

Session 6: Fouad Ajami and the Arab Awakening

Introduction

FOUAD Ajami belongs to a different phase of the American argument about the Middle East. Earlier debates in this course asked whether despotism was embedded in the region's political traditions, whether Islam could accommodate liberal democracy, and whether modernization would dissolve older cultural barriers. Ajami came of age intellectually amid a more immediate Arab drama: the rise and collapse of pan-Arab nationalism. For his generation, the great ideological promise was not initially democracy but Arab unity, national liberation, economic modernization, and the recovery of dignity after colonial rule.

Gamal Abdel Nasser gave that promise its most compelling political form. The catastrophic defeat of 1967 broke its prestige but did not immediately erase its language or habits. Variants of Arab nationalism survived in Syria and especially in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, where an ideology born in the era of Nasser persisted long after its original hopes had been exhausted. Ajami's early work exposed that exhaustion. The Arab Predicament treated the pan-Arab project not as a still-viable program frustrated by foreign enemies but as an ideology that had already failed on its own terms.

This made Ajami an important interpreter of the Arab world for Americans in the 1980s and 1990s. Much Arab political rhetoric still revolved around unity, Palestine, anti-imperialism, and the unfinished struggle against the West. Yet the region's actual politics had become those of entrenched states, military regimes, monarchies, and rulers preoccupied with survival. Ajami's insistence that the language of pan-Arab solidarity concealed a world of hard state interests anticipated his 1993 critique of Huntington: states, he argued, "cheat," manipulate identities, and invoke fraternity when useful while ignoring it when interests dictate otherwise. His treatment of Saddam Hussein was especially revealing. Saddam could present himself as the champion of Arabism and even, during the Gulf crisis, adopt Islamic rhetoric, but Ajami saw beneath these claims a conventional bid for regional primacy by an Iraqi ruler.

By the late 1990s, however, Ajami's focus was shifting. Pan-Arabism had become so visibly spent that merely demonstrating its bankruptcy no longer

answered the central political question. What had replaced it was not a healthy politics of sovereign nation-states but an authoritarian order in which rulers had largely extinguished public life, while Islamist movements supplied the strongest organized opposition. In “The Arab Inheritance” (1997), Ajami described the region as trapped between “the authoritarian state” and “the nihilistic opposition.” The problem now was how to recover the middle ground: limited government, pragmatic opposition, economic reform, and eventually democratic politics. His attention thus shifted from explaining why the old Arab nationalist dream had failed to asking what kind of political order could follow it.

The shift became decisive after September 11. Ajami increasingly argued that Arab authoritarianism could no longer be treated merely as an unpleasant but useful guarantee of stability. The bargain by which the United States supported friendly rulers while largely ignoring their domestic political practices had helped create societies marked by political frustration, conspiracy, anti-Americanism, and radicalization. In his view, democracy promotion was therefore not simply a moral preference but a strategic necessity. Iraq was the great test. In 2003, he argued that removing Saddam should be part of a much larger effort to modernize Arab political life and break with an American policy that had habitually placed its power behind “political reaction and a stagnant status quo.”

Ajami had spent years attacking pan-Arabism because he believed it permitted Arab rulers and intellectuals to evade responsibility: failures could always be attributed to imperialism, Zionism, foreign conspiracies, or the betrayal of the Arab nation. Democracy represented the opposite principle. It relocated political responsibility inside the individual Arab state and made rulers accountable to their own populations. (In his reading, a post-Saddam Iraq in which Shi‘a and Kurds acquired political power might also weaken the old pieties of Arabism.)

Ajami’s importance in this debate cannot be separated from his unusual appeal to an American audience. He occupied a position few other commentators could claim. He was an immigrant from the Arab world who spoke of it not as a distant specialist but as someone formed by its language, politics, and generational experiences. He was, in his own words, steeped in American life but also in “the life and the culture of the Arab world,” and in the secular Arab generation that came of age in the 1950s and 1960s. When he criticized Arab nationalism, anti-Americanism, or

dictatorship, American readers could hear the critique as coming from within the culture rather than being imposed upon it from outside.

His style amplified that effect. Ajami was mainly a storyteller and portraitist, with prose that blended history, literature, politics, memoir, and aphorism. He crafted large arguments using memorable phrases—rulers with “the whip,” societies on “self-pity,” Arabs who “walked by the wall” under dictatorship then chose “to take freedom’s ride.” He was willing to address Arab political culture, anti-Americanism, and authoritarian failure with a directness that many American conservatives felt was missing from academic discussion. Just as important, he was unusually effective at carrying those arguments into the public sphere: media-friendly, eloquent, quick on his feet, and a familiar presence on television and radio through recurring network roles and appearances.

The Arab uprisings of 2011 appeared to Ajami to vindicate that later phase of his thought. The generation that had lived through Nasserism, its defeat, the rise of Islamism, and decades of authoritarian stagnation was finally witnessing mass politics directed not toward Arab unity or another grand ideological project but toward the dignity and political rights of individuals under particular regimes. Ajami knew that elections could empower Islamists and that revolutions could fail. Yet he rejected the argument that these risks justified a return to dictatorship. “We should trust people with their liberty,” he insisted, comparing the Arab upheavals to the uncertain democratic transitions after communism.

The readings thus trace a significant intellectual journey. Ajami began as one of the most eloquent diagnosticians of pan-Arabism's death. He ended as one of the most eloquent advocates of an Arab democratic awakening. Saddam Hussein stands near the hinge between those two concerns: a late, brutal embodiment of an exhausted nationalist tradition whose removal Ajami hoped might clear political space for something different. Whether that hope was justified is one question raised by the readings. Equally important is why Ajami became so influential in the American debate: his authority rested not only on his arguments but also on the distinctive way biography, voice, and positioning made those arguments persuasive to an American audience.

Explanatory notes to the readings appear from page 39.



Fouad Ajami (1945–2014) was a Lebanese-born American scholar of the Middle East, best known for his writings on Arab political culture, nationalism, and the troubled encounter between the Arab world and the West. After emigrating to the United States, he taught at Princeton and later at Johns Hopkins SAIS, where he became a prominent public intellectual and academic. His early work, including *The Arab Predicament* (1981), examined the exhaustion of pan-Arab nationalism and the failures of postcolonial political regimes; later books such as *The Dream Palace of the Arabs* (1998) turned to intellectuals, memory, and the

collapse of secular political hopes. Ajami wrote in an elegant, literary style and often criticized Arab authoritarianism, anti-Americanism, and the evasions of regional elites. His support for American intervention in Iraq made him an influential and controversial figure in Washington, especially during the George W. Bush administration, and linked his reputation closely to the debate over whether external power could help open the Arab world to political change.

After 9/11, Ajami's critique of Arab political culture became increasingly tied to an explicit argument for democratic transformation. He saw the attacks, the Iraq War, and later the Arab Spring as successive demonstrations that the region's authoritarian order was not merely repressive but politically corrosive, breeding humiliation, radicalism, and recurrent violence. His criticism was therefore directed not only at hostile regimes such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Qaddafi's Libya, and Assad's Syria, but also at American partners such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, whose stability Washington had long treated as a strategic asset. Ajami argued that such regimes were themselves part of the underlying problem: by suppressing political life and blocking peaceful change, they helped create the very pathologies the United States sought to contain. This conviction made him a forceful advocate of democracy promotion and of a more interventionist American policy, even when that meant challenging long-standing allies as well as adversaries.



Fouad Ajami on Huntington: The Summoning (1993)

'But They Said, We Will Not Hearken.' — *Jeremiah 6:17*

In Joseph Conrad's *Youth*, a novella published at the turn of the century, Marlowe, the narrator, remembers when he first encountered "the East":

And then, before I could open my lips, the East spoke to me, but it was in a Western voice. A torrent of words was poured into the enigmatical, the fateful silence; outlandish, angry words mixed with words and even whole sentences of good English, less strange but even more surprising. The voice swore and cursed violently; it riddled the solemn peace of the bay by a volley of abuse. It began by calling me Pig, and from that went crescendo into unmentionable adjectives—in English.

The young Marlowe knew that even the most remote civilization had been made and remade by the West, and taught new ways.

Not so Samuel P. Huntington. In a curious essay, "The Clash of Civilizations," Huntington has found his civilizations whole and intact, watertight under an eternal sky. Buried alive, as it were, during the years of the Cold War, these civilizations (Islamic, Slavic-Orthodox, Western, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, etc.) rose as soon as the stone was rolled off, dusted themselves off, and proceeded to claim the loyalty of their adherents. For this student of history and culture, civilizations have always seemed messy creatures. Furrows run across whole civilizations, across individuals themselves—that was modernity's verdict. But Huntington looks past all that. The crooked and meandering alleyways of the world are straightened out. With a sharp pencil and a steady hand Huntington marks out where one civilization ends and the wilderness of "the other" begins.

More surprising still is Huntington's attitude toward states, and their place in his scheme of things. From one of the most influential and brilliant students of the state and its national interest there now comes an essay that misses the slyness of states, the unsentimental and cold-blooded nature of so much of what they do as they pick their way through chaos. Despite the obligatory passage that states will remain "the most powerful actors in world affairs," states are written off, their place given over to clashing

civilizations. In Huntington's words, "The next world war, if there is one, will be a war between civilizations."

