Preface

Dr. Michiel S. de Vries

President of International Association of Schools and Institutes in Administration (IASIA)

It is my honor and pleasure to write this preface to this book on Strategy and Governance in Arab Countries. This is not only in my capacity as president of the International Association of Schools and Institutes in Administration (IASIA), but also on behalf of my good Moroccan friend and colleague, Mohamed Harakat, and because the subject this book addresses is of real importance.

If you would have asked 25 years ago where the main developments take place in terms of radical changes in government, I would have said Central and Eastern Europe, because of its transition from a centrally led economy to a free market economy. If you would ask the same question 20 years ago, the answer would have been South Africa with its fundamental regime change from apartheid to democracy. Afterwards came the Balkan region with its ethnic and religious-based civil wars, and nowadays it is certainly the Mena-region, that is, the Middle East and Northern Africa.

The rapid changes in this region, the devastating civil wars in some parts of it, and the political unrest with latent revolutionary threats in other countries, make one not only deeply worry about humanity and humanitarian values, but also make one wonder which direction the changes will take.
At the beginning, nobody had a clue and still hardly anyone knows. There is even a dispute when it all began. Was it the self-immolating street vendor in Tunisia in 2010 that set it all off? Alternatively, the events – now known under the label of the Arab Spring – could already have found their causes at the same time all the other radical changes mentioned above also took place. The first determinants might already have become manifest in the 1990s, with the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq and the subsequent Gulf war. The Iraqi regime led by Saddam Hussain was defeated, but the region as a whole became unstable.

Few people understand the underlying causes of the uprisings taking place in the Mena-region. The causes are not only to be founding the lack of democracy. Of equal importance are also the long-term demographic and geo-political developments, religious antagonisms, socio-economic inequality, and an interference of outside world powers based solely on their self-interest and their power and influence in the region, not bothered by any moral vision.

Problematic is that still nobody really seems to know where it will all end. Most of the analyses address the new power constellation in the Mena-region and how to deal with that. What to do in order for the region to become stable and to be capacitated to deal with the long-term issues is a still neglected question.

This book is important in that it addresses this question. It urges for the establishment of knowledge-institutes. Much money is spent on the military, but it might be more helpful and profitable, to invest a fraction of that money in such think-tanks. The return on investment from theoretical and empirical analyses from such think-tanks and the subsequent advice could be much larger, regarding the resolution of the wicked problems these societies face, than any military action can ever achieve. In the end thinking, rethinking, reflecting, understanding and consequently communicating the results, is the most effective tool to improve adverse developments.
It is the answer of Public Administration scholars to the mostly politically oriented analyses, in terms of power and interests, which too often dominate strategic thinking. It also fits in a long and respectable tradition of scholars who promote such professionalism. Already in 1945, Herbert Simon published his theory of 'administrative behavior', and he became one of the main advocates especially of procedural rationality, although he recognized the limitations in practice. In 1948, Harold Lasswell, one of the founders of policy sciences, promoted such analyses by pointing to the need of making rational judgments on policy questions. From the 1960s onward, YehezkelDror advocated a 'scientific' approach in policy analysis, and Daniel Belland Donald Campbell promoted the scientific and rational approach to problem-solving in the 1970s. Anthony Giddens called the trust in professionals a bargain with modernity, which seems only to increase. Nowadays, other scholars like Weiss and Brint point at the growing complexity of social problems necessitating such development.

Consequently, think-ranks have emerged all over the world to assist governments in making more effective policies by developing evidence-based policies. Through their analyses, they contribute to the well-being of all. It is therefore, that this book, fitting in with this tradition, learning from international experiences and applying this knowledge to further the development of think-tanks in the Mena-region, is an important book.