After the Arab Uprisings:

Between Democratization, Counter-revolution and State Failure

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The uprisings that commenced in 2010 received different interpretations and were called by different names. Many (Western) countries, media, commentators and pundits called it "Arab Spring", aiming at democratisation and the rule of law. Some others interpreted it as an "Arab Winter", resulting in authoritarianism and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism (see: Feldman, 2020; Korotayev and Tausch, 2019). Some other Islamic countries and groups, namely Iran, labelled it an 'Islamic Awakening', in that the demonstrators were seeking Islamic Government and not Western-style democracies (see: Mohseni, 2013). These contradictory interpretations caused different lines of foreign policy for the regional and trans-regional powers.

Being part of the first group, Raymond Hinnebusch and his colleagues in this edited volume, "After the Arab Uprisings" seek to theorise and explore the different contexts of the Arab uprisings, the pre-protest situation, regime types, characteristics of mobilisation, the different trajectories countries have experienced and finally the outcome of the protests. Believing in democratisation as the main impetus of these uprisings, the book strives to explain the different paths of the uprisings in three states: Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia.

Examining the features of the revolutions' starting points, the regime types, and the features of the uprisings, Hinnebusch endeavours to explain the different pathways Arab countries have taken and different outcomes, in terms of the regime type. He concludes that where social mobilisation was high and political incorporation was low, the society had a good opportunity to demonstrate its will, and state institutions were solid and autonomous, presidents were removed rapidly and peacefully, institutions remaining almost intact, such as in Egypt. This pathway requires a broad mobilisation of opposition. On the other hand, in the absence of these conditions, the result has been a protracted conflict and stalemate, such as in Syria, Libya, and Yemen.

The book claims that "violent uprisings and state failure sharply narrowed democratisation prospects, while relatively peaceful transitions widened them". To conclude, the book argues that "Together, starting points, subsequent agency, and context shaped divergent trajectories of post-uprising regime reformation." (p. 154)

According to the book, some factors have been critical in determining the final outcome of the uprisings, their respective trajectories, and socio-political consequences.

Elements such as the tendency toward secularism, a strong middle class, and presence of an educated, unemployed and internet-proficient youth were critical in the mobilisation and unification of the masses. But lacking a potent leadership, unifying ideology, and experience hindered them to usher in a new era of democratisation and replacing corrupt regime. Furthermore, the split between secular and Islamists was very detrimental to the process.

The dynamics of Islamism have played a very critical role in the issue. The different and complicated relations of Islamic groups and factions with the incumbent regimes and other political actors were determining factors in the outcome of the uprisings. The author believes that without the inclusion of Islamic groups in the process, no democratic transition is likely.

Their relations with ruling regimes, interests, capacities, and institutional autonomy have brought about completely different outcomes. The author argues that in Egypt, the military was solid, somehow had problems with Mubarak's family, and had institutional autonomy to not support the regime. The military sacrificed the president, striving to preserve itself. In Syria, the issue is different and the military remained largely loyal to the president and prevented the fall of Assad. In Yemen or Libya, the story is completely different and the military was split based on tribal or family lines, which has resulted in a stalemate in Yemen and state failure in Libya.

Another important factor is the role of workers. In Egypt and Tunisia, because they were in large numbers and organised by the workers' union, they had a significant role in countering the ruling regime and paving the way for democratisation. It is argued that workers' alliance with the middle class is of crucial importance in any democratisation movement.

The authors believe that besides agency, the political-economic context is also critical in determining the outcome of an uprising. Social and political actors act in that context which defines their behaviour and interests. Because of the political, historical, cultural, economic, and social situation, the authors argue that the political

economy is not in favour of democratisation in the MENA. They argue that " ... the uprisings were rooted in protest at the neoliberal solution." (p. 158)

Foreign intervention has been very important both with regards to the successful transition to democracy or the failure thereof. In Egypt, foreign forces intervention played a positive role in preventing public repression, while in Libya foreign actors intervened and toppled the Qaddafi regime. Regional countries' competitive interferences in Syria, including from Russia, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, have contributed to a protracted civil war, the failure of democratisation and social fragmentation.

Another major issue that has been explained in the book is the typology of the emerging regimes/ governments in the post-uprising era.

1. The book argues that in countries where a regime fails and the emerging regime is exclusionary, with a weak military capacity to save the state, there would be a failed state, with competing groups striving to consolidate their own rule over the country, like what happened in Iraq and Syria with the rise of ISIS.

2. If the ruling regime survives and the state remains intact, a possible scenario is "restoration". After the uprising, it will require "Authoritarian Upgrading" to cope with the mobilised society, like in Egypt. (P. 164)

3. The third possible pathway from the uprising is where democratic transition ends in polyarchy. The authors believe that "the condition of democratic consolidation, a shared identity, a balance of class forces, institutions capable of incorporating mass participation, and insider-outsider transition coalition were largely absent in the post-Arab uprisings period, with the possible exception of Tunisia."

The book is an invaluable contribution of Raymond Hinnebusch and his colleagues to the literature, adding a thought-provoking, argumentative and illuminating piece to the current debates. As a Middle-Eastern, I can't agree with the main assumption of the book that democratisation was the principal goal or the final destination of the uprisings. Besides, the malign intervention of the Western countries in the uprisings deserves much more attention

and focus. Despite these issues, the book is one of the best ones in this category, well organised, well-written, valuable to read and ponder upon it.

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