THE POWER OF MODERNITY

Huntington's meditation is occasioned by his concern about the state of the West, its power and the terms of its engagement with "the rest." "He who gives, dominates," the great historian Fernand Braudel observed of the traffic of civilizations. In making itself over the centuries, the West helped make the others as well. We have come to the end of this trail, Huntington is sure. He is impressed by the "de-Westernization" of societies, their "indigenization" and apparent willingness to go their own way. In his view of things such phenomena as the "Hinduization" of India and Islamic fundamentalism are ascendant. To these detours into "tradition" Huntington has assigned great force and power

But Huntington is wrong. He has underestimated the tenacity of modernity and secularism in places that acquired these ways against great odds, always perilously close to the abyss, the darkness never far. India will not become a Hindu state. The inheritance of Indian secularism will hold. The vast middle class will defend it, keep the order intact to maintain India's—and its own—place in the modern world of nations. There exists in that anarchic polity an instinctive dread of playing with fires that might consume it. Hindu chauvinism may coarsen the public life of the country, but the state and the middle class that sustains it know that a detour into religious fanaticism is a fling with ruin. A resourceful middle class partakes of global culture and norms. A century has passed since the Indian bourgeoisie, through its political vehicle the Indian National Congress, set out to claim for itself and India a place among nations. Out of that long struggle to overturn British rule and the parallel struggle against "communalism," the advocates of the national idea built a large and durable state. They will not cede all this for a political kingdom of Hindu purity.

We have been hearing from the traditionalists, but we should not exaggerate their power, for traditions are often most insistent and loud when they rupture, when people no longer really believe and when age-old customs lose their ability to keep men and women at home. The phenomenon we have dubbed as Islamic fundamentalism is less a sign of resurgence than of panic and bewilderment and guilt that the border with "the other" has been crossed. Those young urban poor, half-educated in the cities of the Arab world, and their Sorbonne-educated lay preachers, can they be evidence of a genuine return to tradition? They crash Europe's and America's gates in

search of liberty and work, and they rail against the sins of the West. It is easy to understand Huntington's frustration with this kind of complexity, with the strange mixture of attraction and repulsion that the West breeds, and his need to simplify matters, to mark out the borders of civilizations.

Tradition-mongering is no proof, though, that these civilizations outside the West are intact, or that their thrashing about is an indication of their vitality, or that they present a conventional threat of arms. Even so thorough and far-reaching an attack against Western hegemony as Iran's theocratic revolution could yet fail to wean that society from the culture of the West. That country's cruel revolution was born of the realization of the "armed Imam" that his people were being seduced by America's ways. The gates had been thrown wide open in the 1970s, and the high walls Ayatollah Khomeini built around his polity were a response to that cultural seduction. Swamped, Iran was "rescued" by men claiming authenticity as their banner. One extreme led to another.

"We prayed for the rain of mercy and received floods," was the way Mehdi Bazargan, the decent modernist who was Khomeini's first prime minister, put it. But the millennium has been brought down to earth, and the dream of a pan-Islamic revolt in Iran's image has vanished into the wind. The terror and the shabbiness have caught up with the utopia. Sudan could emulate the Iranian "revolutionary example." But this will only mean the further pauperization and ruin of a desperate land. There is no rehabilitation of the Iranian example. A battle rages in Algeria, a society of the Mediterranean, close to Europe—a wine-producing country for that matter—and in Egypt between the secular powers that be and an Islamic alternative. But we should not rush to print with obituaries of these states. In Algeria the nomenklatura of the National Liberation Front failed and triggered a revolt of the young, the underclass and the excluded. The revolt raised an Islamic banner. Caught between a regime they despised and a reign of virtue they feared, the professionals and the women and the modernists of the middle class threw their support to the forces of "order." They hailed the army's crackdown on the Islamicists; they allowed the interruption of a democratic process sure to bring the Islamicists to power; they accepted the "liberties" protected by the repression, the devil you know rather than the one you don't.

The Algerian themes repeat in the Egyptian case, although Egypt's dilemma over its Islamicist opposition is not as acute. The Islamicists continue to hound the state, but they cannot bring it down. There is no likelihood that

the Egyptian state—now riddled with enough complacency and corruption to try the celebrated patience and good humor of the Egyptians—will go under. This is an old and skeptical country. It knows better than to trust its fate to enforcers of radical religious dogma. These are not deep and secure structures of order that the national middle classes have put in place. But they will not be blown away overnight.

Nor will Turkey lose its way, turn its back on Europe and chase after some imperial temptation in the scorched domains of Central Asia. Huntington sells that country's modernity and secularism short when he writes that the Turks—rejecting Mecca and rejected by Brussels—are likely to head to Tashkent in search of a Pan-Turkic role. There is no journey to that imperial past. Atatürk severed that link with fury, pointed his country westward, embraced the civilization of Europe and did it without qualms or second thoughts. It is on Frankfurt and Bonn—and Washington—not on Baku and Tashkent that the attention of the Turks is fixed. The inheritors of Atatürk's legacy are too shrewd to go chasing after imperial glory, gathering about them the scattered domains of the Turkish peoples. After their European possessions were lost, the Turks clung to Thrace and to all that this link to Europe represents.

Huntington would have nations battle for civilizational ties and fidelities when they would rather scramble for their market shares, learn how to compete in a merciless world economy, provide jobs, move out of poverty. For their part, the “management gurus” and those who believe that the interests have vanquished the passions in today's world tell us that men want Sony, not soil. There is a good deal of truth in what they say, a terrible exhaustion with utopias, a reluctance to set out on expeditions of principle or belief. It is hard to think of Russia, ravaged as it is by inflation, taking up the grand cause of a “second Byzantium,” the bearer of the orthodox-Slavic torch.

And where is the Confucian world Huntington speaks of? In the busy and booming lands of the Pacific Rim, so much of politics and ideology has been sublimated into finance that the nations of East Asia have turned into veritable workshops. The civilization of Cathay is dead; the Indonesian archipelago is deaf to the call of the religious radicals in Tehran as it tries to catch up with Malaysia and Singapore. A different wind blows in the lands of the Pacific. In that world economics, not politics, is in command. The world is far less antiseptic than Lee Kuan Yew, the sage of Singapore, would want it to be. A nemesis could lie in wait for all the prosperity that

the 1980s brought to the Pacific. But the lands of the Pacific Rim—protected, to be sure, by an American security umbrella—are not ready for a great falling out among the nations. And were troubles to visit that world they would erupt within its boundaries, not across civilizational lines.

The things and ways that the West took to “the rest” —those whole sentences of good English that Marlowe heard a century ago—have become the ways of the world. The secular idea, the state system and the balance of power, pop culture jumping tariff walls and barriers, the state as an instrument of welfare, all these have been internalized in the remotest places. We have stirred up the very storms into which we now ride.

THE WEAKNESS OF TRADITION

Nations “cheat”: they juggle identities and interests. Their ways meander. One would think that the traffic of arms from North Korea and China to Libya and Iran and Syria shows this—that states will consort with any civilization, however alien, as long as the price is right and the goods are ready. Huntington turns this routine act of selfishness into a sinister “Confucian-Islamic connection.” There are better explanations: the commerce of renegades, plain piracy, an “underground economy” that picks up the slack left by the great arms suppliers (the United States, Russia, Britain and France).

Contrast the way Huntington sees things with Braudel’s depiction of the traffic between Christendom and Islam across the Mediterranean in the sixteenth century—and this was in a religious age, after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks and of Granada to the Spanish: “Men passed to and fro, indifferent to frontiers, states and creeds. They were more aware of the necessities for shipping and trade, the hazards of war and piracy, the opportunities for complicity or betrayal provided by circumstances.”

Those kinds of “complicities” and ambiguities are missing in Huntington’s analysis. Civilizations are crammed into the nooks and crannies—and checkpoints—of the Balkans. Huntington goes where only the brave would venture, into that belt of mixed populations stretching from the Adriatic to the Baltic. Countless nationalisms make their home there, all aggrieved, all possessed of memories of a fabled past and equally ready for the demagogues vowing to straighten a messy map. In the thicket of these pan-movements he finds the line that marked “the eastern boundary of Western Christianity in the year 1500.” The scramble for turf between Croatian nationalism and its Serbian counterpart, their “joint venture” in carving up

Bosnia, are made into a fight of the inheritors of Rome, Byzantium and Islam.

But why should we fall for this kind of determinism? “An outsider who travels the highway between Zagreb and Belgrade is struck not by the decisive historical fault line which falls across the lush Slavonian plain but by the opposite. Serbs and Croats speak the same language, give or take a few hundred words, have shared the same village way of life for centuries.” The cruel genius of Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman, men on horseback familiar in lands and situations of distress, was to make their bids for power into grand civilizational undertakings—the ramparts of the Enlightenment defended against Islam or, in Tudjman’s case, against the heirs of the Slavic-Orthodox faith. Differences had to be magnified. Once Tito, an equal opportunity oppressor, had passed from the scene, the balancing act among the nationalities was bound to come apart. Serbia had had a measure of hegemony in the old system. But of the world that loomed over the horizon—privatization and economic reform—the Serbs were less confident. The citizens of Sarajevo and the Croats and the Slovenes had a head start on the rural Serbs. And so the Serbs hacked at the new order of things with desperate abandon.

Some Muslim volunteers came to Bosnia, driven by faith and zeal. Huntington sees in these few stragglers the sweeping power of “civilizational rallying,” proof of the hold of what he calls the “kin-country syndrome.” This is delusion. No Muslim cavalry was ever going to ride to the rescue. The Iranians may have railed about holy warfare, but the Chetniks went on with their work. The work of order and mercy would have had to be done by the United States if the cruel utopia of the Serbs was to be contested.

It should have taken no powers of prophecy to foretell where the fight in the Balkans would end. The abandonment of Bosnia was of a piece with the ways of the world. No one wanted to die for Srebrenica. The Europeans averted their gaze, as has been their habit. The Americans hesitated for a moment as the urge to stay out of the Balkans did battle with the scenes of horror. Then “prudence” won out. Milosevic and Tudjman may need civilizational legends, but there is no need to invest their projects of conquest with this kind of meaning.

