

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



WHAT HAS BROKEN?

Political, Sociological, Cultural and Religious
Changes in the Middle East over the Last 25 Years

S. R. Nathan Annual Distinguished Lecture at NUS,
Middle East Institute, November 17th, 2015

By: Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal



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The Prince Ghazi Trust for Quranic Thought

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Contents

INTRODUCTION	p. 4
I. WHAT HAS BROKEN <i>POLITICALLY</i> ?	p. 10
II. WHAT HAS BROKEN <i>SOCIALLY</i> ?	p. 20
III. WHAT HAS BROKEN <i>CULTURALLY</i> ?	p. 24
IV. WHAT HAS BROKEN <i>RELIGIOUSLY</i> ?	p. 32
V. WHAT HAS NOT BROKEN	p. 34
VI. <i>WHY</i> ARE THINGS BROKEN?	p. 43
VII. <i>HOW</i> TO FIX THINGS	p. 46

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَى خَاتَمِ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَالْمُرْسَلِينَ،
السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

INTRODUCTION

Thanks and Acknowledgements

Before I start, I would just like to warmly thank Professor Sluglett and NUS for inviting me, and to pay tribute to Singapore's achievements. In particular, I would like to salute the role and vision of its late, great leader Lee Kwan Yew. I need hardly repeat here in Singapore what a historically unique accomplishment it is to have established and made so prosperous, safe and happy what is essentially a tiny, heterogeneous city-state with no natural resources—all one has to do is look around—but by way of appreciation, I would like to relate something of my brief, personal experience of the late leader.

Lee Kwan Yew

Shortly after 9.11.2001, I accompanied H.M. King Abdullah II bin al-Hussein here to Singapore a few times. On the first occasion there was an audience with the late leader; the King asked me to brief the late leader about certain aspects of Islam—which I did—and I suggested a book I had written. The next time I saw him, he had read

the book and proceeded to thoroughly grill me about it. He, having taken everything on board, had made a list of the most perceptive questions imaginable. You can just picture what it was like for me, then in my mid-thirties, to be given an intellectual third degree by Lee Kwan Yew himself—then Senior Minister or Minister Mentor—here in Singapore in front of my King. I felt I was back at Cambridge doing my doctoral viva, only the examiner had been taking mental steroids. However, it left me in a position to better answer a question that had secretly puzzled me since my first visit.

The question was this: what were the qualities that Lee Kwan Yew possessed that had enabled him to make, as it were, a metropolitan ‘miracle’ out of a morass?—by God’s leave of course. *Highest intelligence and education?* Of course, but there are many geniuses who do not actually achieve anything. *Iron determination and unflagging perseverance?* These too, yes—but again, these are no guarantee of anything charitable. *Circumstances?* Hardly favourable, if truth be told. *An excellent team?* Sure, but still, holding one together takes *leadership qualities* of the first order. *A moral vision of social justice?* Yes, certainly; but this usually becomes too political. *Carefulness, thoroughness and attention to detail?* Remarkably so, yes. But most of all I think it was this: *intense incorruptibility of will and purpose*. How else to keep pioneering, under changing circumstances, going from strength to strength,

for more than 30 years, and leave in place a system that can work without one? That at least is how I saw it in my brief exposure to him. And I see much of the same in his son Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, albeit in a very different style.

All I would like to add is that I hope young people who have grown up here and take its good things for granted appreciate that this kind of leadership and circumstance is the rarest exception, not the rule, in historical terms. They should make full use of these halcyon days that they have been blessed with. To them I say, 'Count your blessings gratefully, and don't take anything for granted.'

This sadly will be even clearer, by contrast, as I turn now to discuss change in the Middle East over the last 25 years. Before that, however, I would like to make certain parameters clear.

Parameters

First, I do not speak as H.M. King Abdullah II's *Chief Advisor for Religious and Cultural Affairs* and *Personal Envoy*, or even representing Jordan. I speak in a personal capacity as a scholar and a student of philosophy. Most of what I have to say the King would probably disagree with, but one of the strengths of His Majesty is precisely his encouragement of a broad spectrum of views from those around him (and actually from all Jordanians), enabling him to come to more informed decisions.

Second, I am going to speak in sweeping and provocative broad generalisations: these can easily be deconstructed and shown not be correct in many cases. But what I am identifying is large trends that are generally true and broadly significant. The usefulness of these is twofold: they allow me to simplify and aggregate vast swathes of data for a short paper like this, and they allow me to be provocative and get people to see things in a different light. Despite the plurality of reality, generalisations have their uses, and in fact I doubt our minds could understand mass phenomena without them. So I will assert and explain trends very briefly with only one or two examples.

