



After the Arab Spring: How Islamists Hijacked The Middle East Revolts

John R. Bradley

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From the author of the book that uniquely predicted the Egyptian revolution, a new message about the Middle East: everything we're told about the Arab Spring is wrong.

When popular revolutions erupted in Tunisia and Egypt, the West assumed that democracy and pluralism would triumph. Greatly praised author and foreign correspondent John R. Bradley draws on his extensive firsthand knowledge of the region's cultures and societies to show how Islamists will fill the power vacuum in the wake of the revolutions.

This vivid and timely book gives an original analysis of the new Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain by highlighting the dramatic spread of Saudi-funded Wahhabi ideology, inter-tribal rivalries, and Sunni-Shia divisions. Bradley gives a boots on the ground look at how the revolutions were first ignited and the major players behind them, and shows how the local population participated in and responded to the uprisings. In Tunisia he witnesses secularists under violent attack and in Egypt observes radical Islamists taking control of the streets. He illuminates the ancient sectarian strife shaking Bahrain, fierce civil war pitching tribe against tribe in Libya and Yemen, and ethnic divisions threatening to tear apart Syria and Iran. Taking it one step further, Bradley offers a comprehensive look at how across countries, liberal, progressive voices that first rallied the Arab masses were drowned out by the slogans of the better-organized and more popular radical Islamists.

With the in-depth knowledge of a local and the keen perspective of a seasoned reporter, *After the Arab Spring* offers a piercing analysis of what the empowerment of Islamism bodes for the future of the Middle East and the impact on the West.

After the Arab Spring: How Islamists Hijacked The Middle East Revolts Details

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Farwa says

Let me just say: wow. Just...wow.

I've read plenty of books on the topic of the Arab Spring, but never have I come across a book in which the author SO DEEPLY understands the political realities of the Middle East. Not only was Bradley successful in predicting the 2011 protests against Hosni Mubarak (in his previous book), but he ALSO predicted the 2013 protests against Mohammad Morsi. He says on page 93: "...a new revolution in Egypt cannot be ruled out. If and when it comes, it will aim to overthrow the military establishment". This book was published in 2012, and the second Egyptian revolution happened exactly a year later!!!

The fact that he has so much insight of the region is, indeed, truly mind blowing.

Bradley is also very much a realist. Whereas most books published in 2012 about the Arab Spring tended to be naively optimistic, Bradley recognized the real situation taking place on the ground. His assertion that many, if not all, Arab countries would in fact be worse off were the protests be successful, is *absolutely* true. The Islamists that tend to fill in the vacuum after repressive regimes have fallen often fare no better at meeting the people's demands of improving conditions. This has been true in Afghanistan, in Yemen, and in several other states. Bradley's solution, which involves American non-interventionism and bringing about change via peaceful movements seems quite pragmatic.

It is noteworthy, however, that Bradley's pro-Western bias does seem to conflict a little with his overall analysis. He constantly reinforces, albeit subtly, how Western ideals are, quite literally, *ideals*, and rejecting them is akin to rejecting "common sense". His idea of a better, more freer Middle East, seems to involve being able to drink alcohol freely in the streets and intermingle with the opposite sex on beaches. These things are just not acceptable and will almost always be met with reprimand in most Middle Eastern countries, regardless of how liberal a society may be. Does this mean the Middle East will always be "backwards"? Not necessarily.

Nevertheless, I absolutely respect John Bradley for his incredible insight. His rare perspectives are nothing short of genius.

Marwa Hassan says

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Dan Sirotkin says

The vast majority of reporting about the Arab Spring has come from journalists who just showed up for the excitement and inevitably apply their own Western filters onto the events that've transpired since the Arab Spring's first fiery flickerings. Bradley has been living and reporting in the area for decades, and this book reflects that: it smashes the rosy-colored glasses the media at large has been reporting about the Arab Spring through firmly underfoot.

Bradley reminds us that democracy alone is not enough for the Arab World to begin to reflect Western mores and ideals - indispensable from our culture and system of government is the idea of liberalism: that people should be free to live their lives in whatever manner they please so long as it does not impinge on others' rights.

The Arab Spring may have lead to more democracy in the Arab World, but it has not lead to liberalism - wherever there's been revolt it's been the supremely well-organized Islamists who have gained the most power, not the sparse handful of moderates. And these Islamists don't seek to bring the Arab World into the 21st century, but instead drag it even further back into the days when honor killings and judicial amputation first began.

Bradley writes with a thoroughly literate journalistic flair that makes the book a fun and engaging read, even if you're already well-versed in the history and culture of the Muslim World you'll still find plenty of new information from his on the ground experiences and interviews. His section on Islamism within Southeast Asia is especially interesting, considering how little reporting comes from Islam's less-sexy island outposts. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in knowing the true story behind the Arab Spring, it's a soundly historical guide to the region and its analysis of what may come next is already proving to be spot on.

