Fred Halliday Memorial Lecture

Framing the Arab Uprisings: a historical perspective

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Suggested hashtag for Twitter users: #lsemiddleeast
Democracy and Revolt in the Arab World

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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 Alis, 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:
- 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?