Third, I will mention major political changes towards the dysfunctional over the last 25 years—things I judge to be ‘broken’—then social ones, then cultural ones, then religious ones. I will not mention things that are *still* broken (such as, notably, the central issue in the Middle East: the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; justice denied to the Palestinian people and the illegal Israeli occupation of their land). But I will mention things that are not broken. (It should be borne in mind also that not every breakage is bad, nor everything unbroken good: I am here merely observing trends, not judging them.) Then I will suggest a facile Hermetic (with a capital ‘H’) link between all of these: a universal cause of the chaos. Then I will propose two, admittedly glib, practical pana-

ceas—there is not much point in a paper like this without having the courage to propose concrete solutions. Then, if anyone is still here and awake, they can argue with me about everything I have said under the polite fiction of ‘Q-and-A’.

Timeframe

The period I am covering essentially starts with Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait on August 2nd 1990 and the ensuing Gulf War, through the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and up to the present day. It is a period that I personally remember all of, and was already in a position to observe from an excellent vantage point first hand. I served briefly as an officer in the desert police during the Gulf War of 1991, returned to Cambridge to complete my first PhD, and started working in the Royal Court of Jordan in 1992. But I had already visited the USSR during the glasnost period in 1988, and had been to Iraq, on an official visit with my uncle the late King Hussein, also in 1988. For everyone my age not naturally involved in politics, this period corresponds, most significantly, to the rise of the PC, the internet, social media, the mobile phone, global connectivity, drones and global awareness of impending environmental collapse.

Places and People

I am essentially talking here about the 21 Arab League

countries in the whole MENA region plus Turkey and Iran. I will often also take Israel into consideration. Over 90% of the population in this area is Muslim. Sunnis are generally an overwhelming majority everywhere except Iran, where the overwhelming majority is Ja'fari Shi'a. In Lebanon, Iraq and Bahrain, Sunni and Ja'fari Shi'a are more or less evenly matched. In Yemen one third of the population is Zeidi Shi'a, and in Oman Ibadhi Muslims are the majority (with Sunnis a close second). Sizable Alawite and Alewi Shi'a minorities also exist in Syria and Turkey.

I. WHAT HAS BROKEN *POLITICALLY*?

1. **The Iron Curtain, or Warsaw Pact countries, and with it Communism:** It may be hard for younger people to imagine now, but communism used to be a real thing and an ever-present world menace, even in the Arab World, particularly in places like South Yemen. I grew up in Western schools reading books like *When the Kissing Had to Stop* and people really feared then that ‘the Russians are coming’.
2. **The Bipolar World:** The two global superpowers were the USA and the USSR. Then the USSR collapsed, *not with a bang but with a whimper*, as T.S. Elliot said. It suffices to note that the former USSR is now split into fifteen different states, and some of them are now quite hostile to Russia itself.
3. **Ba’athism and Arab Socialism:** For 25 years Ba’athism had an iron grip on Syria and Iraq, and people in the Middle East even took ‘Ba’athi thought’ seriously. I always found it to be an oxymoron.
4. **The Uni-Polar World:** US World Hegemony lasted about 20 years. Since 2010, there has been a multipolar world with the rise of powers like B.R.I.C.S. countries and Europe. Even regional powers like Turkey and Iran can now afford to thumb their noses at the US without it being able to do much about it.
5. **The Arab Economy:** Let’s face it, the Arab economy

is terrible. Even the booming numbers of the Turkish economy are somewhat fragile. Arguably, the Arab economy was never strong enough to be considered 'broken', but Arab nations singularly failed to create any genuinely competitive heavy industry or significant exports that are not based on selling natural resources.

Basically, Arab states are split into rich and poor (Hollywood's oil sheikhs and terrorists respectively). The rich ones export oil and gas; the poor ones rely on tourism and agriculture, minerals and aid. Even with over 50% of the world's oil exports, the GDP of the 21 states of the Arab World (with some 400 million people and 13 million km²) is less than Germany's (with 82 million people and 357,000 km²). When the prices of oil and gas go down, the GDP of the combined Arab League countries approximates that of Holland, with 16 million people a land mass of less than 42,000 km² (that is to say, 2½ times that of Singapore with a population of 5.5 million and an area of 720 km²). Economists say the main reasons for wealth are institutions, culture and geography, location and weather. Given the vastness of the Middle East and the fact that it is not afflicted by tropical diseases, geography cannot still be a major factor. Hence the failure lies mainly with Middle Easterners themselves, not, as in previous ages (such as the Co-

lonial Age), with external causes.

