

## IV. REVIEWS AND NOTES

10

### **A Review of Leonid Grinin, Andrey Korotayev, and Arno Tausch's 'Islamism, Arab Spring, and the Future of Democracy', Springer International Publishing, 2019**

*Antony Harper*

The complexity of the current world-system is almost beyond description and at present beyond cohesive understanding. It is therefore rare that from a holistic perspective, one that is both analytical in nature but also having historical depth, scholars would attempt both an analysis of the current state of the world-system and also predict the future states of this system. Such research requires both a breadth of understanding of the current nature and complexity of the world-system, considerable historical insight, and a significant talent for the analysis. Such, however, is the case in describing the expertise of the three authors of *Islamism, Arab Spring, and the Future of Democracy*: Leonid Grinin, Andrey Korotayev, and Arno Tausch. In a two-part book with Part I devoted to four chapters on Islamism and the Arab Spring, and the remaining six chapters of Part II focused on Islamism and Its Dimensions in the World Values Perspective, the authors address first what Islamism is and its relationship to the Arab Spring and then focus on the Middle East, in fact the entire MENA region [the Middle East and North Africa] as a theater for the events of the book. This is followed by attention given to the Arab Spring within the context of the World-System and with specific focus on China and India. The direction of the book is then narrowed to the role of Islamism in contemporary Islamic societies with consideration of the effects of what they term perturbations within the Arab world during the Arab Spring; the first section ends with an analysis of the Arab Spring as a revolutionary period and the consequences of these revolutions for democratic values. Part II organized much as a scientific research paper would be certainly justified, as what is presented in this book is very sound historical scientific analysis. The second section of the book begins with an introductory chapter on background which describes their methods of research, and then a series of chapters in which results are presented and their significance is

*History & Mathematics: Investigating Past and Future 2020 238–245*

238

discussed. This section ends with a chapter describing and explaining their general conclusions.

At the beginning of the book the authors propose a simple model of system change in which economic improvement is followed, initially only slowly, by socio-political change; the motivation for economic improvement being preceded by technological improvement. The Reformation of the 15<sup>th</sup> century is used as a primary example of this process; Germany of the middle 15<sup>th</sup> century was experiencing an economic boom which was ignited by the invention of the printing press. Further, it should also be noted that this paradigm shift in technology facilitated the final phase of socio-political change, the Reformation itself. Other historical examples are also provided in support of their simple but very effective model. A further point is made about the economic context of this model in that Kondratieff Wave down-swings are suggested as the context for the origin of each paradigmatic system change.

The term 'paradigmatic system change' is perhaps a euphemism, this reviewer's euphemism, for revolution, and the authors explain in detail the conditions for (system wide) revolutions. The circumstances such as demographic youth bulges, modernization traps, regime rigidity, *etc.*, all contribute to revolution, and are the 'catch-up phase', that is the logical successor of the initial separation between economic improvement and socio-political level of development, a condition that by its nature lags behind economic change. It should be noted here that the authors feel that the process of catching up will not be smoothly mediated and it will take some time to reshuffle the power structure of the world-system under consideration. By default, violence, most probably at the world-system level, will be part-and-parcel of this reshuffling.

Islamism played a particular role in the revolutionary process that was associated with the Arab Spring, specifically with respect to the fact that Islamism is political in nature and has the focus of reorganizing government along the precepts of Islam. Of course, radical Islamism employs force to bring such governmental change about. With regard to the specific context of this book, the certain forms of Islamism mediate, enhance, and aggravate the potential for revolution. So, a nuanced understanding of non-hegemonic Islamism, for example, as often characterized by the U.S. diplomatic strategy, certainly in the eyes of others, is required for a more realistic understanding of the nature of the Arab Spring and the events spawned from that occurrence. It should also be noted that Islamism per se is embedded within the culture of Islamic states and so should be understood as part of the whole of a given Islamic state and not dealt with in a piece-meal, reductionist manner. The book emphasizes the flexibility and adaptability of Islamism, characteristics different from what the Western press describes.