Arvind says

3.5/5 The central theory of this book is that the "Arab Spring" was a movement to remove the current dictator, but it was not a pro-democracy movement as understood by the West. Because democracy is not merely the rule of the majority, but also a rule of liberalism with basic fundamental rights. Since, it was a democracy in the limited sense of rule by the majority, what it did result in ? It resulted in theocrats (Islamists) grabbing power and imposing religious laws (Sharia). I agree with his conclusion thus

Doreen Petersen says

Very informative and interesting book. All of the leaders mentioned truly were madmen. What does this say about society as a whole? We must learn from our past mistakes but it appears this is not happening. A must read for all.

Ayman Agour says

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Bilal Ketfi says

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obtain power through the ballot box. They can do this without having anything close to a majority of the votes; in places like Tunisia and Egypt, the number of citizens registered to vote is shockingly small, when viewed through Western pro-Democracy sentiment. All radicals need to do is get a plurality of a minority.

Sound familiar?

It should; that's exactly what happened in Iran, 1979. Khomeini was not expected to end up on top. He was just smarter than the others. He played the other groups -- moderate Islamic groups, secular pro-Democratic groups, communists, socialists, and the military all off against each other. In the end, he seized control of Iran without ever having the support of anything close to a majority of the population.

Oh, were you thinking of the U.S.? Yeah, sometimes it seems like if radical right-wing Christians would stop howling for a minute and take the time to study their brothers in the Islamic world, we pro-Democracy types would be even more screwed than we are. Anyway...

I really, really enjoyed Bradley's Inside Egypt and Saudi Arabia Exposed. After the Arab Spring is a little less tight; there's more argumentation and less straightforward information, and I think at times it gets a bit dense. It's an important and illuminating book, but it's not the enjoyable, unendingly-fascinating read that Bradley's books on Egypt and Saudi Arabia were.

Shaimaa Ali says

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Adeyinka Makinde says

There is always the temptation for writers, analysts and political leaders, all with an eye on future historical narrative, to ascribe a symbolic significance to contemporary events which suggest a break with an old order and the birth of the new. British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan captured the mood of decolonisation with his reference to the 'Wind of Change' then "blowing across the African continent" in a 1960 speech to a

largely indifferent Apartheid-era Parliament in South Africa.

In contrast to this positive message of liberation his predecessor, Winston Churchill, had thirteen years earlier gloomily assessed the series of communist party takeovers in Post War-Eastern Europe as akin to the descending of an 'Iron Curtain' across a continent. Both, the decolonisation of Black Africa and the sovietisation of Eastern Europe, represent the sum of individual but ultimately related national revolutions.

Revolutions are multifaceted. They may be wholly directed and executed by elites or may be engineered by a ground swell of action by segments of the masses. They may be of indigenous origin or may in fact be exported from a foreign source. By definition, they will always involve upheaval and change; out with the old and in with the new, and are often accompanied by some measure of violence, whether as the means used for effecting the change, or, as a means of resisting such change.

Those revolutions which are genuine evocations of the will of the masses and which would largely be composed of uncoordinated protests through mass gatherings, rioting or other forms of civil disobedience eventually need a focus for leadership and an underpinning rationale of the ideas proposing change.

In such circumstances, where one ideological tenet does not underscore the discontent which is driving the mass of people, the danger exists that the removal of the leader or leadership will leave a vacuum which would be filled in, or, for want of a better word, would be 'hijacked' by a well-organised group which may not represent the will of the people as arguably occurred with the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917, and the Khomeini-led Islamists in Iran in 1979.

Revolutions of the popular imagination for the most part emphasize the role played by the common person. Thus, at the heart of the romantic notions with which revolutions are imbued are the deeds of the worker, the student, the farm hand, the rank and file soldier, the housewife and so on.

Contemporarily, in keeping with the need for soundbite-type captions, revolutions as expressions of the largely non-violent masses come with names such as the Czech 'Velvet Revolution', the Ukrainian 'Orange Revolution' and Georgia's 'Rose Revolution'.

When we think of peoples revolutions of the not too distant past, our minds cast back to the 'People Power Revolution' of the Philippines which brought an end to the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos and the ushering of democracy.

A few years later, the revolutions in Eastern Europe among the former nations of the Soviet Union-dominated Warsaw Pact led to the collapse of totalitarian regimes, most memorably the chain of events leading to the fall of Romania's Nikolai Ceausescu and the symbolic breaching of the Berlin Wall.

It is one thing, however, to describe and analyse a current chain of events, but quite another to invoke prophecy before they happen. After the collapse of the Eastern Bloc regimes and the ending of the 'Cold War', Francis Fukuyama infamously declared that the expected spread of liberal democratic forms of government at the expense of increasingly untenable totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, would mark the 'end of history'.