- 6. Consumerism and Unbridled Capitalism.** Consumerism is almost universally regarded as ethically wrong; certainly so in Islam where the Qur'an strictly condemns wastefulness and any kind of excessive consumption (7:21; 17:27; 51:34; 89:19 et al.). Anyway, it is universally acknowledged that consumerism is suicidal because the earth—or rather the environment on the surface of the earth—cannot sustain throw-away human consumerism by 7+ billion human beings, devouring it like locusts. If consumerism continues at the same rate, it will quite likely lead to the end of all human life on earth. **Unbridled Capitalism** as it is currently practised is broken not only because it is the engine for—and of—consumerism, but also because it leads to an economy of kleptocrat rulers in cahoots with billionaire financial oligarchs on the one hand and an underclass of direst poverty on the other. Arguably, the whole so-called 'Arab Spring' of December 2010 was primarily fuelled by staggering economic disparity. This is also strongly condemned in the Qur'an. The economic philosophy of the Qur'an may be summed up by God's words *so that [wealth] is not circulated only among the rich amongst you* (59:7), and this indeed is the expectation of all the youth in the Middle East. An unbridled capitalistic system that combines consumerism

with the rich getting ludicrously rich and the poor getting poorer under the rubric of 'wealth creation' is a broken system that is unacceptable to most people in the Middle East.

7. **Democracy:** Western Democracy is bust in the Middle East. By this I mean *not* what you might like to believe, i.e. that it has failed to be implemented. What I mean is that the very idea is at its root a failure and is rejected by most people in the Middle East. Now this is a very emotional issue in the West, and whenever you say 'democracy' people start purring and bowing. Whenever a patrician like me brings it up, people start throwing things or at least hurling abuse (and perhaps justly so). So allow me to say why it is broken, and what in it is broken, before you do this. Obviously, justice, fairness, the rule of law and equality before the law, accountability, transparency and public participation in government are not broken, but rather very much in demand. What is broken is:
- (a) 'Freedom of speech' Charlie Hebdo style, which actually means freedom to insult Allah, His Prophet ﷺ, the Qur'an and Islam.
 - (b) 'Freedom of choice' which actually means abortion and the mass legal culling of unborn human children.
 - (c) 'Freedom of consent' which mean promiscuity; ubiquitous pornography; an economy based on

making a fantasy out of sex; an industry based on sexual marketing for every product imaginable, all leading to the breakdown of the family.

(d) 'LGBT+ rights' which to Muslims and practising Middle East Christians seem like compulsory celebration of moral deviance, to say the least.

(e) 'Freedom of religion' which means freedom for Western-funded Christian missionaries to re-invade the Middle East as they did in the Colonial Period.

(f) 'Freedom to vote' which in the democratic experience in Palestine, Algeria, Lebanon and Egypt means freedom to vote for those parties that the West likes. Elsewhere, it means the freedom to vote for those who would then take away the vote forever. And no one understands how to navigate between these two poles.

(g) 'Majority rule' which means 'majoritarianism'; tyranny of the majority; the 'rule' of the lowest common denominator, and the suppression, repression, oppression and depression of all minorities and differing opinions.

(h) 'Regional freedom' which actually means freedom to break away, to secede and to enjoy endless civil war (such as in South Sudan precisely).

(i) 'Freedom of the press' which actually means freedom to maliciously slander, insult, vilify, hound, tar and popularly judge and convict anyone who does

not own their own media outlet, based on the evidence of mere suspicion.

(j) ‘Free-market economies’ which actually means freedom to buy Western goods and for states to live in bondage to Western-owned financial institutes like the IMF and the World Bank.

(k) ‘Human Rights’ in general: whether we like it or not, there are profound differences between what the West regards as Universal Human Rights and the Islamic conception of human rights. These can be seen in the differences between the so called Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1990 Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (adopted by 44 Islamic Countries). But there is also a great deal in common.

These are complex issues and I will return to them later to propose distinctions and a solution, but it suffices to say that Western-export democracy is truly broken.

8. **Western Military Dominance:** If truth be told, from Napoleon’s 1798 invasion of Egypt until the 2006 Israel-Hizbollah war and especially the current war with DAESH, the history of Western-Islamic military encounter is basically a two century-long ‘duck shoot’. This is not because Muslims have ever lacked any courage—on the contrary, they have been *nothing but courageous*—but because they have lacked

the latest weaponry, and more importantly, the technology, the research and development and the military industry and industrial economies necessary to produce them. The only wars—or rather battles—that Muslims have really won are those in which one Western power supplied a Muslim army or country with enough weapons to defeat another Western power (such as the 1979-1989 Russian occupation of Afghanistan, when US Stinger missiles knocked out enough Russian heavy equipment to make the occupation untenable; or such as Jordan's 1948 and 1968 defeats of Israel (which was, and still is, technologically and economically a Western power really).

This is in marked contrast with the first five centuries of Islam when Europeans could not float a plank in the Mediterranean, or the first 1000 years when Muslims more or less held their own, right up until the 1683 Ottoman siege of Vienna. Modern Western military dominance came to an end in 2006 with Hizbollah's defeat of, or at least military stalemate, with Israel. It is certainly at an end today (whether we like or not) with DAESH battling the US, the UK, France, Canada, Germany, Russia (since September 2015), the Kurds, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Hizbollah, other rebels and a host of Arab countries for over a year without apparently so far being any the worse for it. The structural reason is simple enough: Hizbollah

and DAESH are not state actors, so they do not care if Israel bombs Beirut or the US bombs Raqqa and Mosul. They are impervious to aerial obliteration of local populations. Additionally, DAESH have a war booty-driven economy so that they actually get richer the more they fight, and a conflict-driven recruitment strategy, so the more of their people get killed, the more recruits (from their friends, relatives and wider circles) join their cause.

