprise, then its foresight process must be inherently faulty.

Untenable Yolk for Gen Z

Things are not looking rosy in the United States either. Its unemployment rate hit 9.1% in September 2011 while the broader underemployment rate, which includes part-time employees and people who have given up job searches, reached 16.2%.⁹

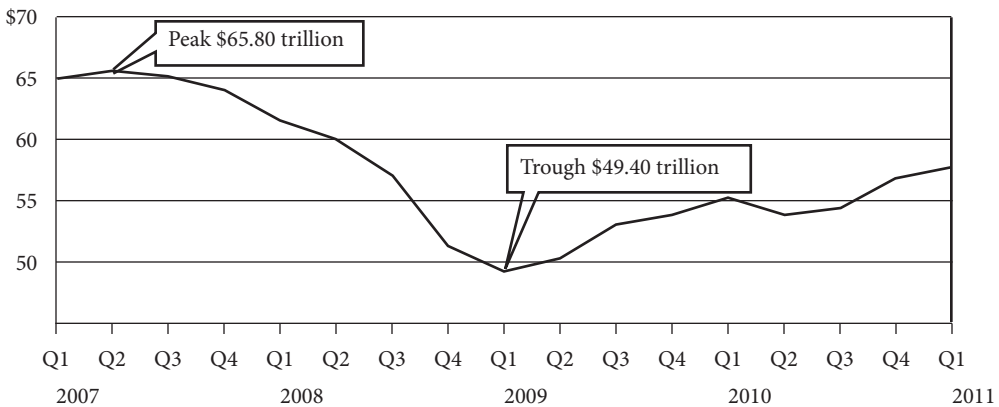
Economic fundamentals remain shaky. If the figures below are extrapolated on a global scale, the total losses/debts incurred worldwide could surpass \$1 quadrillion. Furthermore, nearly 15% of the U.S. population, or 45.8 million people, relied on food stamps in May 2011.¹⁴

The global pension funds industry, which controls \$35 trillion or a third of global financial assets, is facing double-digit rises in funding def-

Table 2

Sampling of Losses/Debts Incurred	Total	GDP (2010) Comparison
Losses in global financial assets including stocks, bonds, and currencies in 2008. ¹⁰	\$50 trillion	\$65 trillion (Global)
U.S. real-estate losses in 2007 and 2008. ¹¹	\$6 trillion	\$14.7 trillion (U.S.)
Fall in U.S. household wealth from 2007 to 2009 ¹²	\$16.4 trillion	\$14.7 trillion (U.S.)
U.S. Government Debt in 2010	\$14 trillion	\$14.7 trillion (U.S.)
Estimate of true U.S. national debt ¹³	\$211 trillion	\$14.7 trillion (U.S.)

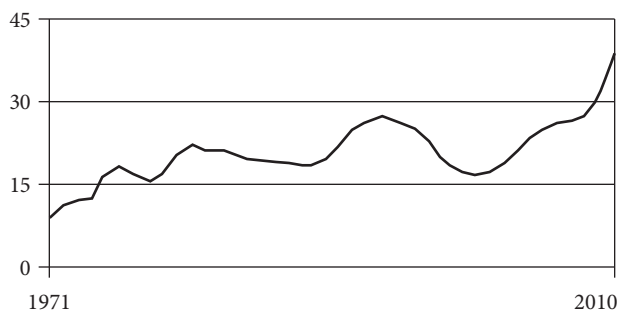
Figure 1: Household Net Worth (in trillions of dollars)



