

THE ARAB SPRING: WHAT'S NEXT?

The heady Arab spring of 2011 has been succeeded by a summer of violence and uncertainty. There are conflicting interpretations of the meaning, nature and results of the revolutions. This article proposes a reading of the changes taking place in the middle East and North Africa based on a macro historical theory and envisions four possible outcomes. There is a danger that the insurrections, after weakening the nation-states, will revive tribal and sectarian divisions, as in Iraq. Political revolution must find fulfilment in an economic transformation and a social emancipation through a cultural renaissance according to the author,

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TRIGGER EVENTS

Whether the trigger event was the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia on 17 December 2010, the earlier *WikiLeaks* cables describing Tunisia as run by a “mafiaesque” elite (Elizabeth Dickinson, “The First *WikiLeaks* Revolution”, available at, <http://wikileaks.foreignpolicy.com>) or the rap music of Hamada Ben Amor (El Général), the Middle East has irrevocably changed. Dictators in Egypt and Tunisia have been overthrown and the stage set for potentially deeper cultural and economic changes. Bahrain’s leadership has survived through mercenary violence by renting the armed forces of Saudi Arabia, Libya is in a civil war, Yemen in the midst of a regime change, while Jordan, Morocco and Syria remain uncertain. This change began in Iran over a year ago—(although some like Dada Krsnasevananda argue that the Arab spring began with the Cedar revolution in Lebanon in 2005)—when the rule of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei appeared to be ending. Nevertheless, by shutting down the internet and using bullets, the Revolutionary Guards and surveillance technologies provided by European

corporations, the Khamenei-Ahmadinejad alliance prevailed. The Iranian spring, it appears will need to wait for more winters. However, if macrohistorians like Ibn Khaldûn, Prahbat Ranjan Sarkar and Pitrim Sorokin (Johan Galtung and Sohail Inayatullah, *Macrohistory and Macrohistorians*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1997) are correct, Khamenei's successors will find it more difficult to keep the youth at bay. A pendulum shift is underway in Iran, away from the religious right, leading to an integrated modern and ideational society.

Before speculating on alternative trajectories, the types of revolutionary changes need to be examined. Are they closer to the American, Iranian or Yugoslav revolutions or the people's power revolution of the Philippines? Using the approach articulated by macrohistorian Sarkar, this paper analyses the nature of these revolutions and forecasts possible futures.

LIBERTY

Citizens in the Arab world have commented that the nature of the new leadership is not crucial as long as the government is democratically elected. As stated by an Egyptian student Khaled Kamel, "I don't care who ends up running the country, as long as I have the ability to change them if I don't like them" (Bobby Ghosh, "Rage, Rap and Revolution", *Time*, 28 February 2011, p23). The issue is not just electoral reform but the desire to influence the future, to recover personal agency. The surprising fact is that old narratives such as imperialism, re-colonisation and Westernisation used by leaders have not stuck. While these were important to the post-World War Two generation, they are now considered tired excuses used by aging tyrants to stay in power. Conspiracy theories—the ever powerful distant "foreign hand"—in the lands that created them have little traction, even though some leaders continue to spout them. More swaying are the demands for autonomy, freedom and liberty—the American ideals. As happened over two decades ago in Tiananmen Square, it was a replica of the Statue of Liberty that stood tall.

In the Arab world today, old narratives such as imperialism, re-colonisation and Westernisation used by leaders have not stuck. While these were important to the post-World War Two generation, they are now considered tired excuses used by aging tyrants to stay in power.