It should be quite clear however that the Arab Spring was a very complex event or series of events and while internal structural and ideological inconsist-

encies can be pointed to as significant contributing factors, there were very unquestionably external factors that gave rise to and contributed to the unrest leading to the Arab Spring revolutions. The authors note that these factors either led to or were in fact themselves system perturbations; elite conflicts, oppositional alliances, the CAMELEERS of the Egyptian revolution, and famine all fall into this category, *etc.* Of special interest are the perturbations associated with ethno-confessional contradictions that occur as a result of ethno-religious differences and differences in equality, or more properly, inequality, between given ethnic groups. In addition, of particular interest is the combination of famine and violence. As has been shown in previous works (Korotayev *et al.* 2006), there is a clear inverse relationship between violence and daily caloric intake. So, it is not surprising that famine is an aggravating factor in the Arab Spring revolutions.

In the final chapter of Part I the authors address the problems of state transition from authoritarian rule to that of democratic rule. Very clearly, the establishment of democracy has not been particularly successful among the Arab Spring democratic revolutions. The revolutions themselves may have temporarily and nominally established democracy, but in many cases those democracies disintegrated shortly after their establishment; note that only two democracies of essentially any form remain today, those of Tunisia and Egypt. Why is this?

While a number of such factors are discussed, three will be highlighted here. They are: 1. The cost of transition from an authoritarian rule to a democratic one. 2. The adaptiveness of political rules in general. 3. The amount of time required for a successful transition to occur. Let us first address the cost of transition by considering both the authoritarian rule from which the transition is occurring and the democratic destiny of the transition as stable equilibria. This is to say that perturbations of either system will result in a return to the original *state*, *i.e.* either to authoritarian rule or democratic rule. The metaphorical and factual basis between these states is unstable and therefore costly to transgress. Revolutions may bring about this transit but may also trigger a reaction to it. This reaction in turn opens the door for intrusion of interests offering stability where none now exists; hence, the success of radical Islamist movements. Not only is the political system vulnerable during transition, but one should also consider the potential for the adaptive flexibility of each political state. If the assumption that each political state represents a stable equilibrium, then simply forcing the change of the system without reorganizing the environment of the system will most probably result in no little chaos. Finally, revolutions are short in time. The term *shock and awe* became popular in the U.S. not too long ago both in reference to swift American military activities but also with respect to economic activities. Here, one has only to consider the book by Naomi Klein, *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* to gain an unsettling picture of exploitation in the face of the vulnerability. The authors ar-

gue, based on revolutions and their consequential reactions, that the acceptance of democracy will require time, appropriate education, and the attendant sense of empowerment at the ground level of the populace before such a transition can be successful; the time requirement for such change would be measured in terms of generations, not simply a few years and definitely not less than a decade.

Part II to be reviewed next is an evidence-based presentation of the state of Islamism within a World Values Perspective.

As previously mentioned, Part II of this book is organized as a research paper with an introduction, a section on methods with results, discussion, and conclusions to follow. The introductory section, Background, provides a detailed review of the intent of radical Islamism, that of an initial focus to replace secular government with that consonant with Islam in a given state, and then to use that state base or state bases as a launching pad for the ultimate world revolution in the name of radical Islamism. Associated with the initial step, in Arabic, *Din-wa-Dawla*, are a series of characteristics, anti-Semitism, women's rights or lack thereof, and as an us-versus-them ideological approach, Orientalism versus Occidentalism, used to unify and justify their very forceful strategy for state and world dominance. Almost by default, within the Arab world the Arab Spring is noted as a conspiracy by the West in order to undermine that world and, as a result the scape-goating of Jews and Free Masons is a logical extension of this ideological position. The authors do an excellent job here of also pointing out the disparity between the radical position of some Islamists with that of the Muslim populace as a whole; only 25 % of Arabs support the position of radical Islamists, however, there are other aspects of popular Arab opinion that present a less sanguine picture of democracy per se as an acceptable form of government; only 17 % of the populace support democracy outright. Also, the majority of both genders do not support gender equality.

The introductory chapter to Part II on background is followed by a short, terse, and very effective chapter, Chapter 7, on the methods of quantitative analysis used to assess the significance of Islamism within World Values Perspective. Special attention is given to the sources of potential error and bias, and all data bases and software used are clearly described and their limitations noted. Further, a clear accounting of the actual statistical analysis is included. While Chapter 7 is the shortest chapter in Part II, it may well be the most important, as without it, the research reported could not be repeated, and repeatable results are a defining requirement of all scientific endeavor. Following this important chapter, the results, discussion, and conclusions are covered in the remaining five chapters.

