

IF THE ARAB SPRING TURNS UGLY

Vali Nasr

NY Times, August 27, 2011

The Arab Spring is a hopeful chapter in Middle Eastern politics, but the region's history points to darker outcomes. There are no recent examples of extended power-sharing or peaceful transitions to democracy in the Arab world. When dictatorships crack, budding democracies are more than likely to be greeted by violence and paralysis. Sectarian divisions-the bane of many Middle Eastern societies-will then emerge, as competing groups settle old scores and vie for power....

Throughout the Middle East there is a strong undercurrent of simmering sectarian tension between Sunnis and Shiites.... So far this year, Shiite-Sunni tensions have been evident in countries from Bahrain to Syria.... Put together, they could force the United States to rethink its response to the Arab Spring itself.

Sectarianism is an old wound in the Middle East. But the recent popular urge for democracy, national unity and dignity has opened it and made it feel fresh. This is because many of the Arab governments that now face the wrath of protesters are guilty of both suppressing individual rights and concentrating power in the hands of minorities....

The struggle that matters most is the one between Sunnis and Shiites. The war in Iraq first unleashed the destructive potential of their competition for power, but the issue was not settled there. The Arab Spring has allowed it to resurface by weakening states that have long kept sectarian divisions in place, and brutally suppressed popular grievances. Today, Shiites clamor for greater rights in Lebanon, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, while Sunnis are restless in Iraq and Syria.

This time, each side will most likely be backed by a nervous regional power, eager to protect its interests. For the past three decades the

**AS THE ARAB SPRING TURNS INTO FALL, HOPE BETRAYED
BREEDS ISLAMIC ATIVISM**

isranet-publications

Isranet Daily Briefing, August 31, 2011

<https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/arab-spring-turns-fall-hope-betrayed-breeds-islamic-ativism/>

Saudi monarchy, which sees itself as the guardian of Sunni Islam, has viewed Iran's Shiite theocracy as its nemesis. Saudis have relied on the United States, Arab nationalism and Sunni identity to slow Iran's rise, even to the point of supporting radical Sunni forces.

The Saudis suffered a major setback when control of Iraq passed from Sunnis to Shiites, but that made them more determined to reverse Shiite gains and rising Iranian influence. It was no surprise that Saudi Arabia was the first Arab state to withdraw its ambassador from Damascus earlier this month.

The imprint of this rivalry was evident in regional conflicts before the Arab Spring. Saudis saw Iran's hand behind a rebellion among Yemen's Houthi tribe—who are Zaydis, an offshoot of Shiism—that started in 2004. Iran blamed Arab financing for its own decade-long revolt by Sunni Baluchis along its southeastern border with Pakistan. And since 2005, when Shiite Hezbollah was implicated in the assassination of Rafik Hariri, a popular Sunni prime minister who was close to the Saudis, a wide rift has divided Lebanon's Sunni and Shiite communities, and prompted Saudi fury against Hezbollah. The sectarian divide in Lebanon shows no sign of narrowing, and now the turmoil in Syria next door has brought Lebanon to a knife's edge.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah's audacious power grab has angered Saudi Arabia. Officials in Riyadh see the turn of events in Lebanon as yet another Iranian victory, and the realization of the dreaded "Shiite crescent" that King Abdullah of Jordan once warned against.

In March, fearing a snowball effect from the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia drew a clear red line in Bahrain...rall[ying] the Persian Gulf monarchies to support the Sunni monarchy...in brutally suppressing the protests—and put Iran on notice that they were "ready to enter war with Iran and even with Iraq in defense of Bahrain."

The Saudis are right to be worried about the outcome of sectarian fights in Lebanon and Bahrain, but in Syria it is Iran that stands to lose. Both sides understand that the final outcome will decide the pecking order in the region. Every struggle in this rivalry therefore matters, and every clash is pregnant with risk for regional stability. The turn of events in

Syria is particularly important, because Sunnis elsewhere see the Alawite government as the linchpin in the Shiite alliance of Iran and Hezbollah....

The specter of protracted bloody clashes, assassinations and bombings, sectarian cleansing and refugee crises from Beirut to Manama, causing instability and feeding regional rivalry, could put an end to the hopeful Arab Spring. Radical voices on both sides would gain....

The Middle East is in the midst of historic change. Washington can hope for a peaceful and democratic future, but we should guard against sectarian conflicts that, once in the open, would likely run their destructive course at great cost to the region and the world.

NOT YOUR FATHER'S MIDDLE EAST

**Seth J. Frantzman
Jerusalem Post, August 30, 2011**

The collapse of the regime in Tunisia, the rebellion in Libya (which looks to be all but over), and the military takeover of Egypt represent profound historical events, but not a “spring.”