9. **'Non-Nation Nation States'** (States whose people do not see themselves as a nation): Post-World War I, after the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, and post-World War II, after the end of the Colonial Age, most if not all of the states in the Middle East were redrawn. In 2014, DAESH destroyed the Sykes-Picot border between Syria and Iraq and it has remained destroyed. Many other borders in the Middle East have also gone or are being erected along new lines. Sudan of course was decimated in 2011, but it seems that Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya at least are no longer viable as nation states along their old borders. Israel is endemically broken in the sense that the borders it claims are not recognised by anyone, much less the lands it is colonising on the ground. Also, and more importantly, there is already another people there (the Palestinians) which Israel is trying to ethnically cleanse. As left-wing Israeli journalist

Gideon Levy remarked, Israel has three different sets of laws: laws for Israeli Jews; *de facto* laws for Israeli Arabs; and apartheid laws for the captive Palestinian population of Jerusalem and the West Bank—hardly a successful recipe for a coherent, let alone democratic, nation state. Post-‘Arab Spring’, it seems clear that ‘non-nation nation-states’ are broken, and that those states that are certain to survive in their current form are those whose people are already a nation: Egypt, Morocco, Oman, and the Kurds (who actually don’t have a state now).

It should be noted that what I mean by a ‘nation’ can be—but is not in principle—a people bound by a common religion, sect, race, tribe, language, culture or history. Rather it is people bound by the sentiment of being one: the ostensible rationalisation being a common religion, sect, race, tribe etc. A case in point is Somalia: Somalia basically has one religion, one sect, one race, one language, one culture, one history and six tribes (four large, two small), yet over the twentieth century it has perhaps been the most failed nation-state in the world. The USA, by contrast, is made up of a plethora of religions, sects, races, tribes, languages, cultures and histories yet over the twentieth century has been the strongest nation of the world precisely because of the proud sentiment of being one: *e pluribus unum*.

10. Borders: Because of the mass influx of illegal (mostly Syrian) migrants, 2015 will be remembered in Europe as the year of broken Middle East borders. This is largely a consequence of the previous point: the failure of certain nation states. Howbeit, it should also be noted that the failure of borders has also allowed DAESH to set up terrorist operations in 60 countries within one year, moving freely from Somalia to the Sinai to Libya to Boko Haram in Nigeria via Turkey to Syria and Iraq. The Middle East has become one contiguous battlefield for DAESH, and to a lesser extent Al-Qaèda, and until existing Middle East countries can co-ordinate their activities and assets as seamlessly as DAESH, fighting them is never going to be more than a deadly and endless game of whack-a-mole. The breakdown of borders also brings one more lesson: the borders of destination countries will not by themselves stop migrants coming in, without the help of the countries of origins and the countries en route. This means that Europe cannot afford to let states in the Middle East collapse.

II. WHAT HAS BROKEN SOCIALLY?

1. **Population Explosion:** An OECD/World Bank report notes that during the 18 years from 1990 until 2008, the Middle East's population (or rather the populations of the 17 Middle Eastern countries which it surveyed) grew by 44%. This is compared to a 5% increase in Europe over the same period, 10% in China and 34% in India. Extending this to 2015 means an increase of approximately 66% in 25 years! In other words, every three people in every country in the Middle East have now become five. Clearly this alone was always bound to lead to strain on every kind of social and economic boundary and capacity, especially poverty, unemployment, medical care, housing, urbanisation, economic disparity, education, and social discontent.
2. **The Middle Class:** Arguably every middle class in the Arab World is either based on the public sector or is getting relatively poorer or smaller.
3. **Law and Order:** The so-called 'Arab Spring' opened the Pandora's Box of anarchy and revolution; this does not need much explanation. What needs explanation is that continuous government interference in the judiciary and the public security agencies causes, over time, a loss of public confidence in justice and this leads in turn to a breakdown in law and order.

In other words, harsh security measures lead to lawlessness not law and order. The lawless situation post-‘Arab Spring’ is thus perhaps a direct result of excessive security measures prior to it.

4. **Mainstream Global Media:** When *CNN*, the first global 24-hour news channel, was launched in 1980 it was an anomaly. Many people thought there would not be enough news to fill a day’s broadcasting. Others thought no one would watch such a channel for more than five minutes a day. This proved completely untrue. By 1991, during the Gulf War, *CNN* overtook the ‘Big Three’ US networks (*ABC*, *CBS*, *NBC*) in terms of viewers. Today it is in 100 million homes in the USA alone. However, as its coverage became more politicised and biased, other countries started their own global 24-hour news channels to transmit their messages, and these naturally reflected their own biases and interests. Today Britain has *BBC* news; France has *France 24*; Europe has *Euronews*; China has *CCTV* news; Russia has *RT*; Qatar has *Al Jazeera*; Iran has *Press TV* and Israel has *Fox News*—and this is to say nothing of the countless ersatz local channels and smaller outfits. Many of these are now just ‘spin operations’ pretending to be objective but towing the ‘party line’ of whoever controls them. But at least by watching different ones, a healthily sceptical viewer can try to piece together some of what is

really going on.