In a set of somewhat disturbing facts, Chapter 8 presents quantitative data first dispelling the accuracy of Pew research on Muslim views regarding terrorism and with that dismissal presents data suggesting that, far from the 17.38 % of the Muslim world supporting terrorism as suggested by Pew, they report that

62 % of Palestinians, 33 % of Lebanese, 27 % of Malaysians, and 25 % of Egyptians amounting to 169 million people all support terrorism as a means to an end, a political end. Also presented with these data are the following results: that greater than 50 % of the Muslim world support the imposition of Sharia law, death for those leaving the faith, whipping and hand amputation as justified punishment for various crimes, for example, theft, and stoning for adulterers. A further segment of the Muslim population exceeding 20 % holds racist and xenophobic views.

If one considers the relationship between involvement in the Arab Spring and the support for terrorism, it can be shown that participation in the Arab Spring was variable within the MENA region, varying from greater than 20 % support in such countries as Yemen and the Sudan to less than 10 % for Lebanon, Jordan, and Algeria. Also of interest is the finding that only 17 % of Muslims actually support the Muslim Brotherhood; a whopping 49 % do not. The book also points out a rather interesting (apparent) contradiction that while there is majority support for democracy, there is little support for the structures of democracy. These findings are believed to reflect the weakness of Arab civil society. However, by focusing only on the support for democracy, that support itself is dichotomous with such qualities as trust, non-violence, gender justice, and tolerance toward homosexuals all being assets of that support, while at the same time the press, civil service, labor unions, and private ownership are looked at askance. Further, in an analysis of who participated in the Arab Spring, the younger and educated elite take top billing, but also characteristic of participation is a reduced trust in the Muslim Brotherhood, a rejection of terrorism against the U.S., a largely male participation, and a rejection of sexism. If support for democracy is considered at the state level, the countries such as Lebanon and Egypt show highest support waning through Jordan and Kuwait to minimal support by Algeria and Palestine. It should also be noted, as the authors do with concern, that Turkey has an exceptionally high level of support for terrorism.

The penultimate two chapters (10 and 11) were written with the intent of showing the global context of the West with respect to the West's focus on deterring terrorism, and this was done with very well presented quantitative data. Chapter 11, sharing the book title 'Islamism, Arab Spring, and the Future of Democracy' then describes the reality of establishing democratic states within the Arab world.

Chapter 10 describes a number of trends and conditions regarding the solitude of the West, three of which will be considered here. First, globally those states with a largely a non-religious population are far less concerned about global terrorism than those with a component having a significant religious commitment. Second, since there is relatively low support for the U.S. position against ISIS, *etc.*, the US must do far more to convince the world outside the

West that global terrorism is in fact the threat that it is perceived to be. Finally, there is significant anti-Semitism globally, a mentality that has clearly been shown to correlate, to the degree of 67 %, with an anti-Israel position. These three factors contribute importantly to the isolation of the West, and in particular, the isolation of America with respect to its position on anti-terrorism. Counteracting the violence of terrorism with violence is not globally popular. Interestingly, the drivers of blockades against terrorism are not violent in themselves; improved education, elevated income, and enhanced trust of others, to name three, are all non-violent, but are time-consuming; violence as a process of enforcement is an expedient time-saver.

In the following and well-integrated chapter, the authors first point out that the prime source of change in the countries supporting terrorism must be a changed focus in education and especially higher education. It is interesting that the position taken by the Obama administration regarding the Muslim Brotherhood was, according to the authors, erroneous and that the Muslim Brotherhood should not have come in for mild support from the US due to, among other things, its adversarial position with respect to an open society. This notion of open society, established by Karl Popper (2012) in his *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, and penned in self-imposed exile in New Zealand during World War II, comes in for serious attention. An open society is characterized as being modern, democratic, open, of course, and developing; also important in such societies are tolerance, secularization, support for gender equality, and being non-violent. It is noted that Norway, Sweden and Andorra are paradigmatic examples of such societies, and Mali, Somalia and Yemen are the antithesis of such openness, all Muslim countries are below the world average. Such a position is characterized by pessimism about the economy, being pro-Iranian, anti-democracy, anti-U.S., anti-secularization, and most intriguingly the young adult female segment of the population being skeptical of pacifism. Reduced life expectancy within Muslim populations, only partial economic convergence with the EU, and poorly rebounding rates of unemployment are further contributing factors to an anti-democracy attitude. Other attributes of less open societies to be overcome on the way to establishing a form of democratic governance are the degree of personal violence, the lack of trust in democratic institutions, poor health and unhappiness, and the perceived distance from positive political involvement. This chapter closes with an astute discussion of the Kuznets trap which exists in the transition from low economic status but stable human values through a phase of increased economic status with destructively reduced human values, then to a second position of stability with restored human values and a (relatively) high economic status. This process is similar to the system phase changes noted toward the beginning of this review in which the system moves from one stable equilibrium through a region of instability to a second, different stable equilibrium. The reader should note then that the phase of instability, *i.e.*