All the countries whose foundations were laid by Arab nationalism are entering a new stage. In some ways, this began with the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Cold War. The Cold War pitted Arab nationalism against the monarchic regimes supported by the West. The first nationalist regime to fall was Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 2003, followed by the victory of Hamas in Palestinian elections and the rise of Hezbollah to kingmaker in Lebanon's parliament. Later, the destruction of the secular regime in Tunisia, rebellion in Libya and Yemen and the vanquishing of Hosni Mubarak moved the ball further along.

The rebellion in Syria actually brings things full circle. Ba'athism, as articulated by Michel Aflaq, a Syrian Christian Arab, began in Syria in the

**AS THE ARAB SPRING TURNS INTO FALL, HOPE BETRAYED
BREEDS ISLAMIC ATIVISM**

isranet-publications

Isranet Daily Briefing, August 31, 2011

<https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/arab-spring-turns-fall-hope-betrayed-breeds-islamic-ativism/>

1940s, and it will die in Syria. Arab socialism, nationalism, pan-Arabism; all of these secular ideologies that once looked so strong are dying. Meanwhile, the monarchies in the Gulf, Jordan and Morocco remain stable.

This is the long-term effect of the insertion of Western ideas and values into the Middle East prior to the Cold War. Arab nationalists embraced modern European concepts of nationhood. Many were Christians who used nationalism as a means to transcend religion, much as Jews embraced communism in Russia to improve their social status. For a decade it seemed as if these Arab nationalists were quite powerful. Gamal Abdel Nasser invaded Yemen and bombed Saudi Arabia, while exporting his ideas to Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Libya.

But nationalism brought stagnation, and in almost every nationalist country it was the children of the dictator-Bashar Assad, Gamal Mubarak, Saif Gaddafi-who were groomed to rule following their fathers. Because the nationalists were unwilling to murder large numbers of people, because their ideology had ossified, and because their militaries were not beholden, they withered on the vine. Monarchy and Islamism have proved more resolute.

Another change that the Middle East has undergone is realignment in its relations with the US. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the US imposed its will on the region.... However, after 9/11, American experts realized that the US-Saudi relationship-a lynchpin in the American strategy-suffered from multiple-personality disorder. The Saudis were close to the Americans, and at the same time supported, directly or by proxy, Islamic terrorism against the West. A Saudi established al-Qaida, and most of the 9/11 hijackers were Saudi nationals.

To wean itself off Saudi oil and a poisoned marriage with its rulers, the US launched a war in Iraq, one of whose corollaries was to democratize Iraq and create a new, preferably secular American friend in the Middle East. But the war ended up costing billions, and has resulted in a weak and chaotic Iraq.

Iran stepped into the breach, emboldened by chastised American power. In just a few short years, the Iranian octopus spread its tentacles

through Syria to Hezbollah, engineered proxy wars with Israel, and undermined the Gulf regimes.

The Arab spring was merely a small afterthought in this process, a final reckoning between the weakened Arab regimes and their slumbering masses.

To excuse internal weakness, many Arab commentators view the Arab world as a trampled and humiliated victim. This is particularly the case when it comes to the effects of colonialism. Intellectuals speak often of the supposed setbacks their countries suffered under colonialism, without acknowledging that for the most part, Western countries colonized the Middle East for just over 20 years, compared to 400 years of Ottoman Turkish rule.

Western scholars accept this characterization under the guise of Orientalism. The West blames the US for weak Arab regimes, and excuses nasty dictatorships because of Israel. But the reality is that the Arab regimes had great agency over the past 70 years, agency they spent in acquiring weapons, building palaces, undermining one another and spreading Islamism. If Syria falls, it will be the last nail in the coffin of secular Arab nationalism....

Arab nationalism/monarchism, Islamism, the rise of Iran, the weakening of American influence and scapegoating of the West for internal malfeasance are the five ruined pillars upon which the next era in the Middle East will be built.

REVOLUTION'S END

Susan Glasser

Foreign Policy, August 8, 2011

When Hosni Mubarak was wheeled in to his courtroom cage the other

**AS THE ARAB SPRING TURNS INTO FALL, HOPE BETRAYED
BREEDS ISLAMIC ATIVISM**

isranet-publications

Isranet Daily Briefing, August 31, 2011

<https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/arab-spring-turns-fall-hope-betrayed-breeds-islamic-ativism/>

day, gasping out his not-guilty plea from his sickbed-behind-bars as his son tried to shield him from the cameras, Egypt seemed to have produced the ultimate photo-op of revolutionary upheaval: the pharaoh brought low before the people's tribunal. But I couldn't help thinking about an unlikely character: Russia's strongman leader Vladimir Putin. While the Middle East struggled to absorb the meaning of how quickly its mighty had fallen, Putin was busy contemplating a return to the Russian presidency, posing with scantily clad girls and trashing the United States for "living like a parasite off the global economy." If it seemed like a line out a Soviet script, well, it was.

