

Fred Halliday Memorial Lecture

Framing the Arab Uprisings: a historical perspective

Professor Juan Cole

Richard P Mitchell Collegiate Professor of History, University of Michigan

Author Informed Comment

Professor Kimberly Hutchings

Chair, LSE



Suggested hashtag for Twitter users: #lsemiddleeast





Democracy and Revolt in the Arab World



Juan Cole www.juancole.com

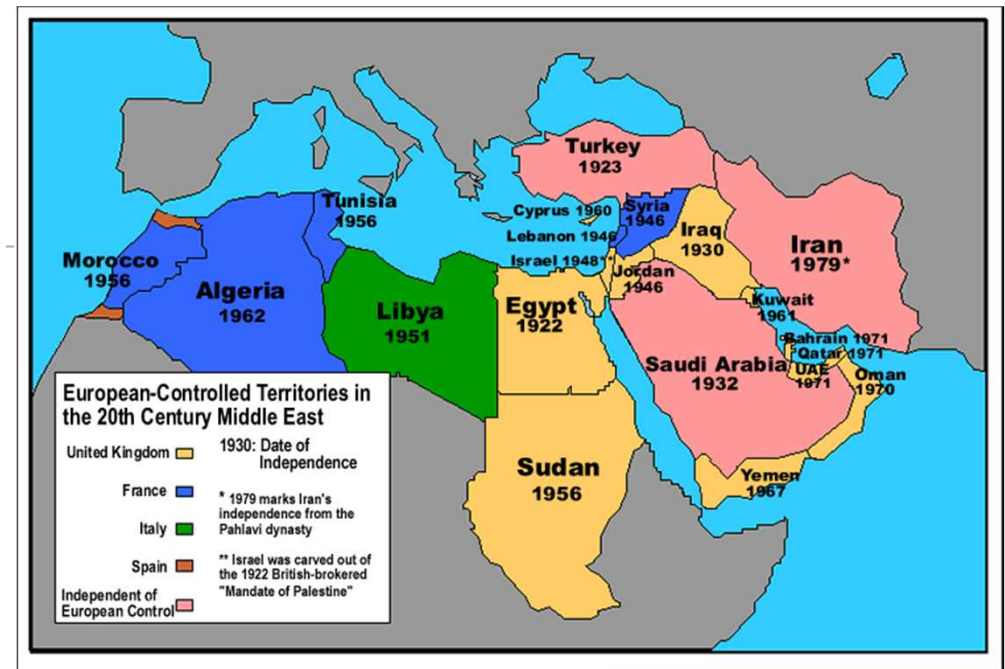
The Evolution of the Arab Spring

- ▶ YouTube - Empire - The evolution of Arab revolutions



Liberalism Tainted

- ▶ European colonial powers
 - ▶ Allowed liberal parliamentary politics
 - ▶ With colonial administrator atop them
 - ▶ European laws imposed on Middle East allowed big landlordism
 - ▶ Hacienda owners were the ones elected to parliament, as PM
 - ▶ Tainted liberalism as elitist, complaisant toward Western colonialism, predatory