reduced human values in this case, is embedded within and therefore part of system change as a whole and consequently is to be expected.

In summary, the Arab Spring represents an initial stage of change in the World-System moving from one position of stable equilibrium to another, but in doing so has to transgress a region of instability. Further, this second stable equilibrium may not, and the authors suggest, will probably not, have the same core composition as in the initial stable equilibrium, or if the core composition remains unchanged, the members of the core will have a different rank of influence, the synchronization of economic change ultimately motivating sociopolitical change, *i.e.* the leading economic change will ultimately motivate the lagging sociopolitical change to increase in rate. This last process, the so-called catch-up phase, occurs as a consequence of the widening gap between the economic status of a given system and the socio-political condition of that same system; this process of catch-up will neither be smooth in its rate of change nor with respect to the ongoing adjustments required to reach that second stable equilibrium. Further, the synchronicity of this process of catch-up within a given polity will not necessarily be in phase with other polities, all of this contributing to the turbulence of the catch-up process within the World-System as a whole. Finally, it is noted that these processes of catching up are embedded within the cyclical phenomenon known as Kondratieff Waves.

The Arab Spring then represents, according to Grinin, Korotayev, and Tausch, an initial phase of this catch-up process, which will then surely spread through the World-System as a whole. Within this readjustment of the MENA region and as part of the embedded culture is the phenomenon of Islamism, the radical version of which has been able to fill a void brought about by the Arab Spring revolution and as a response, a reaction actually, to that revolution. In turn, this reaction is accompanied by a rearrangement of alliances; the book mentions three, and one should expect that these realignments are a sample of what is to come for the World-System as a whole. Not only has a three-way split appeared in the Arab world, but globally China and India are becoming major world-system players, and Turkey and Iran are evolving to be strong regional players in this realignment process.

Where does this leave us for the future? The authors recommend wisdom and compromise, both qualities usually in scarce supply, but in considering the quality of world-system leadership, Trump is highlighted as a significant liability for any sort of moderation in a world-system transition process that will at the very least have reduced military-political balance. Using the metaphor of tectonic plate boundaries and the earthquakes associated with those continual rearranging boundaries, it is suggested that the analogous world-system plate boundaries are to be associated with the Transcaucasus, Central Asia, Western China, West Africa, and areas of South America. [Note that plate boundaries of

whatever nature are subject to sudden and abrupt change, not moderate, continuous change.] World-System economic growth will be relatively weak during the transition process. In response to this potentially tumultuous future a short list of seven principles is present in the book and here also; the present list is without comment.

1. Pluralism of political regimes.
2. The refusal to forcibly impose (new) institutions of governance.
3. The recognition of the worth of a stable world-system.
4. Restrictions on the uses of sanctions.
5. A ban on the use of various forms of information as instruments of leverage in foreign policy.
6. Guarantees of respect for state borders.
7. Refusal to use new ethical standards as a pretext for discrimination.

The World-System is entering a new phase of existence, one of uncharted territory; it is rare and risky for scholars of any merit let alone of the significant merit of the three authors here to venture into this potential quagmire of World-System entanglements. These authors do so and with great success. For anyone interested in the current state of the MENA region as a consequence of the Arab Spring and its attendant Islamism, for those looking for a holistic treatment but also one of quantitative detail of the events of the recent past regarding the Arab world, and for those looking for examples of well-constructed models applied to complex world-system situations and used as a means of simplifying those complex situations, I recommend this book most strongly.

### References

- Klein N. 2014.** *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Picadore.
- Korotayev A., Malkov A., and Khaltourina D. 2006.** *Macrosocial Dynamics: Compact Models of the World-System Growth*. Moscow: URSS.
- Popper K. 2012.** *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.