

Review Article

The Arab spring: Its origins, evolution and consequences... four years on

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Abstract: The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have long been laden with tensions and instabilities. However, the recent Arab Uprisings, better known as the Arab Spring, have intensified volatility, turning this “hot-spot” into a veritable tinderbox whose potential for explosion has far-reaching national, regional and global implications. This review analyses and describes the events leading to the Arab Spring. It also examines the impacts and ramifications of the upheavals on the national, regional and international levels. The review argues that the Arab Spring has both changed and charged some of the region’s thorniest problems - from the rise of political Islam to civil wars to rivalries between key regional powers. It raises important questions concerning the impact of the Arab Spring: were these uprisings a deceptive and transient phase of popular anger, or were they a genuine harbinger leading to genuine democratic transition? The review focuses also on the online networking and digital technologies as effective methods of aggregate activism to by-pass state owned media. Finally, the review offers an assessment of whether MENA is destined for a political impasse or that political wisdom and prudence will prevail and save the region from the brink of destruction.

Keywords: Arab awakening; Arab Spring; democratisation; Islamism; social media.

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Abstrak: Negara-negara di Timur Tengah dan Afrika Utara (MENA) telah lama dibebani dengan tekanan dan ketidakstabilan. Namun begitu, kebangkitan Arab baru-baru ini, yang lebih dikenali dengan nama Arab Spring, telah dirombak, menjadikannya sesuatu yang menggugat kestabilan negara, yang berkemungkinan untuk meletus serta mengakibatkan impak meluas ke seluruh negara, serantau dan seluruh dunia. Kertas kerja ini menganalisis dan menerangkan acara-acara yang menjurus kepada Arab Spring. Ia juga melihat kepada impak dan kesan pergolakan terhadap seluruh negara, serantau dan antarabangsa. Kertas kerja ini juga membincangkan tentang bagaimana Arab Spring telah mengubah dan mengenakan beberapa masalah yang rumit - daripada kebangkitan politik Islam kepada peperangan saudara, dan seterusnya persaingan antara kuasa-kuasa utama serantau. Ia juga turut menimbulkan persoalan yang penting mengenai impak Arab Spring: Adakah kebangkitan ini merupakan satu muslihat dan bahana kemarahan sementara, ataupun adakah mereka merupakan petanda yang benar yang lebih menjurus kepada peralihan demokratik yang tulen? Kertas kerja ini juga memberikan tumpuan kepada jaringan atas talian dan teknologi digital sebagai metod yang berkesan untuk menyemarakkan aktivisme terhadap media milik negara. Akhir sekali, kertas kerja ini memberikan satu penilaian samaada MENA ditakdirkan untuk kebuntuan politik atau samaada kebijaksanaan politik; serta MENA berhemah akan menang dalam menyelamatkan rantau ini daripada ambang pergolakan.

Kata Kunci: Arab spring; kebangkitan Arab; pendemokrasian; pengislaman; media sosial.

Beyond the Arab spring: Authoritarianism and democratization in the Arab world. By Rex Brynen, Pete W. Moore, Bassel F. Salloukh, & Marie-Joëlle Zahar. Boulder. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012, pp. 349, ISBN: 978-1-58826-878-5.

Inside Egypt: The road to revolution in the land of the pharaohs. By John R. Bradley. London: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2012. pp. 272, ISBN: 978-0-230-12066-2.

Islamist politics in the Middle East: Movements and change. Edited by Samer S. Shehata. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. 2012. ISBN: 978-0-415-78362-0.

Islamist radicalisation in North Africa. Edited by George Joffé. London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 217, ISBN: 978-0415-58806-5.

Routledge handbook of the Arab spring: Rethinking democratization. Edited by Larbi Sadiki. London and New York: Routledge, 2015, pp. 688, ISBN: 978-0-415-52391-2.

The Arab awakening: Islam and the new Middle East. By Tariq Ramadan. London: Allen Lane, 2012, pp. 273. ISBN: 978-1-84-614650-3.

The Arab spring, democracy and security: Domestic and international ramifications. Edited by Efraim Inbar. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014, pp. 184, ISBN: 978-1-13-881976-4.

The battle for the Arab spring: Revolution, counter-revolution and the making of a new era. By Lin Noueihed and Alex Warren. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012, pp. 350, ISBN: 978-0-300-18086-2.

The dying Sahara: US imperialism and terror in North Africa. By Jeremy Keenan. London: Pluto Press, 2013, pp. 326, ISBN: 978-0-7453-2961-1.

The Sharia state: Arab spring and democratisation. By Bassam Tibi. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013, pp. 242, ISBN: 978-0-415-66217-8.

Will the Middle East implode? By Mohammed Ayoob. Oxford: Polity Press, 2014, pp. 120, ISBN: 978-0745679259.