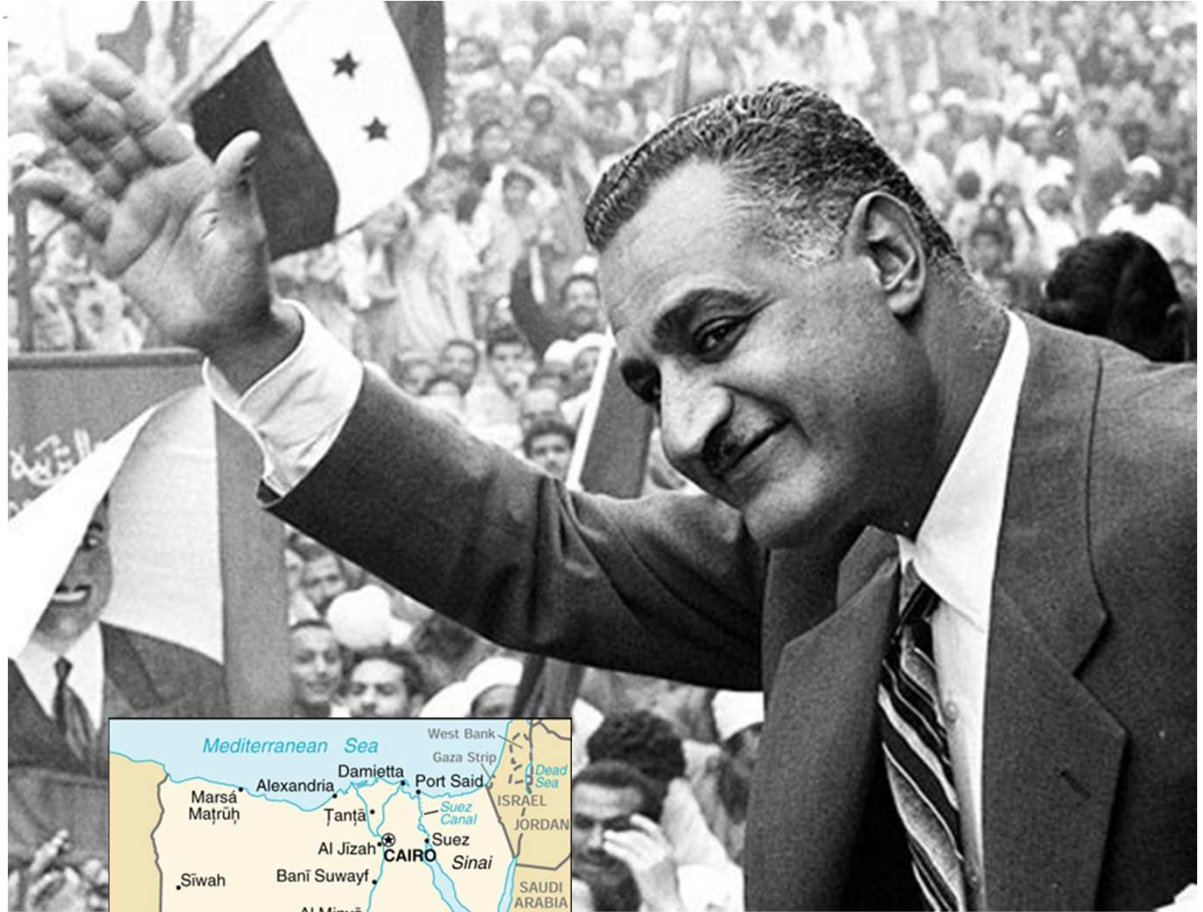
The Rise of the Postcolonial Authoritarian State

- ❖ Anticolonial regimes after World War II
 - ❖ Neo-Destour Party in French Tunisia
 - ❖ FLN in French Algeria
 - ❖ Colonels' revolution in Egypt (Gamal Abdel Nasser)
 - ❖ Military role in post-French Syria
 - ❖ Qaddafi Revolution 1969, Libya
 - ❖ Colonels' revolution in post-British Iraq, 1958



Colonels of the Nation

- ▶ Military regimes drew legitimacy
 - ▶ From role in gaining national independence
 - ▶ Wars for Arab causes, as with Israel, Iran-Iraq War
 - ▶ Land Reform
 - ▶ From state-led industrialization efforts and economic uplift
 - ▶ “Socialism”
 - ▶ From national education programs, creation of national institutions



States of Emergency



- ▶ **Emergency laws**
 - ▶ Often rooted in colonial regulations of French and British
 - ▶ Unrealistic rights mentioned in constitutions often suspended on grounds of national crisis
 - ▶ Assassination of Egyptian President Anwar El Sadat, 1981
 - ▶ Algerian Civil War 1993-2002



Threat of Muslim Fundamentalism

- ▶ Regime as protection from Muslim fundamentalism
 - ▶ Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Islamic Salvation front in Algeria, Nahda in Tunisia
 - ▶ Charged with illiberalism
 - ▶ Terrorism
 - ▶ Oppression of women
 - ▶ Hostility to modernity and progress



1990s-2000s Neoliberalism



- ▶ Privatization of public sector enterprises
- ▶ Allowed 'insider trading'
- ▶ Government made key economic decisions
- ▶ Cronies of leader were well positioned to invest with inside knowledge
- ▶ In Tunisia, nepotism of Ben Ali, Trabelsis
- ▶ Oil wealth of Qaddafis