In his urge to find that relentless war across Islam’s “bloody borders,” Huntington buys Saddam Hussein’s interpretation of the Gulf War. It was, for Saddam and Huntington, a civilizational battle. But the Gulf War’s

verdict was entirely different. For if there was a campaign that laid bare the interests of states, the lengths to which they will go to restore a tolerable balance of power in a place that matters, this was it. A local despot had risen close to the wealth of the Persian Gulf, and a Great Power from afar had come to the rescue. The posse assembled by the Americans had Saudi, Turkish, Egyptian, Syrian, French, British and other riders.

True enough, when Saddam Hussein's dream of hegemony was shattered, the avowed secularist who had devastated the ulama, the men of religion in his country, fell back on Ayatollah Khomeini's language of fire and brimstone and borrowed the symbolism and battle cry of his old Iranian nemesis. But few, if any, were fooled by this sudden conversion to the faith. They knew the predator for what he was: he had a Christian foreign minister (Tariq Aziz); he had warred against the Iranian revolution for nearly a decade and had prided himself on the secularism of his regime. Prudent men of the social and political order, the ulama got out of the way and gave their state the room it needed to check the predator at the Saudi/Kuwaiti border. They knew this was one of those moments when purity bows to necessity. Ten days after Saddam swept into Kuwait, Saudi Arabia's most authoritative religious body, the Council of Higher Ulama, issued a fatwa, or a ruling opinion, supporting the presence of Arab and Islamic and "other friendly forces." All means of defense, the ulama ruled, were legitimate to guarantee the people "the safety of their religion, their wealth, and their honor and their blood, to protect what they enjoy of safety and stability." At some remove, in Egypt, that country's leading religious figure, the Shaykh of Al Azhar, Shaykh Jadd al Haqq, denounced Saddam as a tyrant and brushed aside his Islamic pretensions as a cover for tyranny.

Nor can the chief Iranian religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's rhetoric against the Americans during the Gulf War be taken as evidence of Iran's disposition toward that campaign. Crafty men, Iran's rulers sat out that war. They stood to emerge as the principal beneficiaries of Iraq's defeat. The American-led campaign against Iraq held out the promise of tilting the regional balance in their favor. No tears were shed in Iran for what befell Saddam Hussein's regime.

It is the mixed gift of living in hard places that men and women know how to distinguish between what they hear and what there is: no illusions were thus entertained in vast stretches of the Arab Muslim world about Saddam, or about the campaign to thwart him for that matter. The fight in the gulf was seen for what it was: a bid for primacy met by an imperial expedition

that laid it to waste. A circle was closed in the gulf: where once the order in the region “east of Suez” had been the work of the British, it was now provided by Pax Americana. The new power standing sentry in the gulf belonged to the civilization of the West, as did the prior one. But the American presence had the anxious consent of the Arab lands of the Persian Gulf. The stranger coming in to check the kinsmen.

The world of Islam divides and sub-divides. The battle lines in the Caucasus, too, are not coextensive with civilizational fault lines. The lines follow the interests of states. Where Huntington sees a civilizational duel between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Iranian state has cast religious zeal and fidelity to the wind. Indeed, in that battle the Iranians have tilted toward Christian Armenia.

THE WRIT OF STATES

We have been delivered into a new world, to be sure. But it is not a world where the writ of civilizations runs. Civilizations and civilizational fidelities remain. There is to them an astonishing measure of permanence. But let us be clear: civilizations do not control states, states control civilizations. States avert their gaze from blood ties when they need to; they see brotherhood and faith and kin when it fits in their interest to do so.

We remain in a world of self-help. The solitude of states continues; the disorder in the contemporary world has rendered that solitude more pronounced. No way has yet been found to reconcile France to Pax Americana’s hegemony, or to convince it to trust its security or cede its judgment to the preeminent Western power. And no Azeri has come up with a way the lands of Islam could be rallied to the fight over Nagorno Karabakh. The sky has not fallen in Kuala Lumpur or in Tunis over the setbacks of Azerbaijan in its fight with Armenia.

The lesson bequeathed us by Thucydides in his celebrated dialogue between the Melians and the Athenians remains. The Melians, it will be recalled, were a colony of the Lacedaemonians. Besieged by Athens, they held out and were sure that the Lacedaemonians were “bound, if only for very shame, to come to the aid of their kindred.” The Melians never wavered in their confidence in their “civilizational” allies: “Our common blood insures our fidelity.” We know what became of the Melians. Their allies did not turn up, their island was sacked, their world laid to waste.



Ajami Revisits: The Clash (2008)

Shortly after the appearance of the article that seeded the book, *Foreign Affairs* magazine called upon a group of writers to respond to Huntington's thesis. I was assigned the lead critique. I wrote my response with appreciation, but I wagered on modernization, on the system the West had put in place. "The things and ways that the West took to 'the rest,'" I wrote, "have become the ways of the world. The secular idea, the state system and the balance of power, pop culture jumping tariff walls and barriers, the state as an instrument of welfare, all these have been internalized in the remotest places. We have stirred up the very storms into which we now ride." I had questioned Huntington's suggestion that civilizations could be found "whole and intact, watertight under an eternal sky." Furrows, I observed, run across civilizations, and the modernist consensus would hold in places like India, Egypt and Turkey.

Huntington had written that the Turks — rejecting Mecca, and rejected by Brussels — would head toward Tashkent, choosing a pan-Turkic world. My faith was invested in the official Westernizing creed of Kemalism that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had bequeathed his country. "What, however, if Turkey redefined itself?" Huntington asked. "At some point, Turkey could be ready to give up its frustrating and humiliating role as a beggar pleading for membership in the West and to resume its much more impressive and elevated historical role as the principal Islamic interlocutor and antagonist of the West."

Nearly 15 years on, Huntington's thesis about a civilizational clash seems more compelling to me than the critique I provided at that time. In recent years, for example, the edifice of Kemalism has come under assault, and Turkey has now elected an Islamist to the presidency in open defiance of the military-bureaucratic elite. There has come that "redefinition" that Huntington prophesied. To be sure, the verdict may not be quite as straightforward as he foresaw. The Islamists have prevailed, but their desired destination, or so they tell us, is still Brussels: in that European shelter, the Islamists shrewdly hope they can find protection against the power of the military.

“I’ll teach you differences,” Kent says to Lear’s servant. And Huntington had the integrity and the foresight to see the falseness of a borderless world, a world without differences. (He is one of two great intellectual figures who peered into the heart of things and were not taken in by globalism’s conceit, Bernard Lewis being the other.)

I still harbor doubts about whether the radical Islamists knocking at the gates of Europe, or assaulting it from within, are the bearers of a whole civilization. They flee the burning grounds of Islam, but carry the fire with them. They are “nowhere men,” children of the frontier between Islam and the West, belonging to neither. If anything, they are a testament to the failure of modern Islam to provide for its own and to hold the fidelities of the young.

More ominously perhaps, there ran through Huntington’s pages an anxiety about the will and the coherence of the West — openly stated at times, made by allusions throughout. The ramparts of the West are not carefully monitored and defended, Huntington feared. Islam will remain Islam, he worried, but it is “dubious” whether the West will remain true to itself and its mission. Clearly, commerce has not delivered us out of history’s passions, the World Wide Web has not cast aside blood and kin and faith. It is no fault of Samuel Huntington’s that we have not heeded his darker, and possibly truer, vision.



Ajami on Samuel Huntington’s Warning (2008, excerpt)

Huntington crossed over from the academy into global renown, with his “clash of civilizations” thesis.... He had assaulted the zeitgeist of the era. The world took notice, and his book was translated into 39 languages. Critics insisted that men want Sony, not soil. But on 9/11, young Arabs—19 of them—would weigh in. They punctured the illusions of an era, and gave evidence of the truth of Huntington’s vision. With his typical precision, he had written of a “youth bulge” unsettling Muslim societies, and young, radicalized Arabs, unhinged by modernity and unable to master it, emerging as the children of this radical age.

If I may be permitted a personal narrative: In 1993, I had written the lead critique in *Foreign Affairs* of his thesis. I admired his work but was unconvinced. My faith was invested in the order of states that the West

itself built. The ways of the West had become the ways of the world, I argued, and the modernist consensus would hold in key Third-World countries like Egypt, India and Turkey. Fifteen years later, I was given a chance in the pages of *The New York Times Book Review* to acknowledge that I had erred and that Huntington had been correct all along.

A gracious letter came to me from Nancy Arkelyan Huntington, his wife of 51 years (her Armenian descent an irony lost on those who dubbed him a defender of nativism). He was in ill-health, suffering the aftermath of a small stroke. They were spending the winter at their summer house on Martha's Vineyard. She had read him my essay as he lay in bed. He was pleased with it: "He will be writing you himself shortly." Of course, he did not write, and knowing of his frail state I did not expect him to do so. He had been a source of great wisdom, an exemplar, and it had been an honor to write of him, and to know him in the regrettably small way I did.



The Arab Inheritance (1997, excerpts)

The authoritarian state, the nihilistic opposition: the middle ground has been scorched in the two decades behind us. The ruler claiming everything, the oppositionist dispensing with all that has been built and secured by those who came before. On pain of poverty and decay, nations can persist with ruinous ways. An encrusted tradition has its own ways, a thicket of consolations and alibis shelter it from the world. Beyond economic repair (really a precondition of it), a modernist impulse will have to assert itself if rescue is to materialize. "We can't look for the future in the caves of the past, and we can't make the future with ready-hewn stones," an Egyptian thinker, Mahmoud Amin al-Alim, has written in a recent book on Arab thought between "authenticity" and "globalization." The romance with the Islamic past is illusion, a detour: that romance had filled the void when a national tradition faltered, when new classes, half-educated and bewildered, sought to simplify the world around them.