In early 2011 came the seismic events of the Arab Spring. The Arab Awakening/Arab Spring is a concept denoting a revolutionary sweeping tide of demonstrations, protests and other forms of opposition to the authorities (both violent and non-violent), riot and protracted civil wars in the Arab territories which started on December 18, 2010. Up to this time, rulers in some parts of the Arab world such as Tunisia, Egypt (twice), Libya and Yemen have been dethroned from the mantle of leadership; civil rebellions have erupted in countries like Syria and Bahrain; major protests to show dissatisfactions with the government have broken out in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Sudan; and similar but small scale protests also engulfed places like Mauritania, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Western Sahara, and the Palestinian territories. Similar occurrences outside of the Arab

territories included among others, protests in Iranian Khuzestan by the non-majority Arabs in April 2011 and border skirmishes in Israel in May 2011. The return of the remnant of weapons and Tuareg fighters from the Libyan civil war stocked a protracting conflict which scholars described as “fallout” from the Arab Spring in Maghreb. The sectarian skirmishes in Lebanon were the result of the consequential effect of violence caused by the Syrian political rebellion and thus the Middle East Arab Spring.

The protests in all the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries have shown or shared similar methods. To some extent, the civil resistance showed similar patterns involving strikes, demonstrations, marches and rallies, as much as the effective use of social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the like to organise, communicate and create awareness in the face of the state attempt at crackdown and Internet censorship.

Most of the demonstrations that emanated from the Arab Spring have been met with violent crackdown from state machineries as well as from government created militias and counter demonstrators. These clampdowns had been responded to with violence from the people who staged the protest in some instances. A major slogan of those who staged demonstrations has been *al-sha‘b yurīdu isqāṭ al-niẓām* (“the people want to bring down the regime”).

Some spectators have made comparative analyses between the intifada or resistance in the MENA and the revolutions of 1989 (also known as the “Autumn of Nations”) that spread through Eastern Europe. The comparisons were made in terms of the scale of the revolutions and their significance after most communist regimes began collapsing in a domino effect under pressure from popular mass protests. In a short period of time, most countries in the former communist bloc adopted political pluralism and market economy. However, the events in MENA did not move in a linear direction. Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen entered an uncertain transition period; Syria and Libya were drawn into a civil conflict; while the wealthy monarchies of the Gulf remained largely untouched by the events. The use of the term “Arab Spring” has since been criticised for being inaccurate and simplistic. This review article will focus on the origins, evolution and consequences of the Arab Spring as reflected in the books reviewed.

Origin and genesis of the term

All the authors of the books selected for this review article use the term “Arab Spring”. The exception is Tariq Ramadan who in *The Arab Awakening: Islam and the New Middle East* uses the term “Awakening” instead, which conveys an Islamic connotation to the term. In the book, Ramadan focuses on the role of Islam as a reference in the current process of Arab uprising. He emphasises two main themes: the compatibility of Islam with democratic pluralism and religious diversity and the role of Islamist parties and societies after liberation from dictatorship. He refers to this process as “awakening” (p. 79) and expounds a reformist Islamism, one that purports to respect democracy, women’s rights and the rule of law. His doctrine is grounded in the work of his maternal grandfather Hassan al Banna.

“Arab Spring” is generally believed to have been caused by the way and manner by which rulers ran the administrative affairs of local governments, though others have attributed it to the general income inequality. Several antecedents have led to the protests, including factors like authoritarianism, or absolute monarchic system of administration, violations of inalienable rights of citizens, political mismanagement and nepotism, economic downturn, unemployment, acute poverty, and a number of demographic structural aspects like a considerable percentage of educated but disgruntled youth within the population. The 2009-2010 Iranian election protests was another factor that contributed to the Arab Spring. The Kyrgyz Revolution of 2010 might also have served as an additional factor affecting its beginning.

Generally, the unequal distribution of the wealth of nations and its concentration in the hands of a few elements in the society, particularly those who control power for a very long time; inadequate openness in the redistribution of the societal wealth, corruption, nepotism, and the constant struggle by the youth to change the status quo were the main impetus for the Arab Spring. Constant inflation of the prices of food and global hunger rates had also been major factors, as they included threats to food security the world over and prices which nearly reached the levels of the 2007-2008 global food price crises. In contemporary time, the increases in the cost of living standards and education rates, as well as the increased level of tertiary education, have led to an improved Human Development Index in the countries concerned. The disparity

between rising aspirations and inadequate government reform policies may have been a contributing factor in all of the uprisings.

Most of the Internet-savvy young users have persistently, over the years, been viewing dictatorial rulers and absolute monarchies as anachronisms or error in time and place. Because of their role in the upheavals, Al-Najma Zidjaly of Oman University described the upheavals in the Arab world as “youthquake”, to indicate the prominent role of the younger generation in the uprisings.