Miseries of the Mafia State

- ▶ Government's rents, income decline in 1990s, 2000s
 - ▶ Hurts government employees (huge sector)
 - ▶ Forced to raise taxes
- ▶ Official "unions," no strikes allowed
- ▶ Repression, arbitrary arrest, torture
- ▶ High unemployment among college graduates
- ▶ Corruption, nepotism interfered with economic growth
- ▶ Phony elections (president uncontested, ruling party always won in parliament)



Ben Ali in Tunisia



- ▶ Tunisia:
- ▶ Gen. Zine El Abidin Ben Ali, President 1987-2011
- ▶ Eased in by Italians when Habib Bourghiba seemed failing
- ▶ Wikileaks cable: 50% of Tunisia's economic elite related to President
- ▶ 13% unemployment, strikes broken up, high unemployment among college graduates



Tunisia as Catalyst

- ▶ Dec. 2010 self-immolation of graduate Mohamed Bouazizi
- ▶ In rural town of Sidi Bouzid
- ▶ Provokes provincial town protests where regime not strong
- ▶ Moved to capital
- ▶ Military refuses to fire on demonstrators
- ▶ 14 Jan. Ben Ali flees



Bargaining with the Elite

- ▶ Urban crowds seek to force elite
 - ▶ To push ruling family & its cronies out
- ▶ Paralyze economy with rallies
- ▶ Give military choice of shooting them or making a coup
- ▶ Implicit theory that narrow ruling group is exploitative
- ▶ If they are forced out, system will open up
 - ▶ Politically and economically

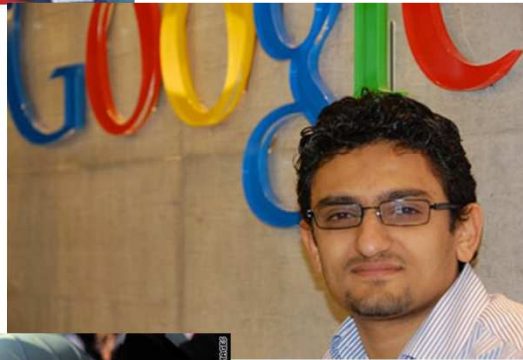


Tunisia aftermath

- ▶ Ben Ali's last appointed prime minister, Mohamed Ghannouchi, survives until 27 Feb., forced to resign
 - ▶ Technocratic cabinet led by Beji Caid el Sebsi
 - ▶ Feb. 4 end state of emergency
 - ▶ Ben Ali's Rally for Constitutional Democracy party dissolved as corrupt
 - ▶ 'Ministry of Information', in charge of censorship, abolished
 - ▶ March 8: Secret police abolished
 - ▶ Parliamentary elections scheduled for October 23
-



Egypt Aftermath



- ▶ Jan. 25, succeeding Facebook flashmobs
 - ▶ Military refuses to fire on protesters, unlike security police
 - ▶ Hosni Mubarak forced out Feb. 11
 - ▶ Military coup
 - ▶ Appointed PM Ahmad Shafiq forced out 7 March
 - ▶ Habib Adly put on trial
 - ▶ Secret police abolished
 - ▶ But:
 - ▶ Emergency laws not gone
 - ▶ Women repressed
 - ▶ Coptic Christians unhappy
-

Arab Spring Spreads

- ▶ Libya: civil war and UN intervention
- ▶ Yemen: President may be forced to step down
- ▶ Bahrain: Crackdown
- ▶ Syria: challenge to Baath Party from urban crowds
- ▶ Oman: Sultan makes concessions
- ▶ Morocco: King makes concessions

□

Syria



Leftover Business Egypt: Military Rule



Muslim Fundamentalism

- ▶ Lamm al-Shaml in Tunisia
- ▶ April 6 & Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt
- ▶ Abdulhakim Belhadj in Libya



Conclusion

- ▶ New Liberal Age in Middle East?
- ▶ Aspirations sound like US New Deal
 - ▶ Union interests
 - ▶ Education
 - ▶ Parliamentary politics, civilian rule
 - ▶ Rule of law, civil liberties, end of censorship
- ▶ Will it suit Great Power politics?
- ▶ Will Neoliberal billionaires steal the show?