The sacrifice of young people has been a result of the new social media. Many young people in the Arab world assert that *Facebook* has made peaceful protest possible. The Arab cable station *al Jazeera* has been instrumental in making daily Arab politics more transparent or at least more obvious. Governments have less control over not just the litany of news events, but the meanings people give to them. Social media allow revolutions to continue longer, since regimes can no longer target leaders through assassinations. As with the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic—by among others the youth group Otpor—with no clear leadership, no particular person can be targeted. With social media what previously took years

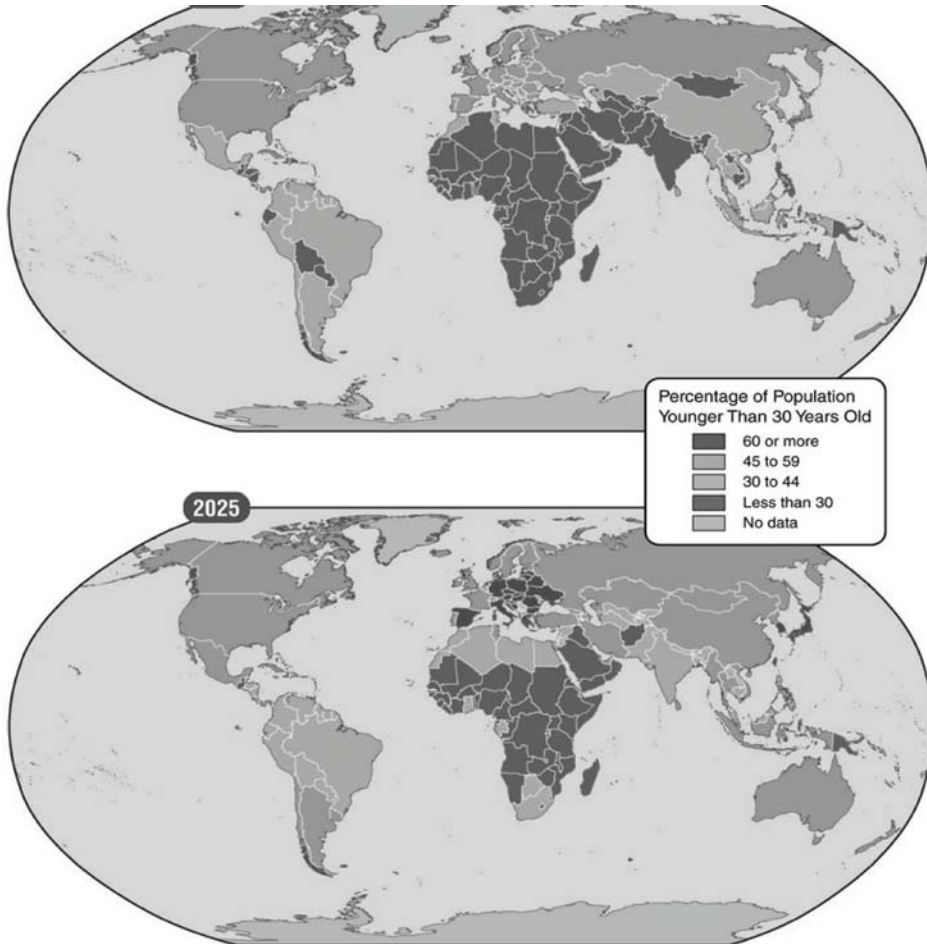
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of careful planning, now occurs over weekends, accelerating the rate of change. These have been moral revolutions as well—fights against corruption and cronyism that have become entangled in Arab economies. Individuals have sought a better life. Globalisation via the internet has

exposed young people in Arab lands to a world that is near but far, possible but not quite—the classic “revolution of rising expectations”. While Bahrain, Iran and Syria engage in the repression of protesters, they are unable to hide their actions—the world’s eyes are on them.

Along with dramatic individual sacrifice, a new vision of the future and supportive technologies, there is demographic destiny. As social commentator Fareed Zakaria (“Why it’s Different this Time”, *Time*, *ibid*, p18) has written, “The central, underlying feature of the Middle East’s crisis is a massive youth bulge. About 60 per cent of the region’s population is under 30. These millions of young people have aspirations that need to be fulfilled and the regimes in place right now show little ability to do so”. The “youth-quake” led Iranian futurist Vahid Motlagh (“Personal Communication”, *Facebook*, April 2011) to argue that the dam had burst and no amount of buttressing it could stop the flow of water. With jobless young people, climate change impacting food prices (Sarah Johnstone and Jeffrey Mazo, “Global Warming and the Arab Spring”, *Survival*, vol 53, no2, pp11–17) the global financial crisis hurting the possibility of overseas jobs (and thus remittances sent home) and crony capitalism limiting the spread of wealth (except through state handouts), something had to give.