Developments leading to turbulence

The contemporary wave of turmoil was not a completely new evolution, resulting in parts from the hustle of dissenting revolutionaries as well as members of an array of social and union organisations that had been in the forefront for many years in countries like Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt and so many other states in this aspect, as well as in the Maghreb. Rebellions had been happening in the Arab world dating back to 1800s. However, only recently have these uprisings and confrontations been transformed from fighting alien rulers or colonial resistance to the Arab state themselves. The popular shake-up in the summer of 2011 pointed to the end of the old facet of national emancipation from colonialism, colonial domination and subjugation; now the revolution is internally directed at the major issues bedeviling the Arab world. Tunisia in particular has experienced a series of internal strife for the past five consecutive years, the most prominent taking place in the resource drilling area of Gafsa in 2008, in which demonstrations persisted for several months.

The resistance movements took various forms which included rallies, sit-ins, and strikes. The Egyptian labour movement had been vibrant for many years for staging several industrial actions since 2004. One significant revolt was an effort of worker’s industrial action on April 6, 2008 at the government-owned textile manufacturing plants of al-Mahalla al-Kubra, just outside the state capital, Cairo. The idea for this kind of uprising expanded everywhere in the country, popularised by computer-literate young age-working class and their allies among middle-class college students. A social media related Facebook page, put forward to advance the strike, lured many followers. The government took measures to stop the strike using several methods like infiltration and riot police, and while the government was, to some extent, successful in averting a strike, protesters formed the “6 April

committee” of youths and labour revolutionaries, which became one of the biggest forces advocating the anti-Mubarak riots on January 25 in the historic Tahrir Square.

The pre-revolutionary era was coherently described and analysed by John R. Bradley in a book titled *Inside Egypt: The Road to Revolution in the Land of Pharaohs*. Although the first edition of the book came out before the events of the Arab Spring, Bradley talked about the darkening mood on the Egyptian street and that a revolution was the only possible culmination of the Mubarak regime’s descent into tyranny. The book’s usefulness, in its original form, lies in its capturing the moment of pre-revolutionary change; pinpointing the social, religious, economic, and political forces in Egypt on the cusp of revolution; and showing how the country’s recent history led to a military coup that meant the army would continue to play a dominant role in the country’s politics for the foreseeable future, as it had since the coup that brought them to power in 1952. Bradley’s prophecy had materialised with the ouster of elected president Mohamed Morsi in July 2013 by the army.

If John R. Bradley focuses on the Egyptian trajectory, in *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism and Democratization in the Arab World*, Rex Brynen et al. study the trajectories of authoritarian rule and reform in the Arab world. They turn their focus to the thematic and theoretical issues in the study of Arab dictatorship, reform, democratisation, and political transition. They argue that whatever the ultimate outcome of the popular mobilisation, uprisings, and regime transitions that shook the Arab World in 2011, there is little doubt that the upheavals marked a historic transformation in the political directions of the region. Authoritarian regimes that once seemed unchallengeable had been challenged and many of them found to be much less formidable than their citizens once feared. Dictators who once seemed to assume a lifetime hold on power had found themselves in exile, on trial, or dead at the hands of victorious rebels. Corruption, nepotism, cronyism, and injustice had been the targets of mass protests. Appeals for dignity, human rights, and democracy had been among the protesters’ most prominent slogans. The book is a timely summary of the found wisdom that came out of studies of Middle East politics in the run-up to the Arab Spring. It does particularly well at updating the readers on the state of knowledge in the discipline of Middle East politics. As an assessment of the root of the Arab Spring, it does not do quite as well. There are

times when the book sounds like an extended literature review rather than a causal contribution to our understanding of the Arab Spring. The strengths of this book include the authors' deep insight into political theories of authoritarianism and democracy as well as their detailed and informative summaries of the Arab Spring movement.

The geopolitical implications of the dissents have drawn worldwide reactions, including the proposal that a few prominent dissenters be designated for the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize. Tawakkol Karman from Yemen was one of the three laureates of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize for her role in the Arab Spring. In December 2011, Time Magazine named "The Protester" its "Individual of the Year".

In *The Battle for the Arab Spring: Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era*, Lin Noueihed and Alex Warren devote a large portion of their book to study the reasons, developments and effects of the Arab revolts in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen and Syria, individually. This book offers the most far reaching analysis of the events. It explains the economic and political roots of the Arab Spring, assesses what has been accomplished so far, and considers the numerous stumbling blocks confronting the Arab nations as they try to shape their futures.

Most of the books of this review share the common features of detailing the factors which ultimately triggered the Arab Spring: the deep-seated resentment of the aging Arab dictatorship, anger at the brutality of the security apparatus, high rate of unemployment, rising prices, and corruption and nepotism that followed the privatisation of state assets in some countries. What added to the people's anger was the attempt by some of the dictators to groom and prepare their children to succeed them in office. Simultaneous with the Arab Spring, dissents erupted in different parts of the region, some tended to be violent, and some leading to political changes. The latest of these outbursts took place in Sudan in late September 2013, following the government's decision to abolish subsidies on fuel. The decision resulted in massive street riots and demonstrations. The government forces ruthlessly quashed the protests.