If the French scholar of Islam, Gilles Kepel, is right, a "post-Islamist" phase is on the horizon. Kepel wrote this of Egypt, the most worldly of the Arab states, but his observation is true of other Arab countries as well, and this phase will not have come too soon. A generation after Iran's upheaval, after the Islamist insurgencies and counterinsurgencies in Arab lands, good

riddance to all that. The interpretation that reduces politics to religious categories (not surprisingly an interpretation popular with the Islamists and Westerners who study political Islam) hides the society from itself and from outside scrutiny. A nemesis has overtaken this politico-religious alternative: routine, the ways of a stubborn tradition, the persistence of an Arab political order of officers and monarchs who survived and outwitted (and outgunned) their challengers. After the brigades of Hezbollah laid claim to Beirut, the old materialist city rose again from the ruins, and the enforcers of Hezbollah themselves have found their way into the order of commerce and protected turfs.

It could be tougher going for the rulers of the Middle East in a post-Islamist phase: on the whole, their present *modus operandi*—counterinsurgency—is easier than economic and political reform. A frightened middle class, desperate to hold on to its small cultural liberties against the Islamists' reign of virtue and terror, is willing to sanction and live with autocratic rule. Reform of the Arab political culture will begin when a system of limited authority encounters the oppositionist with limited, realizable goals—half-steps of reform. The one Arab land that offers the best chance of a political reclamation of this sort is Egypt. It is there, in a society with genuine political experience, an innate temperament of moderation, and the security of centralized rule, that a politics of restraint and pragmatism could break the vicious circle of total rule and nihilistic opposition. Arabs would then have a model of their own of a more accommodating, more merciful political world. To be in Egypt, as I was last May when Iran voted in a presidential election, was to see an Egyptian yearning for a politics of normalcy and democratic rule. Egyptians are not fooled; they do not want for themselves the theocratic culture of Iran. But they are wistful about their own condition and there lies deep within them a reverence for the parliamentary politics they had known in the interwar years.

Failure can drape itself in ways both religious and secular. For a modernist Arab alternative to work and stick, the obsessive themes of the Arab political tradition—a historiography that lays every blame at the doorstep of the West—will have to be shed. It will not be easy, and the odds weigh against a modernist path. There is a widespread belief that the new global order and its civic religion of fiscal rectitude, privatization and competitiveness, and high tolerance for inequality is made in America's image and cut to its needs. In the workshops of the Pacific, this perception has no resonance. There is a self-confident swagger in East Asia, a belief

that the “East Asian way”—markets, political autocracy, and a hierarchical social order—is made out of that region’s own cultural material. No such confidence is to be found among the Arabs.

The shadow of American primacy lies on Arab lands; inescapably, onto the new reforms, onto the whole structure of contemporary international order for that matter, are projected the resentments that the intellectual class harbors toward *Pax Americana*. The Egyptian Mohamed Heikal, perhaps the most influential expositor of the tradition of pan-Arabism and Nasserism, gave voice to this distrust of the new order of things: nothing of value could come out of this American primacy, he recently wrote. A “new order” was being hatched for the region that could bring in its train greater ruin for the Arabs than the diplomatic settlements that carved up the Arab dominions of the Ottoman empire in the aftermath of the First World War. Arabs could come out empty-handed, he warned, in this new order of nations, let down by feeble states, and “kept in the dark in this age of satellites and mass information.” No wonder the economic reforms that the Egyptian state undertook in the last two years—slashing the budget deficit, a beginning to privatize public sector companies, liberalizing the land rent laws in favor of the landholders—are written off by economic nationalists as a capitulation to an American policy bent on dismantling the public sector and undoing what had been built during the high tide of Nasserism and Arab nationalism.

It is a curious presence that America casts across the Arab landscape. America is simultaneously the agent of political order and social revolution. It has befriended the status quo and has, for good reasons, taken a skeptical view of the oppositionists in Arab lands. The irony has not been lost on those on the receiving end of American power. The twin deities in this American civic religion, ballots and markets, have been decoupled in Arab lands. The American enthusiasm for the forms of democracy in other lands has been reined in here. (That enthusiasm is kept in check in the case of Turkey as well, and for the same reasons: fear that secularism may lose out, in open contest, to the Islamists.) Clarity will begin when the political class acknowledges the true and modest dimensions of the American role in Arab public life. The American presence in the Arab world has a long trail behind it: it stretches back to the late years of the nineteenth century with the arrival of the missionaries and the educators. In the intervening decades, America has been the thing and its opposite: Satan and redeemer; it has nurtured Arab nationalism and sustained Israel; its pop culture and media

have disseminated social emancipation while its official weight has been thrown on the side of the ruling orders. But this American imperium is now part real, part pretense. No imperial vocation beckons America in Arab lands.



Iraq and the Arabs' Future (2003, excerpts)

Above and beyond toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein and dismantling its deadly weapons, the driving motivation of a new American endeavor in Iraq and in neighboring Arab lands should be modernizing the Arab world. The great indulgence granted to the ways and phobias of Arabs has reaped a terrible harvest—for the Arabs themselves, and for an America implicated in their affairs. It is cruel and unfair but true: the fight between Arab rulers and insurgents is for now an American concern.

In the 1970s and the 1980s, the political and economic edifice of the Arab world began to give way. Explosive demographic trends overwhelmed what had been built in the post-independence era, and then a furious Islamism blew in like a deadly wind. It offered solace, seduced the young, and provided the means and the language of resentment and refusal. For a while, the failures of that world were confined to its own terrain, but migration and transnational terror altered all that. The fire that began in the Arab world spread to other shores, with the United States itself the principal target of an aggrieved people who no longer believed that justice could be secured in one's own land, from one's own rulers. It was September 11 and its shattering surprise, in turn, that tipped the balance on Iraq away from containment and toward regime change and "rollback."

A reforming zeal must thus be loaded up with the baggage and the gear. No great apologies ought to be made for America's "unilateralism." The region can live with and use that unilateralism. The considerable power now at America's disposal can be used by one and all as a justification for going along with American goals. The drapery of a unanimous Security Council resolution authorizing Iraq's disarmament—signed by the Syrian regime, no less—will grant the Arab rulers the room they need to claim that they had simply bowed to the inevitable, and that Saddam had gotten the war he had called up.

In the end, the battle for a secular, modernist order in the Arab world is an endeavor for the Arabs themselves. But power matters, and a great power's will and prestige can help tip the scales in favor of modernity and change.

...

A successful war in Iraq ... would embolden those who wish for the Arab world deliverance from retrogression and political decay. Thus far, the United States has been simultaneously an agent of political reaction and a promoter of social revolution in the Arab-Muslim world. Its example has been nothing short of revolutionary, but from one end of the Arab world to the other, its power has invariably been on the side of political reaction and a stagnant status quo. A new war should come with the promise that the United States is now on the side of reform. ...

Given the belligerence and self-pity in Arab life, its retreat from modernist culture, and its embrace of conspiracy theories, there are justifiable grounds for believing there are no native liberal or secular traditions to embrace the United States and use its victory to build an alternative to despotic rule. Few Arabs would believe this effort to be a Wilsonian campaign to spread the reign of liberty in the Arab world. They are to be forgiven their doubts, for American power, either by design or by default, has been built on relationships with military rulers and monarchs without popular mandates. America has not known or trusted the middle classes and the professionals in these lands. Rather, it has settled for relationships of convenience with the autocracies in the saddle, tolerating the cultural and political malignancies of the Arab world. A new American role in the region will have to break with this history.

For American power, there are two ways in the Arab world. One is restraint, pessimistic about the possibility of changing that stubborn world, reticent about the uses of American power. In this vision of things, the United States would either spare the Iraqi dictator or wage a war with limited political goals for Iraq and for the region as a whole. The other choice, more ambitious, would envisage a more profound American role in Arab political life: the spearheading of a reformist project that seeks to modernize and transform the Arab landscape. Iraq would be the starting point, and beyond Iraq lies an Arab political and economic tradition and a culture whose agonies and failures have been on cruel display. ...

The case for war must rest in part on the kind of vision the United States has for Iraq. The dread of “nation-building” must be cast aside. It is too late in the annals of nations for outright foreign rule. But there will have to be a sustained American presence if the new order is to hold and take root. Iraq is a society with substantial social capital and the region’s second-largest reserves of oil. It has traditions of literacy, learning, and technical competence. It can draw on the skills of a vast diaspora of means and sophistication, waves of people who fled the country’s turbulent politics and the heavy hand of its rulers. If Iraq’s pain has been great in the modern era, so too has been its betrayed promise. There were skills and hope that the polity could be made right, that the abundance of oil and water and the relative freedom from an overbearing religious tradition would pave the way toward modernity and development.

For Pax Americana, Iraq may be worth the effort and the risks. America has been on the ground in Saudi Arabia for nearly six decades now, in Egypt for three. In both realms, there is wrath and estrangement toward America. What has been built in Arabia appears in serious jeopardy. The aid and help granted to Egypt has begotten nothing other than ingratitude and a deep suspicion among frustrated middle-class Egyptians that the United States wishes for them subjugation and dependence. There is an unfathomable anti-Americanism in Egypt—even among those professionals who have done well by the American connection.

There appears to be no liberal option for Egypt, no economic salvation. This country of outward tranquility and seething internal radicalism is in the grip of deep frustration. Egyptian history has stalled; the military ruler is supreme, but he offers no way out for his country. As the political life of the land has atrophied, anti-Americanism has taken hold, offering absolution and a way of airing the rage of a proud population that has fallen short of its own idea of itself and its place among the nations. Iraq may offer a contrast, a base in the Arab world free of the poison of anti-Americanism. The country is not hemmed in by the kind of religious prohibitions that stalk the U.S. presence in the Saudi realm. It may have a greater readiness for democracy than Egypt, if only because it is wealthier and is free of the weight of Egypt’s demographic pressures and the steady menace of an Islamist movement.