World Age Structure, 2005 and Projected 2025



Source: available at, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu>

The democratic impulse was not the only possibility. Cynics expected the young to migrate to “bin Ladenism”, but the Arab spring was the terrorist’s worst nightmare. Instead of an attack on the West and Western technologies, the West has been admired for its claimed relative transparency. Hidden politics has reached a dead end in the Arab world. Islamic extremism has not prevailed so far; instead the youth want what everyone wants—a better life for their children, clean air and

water, education, health, housing and the possibility for meaningful employment or income generation—and traditional closeted Arab governments have not been able to provide these.

WHAT'S NEXT?

While some tyrants were overthrown, other Arab leaders used brutal force to quell the disturbances, beginning a politics of fear. The Great Game of nations conspiring against each other—Iran against Saudi Arabia, Europe against Islam—has also returned as an overarching reading of events and potential futures. Others see the democratic opening as not a movement towards a new renaissance but as a way to position their fundamentalist politics, to challenge the nation-state through narrow religious readings of history and the future.

Sarkar in his works asserts that social reality consists of four classes and states in history. The worker/*shudra* (present oriented, dominated by the environment), the warrior/*ksattriya* (honour and past focused, seeks to dominate the environment), the intellectual/*vipran* (idea oriented, seeks to understand the world through religion, philosophy and science, the study of space and time) and the accumulator of capital/

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vaeshyan (future focused, uses the other classes to create economic value). Each era organically leads to the next, until the capitalist era dominates and all classes find the heightening inequity unbearable. Chaotic worker revolutions or evolution result, followed by the discipline of a warrior-based state. However, the cycle may be changed and its exploitation phases shortened and the

innovation phases enhanced through wise leadership that integrates all aspects of the social cycle—the service dimension of labour, the protective dimension of the warrior, the truth seeking dimensions of the intellectual and the economic value-creating dimension of the trader/investor.

Using Sarkar's theory of the social cycle, encapsulated in his broader theory titled *Prout*, the Arab spring is a *vipran*—an intellectual idea based revolution. Instead of a *vipran* religious revolution, it is a *vipran* “Magna Carta” revolution, focussing on “more rights for more people”. The youth have been inspired by

European enlightenment for reducing the power of the monarch, to begin with. Warrior power has stayed too long and instead of protecting the weak, it has become carnivorous, eating its own children. While it was important in the initial decolonisation process, it is now decrepit and the honour, clan, warrior based culture of the Middle East is nearing its end.

Over time, according to Sarkar's theory (Sohail Inayatullah, *Understanding Sarkar*, Leiden: Brill, 2002), *vipran* will give way to *vaeshyan*—an economic revolution. However, given that the Arab *vipran* revolutions occurred in the global context of a world *vaeshyan* (capitalist) system, the social cycle will move rapidly. Overtime in an ideal scenario, all social classes will be transformed, creating a global, simultaneous revolution of equity and

aspiration, a better life for all—in a word, *Prout* (Dada Krsnasevananda, “Personal Communication”, 9 March 2011). It will be a prosperity that does not harm others, a world economy where basic needs are met and there are incentives to innovate. This for Sarkar is the *sadvipran* transformation—individuals enhancing their leadership qualities

through the ability to serve and protect others, innovate and create economic value (Dada Maheshvarananda, *After Capitalism: Prout's Vision of a New World*, Washington DC: Proutist Universal Publications, 2003; Sohail Inayatullah, *Situating Sarkar: Tantra, Macrohistory and Alternative Futures*, Maleny, Queensland: Gurukul, 1999 and Graeme Taylor, *Evolution's Edge: the Coming Collapse and Transformation of Our World*, Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society, 2008).