Though the upheavals took place in predominantly Arab societies, global media noted the part played by minority groups in a number of Arab nations. For instance, in Tunisia, the Jewish minority joined the

opposition. In Egypt, the Coptic minority had criticised the Mubarak government for its inability to stifle Islamic radicals who assaulted the Coptic group. The possibility of these fanatic gatherings assuming control after the fall of Mubarak forced most Copts to keep away from the protests, with then-Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria calling for the protests to stop. The international media indicated only a few Copts joined the protests. Since the uprisings and insurgencies started first in North Africa before spreading to Asian Arab nations, the Berbers of Libya took part in the revolts and battled under the Berber platforms. A few Berbers in North Africa saw the revolution as a resurrected form of Berber Spring. In Morocco, a law passed on July 1, 2011 made Amazigh an official language alongside Arabic. In Northern Sudan, many non-Arab Darfuris joined protest against the government, while in Iraq and Syria, the ethnic Kurdish minority partook in protests against the administration.

Outcomes and impact of the Arab spring

The regional turmoil has not been restricted to nations of the Arab world but has had a domino effect elsewhere. The early uprisings in North Africa were encouraged by the 2009-2010 uprisings in Iran and then it swept through the MENA region; in the nations of the neighbouring South Caucasus - specifically Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia - and a few nations in Europe, notably Albania, Croatia, and Spain; nations in sub-Saharan Africa, including Burkina Faso, and Uganda; and nations in different parts of Asia, including the Maldives and the People's Republic of China, where demonstrators and resistance figures were emboldened by the illustrations of Tunisia and Egypt to arrange their own dissents. The dissents in the Maldives prompted the resignation of the President. The offer of statehood for Palestine at the UN on September 23, 2011 is likewise viewed as drawing motivation from the Arab Spring after years of fizzled and inconclusive negotiations with Israel. In the West Bank, schools and government offices were closed to permit demonstrations supporting the UN membership offer in Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nablus and Hebron; emulating same peaceful riots tactics in other Arab nations. The October 15 2011 worldwide dissents and the "Occupy Wall Street" development, which began in the United States and then spread to Asia and Europe, drew immediate spark from the Arab Spring, with coordinators asking US subjects "Are you prepared for a *Tahrir* moment?" The protesters had focused on utilising the "Arab Spring

strategy” to accomplish their objectives of checking corporate power and control in Western governments. Likewise, the “Occupy Nigeria” riots started the day after Goodluck Jonathan reported the scrap of the fuel appropriation in oil-rich Nigeria on January 1, 2012, and this development was inspired by the Arab people revolt. The Tunisian upheaval also brought about critical changes to the intersection of art and politics in post-2011 Tunisia. Tunisian society is sharply polarised today between secularists and Islamists. In Egypt, polarisation is even more pronounced following the ousting of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi by the army in July 2013. A highly volatile situation is developing now in Egypt. Iraq has descended into a lawless sectarian hell. The situation in Libya is confused and quite disturbing. Nobody knows exactly what is happening in Tripoli. On one occasion one armed militia abducted the Prime Minister.

Waves of precariousness have now moved south from North Africa to the Western Sahel region. Weapons from the 2011 civil war in Libya moved quickly all through the area, especially Chad, Niger, and into Mali when in April-May 2012, agitators proclaimed sovereignty in the northern part of Mali. Proxies were attracted from abroad to battle on both sides, regionalising the effect of the clash. Despite the fact that the French military intercession with the assistance of the US had checked the rebels’ aspirations, the circumstances remain unstable. The expansion of instability from north to south has pushed North Africa and the Sahel district into features as another front in the “Worldwide War on Terror”.

In *The Dying Sahara: US Government and Terror in Africa*, Jeremy Keenan uncovered conspiracy between the US and Algeria to advocate US intervention in the Saharan region. Keenan, who is viewed as the West’s most learned source on the Tuareg and Southern Saharan society, is lauded for analyzing so perceptively how the US Empire misuses local outbursts to support military involvement. Western intervention against Islamist insurrection in Mali and savagery in Algeria has pushed North Africa into the foray of another front in the “Worldwide War on Terror”. Keenan uncovers how the Pentagon’s assignment of the district as a “Dread Zone” has decimated the lives and employments of a large number of local people. In this new book, he inspects the US “attack” of the Sahel, and indicates how harsh regional regimes, getting money and support from the US have instigated Tuareg uprisings in both Niger

and Mali. Multinationals seized Tuareg terrains for uranium supported by puppeteers in Washington, Algeria and Europe. Those who read this depressing story will be shocked at both the nature and consequences of the lies and deceptions that have been perpetrated by the West - notably the US, the EU, the UK and France - and its main proxy power in the region, Algeria, in the name of the ubiquitous Global War On Terror (GWOT) or, as President Obama now prefers to call it, the “Long War”. This volume raises serious questions about the extent to which government counterterrorism policies are invariably nothing more than a cover for State terrorism, while Al Qaeda is revealed as something very different from what is portrayed to the public by Western governments and their intelligence services.