Source: Federal Reserve

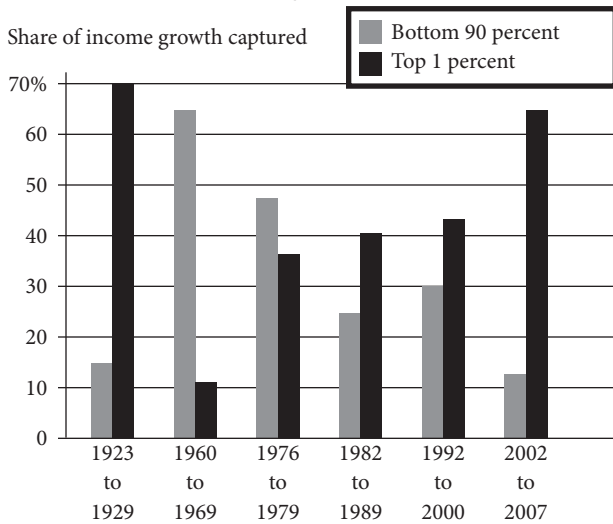
icits.¹⁵ How is our future going to be funded when the present is facing insolvency? Bankers have warned that a “more severe crash than the one triggered ... by the [2008] collapse ... of Lehman Brothers” could occur anytime soon.¹⁶ This will tip many societies over the precipice. Inflation will be unmanageable, unemployment will rise and food prices will skyrocket. Martial law may be declared in many countries.

Figure 2: Food Stamp Use (Number of Users in Millions)



Source: USDA

Figure 3: Share of U.S. Income Gains Going to Top 1 Percent at Highest Level Since 1920s



Source: CBPP calculations based on data from Piketty and Saez

Figure 3 shows the growing wealth disparity in the U.S., drawing parallels to the Great Depression era.

It's a similar story in the United Kingdom. The average British board director now earns "69 times as much as his typical employee. The comparative figure in Sweden ... is only 34 times."¹⁷

Even if sound policies are instituted today, U.S. government debt can still only be paid off over a period of 30-40 years by the younger generation.¹⁸

With key social and economic indicators in a meltdown mode, the pressures facing the future workforce is simply onerous. There is no Marshall Plan 2.0 on the horizon and no nation appears militarily and economically able to bankroll any global rejuvenation. Generation Z is facing a bleak future.

Trends are being drastically reversed. Western professionals are now seeking job opportunities in traditional hardship postings, such as India.¹⁹

A Simmering Global Middle Class

In 2007, a 90-page report compiled by the

Figure 4: Student Loan Defaults Rising

Of the 3.6 million borrowers who began repaying students' loans in fiscal year 2009, 8.8% defaulted within two years.

For-Profit

2009	15.0%
2008	11.6%
2007	11.0%

Public

2009	7.2%
2008	6.0%
2007	5.9%

Not-for-Profit

2009	4.6%
2008	4.0%
2007	3.7%

Source: U.S. Department of Education

UK's Ministry of Defence (MOD) had uncannily predicted a global middle-class revolt within the next 20 to 30 years. This timeline may be rather sanguine as the middle class is already on the war-path. The MOD cites one causative reason for this likely phenomenon: "Declining news quality" with the rise of "Internet-enabled, citizen-journalists" and pressure to release stories "at the expense of facts."²⁰

Headlines-grabbing WikiLeaks reveals the character of the future mob. Its contributors include "accredited journalists, software programmers, network engineers, mathematicians, and others" all working together to expose government and corporate shenanigans. In other words, a highly mobilized and activist-oriented global middle class! WikiLeaks' main source was the U.S. State Department, from which it mysteriously accessed 251,287 confidential cables originating

from 274 U.S. embassies around the world, spanning 1966 to 2010.²¹

The initial leaks had a seismic geopolitical effect. Washington was on the defensive, WikiLeaks personalities fought extradition while despotic regimes became beleaguered.

Few raised the possibility that WikiLeaks may have been an ingeniously calibrated leak, dictated by national existential imperatives. With an overstretched military, a rapidly deteriorating economy and widening social fissures, WikiLeaks is subtly dispersing the United States' unipolar failings into a multipolar mess.

Whatever its provenance, WikiLeaks has tapped into a global groundswell of indignation. The middle class feels betrayed. In a world obsessed by sustainable development, climate change and dwindling natural resources, the most neglected—and important—sector had been human resources.