Where revolutions start is not always where they end up.

Twenty years ago this month, the Soviet Union was experiencing the 1991 equivalent of the Arab spring, all youth and democracy and optimism about a future free from central planning and the dead hand of the security-obsessed authoritarian state. And yet for more than half the time since the hardline coup of Aug. 19, 1991, spelled the effective end of the Soviet Union, Russia has been ruled by Putin, the former KGB colonel who famously called the breakup of the Soviet Union "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century."

The remark is well worth remembering today, against the backdrop not only of a new era of revolutionary tumult in the Middle East but also in the context of a post-revolutionary Russia that has retained an outsized geopolitical importance in a world where its vast energy resources, strategic location, nuclear missiles and U.N. Security Council veto are too important to ignore.

This Russia may matter, but it is a nation whose course is still very much adrift a full two decades after the Soviet collapse Putin so lamented. Across the broad swath of the former Soviet Union, the U.S. NGO Freedom House finds not a single country outside the European Union members in the Baltics that ranks anything better than "partially free" today. Elections are a sham, economies are either almost entirely resource-dependent, as in oil-rich Russia or natural-gas-blessed Azerbaijan, or disastrous basket cases like turmoil-plagued Ukraine or isolated Uzbekistan....

**AS THE ARAB SPRING TURNS INTO FALL, HOPE BETRAYED
BREEDS ISLAMIC ATIVISM**
isranet-publications
Isranet Daily Briefing, August 31, 2011
<https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/arab-spring-turns-fall-hope-betrayed-breeds-islamic-ativism/>

We should all be pondering the question of why the Russian revolution exploded when it did—a mystery still decades later, just as enigmatic as the present day debate over why a self-immolating Tunisian fruit-seller or some protesting students in Tahrir Square triggered a revolution when so many other indignities over decades of corruptive, repressive rule did not. In the case of Russia, as Leon Aron, a Soviet emigre and biographer of Boris Yeltsin wrote...“everything you think you know about the collapse of the Soviet Union is wrong”: it was not Reaganite saber-rattling or oil prices crashing or crushing military expenditures from the losing Soviet war in Afghanistan that did in the communist regime. Yes, those problems—and many more—plagued the Soviet Union in its later days, but then again, as the scholar Peter Rutland memorably put it, “Chronic ailments, after all, are not necessarily fatal.” Instead, Aron argues, it was a radical break in consciousness, “an intellectual and moral quest for self-respect and pride” that “within a few short years hollowed out the mighty Soviet state, deprived it of legitimacy, and turned it into a burned-out shell that crumbled in August 1991.”

Still, what makes this so relevant to today is what happened next. As Aron perceptively notes, such a tide “may be enough to bring down the ancien regime, but not to overcome in one fell swoop, a deep-seated authoritarian national political culture. The roots of the democratic institutions spawned by morally charged revolutions may prove too shallow to sustain a functioning democracy in a society with precious little tradition of grassroots self-organization and self-rule.” Which is why Putinism has proved so attractive—when the former spy came to power a decade into the revolution, he pledged to make Russia a great power again. Attention activists of the Arab Spring: Hauling the old dictator into court is a lot easier than avoiding creating the conditions for a new strongman to emerge....

ATATURK, THE ARAB SPRING, AND EUROPE’S FALL

Clifford D. May
National Review, August 18, 2011

If I asked you to name the most important events of the early 20th century, you'd probably mention the start of World War I in 1914, the Russian Revolution in 1917, the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, the stock-market crash in 1929, and Hitler's becoming chancellor of Germany in 1933.

But for millions of people around the world, the most consequential year was 1924. That was when the last caliph-Islam's supreme religious and political leader, the Prophet Mohammed's heir-was deposed, thus abolishing the 1,400-year-old institution of the caliphate, and sending all members of the Ottoman dynasty into exile.

This was the moment in history when, as Osama bin Laden put it, "the whole Islamic world fell under the Crusader banner." Three months after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Ayman al-Zawahiri, then al-Qaeda's chief ideologue/theologian, and now bin Laden's successor, wrote that the "hope of the Muslim nation [is] to reinstate its fallen caliphate and regain its lost glory."

The man most responsible for abolishing the caliphate-reliably despised by Islamists everywhere-was Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. He is the subject of a timely new biography by military historian and columnist Austin Bay....

Bay points out that although Ataturk was the "only undefeated general of the Ottoman empire," he went on to reject "Ottoman imperialism and colonialism," which could be called, with equal accuracy, Muslim imperialism and colonialism. As a cadet and young officer, he was "schooled on Europe's technological, cultural, and educational advances." He learned French, which he considered "the language of culture and progress." He was inspired by the European ideal of freedom and liberal constitutionalism.