5. **Monopolies of Information:** It's hard to imagine it now in light of what we just said and in the age of *Twitter* and *Wikipedia*, but 25 years ago information itself—even news—was often hard to come by. In the Middle East it was restricted by governments and censors. Now if anything there is so much information it's hard to see the wood for the trees, and hard to understand the truth due to excess of facts and anecdotes.
6. **Trade Unions:** Trade unions in the Middle East were always a poor substitute for the traditional Islamic guilds, mainly because they lacked the moral and social purpose of the latter. My impression is that trade unions have been rendered obsolete as useful defenders of the professions by three elements: (a) governments working to break their power or dilute them; (b) they themselves have become arenas for political discontent and sacrificed their professional roles to the causes of whoever wins their internal elections, thereby losing cohesion and credibility; and (c) social media has a far broader organising effect. The difference between the Nobel Prize's 2015 award to the Tunisian Unions and (fellow Norwegian) King Canute's proclamation to the rising tide is that Canute knew the tide would not stop, whereas the Nobel Committee seems to think it can stop the

tide that is eroding trade unions.

7. **Personality Cults; Westernised Elites; Financial Oligarchs:** Twenty-five years ago the joke was that the MENA region was populated with as many leaders' pictures as people. Now, thanks to social media, personality cults are easily deflated by any 13-year-old with a smartphone. The Westernised elites of the post-Colonial Age have, like the proverbial Jack and Jill, 'fallen down, and broken their crown', and the financial oligarchs have (socially at least) come 'tumbling after'. This may be a good thing, but how will the proverbial water now be fetched—what will be the new engines of the economy?

III. WHAT HAS BROKEN CULTURALLY?

1. **Reagan-era Détente:** Twenty-five years ago we were still in the Reagan era where the ‘good Muslim’ ‘believing’ *mujahideen* were supported by the West against the ‘atheist’ USSR. Huntington had not written his *Clash of Civilisations*, and Islam was not public enemy no.1 in the popular consciousness in the West, nor vice versa. Now, clearly, things have completely changed, especially post 9-11-2001.
2. **Nomadism:** Twenty-five years ago I served briefly in the desert police, and a few years later I was in charge of tribal affairs under my late uncle, the great King Hussein (*rahimuhu Allah*). In those days there were still tribesmen who—although by then exposed to modern technology (such as it was then)—had grown up and roamed for 30 or 40 years on camels, living in tents on the Bedouin ‘camel economy’, without any amenities (including medicine and education) from the post-industrial age; i.e. in a manner unchanged from the previous 6000 years. The late Shaykh Zayed of the UAE was himself one of these, and had personally himself made the Hajj in the 1930s on camelback across the Empty Quarter. I described some of these issues in my 1999 book *The Tribes of Jordan at Beginning of the Twentieth Century*.

Now, that culture has gone forever, and with it all the manly, authentic and chivalric virtues of desert life forged in the harsh but beautiful rhythms of nature in the parched, scorching but sometimes freezing desert. There are still a few black tents left in the desert but these have pick-up tricks and smart-phones inside, and so are more modern 'desert-shepherds' than Bedouin. Cain's descendants have finally killed Abel's last descendants. I saw it in my own lifetime, and I, for one, am heartbroken, but am proud to have known them, *Al-HamduLillah*.

3. **Civility and Modesty:** Twenty-five years ago in the Middle East, it would have been inconceivable for teenagers to prattle on in a gathering of adults, much less insult them. Untoward enthusiasm would soon be redirected with a glare and a private chat, and a cuff around the head was never far behind. I myself was the worthy recipient of a healthy redirect, or two. Now, thanks to virtual chatrooms and i-commenting, any fool with an attitude can (and will) argue with and insult a top professor, and usually, through sheer aggressive energy and rudeness, dominate cyberspace. Also now, thanks to *Facebook*, people share intimate details and pictures, that they would not have dreamt of sharing with their own families, with complete strangers (and indeed the whole world) and consider this normal. These practices

have obviously changed the tenor of even face-to-face interaction.