John R. Bradley, a writer specialising in the history and politics of the Middle East, was less grandiose but extremely prescient in predicting the Egyptian uprising of 2011 in his 2008 book *Inside Egypt: The Land of the Pharaoh's on the Brink of a Revolution*, which was banned by the regime of Hosni Mubarak.

The series of 'revolutions' which came to be known as the 'Arab Spring' began when a Tunisian trader by the name of Mohamed Boazizi committed suicide by immolating himself at the frustration at allegedly having his goods seized by an overly officious official of state. This in turn triggered a series of protests which eventually led to the deposing of President Ben Ali who fled into Saudi Arabian exile.

The example of Tunisia was then followed by Egyptian's whose protests were focussed in Tahrir Square in the capital city of Cairo. Like Ben Ali, long-term dictator, Hosni Mubarak was forced to step down. Like a 'Domino Effect', the upheavals then spread to Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Syria.

The Western media followed events with great interest and intensity, as indeed did the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera News Network. The line taken by the media was that the masses of the Arab nations, tired of corrupt and despotic regimes, were thirsting for Western-style freedoms as represented by a political system of liberal democracy in which pluralism and individual rights would assume primacy.

Like the Czechoslovaks, who under Alexander Dubcek had attempted to unshackle themselves from the Soviet system via a process of liberalisation in an episode referred to as the 'Prague Spring', so it was that the Arabs wished to dislodge the perennial scourge of dictatorship from their countries.

While the media rhapsodized about the efforts of groups in Tahrir Square who valiantly organised themselves and disseminated information via social networking sites such as facebook and twitter, United States President Barak Obama claimed that the uprisings were 'proof' that the Arab masses had not been influenced by Al-Queda and Islamic fundamentalist thinking, but by Western ideals of freedom and pluralism.

Not so claims Bradley, whose *After the Arab Spring* examines the underlying motivations of the demonstrators in Tunisia and Egypt, and also explains why those who represent the 'Western liberal' reformist segment of the political classes in these countries are not in a strong enough position to assume the mantle of leadership.

His thesis is straightforward enough: years of Western governments' indulging of Arab dictatorships whose repressive measures largely submerged viable liberal-leaning opponents, but who while cracking down on Islamists also left enough of their structures in existence to serve as a bargaining tool with the West, has meant that Islamic fundamentalists in both Tunisia and Egypt, represented respectively by Ennahda and Al-Gamaa Al Islamiya, are poised to take over these societies.

Interestingly, he claims that these groups are not necessarily concerned with seizing power immediately, and instead would rather concentrate on Islamizing the societies from the bottom up. The future, they believe, belongs to them.

He gives ample evidence of the efforts of the well-organised adherents of Salafism, an extremist Islamic creed which professes a wish to return to the pre-modern application of the religion, in enforcing Islamic codes and mores on the streets. Salafism is the puritan Egyptian counterpart of Saudi Wahhabism.

In his book *The Siege of Mecca* (2007), Journalist Yaroslav Trofimov, traced a direct line between the armed insurrection in the holy city by one Juhaymon Ul-Taibi and his followers to the events of September 11th 2001 and the contemporary struggle between the West and Islamic fundamentalists.

In short, stunned by the severe criticism of the perceived extent of encroaching 'Westernisation' of Saudi society by clerics, the Saudi royals entered a deal whereby in exchange from not interfering with their

running of the country, they would sponsor the policy of extending Wahhabism via the establishment of a network of Islamic centers of education, known as madrassas, in the wider world. The net result argued Trofimov, has been a rise in extremism and the fodder for the Jihadist guerrillas and terrorists who have been waging war against the Western world.

With the fall of the Tunisian government, Muamar Gadaffi in Libya, the rising influence of Egyptian Islamists and the potential fall of the Baathist regime of Hafez Al Assad's Syria, one of the results of the so-called Arab Spring would be the dislodging of the remnants of secularism in the Arab world.

In Tunisia, a country built on the charismatic leadership of Habib Bourguiba, the gains made in terms of social and economic freedoms appear to be dissipating in the aftermath of the fall of Ben Ali. Bradley persuasively argues that the 'social contract' by which Tunisians enjoyed a wide range of freedoms and benefits in return for not mounting political challenges has perhaps been irrevocably broken.

He is particularly good at pointing out the hypocrisy of the West who armed and supported Libyan rebels against Gadaffi, but who turned a blind eye to the suppression of Bahraini protesters by Saudi troops acting to protect the monarchical despots who rule that nation.

When Gadaffi announced that the West was arming insurrectionists who were adherents to the philosophy espoused by Al-Qaeda, the media smirked. But events have since proved him right. Armed to the teeth, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group along with a rabble of vengeful, racist and genocidal rebels have butchered their foes in a series of beheadings and mutilations culminating in the lynching of Gadaffi himself.

