

The Middle East and North Africa- a quick overview

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A survey of the Arabic-speaking world in early 2012 gives a dramatic picture: Not an "Arab Spring" nor even a successful wave of Islamism, but more of a tendency towards a breakdown of law and order. The world which is undergoing a financial crisis cannot afford such a development but precisely because of Western weakness, local despots and terrorists are flexing their muscles. The US retreat from Iraq will be followed by a Western defeat in Afghanistan and the writing is on the wall.

In Mauritania and Algeria, military dictatorships prevent uprisings by force. In Morocco there are rumblings among the unemployed but the King is still spending his money wisely to keep things calm.

Only in Tunisia do we see the beginnings of a move to parliamentary democracy but it is led by Islamists whose dedication to democracy is in doubt.

Libya may be celebrating the downfall of Qaddafi but inter-tribal rivalry continues and the many armed militias continue to fight for supremacy. The situation begins to resemble Somalia.

In other words: chaos.

Egypt is in the throes of a complicated struggle to define its future: the army which is de facto in power will not give up control easily. The Islamists who won three quarters of the parliament argue that civilians must dominate, not the army. The intellectuals who led the original demonstrations that toppled Mubarak are disgusted with both the army and the Islamists but lack power, coordination or leadership. And meanwhile the economy is in very poor shape, with the inexperienced rulers of today getting into unneeded arguments with the USA upon which Egypt depends.,

North Sudan is on the verge of a new war with South Sudan over oil and water (the Nile!) while the Southerners face inter-tribal wars and cannot maintain unity.

In the Arabian peninsula, Yemen is in the middle of a complicated civil war between tribes, ideologies(al-Qaidah!) and religions (Zaidi-Shii v. Sunni).

Saudia faces Shii unrest in the eastern province, in Bahrain the Shii majority is rising against a Sunni King, in Kuwait the Emir's supporters have lost the last election to the opposition, while large amounts of cash are being spent in Saudia, UAE, Oman, and Qatar to keep people happy.

Syria is in the middle of a popular rebellion to overthrow the dictator Assad who is using brute force to massacre his own people..

Neighbouring Lebanon which is dominated by the Iranian proxy called Hizballah is watching Syria nervously.

Iraq is split between autonomous Kurds, vengeful Shiis and terrified Sunnis who look back with nostalgia

to the days of Saddam Hussein when Sunnis ruled Iraq with an iron fist. Iraq may yet split into three states.

Jordan is afraid of dangers from all directions and the tribal support for the King is weakening.

The Palestinians are split as ever between the government of Gaza and the government of Ramallah and hope that the UN might rescue them from their own mistakes. Meanwhile they are avoiding serious peace talks with Israel.

Outside the Arab lands we have Sunni Turkey and Shii Iran, rivals for leadership in the region. The world now realizes that Iran will be very dangerous if it adds atomic weapons to its arsenal of ballistic missiles.

With such neighbours, Israel must be extremely careful.