

REFLECTIONS ON THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS

ORDER, DEMOCRACY AND WESTERN POLICY

SHASHANK JOSHI

We are witnessing a series of revolutions and uprisings of a pace, connectivity and breadth for which the only parallel in modern history is 1989. But these aspirant and actual revolutions are incomplete, uneven and unpredictable. Shashank Joshi argues that long-held assumptions about the Western trilemma in the Middle East – the choice between democracy, stability and pro-Western foreign policy – must now be urgently re-evaluated.

The most commonly invoked metaphor of the Arab world's string of uprisings in the first part of 2011 has been the seasonal one, the Arab Spring, conjuring up expectations of a democratic summer. But the imagery is not just premature but also misleading. Egypt, the supposed success story, has had its long-term president replaced at least temporarily by a repressive military-led junta. Even if meaningful reform follows, its achievements will be fragile, subject to collapse and reversal under the slightest of shocks. And while millions of Egyptians and Tunisians have recovered a sense of political dignity, it cannot go without notice that Libyans may yet see their country slide in the direction of war-blighted Afghanistan or Iraq, mired in years of civil war that removes stability without offering democracy.

The other publics that have staged 'days of rage' since January 2011 – in Algeria, Morocco, Bahrain, Oman, Iran, Iraq, Gaza, Syria and Yemen – have provoked an array of reactions from their respective governments. The wildfire of protest and activism has been at once one and the same across these largely Arabic-speaking nations, and at the same time channelled in idiosyncratic ways. The complexity of such revolutionary

change is easily obscured. This is especially so when the process is overlaid onto a region whose political texture is often distorted by foreign lenses which perceive an undifferentiated 'petro-Islamic' mass rather than national variation. The region's 'late troubles', as Adam Smith described the American Revolution, therefore deserve greater scrutiny, with an eye on the long-term currents that have been set in motion, as well as the appropriate response to the day-to-day crises.

The evident drama of these events makes it difficult for us to discern those changes that are superficial and transient from those which will be far-reaching and long-lasting. But we may tentatively conclude that we are witnessing not just processes that produce regional turbulence, but genuinely systemic change, in the region and beyond, that challenges Western policy, across and beyond the Middle East and North Africa, far more than our leaders would like to admit. There are five such considerations.

Revolution and Introspection

First, and perhaps parochially, developments in Egypt and Tunisia in particular may reorient the public

discourse on foreign policy within Britain and other Western states by inducing a period of introspection as to the ethics and effectiveness of active support for non-democratic regimes. Historically, that support has been variously driven by efforts to secure energy supplies (as with the pivotal US-Saudi relationship dating to the Roosevelt administration, or the overthrow of Iranian prime minister, Mohammed Mossadeq, in 1952); to build bulwarks against first Soviet and then Islamic extremist penetration (the alliance with the Shah of Iran until 1979, or President Saleh of Yemen to this day); or by fears of the destabilising effects of rapid political and economic modernisation (a concern across the socially conservative societies of the Gulf). In many cases these were policy relics of the Cold War perpetuated by inertia and ignorance, but such 'realpolitik' considerations nevertheless continued to dictate relationships in the region – entailing, in some cases, a kind of knowing ignorance on the part of Western allies about the internal character of their partners.

The extensive media coverage of Egypt's revolutionary fervour, the escalating civil war in Libya and the protests in central squares across the



Egyptian protesters demand the resignation of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi during demonstrations in Tahrir Square in Cairo, 25 February 2011. Courtesy of AP Photo/Kevin Frayer.

Middle East appear to have underscored for Western publics one thing above all: the scale of their own governments' complicity in abetting regimes that regularly violate accepted principles of human rights and liberty. France, for instance, is still reeling from revelations that the since-departed foreign minister, Michele Alliot-Marie, had offered the support of French security forces to then-Tunisian president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali to stem the protests, having also apparently availed herself of private jets belonging to regime-affiliated businessmen.¹

Indeed, it is the Western public sphere – and not entrenched foreign policy bureaucracies or inertial elite discourse – that is likely to be most affected by revolutionary change in these countries. Despite the foreign policy interests such relations may have served, the highly visible impact on current events of the substantial flow of American funds to the nearly six-decade-old Egyptian police state, the flow of British military aircraft to undemocratic Gulf states and the

flow of French weaponry to Libya are likely to have reoriented public attitudes towards the uncomfortable mix of realpolitik and human rights in their nations' foreign policies.² This is a function not just of the protests, but also of the violence employed by the Tunisian, Bahraini, Egyptian and Libyan regimes against almost exclusively unarmed civilians. In a poll of British opinion undertaken in late February 2011, a quarter of respondents had no opinion about the operation of British oil companies in Libya, but over three-quarters considered it wrong for British companies to sell arms there and 62 per cent likewise disapproved of David Cameron's implicit promotion of arms sales on his official visit to the Gulf region that month.³ The impact of recent events is already feeding into popular opinion.