4. **Contentment:** People in the Middle East had lower incomes and less worldly goods 25 years ago. But people have been watching Western TV for forty years. Largely through hit TV shows like *Friends* (the most watched TV series of the 2000 decade) many people have imbibed a tacit expectation of a Western middle-class material lifestyle (notwithstanding the social lifestyles portrayed) and feel that their governments owe this to them as part of the very social contract, even if they do not work hard and cannot do anything well. This may be sustainable in the few very rich Gulf States. It is not in the rest of the Middle East. In short, my impression is that despite more wealth, higher material expectations have led to more discontent in the Middle East.
5. **Fear:** Perhaps the best thing about the so-called 'Arab Spring' is that young people cast off their fears and braved the wrath of their governments. Some resorted to violence and others paid for this with their lives. Nevertheless, perhaps because of solidarity via social media—and perhaps because hope had already gone in the first place—fear of tyranny seemed to break definitively in the Middle East. That is not to say that people ceased to know fear anymore, but rather that they were no longer inhibited by it from

protesting. From then on, and until now, fear has become something different from what it was. With it has also gone fear of the West; fear of Israel; fear of conflict; and even fear of death. This has led to a rise in jihadism and ironically to jihadists—and particularly DAESH—trying to create new fear through ever more horrible ‘death-porn’ videos. At first these *did* terrify people but now they themselves have hit the ‘law of diminishing returns’ and people are losing their fear even of DAESH.

6. **Universities:** Global University Rankings are generally a naked industrial scam designed to boost a nation’s prestige and bring cash into the education system through enticing foreign students to come, study, be influenced and spend money. Accordingly, the *US News and World Report’s Best Global Universities* (which are American) gild US universities; the British *QS World University* and *Times Higher Education World University Rankings* shamelessly puff up a lot of British universities; the *Leiden Ranking* pumps up European ones; the *Global University Ranking* (which is Russian) has Moscow State University at number five; the *Professional Ranking of World Universities* which has five French Universities in the top 20 is—you guessed it—French; and the Saudis, Koreans and others all have their own ranking with their own ‘special’ weightings of the criteria

that they use to favour their own universities. The most apparently objective is the Shanghai Jiao Tong University's *Academic Ranking of World Universities* which cunningly has no Chinese Universities in the top 100, but then has seven of them in the top two hundred, and six more in the third hundred!

Nevertheless, it must be said that by any intelligible criteria, no universities in the Middle East (except in Israel) are in the top 100 in the world (except perhaps certain departments of the Azhar and the Qarawiyyun) and possibly not in the first 300. This, despite the promise of all the universities founded in the 1950s-1980s; despite \$10 billion spent on the likes of KAUST, and despite billions more spent on other universities in the Gulf.

There are many reasons for this, including political instability, poor funding, poor lower education, poor study culture, poor teacher training, the best students going abroad and the best professors settling abroad, inability to attract talent, nepotism, lack of independence from local and government pressure, privately-owned profit-oriented universities, poor accreditation, poor peer-reviewing, poor academic journals and an almost complete lack of scientific R-and-D. Whatever excuse or cause, Middle East universities are broken, even taking into consideration how new most of them are.

The Middle East hosts Qarawiyyun in Fez, Morocco, the Azhar in Cairo, Zaytuna in Tunis. These are the oldest universities in the world and in certain of their disciplines—which include, and have always included, humanitarian disciplines like grammar, linguistics, philosophy, astronomy, logic and history—they are the best in the world, but badly underfunded and underendowed. If you go to *Wikipedia* and look up the list of ‘oldest, continuously operating universities in the world’ you will find the usual list of: Bologna, Oxford, Paris and Cambridge and a note saying that the Islamic Universities are not universities but ‘madrasahs’, which of course is a bitter farce—as if Bologna and Oxford were not religious colleges, or as if for centuries their academic range was anything like that of the Islamic Universities. That is to say, then, that in the Middle East, modern universities are broken, and the ancient ones are not appreciated.

7. **NGOs:** Whilst global NGOs like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Médecins sans Frontières clearly do and say some good things, they remain lopsided in their criticisms of the Islamic World, and are clearly used as political tools by various Western countries to beat Muslim countries over the head. They also try to impose often arbitrary Western values and cultural prejudices, all the while

pretending they are universal human values.

For example, most people in the Middle East think the death penalty should be imposed for certain kinds of murder corroborated by certain sufficient kinds of evidence. Indeed, I have personally seen in a tribal context how, when a state does not execute convicted murderers, it leads to blood feuds that carry on for decades and claim dozens of innocent lives and uproot entire clans. God says in the Qur'an: *In retaliation there is life for you, O people of cores, so that you might fear* (2:179). Thus most people in the Middle East do not see why Amnesty International or others should come tell them how to run their societies, as if they enjoy some kind of moral superiority. There are a million abortions a year in the USA, and one third of pregnancies in Europe end in abortion. How can the West be more concerned about the judicial execution of a few guilty murderers, than the extra-judicial genocide of their own children, whose only crime is to be inconvenient?

Islamic NGOs have also somewhat lost their status, not merely because some of them have funded extremism but also because, post 9-11, donating money to an Islamic NGO is liable to cause problems for the donor, no matter how innocent the donor or worthy the cause. Today every international Islamic charitable financial transaction is tracked and

hounded like a fox.