A demonstrator's placard in Libya captured the underlying reasons for our human resource failures: *No More Autocracy; No More Despotism; No More Cronyism; No More Nepotism.*

It was not the failure of the PowerPoints, the technology roadmaps or national strategic action plans. It was foremost a failure to assure tangible progress based upon merit.

Kleptocratic “System of Structures”

Wikileaks, as well as other whistle-blowing sites, are now training their guns on major corporations, financial institutions and global media monopolies. According to Swiss whistleblower Rudolf Elmer, massive tax evasions by politicians and corporations worldwide revealed a pandemically corrupt “system of structures.”²²

The threat of exposure is uniting otherwise irreconcilable nations, ideologies, and interest groups. Here is where former U.S. presidential hopeful Sarah Palin meets Zimbabwean strongman Robert Mugabe. “National security” was universally invoked.²³

Such a paradox fits the Centre-Periphery Model of sociologist Johan Galtung, where the

Figure 5: Centre-Periphery Power Dynamics

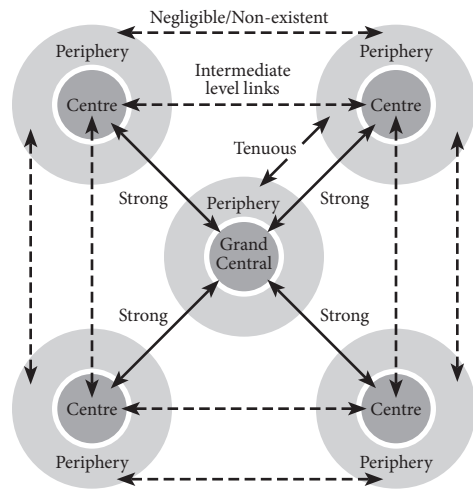
Grand Central-Centre: Representing elitist nexuses between major powers and Developing/Third World nations. Grand Centrals may represent global or regional superpowers and their blocs.

Centre-Centre: Representing elitist ties between secondary regional powers and the Third World. Organizational examples include Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, South-South Cooperation, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, African Union, etc.

Grand Central-(External) Periphery: Tenuous links representing aid and charity efforts, academic visits, missionary activities, backpacking, tourism, among others.

Centre-Periphery: Limited to moderate internal or regional economic engagements as well as cross-border civil society work.

Periphery-Periphery: Negligible or non-existent links due to lack of global awareness, social and economic mobility, educational exchanges, and a common language for wider communications.



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elite of the Periphery (i.e., Third World) share symbiotic interests with the elite of the Centre (i.e., Developed World). What binds them is an instinctive need for self-preservation.²⁴

Deposed Arab dictators such as Muammar Gaddafi and Hosni Mubarak may have maintained a despicable order in the Middle East, but it was a form of order nonetheless. Without them, the Middle East has plunged into a great unknown. Current leaders of Libya's provisional government are discovering the extent of the Faustian compact between the Gaddafi regime and the CIA and MI6. This included cooperation over extraordinary renditions that led to the eventual torture of Libyan dissidents.²⁵

Sharia Law regimes, promising a religiously ordained bulwark against the evils of cronyism, nepotism and autocracy, are replacing dictatorships. The failure of Sharia in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan is not deterring its proponents.

A Third World in Third Tier

The Centre-Periphery camarilla was exemplified by the recent “shameless prostituting” of well-known British universities to major Arab donors. “Between 1995 and 2008, eight universities—Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, University College London, the LSE, Exeter, Dundee and City—accepted more than £233.5 million from Muslim rulers” and their compatriots.²⁶

The sum of £233.5 million may not include donations from non-Muslim sources. Annual donations from less democratic sources could therefore exceed \$1 billion. Instead of injecting fresh expertise and growth into the Third World, these donations create an artificially credentialed class that perpetuate non-meritocratic native systems.