Of course, those publics are not the decisive factor in such policies. And, as China's centrality to the world's economy demonstrates, public opinion does not always pay much heed to the political status of a country's interlocutors and

trading partners. But a natural preference for consistency and the residual impact of popular values on foreign policy both suggest the evolution of new constraints on Western policy-makers when dealing with familiar autocratic clients and a greater sympathy towards dealings with those regimes that evolve in more consultative direction. This may be one tangible outcome from the 2011 revolutions.

Political Order in Changing Societies

Second, we should consider the important long-term question of whether Western policy in the Middle East has helped or hindered political change. In his seminal 1968 book, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, the renowned political scientist Samuel Huntington argued that 'the most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government but their degree of government'.⁴ Premature democratisation in the absence of robust institutions, suggested Huntington, had in the past and would in the future lead

to the survival of neither democracy nor institutions. The process of modernity would only worsen this relationship. Education and urbanisation strengthened social pressures against frail institutions, such as parliaments and courts, which were too weak to channel those pressures effectively.⁵

These arguments, which became a central part of what was called 'modernisation theory', were deployed – alongside equally important arguments about Islamist threats and the free flow of oil – to legitimise support for dictators. In some countries, particularly the more reformist or socially conservative of the Gulf monarchies, this seemed plausible. But there were several problems with it.

Some Western-backed autocrats did little to build meaningful institutions. Egypt, for instance, created an enfeebled parliament and hollowed out political parties as genuine political forces.⁶ The economy was shot through with military and political influence, and civil society suffocated under the weight of an intrusive security apparatus that, thirty years after Mubarak's accession, had barely receded.

Moreover, liberalisation is not democratisation. Bahrain, for example, allowed freer expression and a more vibrant public discourse.⁷ But this hardly affected the marginalisation of its Shia majority, and did nothing to empower a repeatedly disenfranchised parliament in the face of a dynastic absolute monarchy.⁸ In Saudi Arabia, the selective and sporadic transfer of wealth substituted for a process of institution-building. Even King Abdullah, who assumed power in 2005 promising to end corruption and open the political system, has deployed the language of reform but left Saudi politics largely unchanged. 'Reformist', in this context, has indicated non-trivial but institutionally meaningless change.⁹ This is not to deny that Western foreign-policy objectives were furthered in the course of alliances with these regimes. After all, Saudi Arabian, Egyptian, Yemeni and even Libyan support for counter-terrorism efforts has been valuable if imperfect. But this systemic institutional weakness does belie the claim that Western alliances have meaningfully furthered the modernisation process.

Stability or Democracy – or Neither?

In 2005, then-US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice famously told a Cairo audience that 'for 60 years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region, here in the Middle East, and we achieved neither'.¹⁰ The reason Western policy remains deeply confused is that those in Washington, London, and Paris have seen *both* portions of that choice discredited.

In 2003, the invasion of Iraq did not lead to a functional democracy but instead unleashed a hugely destructive insurgency, and strengthened an increasingly radical Iran. In the post-Saddam Iraq of 2011, Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki has dubbed protesters 'terrorists', closed the offices of two political parties involved in demonstrations, taken control of three formerly independent government bodies, and removed parliament's power to propose legislation.¹¹ The neoconservative conviction that democracy has been implanted in Iraq is mistaken. The legacies of that war – today's policy-makers – are aware of this, and correspondingly chastened.

In other places where democratic currents took hold, frequently encouraged by the West as in Palestine and Lebanon, groups with little interest in democratic government have assumed power. Hezbollah has spent years subverting the fragile institutions of Lebanon's post-Syrian future.¹² Hamas and Fatah, in Gaza and the West Bank respectively, have cheered on the arc of protest, while continuing to jail opponents and violently curb dissent.¹³

Over the last decade, then, both military and non-military forms of democracy promotion have received severe blows. It has seemed at times during the spring of 2011 that the pursuit of either stability or democracy would only have one eventual result: instability. That conundrum has led Britain and the United States to push their Gulf allies like Bahrain and Saudi Arabia to work towards a middle ground, reforming speedily rather than entrenching (and risk subsequent implosion or civil war) or capitulating to unknown and possibly hostile groups.