8. **Prizes:** The honest thing about national medals and honours is that they show people that their countries are pleased with them. With the Nobel Prizes, which have in the West become a kind of unquestioned measure of genius, it suffices to say that these serve to inculcate into the world that idea that Westerners (and those working in Western Universities) are superior in intelligence to the rest of humanity. In the case of the Nobel Peace Prize, which has become a kind of secular canonization, it is not lost on people in the Middle East that during the last 25 years it has had little to do with peace itself as such and is only awarded to those working to further the West's or the USA's political agendas. Similar things could be said of other Western prizes.

IV. WHAT HAS BROKEN *RELIGIOUSLY*?

1. **Secularism:** To the (often Western-educated) elite post-colonial generations of the 1950s, 60s and 70s, secularism was unquestionable simply because it was the way of the West. Since the West was dominant economically, militarily and scientifically, they took it for granted that the West was right politically and so should be emulated. Some countries—notably Turkey—were fanatical (‘fundamentalist’, one might say) about secularism. Now that has completely gone, and will recede further with Erdogan’s latest election victory. No government in the Middle East can afford to publically tout secularism; they can talk about religious pluralism and they can talk about civic rule, but no further than that.
2. **Reluctance towards Shari’ah Law:** Following the disastrous attempt of Sudan to impose a version of Shari’ah in the 1980s—which led to constant civil war and eventually the partition of Sudan—it seemed that any new imposition of Shari’ah would likely lead to civil wars in the Middle East. However, perhaps every change of constitution in the Middle East since 1990 has moved towards becoming more overtly religious, and now (not withstanding Turkey, Israel and Lebanon) to explicitly mentioning Shar’iah law as being *a*—if not *the*—principle source

of legislation. Moreover, like it or not, Al-Qa'eda and DAESH have shown that people will even accept very brutal Wahhabi reinterpretations of Shari'ah rather than no Shari'ah at all—such is their attachment to Islam.

3. **Sectarian Tolerance:** Clearly, and sadly, inter-Islamic Sunni–Shi'i political rivalry is at a historical peak. The wars in Syria, Iraq and Yemen are largely sectarian, to say nothing of the tension in Bahrain. Everywhere where there are large populations of Sunnis and Shi'a, except perhaps Turkey and Iran, these populations are at loggerheads. This is sadly even on the personal level, with many Sunnis and even Shi'a excommunicating each other ('*takfir*') largely under Wahhabi-*takfiri* influence. Wahhabi *takfiri* thought also even excommunicates Sunni mystics (Sufis) and Islamic philosophers, and makes a whole industry of it under the rubric of religious 'purification' ('*tathir*') and 'rectification' ('*islah*').

v. WHAT HAS NOT BROKEN

1. **Religion:** From all of the above, it should be clear that religion as such is not broken, and in fact is outwardly as strong as ever. This is not without worldly causes. The US Congress recently noted that Saudi Arabia alone spent \$70 billion on promoting its Salafi interpretation of Islam, and this in fact is a conservative estimate, and does not take into consideration the Saudi private sector, or other Gulf countries. Other forms of Sunni Islam are also supported elsewhere, but with shoestring budgets.

In fact, religion is the strongest single determinant of an individual's identity, and it is what defines communities in times of conflict, crisis and state collapse. Thus, despite modern technology and science, and despite what many in the West want, religion is actually on the rise in the Middle East, albeit a certain kind of religion.

2. **Fundamentalism:** That 'certain kind' of religion is precisely 'fundamentalism'. Fundamentalism is not 'literalism' as non-Muslims seem to think: show me the fundamentalist that takes the Verse of Light (24:35) or the Divine Name 'The Outward' (*Al-Thahir*, 57:3) literally—or God's words *We are closer to him [the human being] than his jugular vein* (50:16). Rather, fundamentalism is that form of religion that

says—whether it is true or not—that not only is it the most authentic form, but the only form acceptable to God, and castigates all other forms of the same religion through either intimidation or violence.

There are basically three kinds of fundamentalism active in Islam today. All three are unbroken in the Middle East. They are: (a) Wahhabi-Salafi *takfirism* (but let me be clear, not all Salafis are Wahhabis; not all Wahhabis are *takfiris*, and not all *takfiris* are *takfiri-jihadis*); (b) Muslim Brotherhood Hakimiyyah *takfirism*; and (c) Shi'i anti-Sunni *takfirism*. Anyone in doubt of this is asked to read: Muhammad bin Abd Al-Wahhab's *Al-Usul Al-Thalathah (The Three Principles)* and his *Nawaqid Al-Islam (The Nullifiers of Islam)*. These basically say that 'anyone who does not worship God the way we interpret is an unbeliever (this is called '*takfir*') and that person must be killed; and that anyone who opposes us—even in thought—is also an unbeliever who must be killed.' For the Hakimiyyah doctrine, people need to read Syed Qutb's *Ma'alim fil-Tariq (Milestones)* and his musings (which people mistake for a 'commentary') on the Qur'anic verses 5:44-50 in his book *Fi Thilal al-Qur'an (In the Shade of the Qur'an)*. This 'doctrine' basically says that 'anyone who uses any laws that are not strictly our version of Islamic law (Shari'ah)—or even works for a state

that does not use only *our* version of Islamic law [i.e. all states in the world except theirs]—is also an unbeliever who must be killed'. For Shi'i anti-Sunni fundamentalism, it suffices to read 'Allama Tabataba'i's *Al-Mizan*, an influential and otherwise quite mystical commentary.