In the meantime, despite resistance from Arab rulers—the old men and their younger successors like Syrian President Bashar al Assad—a renaissance of art, culture and music could occur, particularly hybrid forms between East and West in this context, replacing the Head of the Renaissance University in Istanbul seems prescient. One of the inspiring figures of the Tunisian revolution was the rapper, El Général. He challenged the old story as shown by his lyrics:

“Mr President, your people are dying/
People are eating rubbish/
Look at what is happening/

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Miseries everywhere, Mr President/
 I talk with no fear/
 Although I know I will get only trouble/
 I see injustice everywhere” (Ghosh *ibid*, p20).

The time has come to create a new story, before the system congeals again and change becomes difficult.

Neohumanism as an Intervention

By taking a broader, macro view, in the *Proutist* perspective positive change will come. Along with the social cycle and natural evolutionary movement from worker (labour, chaotic power) to warrior (disciplined heroic power) to intellectual (ideational power of religious and scientific types) to economic (innovation and accumulation) eras, Sarkar (*Neohumanism: The Liberation of Intellect*, Tiljala, Calcutta: Ananda Marga, 1982) offers his theory of neohumanism. In this approach, a revolution will have a greater degree of longer lasting success and will meet deeper and broader needs, if it moves from ego to family to religious to national to humanistic and then to neohumanistic sentiments. For the Arab revolutions to

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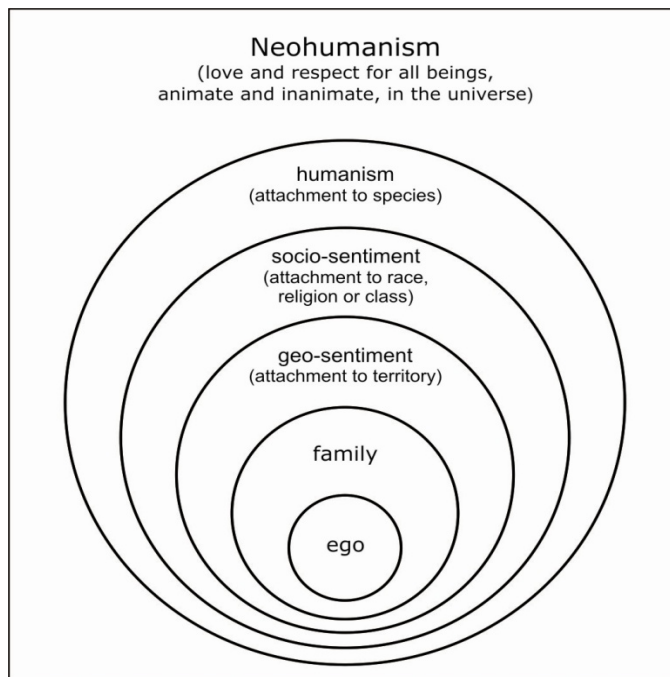
endure over the long run, they must not reverse from the nation-state to ethnic (clan based) and religious divisions (Sunni versus Shia) nor stay confined at the national level but move to a global and planetary level. They must not be just a revolution against tyranny but a revolution for Gaia, for the planet. This is a longer-term and more subtle revolution—a revolution of the spirit. New social media technologies make this possible by globalising the self, but more

than technology a broadening of the mind is required. Merely adding more information to one’s database is not enough, the RAM (rapid access memory) and hard drive must be expanded to hold more. Old pathways in the brain must be reconstructed and new paths that light up the parts of the brain related to compassion opened. This involves daily meditative practices, an inner revolution. Thus, while

neohumanism is modernist in that it challenges feudal social relations, it also has a distinct spiritual mystical dimension—evolutionary inner expansion goes hand in hand with social identity expansion. If a neohumanistic approach does not develop, then the current Iranian model should be anticipated—curtailed freedom, the use of foreign threats and the infamous fifth column to stay in power.

Economic Transformation

Another future and reading of the Arab spring is the Filipino people's power revolution of 1986. While Ferdinand Marcos is long gone, the crony capitalism he engineered on the foundation of feudalism has not been dismantled. The person was removed but economic mismanagement and the deep culture of bowing down



to the “Great Man” remain. The next phase of the Arab revolutions must move from a desire to end tyranny to an inner and outer renaissance of culture. Moreover, new economic organisations need to be created (Jeffrey D Sachs, “The Arab World’s

Agents of Change”, *New York Times*, 28 March 2011, available at, <http://www.nytimes.com>) the lend money to the Arab youth, engage in infrastructure development, microcredit loans, vocational education, reduce the size of defence forces and overtime move to regional economic cooperation.