As a result, when he came to power, Ataturk determined to remake the broken heartland of the Ottoman Empire as a Westernized nation-state. The key was to separate secular and religious authority-strictly limiting the latter. He reformed education and introduced a Latinized Turkish alphabet to facilitate literacy and better link Turkey to Europe and distance it from its Arab and Persian neighbors. He made it compulsory for Turks to take surnames, in the European fashion, which made record-

keeping simpler. (Ataturk means “father of Turkey.”) He granted rights to women, believing that a nation that does not educate and empower half its population can only limp, not run....

In the season we hopefully call the Arab Spring, it is sobering to recall, as Bay does, that Ataturk’s achievement remains unique: No other Muslim-majority nation has become a “Western parliamentary democracy and secular state.” The leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, increasingly powerful in many parts of the Arab world, do not hang Ataturk’s picture in their offices....

Today, it might be argued, the sick man of Europe is Europe-under the flag of the European Union, a flag no one would fight and die for. In one European country after another, signs are not of spring but of fall....

Europe-transnational, post-modern, post-democratic, and post-Christian-believes less in freedom than in bureaucracy, and clings to multiculturalism, an ideology the leaders of France, Germany, and the U.K. all acknowledge has failed but can’t quite manage to replace. The natives have even stopped having children at replacement rates while immigrant communities from the Muslim world grow by leaps and bounds. Militants within those communities impose their religious laws and warn the “infidels” not to interfere.

Who today-other than American intellectuals of the Paul Krugman variety-could possibly want to emulate Europe? Who genuinely believes that a Europeanized Islam is more likely than an Islamized Europe?

For Turkey, the not illogical response has been what some term neo-Ottomanism. Under the [Islamist] Justice and Development Party (AKP), first elected in 2002, Ataturk’s legacy is being dismantled brick by brick.... The AKP has been positioning Turkey as a contender for leadership of the Muslim world, making it both an ally and a rival of Arabs and Persians eager for the same role.

In the concluding chapter of his book, Bay notes that “at midnight on March 4, 1924, the last caliph left the Catalca railway station in a special coach car attached to the Orient Express.” Abdul Mejid II may indeed have been the last caliph of the 20th century. But there are those

**AS THE ARAB SPRING TURNS INTO FALL, HOPE BETRAYED
BREEDS ISLAMIC ATIVISM**
isranet-publications
Isranet Daily Briefing, August 31, 2011
<https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/arab-spring-turns-fall-hope-betrayed-breeds-islamic-ativism/>

fighting [in the Arab Spring countries] to revive the age of Muslim conquerors and conquests, power and glory....

BURYING THE ARAB SPRING

Daniel Greenfield

Daniel Greenfield Blog, August 20, 2011

It was only three months ago that you could hardly open a newspaper without encountering columns full of growing predictions about the revolution sweeping the Middle East. Now the Arab Spring is swiftly becoming the embarrassing relative in the journalism family....

In Egypt, the revolution has been more like a realignment, with the army and Muslim Brotherhood sharing power. Tahrir Square is over....

In Tunisia and Yemen, the Islamists have a clear path to power. And if Libya and Syria do fall, it won't be to the enlightened forces of secular democracy, but to a populist Islamic state that will make the Taliban look like secular humanists. Bahrain has been allowed to go on repressing the Shiites. Turkey's suppression of Kurdish parties is one of those obscure things unmentioned by newspapers too busy running tourism ads urging Americans to travel to Istanbul.

More importantly, the most repressive regimes in the region have emerged untouched. Iran bludgeoned and butchered its protesters. Saudi Arabia sent tanks to massacre protesters in Bahrain. The UAE is still running its slave empire....

The majority of the Muslim world is not interested in Whiskey, Sexy and Democracy. Rather they want Whippings, Sharia and Dhimmis. They want security and stability, and that can only come from either a dictatorship or an Islamic state. They want state subsidized prices and jobs, which makes for a stagnant economy. And they want Islamic morals policing and second class status for non-Muslims and women, which

**AS THE ARAB SPRING TURNS INTO FALL, HOPE BETRAYED
BREEDS ISLAMIC ATIVISM
isranet-publications
Isranet Daily Briefing, August 31, 2011
<https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/arab-spring-turns-fall-hope-betrayed-breeds-islamic-ativism/>**

means there is no room left for human rights....

The Arab Spring is becoming a dangerous embarrassment to the [Western] foreign policy experts. If dictators and our foreign policy can no longer be blamed for conditions in the Muslim world-then all that's left is to admit the truth. It is the Muslim world that is to blame for the state that it's in....