In *Islamist Radicalization in North Africa: Politics and Process*, George Joffé shifts attention from contemporary issues and analytical approaches to the phenomenon of radicalisation in the Maghreb. His work meshes well with the work of Keenan. Contemporary events in the Islamic world dominate the headlines and emphasise the crises of the MENA. In this environment of political extremism and violence, much attention has been focused on the “radicalisation” as the prime factor behind such courses of action, together with a confidence that those who are radicalised embody an illogical deviation from the normally accepted patterns of social and political behaviour. This book shifts attention to the aspect of radicalisation in Maghreb. Taking an overall approach to discuss the matter, it takes a serious look at the processes that lead to radicalisation, rather than the often violent outcomes. At the same time, the ten chapters extend the discussion, historically and conceptually, ahead of the preoccupations of current years, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of an intricate individual and collective process that has represented an enduring challenge to prevailing political, social and, on occasion, economic measures.

In its analyses, the book enshrines the concepts of radicalisation and extremism. The first is treated as the process of alienation from a hegemonic discourse which is usually associated with the legitimisation of the state but also those of dominant political elites within it - and the second as the active adoption of an ideology and associated proxies to challenge the state and its elites, usually through violence. It is clear, nonetheless, that the two concepts of radicalisation and extremism do approximate each other, such that one could be the genesis of the other.

Indeed, this is frequently the dominant normative view that the states feel justified in penalising both under similar terms. There would appear to be an obvious correlation, if not interlinking, of the two concepts. This book was written before the events of the Arab Spring of 2011 took place or was even anticipated, which have changed the face of North Africa. Nonetheless, the events it describes and analyses are crucial to any attempt to evaluate the significance of what has now occurred. Even though it is primarily concerned with Islamist radicalisation and extremism - and political Islam has been noticeable during recent events by its absence - there is no doubt that Islamist movements will play an important role in the political developments of recent events. Against that background, the contents of the book will be essential for a proper understanding of the future of North Africa itself. With contributions from academics and policy-makers within and outside the region, the book is a comprehensive investigation of Islamist Radicalisation. As such, it will be of great interest to academics and students investigating North Africa and terrorism, as well as specialists in radicalism and extremism.

One major impact of the Arab Spring is the ensuing instability created by a widening Islamist - secular divide. Hopes for a smooth move to stable fair frameworks were immediately dashed, as profound divisions rose over new constitutions and the rate and type of change. In Egypt, Tunisia and Libya specifically, the general public is strongly divided into Islamist and secular camps that battled intensely over the role of Islam in governmental issues and society. Democratically elected Egyptian leader Mohamed Morsi was ousted from power within less than a year of his election, plunging Egypt into deep polarisation. The coalition of *En-Nahda* with other parties in Tunisia staggered under its own heavy weight. In Libya, unbridled armed militias are destabilising the country.

Samer S. Shehata's edited volume *Islamist Politics in the Middle East: Movements and Change* tackles a number of important questions by examining some of the region's most important Islamist movements. There is expansive agreement on the imperativeness of political Islam, but far less consensus on its character, the explanations behind Islamists' prosperity, the part of Islamist developments in household and universal undertakings, or what these developments predict for what's to come. Eleven sections by distinguished researchers in the field inspect the

Egyptian Freedom and Justice Party, Hamas, Hizbullah, Morocco's Equity and Generosity, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, the Sunni Uprising in Iraq and Islamist agendas in Turkey and Iran.

The points of focus in this volume incorporate informal organisations and social welfare procurement, Islamist gatherings as resistance performers, Islamist appointive interests, the crossing point of Islam and national liberation battles, the part of religion in Islamist governmental issues, and Islam and state governmental issues in Iran, in addition to a number of different themes. The dramatic political events of the Arab Spring that took place in the Arab world in 2011 led some observers to mistakenly conclude that Islamist politics in the Middle East was in decline. After all, Islamist movements were not behind the mass uprising that brought down Zein Al-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, who spent almost 23 years as president. Similarly, the organisers of the January 25, 2011 protests that led to Hosni Mubarak's ouster in Egypt were largely liberal, Internet savvy, youth activists, not the Muslim Brotherhood. The same can also be said of the uprisings that shook Libya, Yemen, Syria and other parts of the Arab world.