The Liberal Trilemma

The central question is how the lessons of rapid democratisation on the one hand, and the lessons of the dangers inherent in tolerating sclerotic and stagnant regimes on the other, will be balanced and synthesised. So third, how will those in the corridors of power answer the following questions: how much democracy is too much, and how much pursuit of immediate stability is too much? The example of Bahrain suggests one of two things: either that Western powers have decided they do not possess the coercive levers necessary to force democratic change in wealthy and independent countries, or that – their embarrassment over Ben Ali and Mubarak notwithstanding – they are unwilling to accept the risks of that change.

The Bahraini monarchy employed remarkably brutal techniques against the largely Shia protesters, including attacks on medical personnel.¹⁴ But as thousands of Saudi troops marched on to the island to quell the unrest, Western states remained unwilling to put the same degree of pressure on either Bahrain or Saudi Arabia as had been placed upon Mubarak in the days before his departure. This may avoid the many pitfalls of a volatile democratic transition, but it does nothing to address the pent-up demands of activists who remain unsatisfied with the severe backsliding in Bahrain's modest liberalisation over the past ten years. The West may have perceived pressing interests in preserving the Bahraini monarchy, not least because its role in enabling the US naval forces that guard regional sea-lanes and Saudi oilfields. But protests began as statements of socio-economic grievance; they were without the sectarian edge and demand for regime change that later transpired. Grievances can also evolve in the course of their expression: many in Tahrir Square arrived with economic motives, but left with political ones.

A failure to account for the accumulation of these forces against elaborate but superficial institutions will simply force a repeat of the late violence in the near future. In 1989, China's use of massive force against

unarmed protesters was a reminder of how force can effectively silence dissent.¹⁵ But China's ruling party is a flexible body that regularly replaces its leadership, uses provincial government as a lightning rod for dissent and has cultivated an extensive apparatus of repression.¹⁶ That apparatus includes state-of-the-art surveillance and censorship tools, extensive networks of paid informants and carefully calibrated crowd control. China's Communist Party has also re-articulated a post-Tiananmen justification for its rule, fashioned around economic growth and nationalism.¹⁷ Where Arab governments delivered growth, as in Egypt, this was narrowly based and bound up with a more pervasive and visible form of corruption than its Chinese equivalent.

No Arab state can hope to match that level of repressive sophistication and, as President Obama insisted in his own Cairo speech, 'suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away'.¹⁸ Nor have most Arab regimes succeeded in articulating a persuasive justification for their rule, whether prosperity or religious sanction. Everything in the 'Obama doctrine', as embodied in the Cairo speech and others, suggests that Obama and his administration understand the long-term imperatives of pressing for reform – but everything about their practice in Bahrain, Iran, and Saudi Arabia implies that the reality is inestimably more complicated.

In short, Western governments perceive a 'trilemma'.¹⁹ In this view, one can have any two out of the following three: (1) a stable regime, (2) a democratic regime and (3) a pro-Western regime. The first two produce a self-governing and independent democracy (Turkey); the second two produce an unstable Western-allied democracy (Pakistan, Afghanistan); the first and third together produce a Western-allied dictatorship (Saudi Arabia). We stand at the edge of an era in which the third of these combinations looks to be discredited and itself unstable.

Of course, merely understanding the persistence of those forces and ideas is no guarantee that local rulers can be persuaded to make the necessary changes. We should be wary of

overstating our ability to effect change by the power of persuasion and sanction alone. Some regimes, like Libya's, will tear apart their country in the name of stability regardless of the pressure heaped upon them.

Varieties of Revolution

Fourth, we have to ask whether there is one revolution in the Middle East or as many (proto-)revolutions as there are protest movements.

Egypt is the most populous state in the Arab world. It has been a republic for six decades, including radical spells under Nasser, and at the vanguard of multiple wars with Israel. Bahrain is a minuscule island with a Shia majority and a Sunni absolute monarchy. Iran is a revolutionary clerical state, plural in its politics but authoritarian in its administration. Tunisia is a relatively wealthy North African state (its per capita income is nearly double that of Egypt or Morocco) with a large middle-class and diversified economy. In every one of these states, and more, the fall of Tunisian President Ben Ali triggered serious protests. The chain of uprisings cuts across class, socio-economic, political, linguistic, sectarian, societal and historical divisions.²⁰ No series of concentrated and overlapping uprisings in history, other than that of 1989, can have spanned as great a range of states.