Iraq should not be burdened, however, with the weight of great expectations. This is the Arab world, after all, and Americans do not know

it with such intimacy. Iraq could disappoint its American liberators. There has been heartbreak in Iraq, and vengeance and retribution could sour Americans on this latest sphere of influence in the Muslim world. But America could still be more daring in Iraq than it was after Desert Storm. To begin with, the bogeyman of a Shi'ite state emerging in Iraq as a satrapy of the Iranian clerical regime—the fear that paralyzed American power back in 1991—should be laid to rest. The Iranian Revolution's promise has clearly faded. The clerics there are in no position to export their “revolutionary happiness,” for they would find no takers anywhere. Then, too, the Shi'a of Iraq must be seen for what they are: Arabs and Iraqis through and through. ...

A new regime in Iraq might be willing to bid farewell to virulent pan-Arabism. The passion for a Palestinian vocation in a new Iraq may subside, if only because the Palestinians have been such faithful supporters of Saddam Hussein. The norm has been for Iraq, the frontier Arab land far away from the Mediterranean, to stoke the fires of anti-Zionism knowing that others closer to the fire—Jordanians, Palestinians, Egyptians, Syrians, and Lebanese—would be the ones consumed. A new Iraqi political order might find within itself the ability to recognize that Palestine and the Palestinians are not an Iraqi concern. A new ruling elite that picks up the pieces in Iraq might conclude that offering a bounty to the families of Palestinian suicide “martyrs” is something that a burdened country can do without.

A new Iraqi political arrangement would also empower the Shi'a and the Kurds, and neither population owes fidelity to the pieties of Arabism. The Iraqi Kurds owe the Arab world little. The Iraqi opposition's solitude in the wider politics of the Arab world has been deep and searing. Saddam's opponents have had no Egyptian or Saudi sponsorship, nor have the Arab nationalists and “the street” embraced them. They have worked alone from London and Iran, and more recently, with American patronage. They are free to fashion a world with relative indifference to Arab claims. ...

An Arab world rid of this kind of ruinous temptation might conceivably have a chance to rethink the role of political power and the very nature of the state. It has often seemed in recent years that the Arab political tradition is immune to democratic stirrings. The sacking of a terrible regime with such a pervasive cult of terror may offer Iraqis and Arabs a break with the false gifts of despotism.

If and when it comes, that task of repairing—or detoxifying—Iraq will be a major undertaking. The remarkable rehabilitation of Japan between its surrender in 1945 and the restoration of its sovereignty in 1952 offers a historical precedent. Indeed, the Japanese example has already turned up, in both American and Arab discussions, as a window onto the kind of work that awaits the Americans and the Iraqis once the dictatorship is overthrown. Granted, no analogy is perfect: Iraq, with its heterogeneity, differs from Japan. America, too, is a radically different society than it was in 1945—more diverse, more given to doubt, and lacking the sense of righteous mission that drove it through the war years and into the work in Japan.

Yet for all these differences, the Japanese precedent is an important one. In the space of a decade, imperial Japan gave way to a more egalitarian, modern society. A country poisoned by militarism emerged with a pacifist view of the world. It was the victors' justice that drove the new monumental undertaking and powered the twin goals of demilitarization and democratization. The victors tinkered with the media, the educational system, and the textbooks. Those are some of the things that will have to be done if a military campaign in Iraq is to redeem itself in the process. The theatrics and megalomania of Douglas MacArthur may belong to a bygone age, but Iraq could do worse than having the interim stewardship of a modern-day high commissioner who would help usher it toward a normal world.

At a minimum, Iraq would be lucky to have the semidemocratic politics of its neighbors. Turkey and Jordan come to mind, and even Iran is a more merciful land than the large prison that Iraq has become under its terrifying warden. The very brutality that the Iraqis have endured under Saddam may be Iraq's saving grace if redemption comes its way. There may come relief after liberation—and a measure of realism.

The deference to the wider Arab phobias about the Shi'a or the Kurds coming into new power in Iraq should be cast aside. A liberal power cannot shore up ethnic imperiums of minority groups. The rule of a Sunni minority, now well below 20 percent of Iraq's population, cannot be made an American goal. The Arabs around Iraq are not owed that kind of indulgence. It is with these sorts of phobias and biases that the Arab world must break. A culture that looks squarely at its own troubles should think

aloud about the rage that is summoned on behalf of the Palestinians while the pain of the Kurds, or the Berbers in North Africa, or the Christians in the southern Sudan, is passed over in silence.

This righteous sense of Arab victimhood—which overlooks what Arab rulers do to others while lamenting its own condition—emanates from a political tradition of belligerent self-pity. The push should be for an Arab world that acknowledges its own economic and political retrogression and begins to find a way out of those crippling sectarian atavisms. ...

A new American primacy in Iraq would play out under watchful eyes. There will be Arabs convinced that their world is being recolonized. There will be pan-Arabists sure that Iraq has been taken out of “Arab hands,” given over to the minorities within, and made more vulnerable to Turkey and Iran, the two non-Arab powers nearby. There will be Europeans looking for cracks in the conduct of the distant great power. The judgment that matters will be made at home, in the United States itself, as to the costs and returns of imperial burden. The British Empire’s moment in Iraq came when it was exhausted; on the eve of its occupation of Iraq, the United Kingdom’s GDP was 8 percent of the world product, when the comparable figure for America today is at least three times as large. America can afford a big role in Iraq, and beyond. Whether the will and the interest are there is an entirely different matter.

The Arab world could whittle down, even devour, an American victory. This is a difficult, perhaps impossible, political landscape. It may reject the message of reform by dwelling on the sins of the American messenger. There are endless escapes available to that Arab world. It can call up the fury of the Israeli-Palestinian violence and use it as an alibi for yet more self-pity and rage. It can shout down its own would-be reformers, write them off as accomplices of a foreign assault. It can throw up its defenses and wait for the United States to weary of its expedition. It is with sobering caution, then, that a war will have to be waged. But it should be recognized that the Rubicon has been crossed. Any fallout of war is certain to be dwarfed by the terrible consequences of America’s walking right up to the edge of war and then stepping back, letting the Iraqi dictator work out the terms of another reprieve. It is the fate of great powers that provide order to do so against the background of a world that takes the protection while it bemoans the heavy hand of the protector. This new expedition to Mesopotamia would be no exception to that rule.



NPR Interview with Fouad Ajami (2006)

STEVE INSKEEP: The confrontation with Iran intensifies at a moment when the U.S. is still at war just across Iran's border. One American supporter of that war in Iraq has been exploring why the conflict has proven so difficult.

Fouad Ajami is a noted writer on the Arab world from which he came. He charges that the Arab world was prejudiced against the Shia Muslims who were poised to lead Iraq, and against the Americans who confidently expected to help them do it.

“This was a world that could whittle down, even devour, a big American victory. It was a difficult, perhaps impossible, landscape. There were countless escapes available to that Arab world. It could reject the message of reform by dwelling on the sins of the American messenger. It could call up the fury of the Israeli-Palestinian violence and use it as an alibi for yet more self-pity and rage. A foreign power bearing reform and dreaming of it had its work cut out for it.”

The man who wrote those lines was born in Lebanon to a Shiite Muslim family. Today, as an American journalist and academic, he has advised the White House on Iraq. Fouad Ajami traveled to Iraq several times while writing a book called *The Foreigner's Gift*.

To Fouad Ajami, that gift was supposed to be liberty for Iraq and a new political order for the Arab world. He says the disaster came when Arab governments, Muslim imams, even Western-leaning intellectuals, rejected that gift.

FOUAD AJAMI: It's not so much just the climate within which this war has played out. It's also the fact that the Arab world dispatched into Iraq, dumped in Iraq, its jihadists, its castaways, its rejects, its angry children.

So if you are upset with the order in Saudi Arabia, if you are an enemy of the king of Jordan, if you are an enemy of the autocrat in Egypt, Hosni

Mubarak, and you couldn't take on these regimes in Arabia or in Egypt or in Jordan, you made your way to Iraq, and Iraq became this battleground. So it did matter.

INSKEEP: An opponent of the war in Iraq can say, well, obviously the Arab world turned against this war. Civilians were being killed. It was an American invasion. It was uninvited. Do you believe those were the reasons?

AJAMI: No, I don't think so. I think the reasons are very different. The Arabs are very shrewd and cunning people. I say this as an Arab. And I think, in a way, they would never let us in on the reasons for their opposition to this Iraq war.

We ended up now in Iraq, three years or so into the American invasion of Iraq, with a Shia prime minister in Iraq. That's new. We ended up with a Kurdish president in Iraq. That's new. We ended up with a Kurdish foreign minister. So when the League of Arab States meets in Cairo, in Tunisia, wherever it meets, there is a young Kurdish man there representing a big Arab state.

The Arabs were not ready for this. They did not want the emancipation of the Shia and of the Kurds. And they were never going to let us in on the secret of their opposition.

INSKEEP: So are you arguing that the war in Iraq would have worked out fine, or at least better, had it not been for this widespread sectarian animosity throughout the Arab world against it?

AJAMI: There's a word which our listeners who will have seen the great movie, Sir David Lean's movie, *Lawrence of Arabia*, may remember it. It's a word called *maktub*: fated, written.

I think it was fated and written, as the Arabs would say, that this war would be difficult. It was fated and written that we were going into a country we did not know, in a region that we can't really fully comprehend.

Now, was it fated and written it would be this difficult? Did we judge that the Sunni Arabs would completely turn away from this new war and reject the gifts it brought with it? I think that's where the surprises of the war lay.

INSKEEP: Why do you think that American officials first denied and then downplayed these sectarian differences?

AJAMI: I think we just, this country, the United States, is not alert to sectarianism. It doesn't understand sectarian differences.

