

**The Arab Spring:  
The Hope and Reality of the Uprisings, 2nd ed.**

*Mark L. Haas and David W. Lesch (eds.)  
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The Arab Spring was a series of protests which took place in Arab countries against longstanding dictatorial regimes, because of the latter's inability or refusal to deliver socio-economic and political justice to the common

masses. Protests spread like fire and made an impact not only on the governance of the Arab world but also internationally, by involving big players like Russia and the United States of America. Yet these events were intensely complicated, with multiple actors and layers of history involved in each country. The book under review here is one prodigious effort to understand the Arab Spring, considering causes and effects of the uprisings. Structurally, the book is divided into two parts. The first part, consisting of seven chapters, deals with the uprisings in Arab countries; part two, consisting of six chapters, discusses the impact of the Arab Spring on the non-Arab world and their core interests related to the uprisings. This second edition of the book has a separate chapter on Iraq and a concluding chapter that allows it to cover a longer history.

Part I opens with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor whose public giving up of life sums up the hopeless condition of unemployed youth. This part of the book endeavors to document the causes that triggered the mass protests, seeking historically-rooted “long-term tectonic transformations” (30), followed by various other factors like youth bulge, globalization, unemployment, poverty, and environmental pressures. Such factors are a rationale for the mass protests themselves but also help contextualize the broader rise of the “Muslim Brotherhood and spread of activist networks and movements” (48). In addition, the authors see the role of the army (in the cases of Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria) as crucial to the course of the uprisings. In Egypt, the “military’s decision not to fire on protesters was pivotal” (49) in 2011, as was the army’s role in the popular-cum-military coup which ousted Morsi in 2013; in Syria, the military slowed the momentum of the uprising writ large.

Throughout the book, a leadership crisis is identified as one of the important dimensions of uprising and continued civil war. In the case of Libya and Tunisia, the authoritarian leadership was exposed. Gaddafi and Ben Ali accumulated massive wealth and prevented their populations from benefiting from it en masse. Gaddafi’s refusal to solicit broad loyalty from the Libyan people, preferring instead to “divide and conquer”, presented the simulacral “appearance of direct democracy” while “neutralizing any potential for rivalry from other governments” (84). Leaders like Bashar al Assad were caught unaware, he because of his “opposition to the west, Israel and their lackeys” (94). The Saudi leadership reacted to the Arab Spring the earliest, introducing the earliest reforms (as Jordan too).

The role of economic deprivation is a truism in analysis of the Arab Spring; nearly all authors here consider it. Saudi Arabia provides an inter-

esting example of how the regime managed to dodge similar uprisings due to “oil monies and royal diplomacy” (117). The late King Abdullah reacted to the Arab Spring by spending 130 billion US dollars on social benefits, housing, and jobs in order to quell dissent, especially from state minorities. In addition, it has active foreign policy commitments (unlike countries like Libya and Syria), which allows for a broader roster of allies and actors.

The authors deal seriously with the “outcomes” of the uprisings, besides the ousting of dictators and the rise of Islamists. In the case of Syria, Iraq, and Jordan, such “outcomes” include the tremendous rise of ISIS and so the emergence of new threats (143), as well as the rise of Sunni discontent against the regimes of Nuri al-Maliki and Bashar al-Assad (153)—something well exploited by ISIS.

In part II, the authors analyze the reactions of five non-Arab countries: Iran, Turkey, Israel, Russia, and the United States. This part first looks into the impact “demonstrations effects” had on these above-mentioned countries. In the case of Iran, for an example, the Arab Spring posed challenges on multiple fronts (given the contiguous borders and complex relations with Iraq and Syria, particularly). Yet the political positions of these parties are not simply sectarian, being “more grounded in political expediency than in ideological similarities or contradictions” (103). ISIS, according to the authors, created a motivation for this engagement in Syria and Iraq because of their ant-Shia Islamic propaganda (183). The Arab Spring also had an impact on US-Iran relations, regional geopolitics, and domestic politics in Iran.

Turkey explicitly intervened in Egypt, calling for the ousting of Mubarak, and practically supported the ousting of the Gaddafi regime (195). In Iran, we see both an ideological and political expediency at work; however, according to the author, Turkey shifted from a “zero problems” foreign policy (wherein intervention was based on interest) to an ideologically-driven policy. The author exemplifies this by noting Turkish support to Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS directed at overthrowing the Assad regime and preempting the activities of Syria’s Kurdish Party (211).

Israel’s response is seen as “frosty” by the authors, namely, negative and based on “group-think policy” which perceives any change to the status quo as detrimental. The rise of Islamists thus was seen as destabilizing Israel’s national goals and a threat to their existence as a sovereign Jewish state. A further complicating factor is how (according to the authors) the question of Palestine was implicated in the Arab Spring.

The major game was played by Russia, which not only far outweighed the presence of USA in these developments—“a big plus for Putin domestically” (265)—but also massively supported the Assad regime (which they failed to do in Libya). Time will tell how costly this may prove, decries the author of this chapter.

The Obama policy was clear, according to the author of the chapter on the US, simply stating, “I am not getting us into Syria.” The US has maintained indirect relations with the army in Egypt, with otherwise minimal influence on the Arab Spring despite maintaining interests in the region (oil and gas prices, Israel) (283).

This book received positive editorial reviews; Fawaz Gerges, Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics, lauded the book as empirically rich and analytically rigorous. Indeed, although there exist many other publications on the topic by now, it should be a reference on the Arab Spring for it covers developments in more than a dozen countries. It will be useful for Middle Eastern studies, Islamic studies, and international relations audiences. It approaches the “Arab Spring [as] a decade old struggle for human dignity” (160), an effort to establish democratic norms and reforms by defying dictatorial regimes, which then was overtaken by counterrevolutions, civil wars, and foreign military interventions. It is only in Tunisia that one can see the fruits of the uprisings flourishing. The book does not provide us easy answers about what the future of Middle East could be; it ends with the hope that global norms of human and democratic rights remain on the table for the Arab world.

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