This suggests a paradox. On the one hand, no autocracy is immune because they all share one pivotal characteristic: their rule is built on fear, rather than raw coercive capacity. When that fear evaporates, even the constant application of force will struggle to keep up with the pace and intensity of fresh protests. This is what differentiates this epoch of protest from past episodes.²¹

Bahrain, Libya, Egypt and Syria all faced recurrent protest movements in the 1980s and 1990s. In February 1982, the Syrian army killed up to 40,000 residents of the town of Hama after a Muslim Brotherhood revolt. In 2004–05, the Kefaya Movement in Egypt united disparate anti-government movements into a grassroots coalition that eventually petered out. Every country in the region has felt some degree of resistance, but it is only now that a widespread

sense of momentum – physical but also psychological safety in numbers – has tilted the balance for many of the uncommitted.²² This is precisely what lends to these movements a thrilling unpredictability. The previously fixed boundaries within which previous protest occurred have been dismantled. The resultant dynamics are exceedingly fluid.²³

On the other hand, then, local conditions will shape the 'demand side' of revolution as well as the 'supply side' of repression – the constraints within which regimes can strike back. The 'Tiananmen solution' is one option, but it requires that protests not be too geographically dispersed and a long period of deft information management.²⁴

Returning to Huntington, we can observe that where effective channels of expressing grievance are deemed to exist, then what Huntington called 'social forces' make themselves felt through those, rather than via direct action. Pakistan is a notional democracy in the grip of an enormously powerful military establishment;²⁵ but there is genuine turnover of political parties. Voters rightly believe that they can remove rulers, including military rulers like President Musharraf.²⁶

On the supply side, the pivotal factors are the coherence, capacity and loyalty of the security forces. The political scientists Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, in their authoritative study of 'competitive authoritarian' regimes, argue that 'state coercive capacity is critical to regime outcomes'.²⁷ Eva Bellin, a professor at Hunter College, similarly notes that 'democratic transition can be carried out successfully only when the state's coercive apparatus lacks the will or capacity to crush it'.²⁸

Bellin's mention of 'will' is important because Egypt's army would have had little trouble in clearing Tahrir Square if it had chosen to do so. Though tied into the regime through patronage and personal linkages, lower levels of the officer corps proved unwilling to fire on fellow citizens.²⁹ In this, they were likely affected by the professional – rather than, say, sectarian or ethnic – status of the Egyptian military and its strong nationalist credentials.³⁰

In other words, strong and coherent security forces can still peel away *en masse*. In Libya, the army quickly split once protests began. Those units commanded by Gaddafi family members and bound by ties of clan and personal loyalty to the regime formed the nucleus of the loyalist forces, but it is also important that even many defecting units withdrew to barracks or disbanded rather than join the rebels outright.³¹ In other words, weak and divided security forces can fracture, but still leave the regime with sufficient firepower to frustrate a rebellion. Where the demand for change is high and the supply of effective repressive capacity low, protests are likely to explode and be self-sustaining. But it is profoundly difficult to ascertain *ex ante* what actually constitutes sufficient repressive capacity.³²

In Syria, for instance, where protests commenced in mid-March, the regime's bloody reaction set in motion that familiar cycle of demonstrations, crackdown, death and renewed protest. We may attribute some of this at least to the nature of the Syrian security forces which, dominated by the minority Alawi sect, are bound closely to the regime through patrimonial rather than professional ties. This is why, unlike in Egypt but as in Libya, orders to fire will be obeyed. But no single factor is determinative of revolution. Bashar Al-Assad's popular hard-line foreign policy and pseudo-reformist credentials reduce the likelihood that any uprising will be sufficiently broad-based to necessitate a brutal response. What this suggests is that revolutions, if they occur at all, will follow idiosyncratic, unpredictable paths that depend on national characteristics.

Revolution is a Process

Fifth, we need to consider whether the greatest misunderstanding of the uprisings lies in our ontology of revolution. Revolution is a process – not an event.³³ And revolution is not a process internal to states – it is at least a partially public spectacle, played out in front of a crowd of co-Arabs and a world audience, whose reactions feed back into the script.³⁴ Crucially, these two factors interact.