When cable news networks began flashing bloody images of the Libyan revolt, the London School of Economics (LSE)—to whom Tripoli had pledged a £1.5 million research grant—was pressured to investigate plagiarism charges against the Libyan dictator's son. Rather perversely, Saif-al-Islam Gaddafi's PhD thesis was titled “The Role of Civil Society in the Democratization of Global Governance Institutions: From ‘Soft Power’ to Collective Decision-Making.”²⁷

Periphery-Centre dynamics are marked by contradictions. Ideals pontificated in the Centre were inversely applied in the streets of Benghazi, Tripoli, and Sirte. Academic and financial favors conferred on the Periphery sustain a vast pool of global sweatshops and commodity access for the Centre. Periphery dependencies on the Centre will expand, maintaining a plutocratic status quo for its elite as a quid pro quo for the Centre's economic and military predominance.

The un-meritocratic elite of the Periphery tend to view fundamental freedoms and social innovations as an existential threat. Their social prestige and privileges depend on the level of suppression they wield. This suppression may take the form of a brutal Tiananmen-style crackdown or it can be simply a passive, systematic discrimination.

The more repressive Periphery societies are ruled by the law of *panem et circenses* (bread and circuses—i.e., mass appeasement achieved by offering inconsequential benefits). The masses here are regularly treated to economic offal, fervid nationalism and religious hysteria as seen during the heydays of Saddam Hussein, Hafez al-Assad and Muammar Gaddafi. Citizens may thump their chests, chant slogans and weep for their beloved leaders. The eventual blowback was once noted by the American philosopher Eric Hoffer: “People who bite the hand that feeds them usually lick the boot that kicks them.”²⁸

Less repressive Periphery societies, including so-called “authoritarian democracies,” also rely on a manufactured intelligentsia to “set the public discourse.” Erudition is defined by the latest buzzwords borrowed from the Centre. High-profile conferences thus become more a taxpayer-funded exercise to legitimize the un-meritocratic class rather than a genuine platform for dialogue.

Public diplomacy bodies like the British Council, eminent captains of the industry and Nobel laureates, play up this charade. Think tanks at the Centre cultivate sympathetic—and usually

sub-par—academics from the Third World, especially those with connections to the corridors of Periphery power. Such an arrangement oils the Centre-Periphery machinery, for the benefit of a dwindling few at the expense of the faceless many.

While this pantomime is nurtured by the Centre and Periphery, national failings in the latter are routinely externalized to the imperialistic machination of “foreign elements” or the West. As long as the masses are spooked by the spectre of “the other,” Centre-Periphery dynamics can be sustained.

Such a feudal matrix of power is perpetuated by poverty, social and economic marginalization and general ignorance. A vibrant middle class—whether foreign, native or combined—and ICT-enabled communications will destroy that status quo.

Now that the Peripheries are crumbling, anxiety is gripping the Centres. The global economic meltdown is blurring artificial boundaries between the Centre and Periphery. The bridge is the communications-savvy middle class.

Democracy’s Subversion

British authorities should have heeded the MOD’s warning over “declining news quality” at the expense of facts” along with the rise of “Internet-enabled, citizen-journalists.” Britain became a focal point of what the warning entailed!

It began with a clandestine phone-hacking operation initiated by executives from News International, a subsidiary of media behemoth News Corp. Left unchecked—despite official complaints dating back a decade—News International’s industrial-scale hackings tapped up to 5,000 landlines and 4,000 mobile numbers.²⁹ Victims included celebrities, the British Royal Family, and former Prime Minister Gordon Brown.³⁰

Coincidentally, two senior News International employees were insinuated into the offices of the British Prime Minister and the London Metropolitan Police. Concurrent salaries were drawn from the taxpayers, and News Interna-

tional Security vetting was either exempted or loosened; the fix was in; and the web of corruption complete.

Confidence in British politicians finally plunged beyond the threshold of tolerance. Rising economic hardships compounded matters further.³¹

Mirroring similar frustrations in the Middle East and Europe, protests became common. London erupted in an orgy of anarchist violence in March 2011, followed by a larger convulsion of looting and rioting across several English towns from August 6-10.

Citizens are not just losing faith in their politicians; they are losing faith in democracy itself. While the Third World rallies for Western-style fundamental freedoms, and democracy, the West is rallying against a democracy that could be purchased at will. Democracy is being transformed into a corporate-vetted Hobson’s choice, not Fukuyama’s utopia.

