

**The Arab awakening: Islam and the new Middle East.** By Tariq Ramadan.  
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Tariq Ramadan is a prominent scholar and a grandson of the late Hassan al-Banna who founded Muslim Brotherhood. He holds a PhD from the University of Geneva for his thesis “Nietzsche as a Historian of Philosophy” and has written more than a dozen of books and enjoys speaking for Islam in general and European Islam in particular. The book under review is a refinement of the collection of his articles relating to uprising in the Arab world especially North Africa. It contains four chapters together with appendixes of his previous articles on the same issue.

Ramadan begins by narrating the incident of self-immolation by MohammadBouazizi which awakened the spirit of disenchanted Tunisians and led to the overthrow of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia. Domino effect theory is confirmed when uprisings in other parts of the Middle East resulted in the ouster of Hosni Mubarak. Of the plethora of theories, the conspiracy theory has gained wide publicity which identifies the external factor as the driving force of Arab uprising. People point fingers at the West especially the US as being behind these shockwaves. Others, however, attribute the Arab uprisings to the misuse and abuse of power by the dictatorial regimes in the Middle East.

Without casting aside, the external and internal factors, Tariq Ramadan provides a balanced analysis of the events. Firstly, he uses “Arab uprisings” to describe the common character of mass movements that have shaken Arab countries. The main purpose Ramadan’s book, it appears, is to situate Islam as a religious and ideological reference. It is vital to rethink the role of religion in the democratisation process in the Arab world. By referring to Islam, one cannot discard the role of Islamism or political Islam. This phase of history does not mark the end of Islamism. Rather, it faces new conjuncture and to undergo a profound shift. The author advocates civil state by which Islam will be a point of religious and cultural reference in ethical dimension but it should not be taken as a sole reference because this will result in state oppression. He points out that Islam as a religious and cultural reference is not a closed system and it should not be presented as such. It has to define rules and objectives that guide ethical considerations but the shape and substance of these considerations must be developed and evolved over time. Islamic state and civil state were defined by him. The conventional notion of an Islamic state by which religious authority would impose its authority upon the state is not only dangerous but is contrary to Islam. Civil state, on the other hand, is understood where religion remains an ethical orientation that sets out a framework and objectives but intervention in the regulation that defines state authority is avoided. Given the notion of civil state, ethical system is laid out where it makes it possible to avoid divorce between the administration of political power and awareness of its limits, the rules of transparency and service, and its goals. This ethical orientation of Islam renders no ambiguity because it provides for principles that applies to all humans, women and men, rich and poor,

black and white, Muslim or not. These constitute as primary, fundamental principle of social justice that rest on two prerequisite: equal rights and equal opportunities.

The author demonstrates that genuine democratisation and liberation of Middle Eastern and north African society will depend on the mobilization of civil society. There is a need for broad-based social movement to mobilize civil society as well as public and private institutions. It is here where Islamic reference assumes an immediate, imperative and constructive meaning in Muslim-majority societies. Further, the concept of *Shari'ah* and *Jihad* are clearly defined. The implementation of *Shari'ah* is not to enforce prohibitions and imposing a strict, timeless penal code. *Shari'a* is not a rigid, sanctified legal structure. Rather, it corresponds with spiritual, social, political and economic dynamic that reaches towards higher goals associated with a certain idea of humankind. Muslim-majority society is freed from shackles and demons if the *Shari'ah* is to be pervaded by and founded upon vision of the higher goals of dignity, justice, freedom and religious, political and cultural pluralism and if *Jihad* is seen as the effort of resisting racism, corruption and dictatorship, allied with a commitment to the reform of the individual's being and of society in the light of these finalities. The author also uses the term intellectual *Jihad* (intellectual resistance) referring to the notions of liberation and identity with qualitatively different substance and a new density of meaning.

In international realm, the author favours the multipolar world that could bring an opportunity to promote more ethical approach. New economic forces provide an avenue for Arabs to bring in an alternative to neo-liberal economic order which now faces crisis. The presence of new political and economic forces makes renewal inevitable. Relationship with the West must change in the medium or long term. China, India, Russia, Brazil, South Africa or Turkey are emerging as powerful players. These realities will have major consequences on relations with the West. This promises a new paradigm originating from within but also an outcome of the eastward shift in the economic and social centre of gravity. Facts on the ground have changed. The assertive presence of China, India, Russia, Brazil, South Africa and Turkey will be determining factor in facing the question of Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The author pushes a new direction for the understanding of Islam. He situates Islam to the conditional reality of Muslims. He falls under the category of scholars who while loving Islam entertains the idea of secularism. He goes on to declare that Islam is secular. He advocates for a civil state where Islam is situated only in framing ethical orientation of the constitution but is not made the main reference for the administration of state for, according to Tariq Ramadan, this will result in state oppression.

This book offers a new direction for Muslims and Arabs. It addresses the dilemma this society has been plunged in that offers no productive solution for future of Middle East and Muslim-Majority countries at large. Its critical stance regarding Islamists, Secularists, West and other potential players signal for rethinking new approach or paradigm. For about two hundred seventy two-page book, it gives us broad understanding of what is taking place on the ground given its complexity and diversity. It is no doubt that guidelines are provided in this book but they are too general and not well-defined. He touches on the crisis and problems comprehensively but he only provided a piece of the pie of the solutions. Overall, this book opens rooms for debates on the role of Islam in state affairs and for intellectual discourse on Islam and secularism. The West may admire the work.