Five years after the beginning of the Arab uprisings, however, there can be no doubt about the importance of Islamist politics in the region. Over the MENA, Islamists are fast growing. In October 2011, the Islamist *En Nahda* Party won nearly forty percent of the vote in elections for Tunisia's Constituent Assembly, the first elections since Ben Ali's departure. A month later, Morocco's Islamist Justice and Development Party secured a plurality of the vote in the country's first elections after the Moroccan King instituted constitutional reforms. In Egypt's first legislative elections which took place after President Mubarak was overthrown, opposition Islamist parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood's newly established Freedom and Justice Party and the Salafi Islamist Alliance - won more than seventy percent of parliamentary seats. Earlier, in June 2011, Recip Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party became the first Turkish Party in modern history to win three consecutive parliamentary elections with an increasing percentage of the vote in each election. This volume presents authentic inquiry on a number of Islamist movements and their involvement in politics in countries like Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran, adding to theoretical treatments of the issue. The chapters mirror the diversity of Islamist politics and address a number

of themes. However, as the editor asserts, the volume does not aspire to provide a comprehensive account of the Islamist involvement in the politics of the Middle East.

In sharp contrast to Shehata's book, Bassam Tibi in the *Sharia State: Arab Spring and Democratization* challenges the unchecked assumption that the seizure of leadership by Islamists (in Egypt and Tunisia) is part of the democratisation of the MENA, providing a new perspective on the relationship between the Arab Spring and democratisation. In contrast to the prevailing view which sees the Arab Spring as a revolution, Tibi argues that the phenomenon has neither been a spring, nor a revolution. To him, the term Arab Spring, connotes a just rebellion that led to toppling dictators and authoritarian rulers.

On yet another note, in the *Arab Spring, Democracy and Security: Domestic and International Ramifications*, Efraim Inbar analysed the political, economic and strategic dimensions of the Arab Spring. The book argues that while it is too early to offer a definitive analysis of the impact of what has happened, the trajectory of the events indicates regime changes in several states, containment of political unrest in most states, increased Islamic tendencies, centrifugal tendencies in a number of political units and deterioration of economic conditions. The volume presents an initial assessment by a selected group of Israeli scholars of the implication of the Arab Spring. The chapters focus on important issues such as democratisation, the role of economic factors in political change and the explanation for variations in regime stability in the MENA. Taking an international relations perspective, the book not only examines the evolving regional balance, but also explores the link between external and internal politics and the implications of terrorism for regional security. The chapters also address the implications of the Arab Spring for Israel and its chances of existing peacefully in the region.

Larbi Sadiki in *Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring: Rethinking Democratization* seeks to provide a departure point for ongoing discussion of a fluid phenomenon on a plethora of topics, including: contexts and contests of democratisation, the sweep of the Arab Spring, Egypt, women and the Arab Spring, agents of change and the technology of protest, impact of the Arab Spring in the wider MENA and further afield. Collating a wide array of viewpoints, specialisms,

biases, and degrees of proximity and distance from events that shook the MENA to its core, the *Handbook* is written with the readers in mind, to provide students, practitioners, diplomats, policy-makers and lay readers with contextualisation and knowledge, and to set the stage for further discussion on the Arab Spring.

In *Will the Middle East Implode?* Mohammed Ayoob lucidly and forcefully discusses three key themes: the derailing of Egypt's democratic transition, the regional geopolitics of the Syrian conflict, and the dance between Islamism and democracy. He contends that the July 2013 coup that ousted Morsi from power was a catastrophe for Egyptian democracy, the Arab Spring's "most dramatic and possibly irreversible setback" (p. 147). Indeed, given the repression against the Muslim Brotherhood since the coup, including massacres of peaceful demonstrators, "it may not be too far-fetched to imagine the emergence of an al-Qaeda on the Nile" (p. 35). In bringing down a democratically elected president, Egyptian liberals and the military have shown striking political immaturity and impatience. The coup was a short-cut, one that aborted Egypt's democratic transition (p. 23).

International reactions

Protests in many Arab states afflicted by the Arab Spring have called for a widespread support from the international community while repressive government responses have been globally condemned. In the case of the protests of the people of Bahrain, Morocco, and Syria, the global response has been to some extent more nuanced. Some analysts have blamed Western powers and media, particularly France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, of pretense in the way and manner in which they have responded to the Arab Spring. Contemporary analysts, like Noam Chomsky, blamed the Obama administration for trying to suppress the revolutionary wave and prevent popular democratisation attempts in the MENA.

Some scholars, notably Mohamed Ayoob, have contended that the range of international reactions to the events in the MENA demonstrate hypocrisy on the part of "the free world", charging that Western reactions to the uprisings, particularly in Egypt and Tunisia, were mere expressions of cynicisms. Ayoob was particularly critical of the attitude of Obama, who, when asked if he considered Hosni Mubarak to be an "authoritarian ruler", prior to the popular revolt in Egypt, replied that he

tended “not to use labels for folks”, calling Mubarak “a stalwart ally in many respects to the USA,” adding that Mubarak “has been a force of stability and good in the region” (p. 73).

The army of Yemeni president Salih massacred hundreds of Yemenis who were staging largely peaceful demonstrations. The United States approach, and that of the European Union, was relatively sluggish in supporting the Yemeni protests compared to their swift and decisive backing of Libyan protesters (Noueihed & Warren, p. 127). During the international operation in Libya, Noueihed and Warren called NATO’s concern for Libyans “deeply hypocritical... when they ignore or promote same repression in Bahrain” (p. 129).