When you try to explain to people the differences between the Sunnis and the Shia, when you try to tell them that there are no linguistic differences, that the two speak the same language, Arabic in the main, in the Arab world, that there are no ethnic differences, there are no differences of pigmentation, but that here are these two clashing histories, here are these two memories, if you will, these two ideas of Islam—the Islam of the Shia, which is the Islam of opposition, and the Islam of the Sunnis, which is the Islam of the cities, of the merchants, of the rulers—you try to explain it this way, and I think it's very hard.

INSKEEP: Did you get a chance, as a prominent writer and academic, to advise American officials about their course in this war?

AJAMI: I think that when you are brought in, you're not really brought in to really tell people what to do. You're brought in to tell them what you know, to report on what you've seen.

So yes, I've talked to Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. I've seen the president once, really, basically for one sustained conversation about Iraq. You know, people bring you in if they sense the basic sympathy that you have. And I have this basic sympathy for this project, this American project.

INSKEEP: Vice President Cheney, as I'm sure you know quite well, quoted you in the run-up to the war to say the war would not be so hard. He said that, according to you, the streets of Basra and Baghdad are sure to erupt in joy, the same way that the throngs in Kabul greeted the Americans. Was that your advice?

AJAMI: Well, I'll tell you the origins of this. I have no problem, by the way, with these remarks that the vice president made. People have asked me. Their origins lie in a piece I wrote for *The New York Times Book Review*. I was reviewing a book on Iraq, and I said, if we pick up where we left off a

decade ago and head to Baghdad—that means the reference, as you know, to Gulf War I—and head to Baghdad, the crowd, if only for a moment, may forgive us the multitude of our sins and may believe in this project.

So, you know, did the crowd believe in this war? Absolutely. Did people welcome the American forces as liberators in Iraq? Absolutely. Did the Sunni Arabs? No. Did the Shia? Yes. Did the Kurds? You should see the pro-Americanism in Kurdistan. So I stand behind this.

[Exact original quote: “Were we to pick up where we left off a decade ago and head to Baghdad, the tormented people of Iraq would be sure to erupt in joy. If we liberate them, they may (if only for a while) forgive America the multitude of its sins. They may take our gift and do the easiest of things: construct a better Iraq than the one that the Tikriti killers have put in place.”]

INSKEEP: Interesting that you say the original quote. You said that the crowd would support an American invasion “for a moment,” or “if only for a moment.”

AJAMI: Yes.

INSKEEP: A qualification that was stripped away by the administration, in the same way that all the qualifications about the intelligence information were.

AJAMI: Was it stripped away? Do you think that? No, there’s no problem. I have absolutely no problem with the way I was quoted. You know, people quote you, and people quote you in ways that they like. And had I had any problem, I would have objected, because I’ve had fairly steady access, particularly to the vice president, over the last several years. And I think he quoted me in the way that I meant, the way I read Iraq, and the way I read how the people of Iraq would respond to the coming of the Americans.

INSKEEP: So you don’t think that policymakers oversimplify or cherry-pick the ideas of intellectuals?

AJAMI: Yeah, they do. I mean, I think they do. But I think they do because it’s inevitable.

INSKEEP: So when you consider the sectarian divisions, and what you see as sectarian objections to the war in Iraq, is there some level on which you're saying, you know, I'm an American, we're Americans here, and those darn Arabs just will not think the way that we wish they would think?

AJAMI: Well, I can't think this way, because, you know, as you might suspect, I know a little too much for that, because of my own background, both steeped in the life and the culture of the Arab world, and steeped in the life and the culture of my generation of Arabs, which was, by the way, a secular generation, the baby boomers, if you will, who came into their own in the '50s and the '60s.

That's not the case I make. And I wish the Iraqis well. I think we've given them this chance to construct a new life. Will they take it? It's hard to know.

It wasn't a war I was a cheerleader for. It was a war I believed in. That's a big difference.



The Best Day After a Bad Emperor is the First [quote from Tacitus] (2011, lecture)

I remain bullish on this Arab Awakening. I know the dangers of the Arab Awakening. I have been under enormous pressure from conservatives in the United States. Conservatives in the United States think I'm really good on Arab politics, by the way. The liberals think I'm just completely out of it, which is okay with me. I don't mind, since the conservatives are my buddies. These are the people who give me positive reinforcement. And they have been asking me, "Hey, you know, what's this Arab Awakening?"

So I always quote, to myself and to people I talk to about this Arab Awakening, a very important exchange between President George W. Bush and the incredible commander David Petraeus, who led our forces in Iraq and then went to Afghanistan and eventually to the CIA. When George W. Bush decided to launch the surge in Iraq, the Republicans had had a "thumping," as Bush called it, in the congressional elections in November 2006. But being George W. Bush means that you are very stubborn. So he decided to launch the surge. He brings in David Petraeus and says, "General, I'll give you all you want to win this war. I'm doubling down in

Iraq.” And Petraeus says, “Mr. President, you’re not doubling down. You’re all in.” That’s a gambling term.

Well, I’m all in on the Arab Spring. I can’t change. I can’t go back to Anderson Cooper and say, “Oh, by the way, I changed my mind. This is not a good thing, this Arab Spring.” I can’t tell Wolf Blitzer or the *Wall Street Journal*, “This is the wrong call.”

I believe in this Arab Awakening. The drums of anti-Americanism in the Arab world magically have ceased. In Hama in July, they threw roses and olive branches at our amazing, courageous U.S. ambassador, Robert Ford. They didn’t throw eggs. They didn’t throw tomatoes. They hailed him. The homicide bombers and the cult of the martyrs have been joined by a new breed of young people and a new kind of politics: civil protest. Now the possibility of failure is present in all human endeavors. There is no human deed that begins with perfect assurance of success. But I think this is really where this Arab Awakening stands.

This Awakening is motivated by shame—that the Arabs had applauded the despots, chanted their names, turned them into deities. I think there will be a new dawn in the Arab world when a certain chant will be completely edited out and banned in all Arab lands: “With our blood, with our souls, we sacrifice ourselves for you”—fill in the blank: Saddam, Arafat, whoever.

I think the Arabs had participated in the making of these despots. Dictatorship always rests on consent. A sublime essayist, my editor and colleague and friend at *The New Republic*, Leon Wieseltier, has recently recalled a sixteenth-century French humanist, Étienne de La Boétie, who wrote something relevant, I believe, about dictatorship and the consent of the masses to dictatorship:

I would like to understand how it happens that so many men, so many villages, so many cities, so many nations sometimes suffer under a single tyrant who has no other power than the power they give him; who is able to harm them only to the degree to which they have the power to endure it; who could do them absolutely no injury unless they preferred to bear with him rather than contradict him.

It is the people themselves who permit, or bring about, their own subjection. A people enslaves itself, cuts its own throat.

This Awakening is driven by the knowledge that the Arabs had given up their freedom in return for bread and ended up with neither. Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, conservative economists, could have pretty much prophesied what would happen in the Arab world: that the absence of economic freedom means, of course, the absence of political freedom.

I'll give you these numbers. They're very interesting. This is the Index of Economic Freedom from the Heritage Foundation, on a scale of one to one hundred, measuring how much economic freedom a society has. Number one in economic freedom, says the Heritage Foundation, is Hong Kong. It scores 89.7. Number two is Singapore; it scores 87.2. Number nine, for reference, is the United States, 77.8. Number ten, amazingly enough, interestingly, is Bahrain, 77.7. Number twenty-seven is Qatar, 70 points. Number fifty-four is Saudi Arabia, with 66 points. Ranked number sixty-one is Kuwait, with 64.7.

I am shocked that my birthplace, Lebanon, the land of the Phoenician traders, stands at eighty-nine, with a score of 60 points. And then Egypt ranks ninety-six, with a score of 59.1. Number 123 is Pakistan—not an Arab country, but we'll include them—with 55.2. Number 127 is Yemen, with 54 points. Number 140 is Syria, with 51 points. Number 171 is Iran, with 41 points. Number 173, bringing up the rear, is none other than Libya. So again, the absence of economic freedom, and then, of course, the absence of political freedom.

These are Arab revolutions. They met the Obama test. President Obama said they have to be organic, these revolutions. I called that the Whole Foods test. So they met the Whole Foods test. America didn't make these revolts, nor could America stop these revolts....

Now, in looking at these revolutions—these are, as I said, Arab revolutions—we should dispense with “the soft bigotry of low expectations.” “The soft bigotry of low expectations” isn't my phrase. It is George W. Bush's. His speechwriters gave him this idea, and he believed we should dispense with the soft bigotry of low expectations.

We should trust people with their liberty. Television anchor people, to fill time, have to ask this: “Well, now Qaddafi has been overthrown. What will happen next? Will Libya go Islamist?” I tell them, give these people a break. They just rid themselves of a forty-two-year nightmare. Let’s give them twenty-four hours, and then they can figure out what their life is about.

We should trust people with their liberty. We know that post-communism was messy, but surely, surely it was preferable to the grand failure that was communism. Those captive nations that came out of 1989, came replete with baggage, but nevertheless they made their way. And who would want the Poland of 1980 as opposed to the Poland of today?

There is a fashionable affectation of worldliness. People say, “Ah, you know, I’m disappointed in the Arab Spring.” One of my colleagues, who shall remain unnamed, said, “I’m disappointed in the Arab Spring.” Well, I have always loved that word, “disappointed,” because I have a little clever play on it, and he gave me my chance to use it. I said, “Who the hell appointed you?” Why do you have the standing even to say, “I’m disappointed in the Arab Spring”? You don’t have any stake in this fight. Since when did you care whether there was an Arab Awakening, or what exactly was there in the Arab world?