Paul Collier, an Oxford economist, predicts more social turmoil ahead, based on data collated since 1960. Above “a certain income threshold, democratic countries became less prone to political unrest as they get richer.” Autocracies “actually suffered more political unrest as they got richer.”

There were 180,000 riots, protests and strikes in China in 2010, reflecting a 100% rise even as its economy boomed. “The Arab uprising broke out in the most economically successful model autocracy in Africa.”³²

But is economic growth actually trickling down to the middle and lower classes? In Britain and other developed nations, inefficiencies and corruption were tolerated until livelihoods suffered. Up until then, the promise of enduring wealth was sufficient to absorb lingering disenchantment. Corruption was tolerated as long as the blowback was “not-in-my-backyard” (NIMBY). However, as backyards shrink, social discontentment hits a critical mass.

Information Chokepoints

What differentiated the British protests from the relatively peaceful anti-corruption agitations in India? Was it the non-violent approach of activist Anna Hazare, or the local demands to institute independent ombudsmen at key levels of government?

Or did India host too many political lobbies for effective corporate management? U.S. politics are mainly a bi-partisan Republican/Democrat affair. In the UK, it has historically been a three-way street. The Indian Lok Sabha—the lower house of the parliament—on the other hand, hosts over 40 parties and independent candidates representing motley ideologies and regional interests. The number of publications and channels of communications are equally varied.

Hazare was cognizant of democracies' vulnerability at its information chokepoints. "All corruption can end only if there is freedom of information."³³

While political plurality has shrunk in the United States and Britain, media monopolies like News Corp. have grown into unaccountable states-within-states, with powers to make or break governments.

The social media, applauded during the Arab uprising, was now viewed as subversive. David Cameron's warning was particularly revealing: "When people are using social media for violence, we need to stop them." One Syrian activist's prompt reply was: "Cameron will now be the most cited reference by all despots clamping down on social media."³⁴

The Next Big Thing

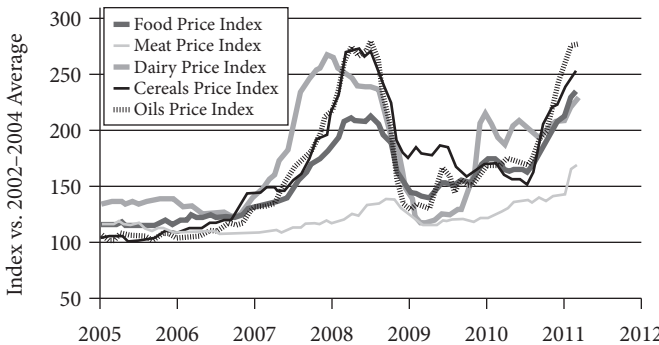
Middle-class anger is beginning to debilitate societies. In the United States, the militia movement is arming itself in anticipation of the eventuality of martial law.³⁵ The UK's MOD had foreseen this. Its 2007 report, *The DCDC Global Strategic Trends Programme, 2007-2036*, states:

The growing gap between the middle class: "and a small number of highly visible super-rich individuals might fuel disillusion with meritocracy, while the growing urban under-classes are likely to pose an increasing threat to social order and stability, as the burden of acquired debt and the failure of pension provisions begin to bite.

Faced by these twin challenges, the world's middle-classes might unite, using access to knowledge, resources and skills to shape transnational processes in their own class interest.³⁶

It has been said that "Society is only nine meals (or three days) away from anarchy."³⁷ When floods ravaged Australia's Queensland province in December 2010, many governments worldwide held crisis meetings to assess

Figure 6: FAO Global Food Price Index (3-3-11)



	Food Price Index	Meat Price Index	Dairy Price Index	Cereals Price Index	Oils Price Index
3/3 as % of 2007-9 peak	111%	123%	86%	93%	96%
% increase in February	2.5%	2.7%	3.3%	3.3%	0.6%
2007-9 Max Index	213.5	137.4	268.6	274.3	282.7

possible food shortages. Droughts and floods have been affecting other major global granaries throughout 2011. World food prices are expected to increase in 2012, sowing the seeds of more social tumult.