In assuming that revolution ends with the deposition of a ruler, we confuse regime decapitation with regime change. But this perception is reinforced by media coverage of such events, which treat them sequentially – Tunisia, then Egypt, then Libya, with the next revolution waiting patiently in line. But not only are these overlapping struggles, they do not end when the ruler and cameras jointly leave.

The term 'regime' is used with care. It denotes a *network* of powerful actors, operating both within and outside formal political institutions. Robust regimes are built around more than one individual, and include a number of powerful actors whose rule depends on mutual support. This is why Mubarak's departure, understandably euphoric for the ten of thousands in Tahrir Square, was the beginning rather than the end of the Egyptian Revolution. This is also why Bashar Al-Assad's departure in Syria would not by itself transform a regime built on overlapping networks of political, military and business elites. The French and Russian Revolutions suggest the scale of the task that can follow a successful deposition.

There are strong reasons for scepticism that a genuinely democratic structure will replace the Mubarak dictatorship. Leaked US diplomatic cables suggested that the man who replaced Mubarak, former Defence Minister Mohammed Tantawi, had 'opposed both economic and political reforms that he perceives as eroding central government power', and was 'mired in a post-Camp David military paradigm that has served his cohort's narrow interests for the last three decades'.³⁵ The cable went on to note that 'he [was] focused on regime stability and maintaining the status quo through the end of [his] time'.³⁶ Though the military quickly unveiled a plan for a referendum on constitutional amendments and handover to civilian authority, neither initiative was straightforward.

The military has sound reasons to step aside from civil administration, because it has no wish to be tainted by the inevitable maladministration that blights Egyptian governance. Nor, as Pakistan demonstrates, does stepping

aside require that it relinquish its sprawling economic empire or control over key foreign policy decisions.

After the military unveiled plans for a rapid handover of power in February, Egyptian liberals objected to the constitutional amendments – approved by more than 77 per cent of voters – on the grounds that they compressed the transition period and thereby benefited the better organised and resourced members of the formerly ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) and regime elites.³⁷ The amendments also banned the formation of political parties with a regional or linguistic agenda, or those threatening 'social peace'.

Above all, liberals were denied the elected Constituent Assembly that, they claimed, would allow for political catharsis. There are also worrying signs that Egypt's military is reverting to type after a brief post-Tahrir interlude in which it was feted as an instrument of the people. In the weeks after Mubarak's ouster, the military has employed arbitrary detention and torture. In late March, the new regime passed a law banning all demonstrations. All this bodes ill for a free Egypt. As in Turkey, the military's privileges and ambitions will prove serious obstacles on the path to reform unless military elites consciously choose to play a constructive and statesmanlike role even when doing so impacts upon their own privileges.³⁸

Revolutionary Trajectories

What, then, will be the long-term effect of this revolutionary energy? First, this movement is already of global and historical significance. Successive twentieth-century waves of democratisation – in Asia, Latin America, Europe and Africa – had left the Arab world behind. Those waves are now washing over North Africa and the Middle East, and will leave their indelible mark on every regime. Even those regimes that have deftly contained resistance and show signs of greater resilience have been compelled to respond to their people's wishes. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, the monarchy has initiated what Steven Cook calls 'riyalpolitik' – allocating tens of billions of dollars on housing, unemployment and medical care.³⁹ King

Abdullah's promise to fight corruption was vague and devoid of detail, but it reflected the threat to authority perceived by one of the most robust and wealthy regimes in the region.

Second, mainstream Arab opinion is more anti-American and anti-Israeli than that of its pro-Western governments.⁴⁰ The Pew Global Attitudes Project shows that, in Egypt during 2010, 82 per cent of Egyptians held an unfavourable view of the United States; only 15 per cent felt that the US considered Egyptian interests. Most worryingly for Washington, 73 per cent opposed US-led anti-terrorism efforts.⁴¹

But this does not mean that a third 'radical wave' – the first two being the postcolonial and Islamist waves, to use Lawrence Freedman's terms – is upon us.⁴² Powerful armies are likely to keep a tight grip on foreign policy, as they do in Pakistan and did in Turkey. Egypt's army will not jeopardise the \$1.5 billion it receives annually from the United States in military assistance, and it therefore possess incentives to block any civilian efforts to repudiate the Egypt-Israel peace treaty or offer major assistance to Hamas.⁴³ There may yet develop a new kind of gulf between the democratic-radical and status quo conservative camps, led by Egypt and Saudi Arabia respectively, but this will make itself felt only incrementally.

