

Editor's Note

An Iranian View on the Uprisings in the Arab World

In the last couple of seasons, the Arab world has been engulfed by popular uprisings. What was sparked by a young Tunisian man's self-immolation, by any definition in social science, has evolved into a turning point in the Middle East and North Africa. Some observers have compared recent events with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I, resulting in the birth of a new regional order. All concerned players in international and regional politics have demonstrated a high degree of sensitivity to this indeed remarkable shift and have been trying to cope with a plethora of analytical as well as policy challenges. In this equation, how does the Iranian perspective on these developments look like? Taking into account that there are a wide range of views in the Iranian discourse on the Arab uprisings on the one hand, and the exigencies of Iranian neighborhood with the Arab world, on the other there is no single way to discern "the Iranian view". However, an Iranian perspective may be recognized by looking at Iran's views on the nature and direction of the Arab uprisings, as well as the opportunities and challenges these developments pose for the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The question of how to analyze the Arab uprisings has turned into a cognitive and analytical battlefield among competing Iranian

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views, some with monumental distances between each other. One analytical school is of the belief that these uprisings are nothing but the outcome of an American and Western grand social engineering devised outside the region. The other school focuses on domestic, social and political structures as the main reasons behind the Arab Spring. The dominant, official Iranian view is that the Arab uprisings are an 'Islamic Awakening' and a continuation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. Obviously, the cognitive and practical outcomes of these schools' views differ in a qualitative fashion.

One of the opportunities for Iran born out of the Arab uprisings is the relative failure of Iranophobia. Let us not forget that the concept helped construct the security identities of regimes such as that of the ousted Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak. The collapse of Mubarak's regime can be equated with the collapse of the "Iran as the Most Important Security Danger Project in the Middle East": a project designed by the United States, Israel and their Arab friends. The pro-western Arab elites manipulated fear of Iran to solicit international support for their very oppressive domestic agendas. During the last six months, Iran has not topped the security agenda in the region, though some players are trying very hard to repair the obsolete and tainted construction of Iranophobia in the regional and international strategic arenas. In addition to the lessening of the efficacy of Iranophobia, Iran has a special feeling that its revolutionary values have gained regional weight: a celebrated opportunity.

The Arab uprisings are not, however, solely an opportunity for Iran; challenges are also significant in the new regional setting. The most vivid challenges stem from the nature of Arab political systems, which through the prism of Iranian interests have sharp structural differences. This can be seen in the cases of Bahrain and Syria. Furthermore, the Western stance towards the Arab uprisings is challenging; especially when the concept of an opportunistic wave riding by Western powers comes to the Iranian psychological



mindset. Finally, Iran and other Middle Eastern states cannot be but concerned and worried about the dark side of these developments, which include civil war and regional instability.

Whatever these Arab uprisings are, they have caused "surprises" and "shocks" for those involved in the policy community and scholarly circles. Yet, the surprise Iran felt and feels seems to be relatively less compared with other regional and global actors. The reason? More than three decades ago, Iran experienced what the Arab world is going through today.

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