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## The 'evil' side of the Arab Spring



In one of the most prominent sayings by Islam's Prophet Mohammed, the prophet's companion Huthaifa bin al-Yaman recounts a conversation between him and the prophet: "People asked the prophet about good and I asked him about evil for fear it might befall me. Once I said, 'We had lived in ignorance and evil and God has bestowed upon us the present good. Will there be any evil to follow?' He said, 'Yes.' I asked, 'Will there be good after that evil?' He said, 'Yes, but it would be tarnished with a touch of evil.' I asked, 'What does a touch of evil mean?' He said, 'There will be some people who will lead according to principles other than mine. You will see their actions and disapprove of them.' I said, 'Will there be any evil after that good?'

He said, 'Yes, there will be people who will invite others to the doors of hell, and whoever accepts their invitation will be thrown in it.' I said, 'Describe those people to us, prophet of God.' He said, 'They will belong to us and speak our language.' I asked, 'What do you instruct me to do if such a thing should befall me?' He said, 'Adhere to the group of Muslims and their leader.' I asked, 'What if there is neither a group nor a leader?' He said, "Then stir clear from all those different sects, even if you had to bite on the root of a tree, till you meet God while you are still in that state."

### An evil presence

If we follow the prophet's venerated companion, we can ask ourselves, "Is there evil in the Arab Spring?" I wrote a lot about how optimistic I am and said that this Arab Spring is the power of history and that it is the second and third renaissance of Arabs and that it has to succeed in order to follow the historical path towards democratic transition, popular participation, and political and economic freedom. Despite the "touch of evil" surrounding the Arab Spring, I am still optimistic and I am not the only one. Three quarters of the Arab youths who took part in a survey, which was conducted by ASDAA Burson-Marsteller and whose results came out last week, said they believe that the coming days are better.

It is not wrong for some people to ask about evil like the prophet's companion did for fear it might befall

My friend the researcher at Harvard University Nawaf Obeid asked about the evil surrounding Arab Spring countries and presented a detailed study that was published by the Belfer Center for Sciences and International Affairs. Obeid chose nine countries: Arab Spring countries—Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Libya—in addition to Bahrain, Sudan, Jordan, and Iraq. He utilized a rubric developed by Anthony D. Smith, emeritus professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

The rubric consists of his six logical corollaries of national independence. In Professor Smith's view, a nation gains the right to call itself such based on its ability to (1) secure fraternity and equality into homogenous unit, (2) unify a single nation-state of extraterritorial nationals, (3) stress cultural individuality through accentuation of 'national' differentia, (4) drive for economic autarchy and self-sustaining growth, (5) expand the nation-state to maintain international power and status, and (6) renew the cultural and social fabric of the nation through sweeping institutional changes to maintain international parity effect the success and independence of the nation-state.

In each of the nine countries I examined, in every instance a lack of one or more (generally most or all) of Professor Smith's six logical corollaries indicates that the state in question is unable to function effectively in securing a unified nation. It is this incapacity that explains the high rate of failing states among those nations that experienced turmoil in relation to the Arab Awakening revolutions.

By utilizing Professor Smith's six logical corollaries and seeing how their lack is impeding state progress in these nine nations, we gain a better understanding of what prerequisite conditions are necessary before a state can secure survivability, maintain stability, and achieve success.

## **No going back**

I do not disagree with Obeid as far as the reasons for his pessimism are concerned, especially in the light of the deteriorating conditions of Arab Spring countries and those who share borders with them, particularly Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, maybe Libya. Yet, I do not think that they will necessarily turn into failed states as the researcher fears. This will, instead, usher a new birth for these countries in which history had stopped owing a prevalent state of failure that seemed like stability to those watching from afar while it was in fact the stability of graves, one that heralds imminent collapse.

There are valid reasons for a failure to happen, but we have to believe that there is no going back. For example, Bashar al-Assad's regime is bound to fall but we do not know what Syria would be like after him and how much time and how many conflicts it will take the country to be back to normal. Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi might fall and the army might intervene if it feels that the state is collapsing. Yet, it will be a temporary intervention for the people will still retain the final say and there will be no going back to the time of military and totalitarian rule. In the second part of the article, I will convey Nawaf Obeid's pessimistic opinions about the nine countries and which drove him to call it a hot Arab summer rather than a blossoming spring.

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