Moreover, the last ten years have seen a series of anti-Israeli shifts in the region, from Hezbollah's ascendance in Lebanon to Turkey's reorientation away from Israel and towards the Islamic world.⁴⁴ Throughout, the United States has preserved continuous and staunch support for Israel, even when the latter's actions have provoked profound regional and global anger, as with Operation *Cast Lead* in Gaza or the relentless pace of expansion in its West Bank settlements. However, the strains in the US-Turkey relationship – over Israel, Iran and Libya – are suggestive of the diplomatic difficulties the United States and Europe will face in engaging with newly empowered Arab publics.

This is consonant with a broader shift. The diplomacy behind UN Security Council Resolution 1973, sanctioning intervention in Libya, was remarkable

in avoiding Russian or Chinese veto. But behind that success lay a chasm: every BRIC country and every aspirant to a permanent UN Security Council seat was opposed to the intervention. States at the heart of NATO, like Germany and Turkey, were similarly opposed. What remained was a transatlantic rump with a superficial Arab veneer. Though the resolution's multilateral status is symbolically and practically important, this cannot disguise that the question of intervention has sharpened the existence of stark international fault-lines, with those states that were opposed constituting nearly two-fifths of the earth's population. That those fault-lines existed even during the Kosovo intervention – which proceeded without a UN resolution – makes this no less significant, because in 1999 the unipolar world looked as if it might persist. China was neither the world's second largest economy nor Washington's creditor. India was only seven years into its economic reforms and faced international isolation for its nuclear tests. The US had not yet suffered the dotcom bubble and associated recession. That year, William Wohlforth could write that 'no other major power is in a position to follow any policy that depends for its success on prevailing against the United States in ... extended rivalry'.⁴⁵ That no longer appears as self-evidently correct.

If a multipolar world is emerging, then multilateralism will be an increasingly important tool for global governance.⁴⁶ But the paradox is that it will also be much harder to wield successfully, unless established major powers are willing to act through small and unrepresentative coalitions.

Between Prudence and Alarmism

Third, and last, revolution is unpredictable. At the end of 1978 Jimmy Carter famously declared that 'under the Shah's brilliant leadership Iran is an island of stability in one of the most troublesome regions of the world'.⁴⁷ Two months later, the Shah was toppled. In January 2011, US Vice-President Joe Biden noted that Hosni Mubarak was 'very responsible', adding that he 'would not refer to him as a dictator'.⁴⁸ Two weeks later, Mubarak was forced

from office. The Iranian precedent suggests that it is not just difficult to predict the course of revolutions, but also the types of regimes they produce. Sceptics are correct to question the democratic credentials of, say, Libya's opposition movement. But scepticism too easily slides from prudence to alarmism.

Revolutionary movements do sometimes produce lasting change, overcoming tremendous institutional handicaps to build inclusive and open states. This is all the more so when the engine of change is indigenous, both to the region and the countries involved. It is also important to understand that the process of revolution forges new political forces by virtue of the demands it makes on civil society. In Egypt, young and secular activists formed the nucleus of the protest movement that absorbed so many others once a critical mass gathered in Cairo. The Muslim Brotherhood, commonly described as 'the best organized and most extensive opposition movement in Egypt', arrived late and participated with weariness.⁴⁹ In Syria, protests have penetrated both Alawi and Sunni majority cities, both assumed to be loyal to the regime.

The Arab spring – or, rather, 'awakening' – suggests that a fixation with pre-existing fault-lines can blind us to alternative sources of revolutionary energy, but also prove misleading as to the post-revolutionary futures that exist beyond the 'lurking Islamism' caricature invoked by so many trite public-policy briefs and Arab despots over the past decade of stagnation. The Arab world resists both utopian and dystopian simplifications, and our policy discourse must equally resist the lure of each. ■

Shashank Joshi is a doctoral student of international relations at Harvard University's Department of Government, and an Associate Fellow of RUSI. During 2007–08, he was a Kennedy Scholar from Britain to the United States. He has taught undergraduates at both Cambridge and Harvard, and also worked for the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Moscow, Citigroup in New York, and in RUSI's Asia Programme on India and global security issues.

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