Western powers were not the only targets of criticisms for their lukewarm reactions to the suppression of the Arab Spring. Shehata et al. observed that Hizbullah chief, Hassan Nasserallah’s response to the revolts was hypocritical as he supported Shi’ite protesters in Egypt and Bahrain but he backed the “murderous shi’i government in Syria” against peaceful demonstrators (p. 217). The authors of the same volume criticised the government of Iran for its harsh criticism of Egypt and Bahrain, but virtually ignoring Bashar al-Assad’s violent suppression of Syrian protesters (p. 228).

Generally, international reactions to the Arab Spring were variable, including calls for restraint and more expanded civil liberties and human rights. While Western leaders criticised their regional foes in the MENA countries, they eschewed openly criticising their regional allies.

Was Arab Spring a reaction to the forces of globalisation? Efraim Inbar provided a cogent explanation which suggested that the Arab Spring was not a unified revolution on the model of East Europe in the late 1980s, but a series of national uprisings in response to national and regional-international socio-economic grievances. Those events were fuelled by purely national concerns and did not reflect a pan-Arab or pan-Islamic character; and that they are devoid of any overarching ideology or global concerns (pp. 98-99).

On the international economic front, international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund, maintained that oil prices were possibly increased higher than the initial forecast because of the crisis in the MENA area. Beginning in 2010, worldwide investors

have altogether decreased their activities in that region, leading to substantial decreases in domestic stock values. Dramatic collapse in oil prices in early 2015 has added to the economic worries within the MENA.

Social media and Arab spring

In the wake of the Arab Spring, much attention has been focused on the concept of democracy and collective activism, which continues to unfold before the Western eyes across mass media. Almost all the books of this review article have emphasised how essential had been, the role of online networking and digital technologies in permitting citizens inside the territories influenced by “the Arab Spring” as a method for aggregate activism to go around or bypass state-owned media channels. Public polls showed that nine out of ten Egyptians and Tunisians used social media, like Facebook, to coordinate riots and spread enlightenment. Noueihed and Warren reported that 28% of Egyptians and 29% of Tunisians in one survey argued that intercepting Facebook largely crippled and/or obstructed communication. The effect of online networking on political activism amid the Arab Spring has received substantial coverage.

A few observers have contended that digital technologies and different other ways of communication-videos, mobile phones, websites, photographs and text messages- have achieved the idea of an “electronic democracy” in parts of the MENA influenced by the uprisings. Others have asserted that keeping in mind the end goal to comprehend the part of online networking amid the Arab Spring, it should first be understood that in connection with the high rates of unemployment and degenerate political regimes that prompted dissent movement as a new development inside the region.

The transformations that were begun on Facebook were quickly contained ruthlessly by secret police in those nations, to such an extent that in Egypt a conspicuous activist group all the time had “Don’t utilize Facebook or Twitter” on the front and back of their revolutionary material. Additional proof that proposes an essential part of social networking on the uprisings is that social media use increased to more than double in Arab nations amidst the dissents. Some studies have demonstrated how collective intelligence and dynamics of the collectivity in participatory means, for example, online networking, has the force to help an aggregate

activity to instigate a political change. This inflow of social networking usage shows the sort of individuals that were basically fueling the Arab Spring. Youngsters led the rebellions of the different Arab nations by utilising the new era's capacities of person-to-person communication to spread the message of uprising to not just other Arab countries but to other countries throughout the world. It has been contended that audio visual means, such as television, particularly the constant live broadcast by Al Jazeera and the sporadic live broadcast by BBC News and others, were very supportive of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. The cameras gave full coverage and help to stop mass clampdown by the Egyptian government against the protesters in *Tahrir* Square, and ignored live coverage of the brutal developments in Libya.

The capacity of dissenters to center their demonstrations on a restricted area and to be televised live was crucial in Egypt, yet was unrealistic in Libya, Bahrain and Syria. Diverse types of media, for example, picture and video were additionally used to depict the information. Pictures surfaced that demonstrated live happenings, which delineated what was going on inside the Arab countries. The visual media that spread all through the Internet portrayed not just singular moments but also demonstrated the Arab countries' history, and the transformation that was to come. Through social networking, the goals of rebel groups, and also the current circumstances in every nation had worldwide focus. It is still a source of controversy whether or not social networking acted as an essential impetus for the Arab Spring to pick up force and turn into a globally perceived situation. Notwithstanding, it has still assumed a vital role in the movement. In the *Battle for the Arab Spring*, invariably all the authors described how television taboos had been broken and the cults of personality had been eroded. Once easily isolated and crushed, labour movements increasingly teamed up with the new generation of dissident bloggers who harnessed the Internet and social media for wider public support. Once the protests began, despite the government efforts to close down the Internet, ban specific sites or cut off mobile phones, they would not be able to halt the momentum of the revolts.

