

Arab Spring Is a Conflict between Religion and Nationalism.  
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The enthusiasm for the Arab Spring and its birth of democracy in the Middle East gives me heartburn. What we hoped is not what we got. Now, as disillusion sets in, not only ours, but also that of the young demonstrators (particularly young women) who shed their own blood in Tahrir Square and Tunisia, we need to see what the optimists missed.

We have again mistaken voting for democracy. Although people who have never had choices love to vote, they really do not like choices that threaten their unexamined beliefs. They refuse to tolerate not only other religions, but also other sects of their own. They scorn uppity women and fear turmoil that threatens daily stability. The Arab Spring, at least in Egypt, threatened those popular values. Our reporters and analysts, however, were foolishly dazzled by young professionals (such as a Google executive) risking their lives in the streets.

The vast majority of Egyptians are not Google executives. Most Egyptian men do not like losing the little power they have, which is over women and children. They do not like demonstrations that erupt in violence. They want order, and it will soon be apparent that because of that, the Egyptian military will not be made to go away quietly.

In all Arab Spring countries, several with once secular governments, we are now seeing the Muslim Brotherhood winning majorities in parliament and Salafists (totalitarian Muslims) coming in second. The electorate has voted them in because they are promising them jobs, restoring order, and fighting corruption. But once in power, they will show their teeth. It will be up to the Military to keep them from the predictable \223one man, one vote, one time.\224

Should we be pleased that \223democracy\224 worked? Or should we worry, as analyst Barry Rubin notes: \223\205that the people want a repressive dictatorship, repression of women, the suppression of Christians, conflict with Israel, and hatred of the West?\224 Who would invest money in such a culture?

The Islamists envision a world in which Islam will take over and unite the world under one ideology (the Caliphate). During the Dark Ages in Europe, Christianity hoped for the same outcome: a Christian Europe, united under the leadership of the Catholic establishment in Rome. It did not happen because another idea was struggling to be born: nationalism. European states evolved with their own kings, their own languages and dialects, and their own national interests. Christianity could not even prevent England and France from constant warfare.

There will never be a new Caliphate for Islam. Each Muslim country, as it gets more literate and connected to the currents of the modern world, will fight for its own national identity. Even Iraq, with a Shiite majority like Iran, will not give up their national identity. Iraq not only has an Arab identity, but also an Iraqi identity, much older than Islam. And they detest Persians.

Iran, being Persian, also has its own identity as a country much older than its Islamic identity. Iran will eventually regain its freedom from religion and regain its identity as a nation with a great and ancient culture. Even Ayatollah Khomeini gave up his idea of a united Muslim world when his country was attacked by Saddam Hussein\222s Iraq. He suddenly remembered he was Iranian, not just a Shiite Muslim.

The turmoil in the Middle East may continue to take down some long-standing dictatorships, but freedom and democracy are not yet in the cards. The traditions that all Middle East countries have in common are: authoritarian families, authoritarian religion, and authoritarian government. With that heritage, why should they become a liberal democracy? Some new dictatorships will replace the old ones. We are foolish if we do not know this. However, world currents will continue to roil these countries, and little by little they will change.

As one Egyptian woman reporter who had been beaten and sexually abused noted: \223\205we have had a political revolution. But what we need now is a social revolution and a cultural revolution.\224 Poisonous testosterone is no way to run a modern state. Let\222s hope there are more like her, and that a few men listen.

680 words

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