

The Battle for the Arab Spring: Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era by Lin Noueihed and Alex Warren.
Yale University Press 2012.

This is the first, but will not be the last, serious survey of the impact of the Arab Spring on the Middle East and its implications for the region and the world.

The Battle for the Arab Spring is divided into three sections: The Roots of Rage; The Battlegrounds; The New Arab Politics, and each section is sub-divided into chapters that move from an analysis of the background to the Arab Spring to the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen and Syria, the latter still in flux, and concludes with an assessment of the implications of the tumult and upheaval for those regimes still in place.

As an indicator of the authors' mood looking towards the future, the last chapter, entitled Embracing the Void, and the Afterword, leave the reader in no doubt that they are deeply pessimistic.

This is a fine survey of events that have taken the world and the region by surprise, though the authors' deconstruction of recent history and politics in the Middle East make clear that the volcano has been waiting for some time to erupt. The demographics of the region, the imbalance between rich and poor, the vast numbers of unemployed young men who fall too easily into the arms of well organised radicals, all of these conspire to paint a very grim present and a deeply disturbing future.

The key missing chapter, about the Syrian Revolution and its aftermath, cannot be written because the House of Assad is yet to fall, but the collapse, and what will fill the void left by the regime when it falls, may well prove to be the single biggest and most important upheaval in the region with the potential to radically alter the power balances and stability of the Middle East. Unless, of course, Syria's demise is but the opening stage in the fall of the mullahs in Iran...

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