Other economic indicators for 2012 are equally bleak. More trouble is expected on the streets.

Rise of the Surveillance Society

Terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, prompted governments worldwide to introduce a variety of surveillance countermeasures. Cross-border cooperation rose dramatically.

The electronic All-Seeing-Eye being developed today may be trained on a restive global middle class tomorrow. Surveillance of the future will be done in real time. Facial and behavioural recognition software will anticipate intentions via street CCTVs, way before a crowd swells up. Supercomputers, such as the Nautilus at the University of Tennessee's Center for Remote Data Analysis and Visualization, already possess this capability.

Kalev Leetaru, from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, had refined this supercomputer-aided predictive model by analysing "a database of 100 million news articles" spanning 1979 to 2011. According to Discovery News:

The data is from the Open Source Center and Summary of World Broadcasts, both set up by the U.S. and British intelligence agencies to monitor what amounts to nearly every news source in the world and translate them into nuanced English. By analyzing the text in the news stories and the tone—whether they were largely positive or negative—Leetaru found patterns emerging that seemed to line up with major periods of unrest. For example, in Egypt, the tone of news articles about Mubarak grew in-

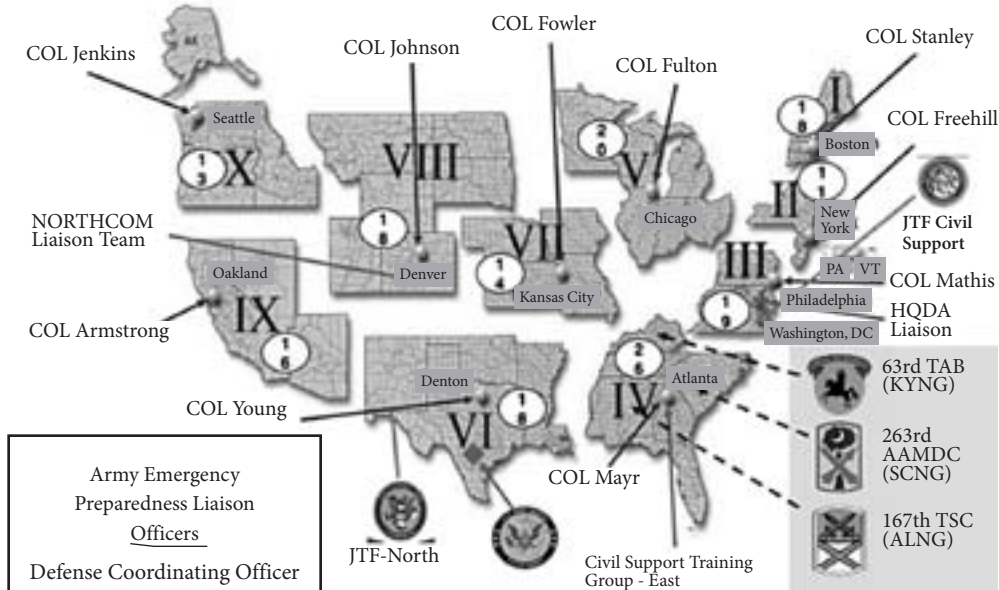
creasingly negative as the protests grew, until eventually Mubarak resigned. Another pattern the supercomputer was able to tease out was evidence of Osama bin Laden living in Pakistan. It did so by checking how often his name was recorded in association with the country. Visualized as lines on a map connecting the cities mentioned in stories that also referenced bin Laden, a pattern emerged that centered on northern Pakistan—within a couple of hundred miles of Islamabad.³⁸

Some British police departments have been flying experimental surveillance drones over high-risk urban areas.³⁹ Iris and fingerprint scans may be mandatory for transactions, applications, and entry into premises. Brain implants may discern thoughts and reveal real-time locations. Powerful satellites may pick up conversations as well as locate hideouts anywhere in the world. A person's history, actions, and personality traits may be collated for predictive behavioural projections. Artificial Intelligence will think a few steps ahead of surveillance targets. Hypothetically, if the 2011 Arab revolt had been delayed by three or four years, its key proponents might have been pacified in advance.