In a short but excellent segment of analysis which illuminates the nature of power politics, as well as the expediency of the sorts of 'unholy' and alliances Western powers have consistently made in the Middle East, Bradley compares and contrasts the kingdom of Saudi Arabia with the republic of Iran; the former, a Sunni nation which oppresses the Shia minority in its oil rich eastern province, and the latter, a Shia nation that marginalises the Sunni minority in its oil producing Khuzestan province.

Run as theocracies, both are regional rivals whose competitiveness is exacerbated by the current uprisings. Many of the features of their governance are antithetical to the values espoused by the United States. Yet, America backs the Saudis to the hilt and turns a blind eye to its foreign interventions, the virulent anti-Jewish propaganda in its learning curricula and its human rights violations while demonizing Iran.

But of course, Realpolitik, holds sway: Saudi Arabian action in putting down Shia protests in Bahrain not only perpetuates the Sunni hegemony in that country, it also protects the interests of the United States because of the naval base stationed there.

It also means that the kingdom will vote for the US and bring along the Arab league in a half-filled conclave in support of US and Western European bid for Libyan oil, while America and its allies turn a blind eye to Saudi suppression of revolts in its troublesome Shia region.

The fallacy of the claim that NATO was protecting demonstrators from being massacred in Libya is confirmed by the lack of evidence of any mass killings having taken place. It is clear that the Americans wish to use the uprisings as an excuse to remove those countries in opposition to its foreign policy objectives.

Bradley does not go into the motives the West went for broke in seeking the ouster of Colonel Gadaffi. Certainly, it is difficult to see how the blood of Libyan protesters is more precious than the blood split by

protesters in Bahrain, Yemen or Syria where, so far, the Western powers have been unwilling to intervene.

And while oil played a part in it, so too, it is argued, did Gaddafi's plan to introduce the gold dinar, an African currency which would have rivalled the dollar and the euro. The idea that African and Muslim nations would sell oil and other resources around the world in a currency other than for dollars and euros is one which the West ultimately could not countenance.

With Gaddafi gone, the other states which would be targeted are Syria and Iran, both of which enjoy good relations with Russia and China. It may be a long-term geo-political ploy engineered in the corridors of Washington's policymakers' and 'think tanks' linked to Western corporate interests to contain the threat of these nations.

Nonetheless, with the unleashing of the forces of puritanical Islam, such meddling may ultimately come back to haunt the West. The expedient support of Mujahideen guerrillas in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan among whose ranks was the young Osama Bin Laden springs to mind, as does the advent of a Shia dominated, and Iranian-influenced government in post-invasion Iraq.

It is perhaps a lazy analysis to infer that the West is inadvertently presiding over the creation of a modern Islamic Caliphate, but the irony is that such scheming may lead to the cultural and political domination of North Africa and the Middle East by Sunni Islamism under the suzerainty of the Wahabist Saudi kingdom.

If this happened, it would signal the final victory of the proponents of pan-Islam over the secularists who in the heyday of Gamal Abdel Nasser had projected the cause of pan-Arabism under the stewardship of Nasser.

If one primary result of the so-called Arab Spring is the dislodging of the remnants of secularism in the Arab world, it is a cause for concern, notwithstanding that the overthrown regimes were corrupt or oppressive. As Bradley points out, Ben Ali largely continued Bourguiba's policies which led to a strong economy and individual freedoms so long as they did not challenge the political authority of the rulers.

He mentions nothing about Gaddafi's achievements. Yet, his eccentricities notwithstanding, the Jamahiriyan republic of Libya provided free education and health services to the masses, as in Tunisia women were accorded opportunities for social advancement. Not least among his achievements was the feat of developing the 'Great Man Made River Project' which provided water to the country's major cities.

The apostate-form of Ba'athism as practised in the police state of Syria nonetheless has kept a balance of peace and protection for the rights and interests of different ethnic and religious groups. The removal of Assad and the Alawite minority from control would lead to a Sunni-Shia conflict in the midst of which the Christian minority, as happened in Iraq and is happening in Egypt, would face increasing persecution.

So what to make of the 'Arab Spring'? Despite the grandiloquent passages in the initial rose tinted coverage by the Western media which waxed lyrical with the usual sentimental metaphors and motifs of revolution, the uprisings have been shown to bear little of the romantic notion of fighting for Western-style liberal democracy; most protesters having been simply motivated by their deteriorating economic circumstances.

That Arab societies seem perpetually to be governed by dictatorships need not be considered a foible of fate or adjudged to be an ineradicable cultural phenomenon, if a 'social contract' of the sort established by Bourguiba in Tunisia brings about positive social and economic advancement.

But even the overthrow of Gaddafi which involved the decimation of Libya's infrastructure by NATO and