So we should not succumb to this kind of affectation—that we are world-weary, we’re clever, and we’re disappointed in the Arab Spring and it’s not worthy. I genuinely believe that people who live in free societies have an obligation, a special obligation, a special burden, to support freedom and liberty. So I think that’s my answer to the people who feign disappointment.

The closest historical analogy to the storm that broke upon the Arab world may be the revolutions of 1848 in Europe. 1848 in Europe—the “Springtime of Peoples,” it was called. The revolution erupted in France, then hit the Italian states and the German principalities. Finally, these revolts reached the remote outposts of the Austrian Empire. There must have been fifty of these revolts.

One aristocrat from Piedmont, Massimo d’Azeglio, penned what for me are the most arresting words about liberty’s promise and liberty’s risks. “The gift of liberty,” said the Piedmontese aristocrat, “is like that of a horse,

handsome, strong, and high-spirited. In some it arouses a wish to ride; in many others, on the contrary, it increases the urge to walk.”

Now, for several decades—and I think we can be honest about this—the Arabs walked. I think our parents, those of us who are old, would remember this: they would say about someone, “He walks by the wall and hopes not to be noticed.” So for several decades the Arabs walked and cowered in fear.

Now they’re eager to take freedom’s ride. Luckily for the Arabs, they are paying no heed to those warning them of liberty’s risks. They have decided to take the risk of liberty.



Islam, Democracy and the Long View of History (2012)

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta arrived in Cairo Tuesday to meet Egypt's new Islamist president, the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Morsi, and the country's top general, Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi. After the meeting, the secretary told reporters, “It’s clear that Egypt, following the revolution, is committed to putting into place a democratic government.”

Such patience and reassurance is wise in the wake of an Arab Spring that brought forth democratic elections for the first time in generations. It should be remembered that the U.S. had no trouble living with the Arab autocrats. It did so, as George W. Bush once put it in a memorable speech to the National Endowment for Democracy in 2003, for six long decades—all in the name of stability. The terrible band of jihadists who struck America on 9/11 shattered that compact with the autocrats.

We are now called upon to figure out the terms of a new accommodation, and suddenly many of us are without historical patience. The Islamists in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco have stepped forth. They didn’t make that Arab Awakening of 2011 but had become its beneficiaries. Their leaders had not been on the Rolodex of Goldman Sachs, they were not clients of Washington lobbying firms. They had no favors to dispense. Suddenly history broke their way.

My generation of Arabs, who came to politics amid the high hopes of secular nationalism in the 1950s and '60s, had no use for religious politics. We didn't know these men, let alone the women in oddly stylish headscarves. For a fleeting moment, in the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution led by Col. Gamal Abdul Nasser in July 1952, the Brotherhood was confident that it would partake of the New Order. It had infiltrated the officer corps, and the men in uniform, they thought, would be their instrument in bringing about the "reign of virtue."

But the Nasserist state, and its tributaries and enthusiasts in other Arab lands, had no room for what we would now call political Islam. The Brotherhood was decimated by the Nasser regime, and in 1966, its inspirational leader, Sayyid Qutb, was sent to the gallows.

It was secular nationalism's heady moment. The modern world beckoned in all domains. There was new literature and art and culture, lively media, the promise of mighty armies and an industrial economy. But the promises of pan-Arabism were to go unfulfilled. The reckoning came in June 1967 with a defeat by Israel in the Six-Day War—days from which two generations of Arabs never quite recovered.

Yet those six days were a boon for Islamists. They didn't quarrel with fate. The deliverance that came their way was a gift of their dreaded enemy—the Jewish state that put the Arab armies to flight, and put on cruel display the fraud of so much of what their leaders had claimed. The return of the Islamists had truly begun. The broad middle classes of the Arab world were in play, their economic and psychological gains shattered. The Arabs, said the Islamists, had forsaken God, and this devastating defeat by Israel had the hand of God in it.

The intervening decades were the time of the despots—charisma quit the world of the Arabs. The rulers now had the whip. They banished politics. Mass terror made its appearance, Syria under Hafez al-Assad and Iraq under Saddam Hussein turned into slaughterhouses. In Algeria a barbarous war was fought between the Islamists and Le Pouvoir, the cabal of ruling generals.

We shall never know for certain the impact of Saddam Hussein's ouster in 2003 on the Arab revolutions that toppled dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and soon, one hopes, Syria. The spectacle of Saddam—the knight of

Arabism, the self-appointed gendarme of the Persian Gulf—flushed out of his spider hole doubtless was a trauma for rulers and their accomplices, and a vicarious spectacle of liberation for those among the Arabs who yearned to see the demise of their own dictators.

The Islamist leaders with cardigan sweaters and close cropped beards were not exactly the heirs of the old Brotherhood. They had emerged out of the professional syndicates—engineers and physicians figured prominently in their ranks, as did worldly businessmen. There were those who returned from exile in the West, those with modern degrees earned in Western universities. Rachid Ghannouchi, the leader of the Tunisian Islamists, belongs to the first category, while Egypt's Mohammed Morsi, who holds a doctorate in engineering from the University of Southern California, belongs to the second.

The skeptics see them as opportunists who hijacked the democratic process. Yet what choice do we have but to accept the democratic claims of these new Islamists? We can't send the *mukhabarat* (secret police) after them, as past dictators did. We have to grant them time.

At any rate, the Islamists don't have the political world to themselves. In Morocco, for example, some space was created for the Islamists, and one, Abdellah Benkirane, heads the cabinet. But Morocco remains a monarchy with more than three centuries of rule behind it, where the king claims descent from the Prophet and wields religious, political and military authority.

In Tunisia, the Islamist Nahda Party received a plurality of the votes—and cut a deal with two secular parties to divide the power—and the burdens.

In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has the presidency, but the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces emptied that office of much of its power. The “deep state”—the security forces, the vast apparatus of the ministry of interior—has not been dismantled.

In Libya, the Islamists contested a parliamentary election but they lost out to an older force—tribalism. The coalition that prevailed was headed by a technocrat, Mahmoud Jibril, with a doctorate in political science from the University of Pittsburgh, who was carried to power by the allegiance of his tribe and a broad “liberal” coalition.

We are not the only ones watching. Ordinary Arab men and women will be on the lookout for any cracks in the Islamists' edifice. They will look for evidence of corruption, for the possibility of sons and daughters and nephews and in-laws inheriting the new world. It will be hard for the Islamists to hide—their beards and their worry beads and their affirmations of faith shall not acquit them.



The Pharaoh Fell, but His Poisonous Legacy Lingers (2013)

Two years ago, on Feb. 11, 2011, the Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak stepped aside, overwhelmed by 18 days of protests. Silent and remote, he had ruled for three decades. He had offered his countrymen—and powers beyond—the sole gift of stability. He was a gendarme on the banks of the Nile. Now his country was done with him, and the vaunted stability of his near 30-year reign was torn asunder.

Yet it is only against the backdrop of the sordid political landscape of today's Egypt—the hooliganism of the young, the lawlessness, the fault line between a feeble secular camp and a cynical Muslim Brotherhood bent on monopolizing political power—that the true work of the Mubarak tyranny can be fully appreciated. The "deep state" he presided over—a Ministry of Interior with nearly two million functionaries, a police force that ran amok—is Mubarak's true legacy.

The disorder today in Egypt's streets is taken by some as proof that the despot knew what he was doing, and that Egyptians are innately given to tyranny. But that view misses the damage that this man and his greedy family and retainers inflicted on a nation of more than 80 million people that once had nobler ideas of its place in the world.

Grant the Egyptian people credit for their mercy and forbearance. The Pharaoh was deposed and his two sons, who sat astride the country's economy and politics, were hauled off to prison, but they were spared the gruesome end that was meted out next door to Moammar Gadhafi. A sickly Mubarak was humbled, wheeled into court on a gurney. But he was not sent to the gallows. True, some of the families of victims struck down during the upheaval howled for his blood. But the day of his reckoning was deferred

as the judiciary let the matter run in the hope that the aged former ruler would succumb to a natural death.

It was odd, this tale of Hosni Mubarak. He had started out as a modest officer who had risen to power through the patronage and will of his predecessor, Anwar Sadat. Mubarak had not been imaginative or brave—and that was what recommended him to the flamboyant Sadat. Where Sadat had been unabashedly open in his identification with American power, the new man would be more discreet. Where Sadat had been a trailblazer who had made that celebrated journey to Jerusalem, Mubarak would keep the peace with the Israelis, but keep them at arm's length.

Throughout his reign, a toxic brew poisoned the life of Egypt—a mix of anti-modernism, anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism. That trinity ran rampant in the universities and the professional syndicates and the official media. As pillage had become the obsession of the ruling family and its retainers, the underclass was left to the rule of darkness and to a culture of conspiracy. The middle class was tentative and timid, unsure of itself. It knew the defects of the regime but could not contest its power.

More important, with the Muslim Brotherhood quietly toiling in the shadows, broad segments of the middle class succumbed to the theocratic temptation. Wealth accumulated in the Arab states and the Gulf had remade the Brotherhood. Its members were sly: They accepted the subtle accommodation offered them by the regime.

The historical role of the centralized state in Egypt as the principal agent of social change was abandoned. No wonder the Brotherhood sat out the early and decisive phase of the 2011 protests in Tahrir Square. Courage was not the hallmark of the Brotherhood. Its theorists were still maintaining that the ruler was due deference and obedience while a new generation of activists was battling the security forces.

Yet the Brotherhood had no scruples about “hijacking” a revolution that was not theirs. The annals of revolutions the world over bear testimony to the truth that the rule of the moderates in times of revolutions is always undone by the ascendancy of the extremists. (Think of the liberals who rode with Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979—so many of them were cut down by firing squads.)