Conclusion... The Arab spring four years on

The books of this review article have provided adequate accounts of the factors leading to the revolts, their genesis, evolution and impact.

What can be gleaned from these analyses is that we have an incomplete uprising and uncertain results. The result of the Arab uprisings is prone to appear as something different in each nation, depending upon the quality of the rival forces, the readiness of the incumbent powers to respond to requests for change, the limit of administrations to oppose change, and the balance of power between adversarial factions that try to fill the vacuums caused by changes. It seems that Libya, Syria and Yemen which for long have been affected by devastated and divided civil societies and sour and protracted civil war have to face remarkable difficulties in their transition to stable democracies.

The Arab Spring has beyond any reasonable doubt proven to be a process instead of series of events. Its erratic shockwaves, still reverberating, has caught up with nations outside the Arab world. The uprisings have been broadly seen as a watershed happening which has definitely changed the region and led to seismic shift in the social contract governing the interface between the Arab ruling elites and their citizens. Nonetheless, there is an ample worry about the extent to which the uprising is likely to spread or be maintained. There is also the belief that the Arab Spring will sadly turn into a long and cruel winter. The lack of traditions of liberalism, the tribes' power, elites' control of businesses, the hold on power by ethnic minorities, the high rank military personnel that cling to power, the sectarian divide and Islamic extremism will make the transformation in the region slow, bloody, and filled with hurdles. Moving ahead, pragmatism based on the rule of law ought to be the guiding force that translates the revolutionary fervour of the last few years into concrete policies that bring about political freedom and inclusive economic growth. Providing a functional democracy in the region will have profound implications for long term stability, growth and social justice. Consequently, enshrining emerging constitutions with a strong sense of political pluralism will be critical to empowering a fertile citizen-based politics. The short-lived Morsi experience in Egypt should be avoided at all costs. For the foreseeable future, post-authoritarian Arab Spring countries in transition will continue to grapple with a range of socio-political distractions ranging from economic shocks to the dilemmas of constitutional and electoral reform. Counter-revolutions, sectarianism and the consolidation of Islamist power (excepting the debacle of the Islamists of Egypt) remain distinct possibilities, each bringing further uncertainty and unintentional results.

After four years it is sobering to see what has happened to what was once, wishfully, known as the Arab Spring. Youth, dissidents, women activists, nascent civil society groups, and others, challenged - and changed - the status quo in the four countries that account for over 30 percent of the Arab population. But many in three of those four nations are today worse off, and in the fourth some are only marginally better off. Libya the only country with a small population and large oil assets, technically able to reconstruct and afford the transition has instead fractured, possibly beyond repair. Egypt, has gone through two military coups. The military, which has dominated Egyptian politics since 1952 is back in power, autocratic rule is back in Cairo. More than 21,000 have been detained and about 1400 Islamists sentenced to death in 2014.

In Syria, the uprising has disintegrated in what can be depicted as the most complex war in the Middle East since WWI. The country is being torn apart by two wars: rebel militias that emerged from the 2011 uprising are fighting the government of Bashar al-Assad, and the Islamic State (IS) extremists who are carving up territory, largely from the rebels, but also from the governments in both Syria and Iraq. The multi-layered conflicts, involving dozens of militias, pose an existential threat to Syria, its borders and its people. Nearly four years later, Yemen is in chaos. Shi'ite Houthi rebels, marginalised in the deal of late 2011 that ousted Salih from power, have in late January 2015 overrun the capital, Sanaa, and forced the resignation of President Hadi and his cabinet, prompting a military campaign led by a Saudi coalition to restore legitimacy to the country. Aside from Bahrain, the other Western-backed oil and gas-rich Gulf nations are largely untouched by the Arab Spring. Kings, Emirs and Sheikhs collectively pledged billions of dollars to appease the public while unleashing heavy-handed crackdowns on activists calling for reform. Tunisia's uprising is the only one that has introduced more inclusive rule and a more equitable constitution that balances power between a President and a Prime Minister to prevent the return of autocratic rule.

The books of this review held two opposed theses concerning the Arab Spring and its future: the optimists hailed a region-wide birth of democracy and pluralism following the path of Eastern Europe during the anti-communist revolutions of 1989. The pessimists were anxious that the Arab world might be following Iran's example of 1979 of replacing secular tyrants with even more repressive Islamist regimes.

Four years on, both narratives have turned out to be wrong, and not because their enthusiasts had the wrong narrative. The Arab Spring was not one thing. Unlike Eastern Europe, each affected Arab nation is moving in different and sometimes opposing directions. Each has its own history, and its own environment. Any scenario superimposed over this series of events was doomed to be misleading and simplistic. Events in the MENA will most likely move in a less symmetric and straightforward direction. However, the major legacy of the uprisings lies in the destruction of the myth of Arabs' political incapacity and the wrong perception of invincible corrupt rulers.