While external investment is welcome, the cooperative structure is the wisest. Traditional clan based societies already excel at emotional intelligence, thus making cooperative success likely. Cooperatives enhance wealth and ensure that it is shared, that money keeps on rolling instead of being stuck with a few, unable to catalyse wealth creation. Cooperatives also protect against the worst effects of external crises.

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Without an economic revolution, political freedom may just lead to underdevelopment as in some Eastern European countries that threw off the chokehold of communism only to find themselves unable to survive economically. Prior to entering the *vaeshyan* era, if the Arab world moves to a neohumanistic approach or at least softens the divisions of ethnicities, nations and religious fundamentalism, then it would have a major competitive

advantage as social inclusion leads to higher productivity. In this potential ideational renaissance, the goal must be economic experimentation and institutional innovation, using new technologies to create alternative models of wealth generation.

None of the above would be possible without gender equity. Women played a pivotal role in the Arab spring. Unfortunately, as Carla Power (“Thanks for the Revolution: Now go Home”, *Time*, 4 April 2011, p32) wrote earlier this year, women have now been told to “go home”. For Sarkar, just as a bird cannot fly without two wings, neither can a revolution. As gender cooperation and equity is enhanced—through cultural and political opportunities—productivity increases—more jobs, more wealth and more freedom of mobility. The pervasive tyranny that has been central to the Arab world so far has been patriarchy. While this deep civilisational code is far from extinct, the next steps will not occur, without women and men playing equal roles. (For frameworks possible within the Islamic paradigm, see the works of Fatima Mernissi.)

Galloping Time, Exponential Influence

According to Sarkar (“The Coming Ice Age”, *Prout in a Nutshell* (Part 17), Tiljala, Calcutta: Ananda Marga, 1987, p55) we have entered a period when time no longer moves like a slow cart but rather gallops and each action does not lead to mere linear consequences but exponential impacts. History is being made—the Middle East and North Africa will never be the same. Many of these nations already guarantee basic minimum necessities, but often only for their major clan or group. Regime change means a loss of income for some and a gain for others—thus the fight to death to remain in state power. The treatment of foreign workers also remains feudal. Over time, it is hoped that the coming “youth-quake” will unleash energies that will spread neohumanism and lead to an eventual system where prosperity is not just for a few, but for all.

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FOUR ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

Based on the above analysis, four alternative futures for the Arab spring are possible. First is the American model—a long-term developmental process where modernisation, individualism and a market economy develop. The first phase was freedom from external powers, the second is freedom from internal dictators. In the future one may anticipate more civil society, electoral democracy and positive market reforms. However, equality is likely to remain an issue and backsliding into the forces of totalitarianism a possibility. Second is the Filipino model and future where a dictator is overthrown but as there is no change in deep culture or the economy a malaise sets in. Revolution leads to a destabilisation of polity. Crony capitalism continues and a long slow decline results. With peak-oil near, the Middle East may slide back to a peripheral status.

A third scenario is an Iran style future where the liberators become the oppressors or seeing it in the context of the past few years, the revolution fails and oppression

and surveillance become the norm. Priests use warriors to stay in power, giving no scope to other classes. The fourth scenario is the *Proutist* one. Although idealistic, it seeks political revolution followed by an economic revolution (cooperatives,

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economic democracy) and then a cultural renaissance. Inner change—the syncretic mystical part of all religions—is as important as external change. However, real politics—the Great Game (Iran versus Saudi Arabia, the role of Israel, Turkey and the Great Powers)—may intervene, making idealism a zero-sum position. One cannot know which future will ensue. However, the

aspirations for greater freedom and expansion are there. As El Général says in his “Ode to Arab Revolution” (available at, <http://www.enduringamerica.com>):

“Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Morocco/
All must be liberated/
Long live free Tunisia”.

For the idealistic *Prout* vision, it is:
“Long live a free planet”. ❧