The U.S. Information Awareness Office (IAO) went a step further with its Futures Markets Applied to Prediction (FutureMAP) program. FutureMAP simulated market-based trading patterns, political instability, threats to national security, and other disruptive events in advance. "In layman's terms, FutureMAP would be a website that allowed people to bet on when a terrorist attack would occur." The federal government would have acted as the bookie.

An outraged U.S. Senate subsequently shelved the FutureMAP program—at least from public view!⁴⁰ In a world dependent on accurate anticipatory intelligence, FutureMAP and its de-

Figure 7. USARNORTH Force Array



Source: USARNORTH/ Joint Force Land Component Command (JFLCC) Overview/CONPLAN 3501 "Earthquake" Planning Considerations.

rivatives would be highly valuable tools in the decision-making process.

The brewing global middle class revolt may have greater ramifications than mere demands over merit, equality and liberty. The mobs in Cairo, Tunis, Athens and London may have actually preempted or hastened the emergence of a Total Surveillance Society. Much depends on how events transpire within the next few months. If chaos reigns in place of liberty, then governments have the means to tackle them. This is the legacy of 9/11.

The U.S. government, for one, has reportedly drawn up a CONPLAN 3501 and 3502 to deal with such exigencies. According to Globalsecurity.org:

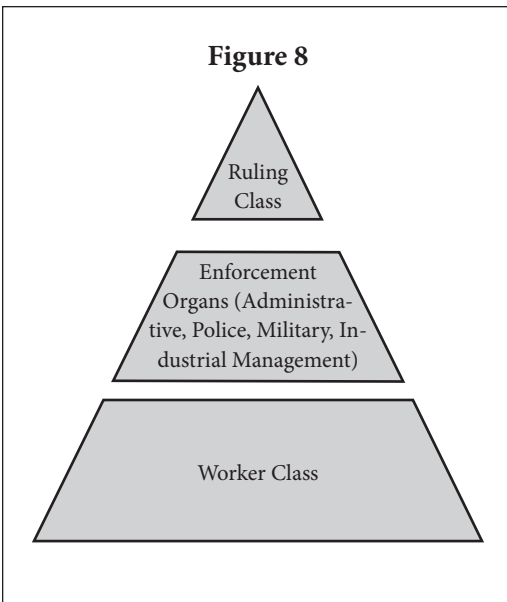
Tasks performed by military forces

may include joint patrolling with law enforcement officers; securing key buildings, memorials, intersections and bridges; and acting as a quick reaction force.⁴¹

Contingency management forces worldwide may be martialled to preempt a Tahrir Square-type contagion.

If the global middle class fails to wrench concessions for a more equitable social contract, the need to maintain order and security may trump other considerations. This will lead to further social disparities. Sociologists in the distant future may view this new order as yet another totalitarian experiment. A minimalist three-tiered social hierarchy, like the one depicted in Figure 8, may emerge.

Figure 8



Under this paradigm, social strata would be simplified to serve militarized societies. There will be no Hazare-type ombudsmen to act as checks and balances. The chaos and horrors of the previous order will be endlessly repeated as a citizen pacification propaganda tool.

It may be a new order of sorts, but its foundations were laid by the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. Conditions today are dangerously paralleling the Great Depression, which macerated democracies in favour of martial societies. Greece, the font of democracy, sacked a few ranking generals in 2011 to prevent a possible military coup.⁴²

There will, however, be one notable difference between the totalitarian experiments of the past and the future society. For the first time in history, an ICT-enabled Panopticon is close to technological fruition. It may have the capacity to track individual human actions throughout the planet. The future world may resemble an electronic Gulag archipelago without costly borders or barbed wires.

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