It was no surprise that the Egyptian liberals and secularists quarreled among themselves and were feckless and divided. The dictatorship had not allowed them political space and experience. In hindsight, the tipping point in the ruin of Egypt came in 2005. The dictator rigged yet another presidential election, his fifth in a row, and he ordered a decent young rival, Ayman Nour, to prison on trumped-up charges. The administration of George W. Bush grasped the importance of the moment, but Mubarak brushed their entreaties aside.

President Obama and his advisers had two years on their watch before the upheaval. But they lacked the interest and the determination—and the knowledge of matters Egyptian. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described Mubarak as a friend of her family, and Vice President Joe Biden opined that the regime was stable even as millions of Egyptians had gone out to push it into its grave.

Today, a stalemate paralyzes Egypt: The Brotherhood won a plurality in parliamentary elections that began in 2011, but an activist judiciary declared the elections unconstitutional and ordered parliament dissolved in June 2012. The Brotherhood drafted and secured the passage of a new constitution by referendum in December, but those unreconciled to the reign of the Brotherhood wanted nothing to do with it.

Mohammed Morsi has the presidency, but he was defied some days ago when he ordered a curfew in the cities of Ismailia, Suez and Port Said. Thousands went into the streets to sing and dance and play soccer in the night. From afar, those with a superficial knowledge of Egypt think of it as a country willing to slip under the yoke of the Brotherhood. But Egypt is a skeptical, weary country; it wears its faith lightly, and its people have an innate suspicion of those who overdo their religious zeal.

The economy is wrecked and the government has run down its foreign reserves as it attempts to maintain a system of costly subsidies. A \$4.8 billion International Monetary Fund loan was tentatively agreed on, but the government was unwilling to put through the austerity measures required by the loan. Only the remittances of Egyptians abroad, an impressive total of \$19 billion in 2012, averted catastrophe. The ruling bargain that had the Egyptians give up their freedom for bread, and for the handouts of the state, still obtains. The old regime fell, but its ways endure.

Nowadays freedom is out of fashion in American official thinking, and the tumult in Arab lands serves as an alibi for abdication. But we should know that the bargain with the Arab dictatorships brought our way the jihadists. Two products of Mubarak's Egypt must be figured into an audit of that regime: the Cairene al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and the psychopath Mohammad Atta, who led the death pilots of 9/11. It was folly and naiveté to think that we really knew and could befriend the tyrants.



Ajami receiving the National Humanities Medal at the White House, 2006.

Explanatory Notes

- **p. 5 — Joseph Conrad, *Youth*** — 1898 novella narrated by Marlow, who later appears in *Heart of Darkness*. Ajami uses Conrad's image of "the East" speaking in a Western voice to argue that non-Western societies had already been deeply transformed by modernity and the West.
- **p. 6 — Fernand Braudel** — French historian of the *Annales* school, famous for large-scale histories of the Mediterranean and for emphasizing long-term structures, exchange, and interaction across political and religious frontiers.
- **p. 6 — indigenization** — Huntington's term for the reassertion of local cultural identities and traditions after periods of Westernization or ideological borrowing.
- **p. 7 — nomenklatura** — Originally Soviet term for the privileged administrative and political elite of a one-party state; Ajami applies it to Algeria's entrenched FLN ruling establishment.
- **p. 8 — "Sony, not soil"** — Shorthand for the post-Cold War argument that prosperity and consumerism would increasingly displace territorial, nationalist, and ideological passions.
- **p. 8 — "second Byzantium"** — Allusion to the idea of Russia as heir to the Byzantine Empire and protector of Orthodox Christianity; related to the older notion of Moscow as the "Third Rome."
- **p. 8 — Cathay** — Archaic Western name for China. Ajami uses it rhetorically to dismiss the notion of a coherent "Confucian civilization" acting politically as a unit.
- **p. 10 — Chetniks** — Serbian nationalist and paramilitary tradition, originally associated with royalist guerrillas during World War II; in the Yugoslav wars the term was commonly used for militant Serb nationalist forces.
- **p. 10 — "kin-country syndrome"** — Huntington's term for the tendency of states or peoples to support combatants belonging to the same civilization, religion, or cultural community. Ajami invokes Bosnia to challenge this effect's strength.
- **p. 12 — Pax Americana** — "American peace": the international order sustained by U.S. power, particularly after 1945 and, in Ajami's usage

here, U.S. strategic predominance in the Persian Gulf after Britain's withdrawal.

- **p. 12 — self-help** — Term of art in realist international-relations theory: because no higher authority guarantees a state's security, states must ultimately rely on themselves.
- **p. 12 — Melian Dialogue** — Famous episode in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Neutral Melos expected aid from Sparta because of kinship, but Sparta did not intervene and Athens destroyed Melos. Ajami uses it to argue that shared identity does not override state interest.
- **p. 12 — Lacedaemonians** — Spartans; Lacedaemon was the ancient name for the Spartan state.
- **p. 13 — Kemalism** — State ideology associated with Atatürk: republicanism, secularism, nationalism, and a deliberate orientation toward European modernity.
- **p. 14 — zeitgeist** — German, "spirit of the age": the dominant assumptions or intellectual mood of a particular period.
- **p. 15 — Mahmoud Amin al-Alim** — Egyptian Marxist literary critic and intellectual associated with debates over Arab modernity, authenticity, and cultural renewal.
- **p. 15 — "post-Islamist"** — Term used by scholars including Gilles Kepel and later Asef Bayat for a phase in which the revolutionary appeal of Islamism is exhausted or modified by pragmatism, pluralism, and demands for individual rights. Ajami uses it in the late-1990s sense of declining Islamist insurgency.
- **p. 16 — modus operandi** — Latin, "method of operating"; here, the habitual governing method of authoritarian regimes.
- **p. 16 — fiscal rectitude** — Orthodox commitment to balanced budgets, limited deficits, and restrained public spending; part of the market-reform agenda Ajami associates with the post-Cold War global order.
- **p. 17 — Mohamed Heikal** — Muhammad Hassanein Heikal, highly influential Egyptian journalist, editor of *Al-Ahram*, confidant of Nasser, and prominent interpreter and defender of Nasserism and pan-Arab nationalism.

- **p. 18 — rollback** — Cold War strategic term for actively reversing an adversary's gains or regime, as opposed to merely containing it. Ajami uses it for the shift from containing Saddam Hussein to overthrowing him.
- **p. 19 — Wilsonian** — Foreign-policy tradition associated with Woodrow Wilson emphasizing self-determination, liberal political order, and the spread of democratic principles.
- **p. 20 — social capital** — Networks of trust, norms, associations, and civic relationships that facilitate cooperation and effective institutions.
- **p. 21 — satrapy** — Originally a province of the ancient Persian Empire governed by a satrap; figuratively, a subordinate or dependent state.
- **p. 22 — high commissioner** — Senior colonial or mandatory administrator exercising broad governing authority on behalf of an imperial power. Ajami invokes the model provocatively for post-Saddam Iraq.
- **p. 23 — atavism** — Reversion to an older or supposedly primitive pattern; Ajami uses “sectarian atavisms” for the persistence or revival of inherited communal antagonisms.
- **p. 23 — “crossing the Rubicon”** — From Julius Caesar's irreversible crossing of the Rubicon River in 49 BCE; figuratively, passing a point from which there is no turning back.
- **p. 25 — maktub** — Arabic, literally “written”; commonly used to convey the idea that something is destined or fated. Ajami references its familiar use in *Lawrence of Arabia*.
- **p. 27 — “Tikriti killers”** — Ajami's shorthand for Saddam Hussein's ruling inner circle, many of whose key members came from Tikrit and surrounding tribal networks.
- **p. 28 — Tacitus, “The best day after a bad emperor is the first”** — Allusion to the Roman historian Tacitus and the relief following the death of a tyrannical ruler; Ajami uses it as a motto for the Arab uprisings.
- **p. 29 — Étienne de La Boétie** — Sixteenth-century French humanist, author of *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*, which asks why large populations consent to rule by a single tyrant. Ajami invokes him to stress popular complicity in dictatorship.
- **p. 30 — Hayek and Friedman** — Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, leading twentieth-century advocates of economic liberalism. Ajami

invokes their argument that concentrated economic control tends to reinforce political unfreedom.

- **p. 30 — Index of Economic Freedom** — Annual ranking produced by the Heritage Foundation and *Wall Street Journal*, measuring countries by criteria such as property rights, regulation, taxation, trade, and government intervention.
- **p. 30 — “Whole Foods test”** — Ajami’s joking label for President Obama’s insistence that the Arab uprisings be “organic,” meaning indigenous rather than engineered by the United States.
- **p. 30 — “soft bigotry of low expectations”** — Phrase associated with George W. Bush, originally used in domestic education policy. Ajami repurposes it to criticize assumptions that Arabs should be judged by lower political standards.
- **p. 31 — “Springtime of Peoples”** — Common name for the revolutions of 1848, a wave of liberal and nationalist uprisings across Europe.
- **p. 31 — Massimo d’Azeglio** — Piedmontese statesman, writer, and Italian nationalist associated with the Risorgimento; later prime minister of Piedmont-Sardinia. Ajami cites him on the risks as well as the promise of liberty.
- **p. 33 — Le Pouvoir** — French, “the Power”; Algerian shorthand for the opaque military-security and political establishment that exercised decisive power behind formal institutions.
- **p. 34 — professional syndicates** — In Egypt and several Arab states, professional associations of doctors, engineers, lawyers, and others that became important arenas of political organization, particularly for Islamists when conventional party politics was restricted.
- **p. 34 — deep state** — Durable network of military, security, bureaucratic, and judicial institutions capable of exercising power independently of, or constraining, elected governments. Ajami applies the term to Egypt’s post-Mubarak state apparatus.
- **p. 35 — gendarme** — Literally a police or security officer; figuratively, a ruler or state acting as guardian of political order. Ajami calls Mubarak the “gendarme on the banks of the Nile.”