



The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, USA, 2011, 381pp.

The Arab Awakening America and the Transformation of the Middle East offers broad lessons by analyzing key aspects of the Middle East turmoil. Eighteen authors cover the events since December 2010, analyzing these developments and their consequences.

The 18 co-authors look at the countries themselves, finding commonalities and grouping them according to the political evolutions that have (or have not) occurred in each

country. They offer insight into the current situation, and possible trajectory of each group of countries, as well as individual nation studies. They also bring together different major topics such as public opinion trends within the “Arab Street”; the role of social media and technology; socioeconomic and demographic conditions; the influence of Islamists; and the impact of the new political order on the Arab-Israeli peace process. They provide different perspectives on specific issues within a broader common framework, a broader agreement about what was happening and why, and what should be done about it.

Kenneth M. Pollak, Director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, who directed the book, explained that the goal, “by putting all these chapters in one place, all these countries in one place, [was] to allow people to look at both the individual idiosyncrasies of each country to see how the Arab Spring and understand how and why the Arab awakening played out in each of these countries in the way that it did, but also be able to compare that to how it played out in all the other countries. And so, we have relatively brief overviews of what the Arab Spring has meant in each country, why it played out the way that it did, how it happened, and of course, what ought to happen there to bring this to a successful, in some sense of the word, conclusion in each one of these countries. (...) But we also wanted to present a book that would give a holistic sense of what is going on with the Arab awakening, and how all of these different pieces which can be so utterly bewildering when looked at through the lens of TV or newspaper articles talking about unrest here and problems there and protests here and change or revolution in these other places, how all of it knitted together and how you could stand back and see the region as a whole, but also see it in different pieces”, he said.

The 36 chapters are organized in six different sections dealing with: The Dynamics of the Arab Spring, Countries in Transition, The Imperative of Reform, States in Crisis, Other Regional Actors and The External Powers.

If most of the chapters are country by country, the general structure of the book is quite original. Instead of being typically organized geographically or by political alignment, the book breaks the countries out in terms of how they stand in relationship to change, what needs to

happen, where they're moving in the future. The authors have organized them into three groups:

- countries in transition, who may even be struggling towards some kind of democratization, like Egypt, Iraq, the Palestinians, Tunisia, and Libya.
- countries who have so far resisted revolution, but who nonetheless are facing the pressures to change just as the countries that already have gone through these transitions,
- countries that are going to need to come to grips with change in the future if they are going to continue to survive in some recognizable form, countries like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the other Gulf states, Algeria, Jordan, Morocco. And finally, we have a section on the states that are in civil war, Yemen and Syria.

The Arab awakening begins with an entire section looking at the dynamics driving the Arab awakening, issues that span the entire region, how did these things shape the Arab awakening, how did the Arab awakening affect them? It aims to be a coherent summary and encapsulation of all of the events of the past year. There is also a whole chapter dedicated to public opinion and how it should have led us to understand what was happening and what the people of the region want.

But the analysis goes beyond the countries of the Middle East. There are other countries in the region which have

important equities involved, and are themselves exerting important influences. So there is a section looking at Iran, at Israel, and at Turkey, with separate chapters for each one talking about how they view the developments of the Arab awakening, How the Arab awakening is affecting them, and what they ought to be thinking about in the future?

Other chapters treat the reactions of the rest of the World, including emerging powers. In this section we look at the Arab awakening through the lenses of China, the European Union, Russia, and, most of all, of the United States. These chapters analyze how the Arab awakening has affected each of these countries or powers, how each of them has tried to react to the Arab awakening. They also try to define what should be expected in the future.

In the last section, the authors examine through thematic or functional chapters a wide range of factors that influenced the revolts: new media technologies, powerful militaries, democratization efforts, and ascendant Islamist parties, and the economics of the region, both how that contributed to the revolts around the Arab world and what the Arab Spring itself means for the economics of the region.

Extremely well documented, this book aims to set out in one place a whole variety of information. It helps us to understand why things happened the way that they did, what to expect in the future, and also what the United States and what the other countries of the region ought to be doing about them.

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