3. **Tribalism:** Tribalism is alive and kicking in the Middle East even if the nomadic Bedouin lifestyle which is its origin is gone. By this, I mean the pre-Islamic ethos of loyalty to family, kin and tribe, come what may, right or wrong, best summarised by the adage: 'Me vs my brother; me and my brother vs my cousin; me and my cousin vs the stranger'. We have all seen how in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya, when the state breaks down, communities organise around tribe and then religion, and essentially nothing else.
4. **Monarchy:** At the beginning of the so-called 'Arab Spring', it seemed to modern Jacobins in the West that the Arab monarchies were going to topple like dominoes. None of them did. If anything, there are now public calls for the old monarchy to return to Libya. Moreover, DAESH has set up its own super-monarchy (caliphate). What toppled were the 'Presidents-for-life', in particular those with plans to be followed by their sons, namely Mubarak of Egypt, Qaddafi of Libya, Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen, Ali Zein Al-'Abideen of Tunisia and (in two thirds of

Syria anyway) Assad of Syria (who himself ‘inherited’ the presidency from his father).

There are a number of reasons for this. The money of the Gulf States is one reason behind this, but it does not explain everything; otherwise, how to explain the cash-poor monarchies of Morocco and Jordan? Rather, there are two other important reasons. The first is that, like it or not, monarchy is more based in Islam than the democracy of ‘Presidents’: in the Qur’an, God ﷻ is the *True King* (20:114); the *Master of the Kingdom* (3:26); *He in Whose hand is the Sovereignty* (67:1) and *give[s] the Kingdom to whom [He] will* (3:26).

Moreover, in the Qur’an, God ﷻ made some Prophets kings (e.g.: David عليه السلام and Solomon عليه السلام) and God ﷻ also gave kingship in answer to the Prophet Samuel’s prayer (2:246). Furthermore, God ﷻ made the Prophet Joseph عليه السلام serve a (good) king of ancient Egypt—and only the word ‘king’ is used to describe him in the Qur’an—whereas the tyrants of Egypt who opposed Moses عليه السلام are always referred to as ‘Pharaoh.’ Also, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ confirmed the monarchies of all the kings who submitted to Islam. He also sent the Muslims to a king in Abyssinia whom he ﷺ referred to as ‘a righteous king.’ Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had no sons, brothers or nephews, but the four

Rightly-Guided Caliphs were all relations of the Prophet ﷺ through blood or marriage from his own tribe Quraysh. Indeed, throughout history—until the fall of the Islamic Ottoman Caliphate in 1922—Islamic states were all monarchical systems, and many of Islam’s great heroes were kings and princes, such as: ‘Umar bin Abdul-Aziz, Abdul-Rahman al-Dakhil, Nuraldin Zengi, and Salahaldin al-Ayoubi.

That is not to say that there is a ‘Divine Right of Kings’ in Islam as there was in Medieval Christianity, or that monarchies in the Middle East are not plagued by the usual monarchical problems (namely occasional incompetent, corrupt, tyrannical or even mad rulers who inherit the throne through no merit of their own, but merely by being born into the right family). But it does mean that monarchies represent a kind of dynastic social contract with a known quantity that is relatively more stable, more just, more merciful, more religious, more accountable and less in a hurry to plunder the people than presidents-for-life or even billionaire financial oligarchs.

The second—and in my humble opinion—more important reason why monarchies are so far unbroken in the Middle East is: Patronage and ‘Clientship’. No one quite articulates this clearly in the West partly because democratic mythology refuses to admit how normative this is in politics, even in the West,

in a different form. The basic idea is that monarchs are *institutionally* better able—through longevity and through prestige—to co-opt, convince, coerce, charm, benefit or buy a critical mass of local stakeholders (in the Middle East, these being usually the army, the security services, the tribes, the religious establishments, the minorities, the poor, the government employees [who make up the bulk of the Middle Class] and the very rich—i.e. almost everyone who is not ideologically predisposed against them) into a tolerable, if not comfortable, *modus vivendi*.

This is actually what happens at almost every localised political contest in the world where the ‘clients’ are few enough to be able to have direct access to a ‘patron’. It can even happen en masse, up to a certain point. At the start of the ‘Arab Spring’ the late King of Saudi Arabia raised government salaries, paid off loans and gave out benefits to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars. Moreover, essentially everyone running for local elections, even in the West, promises to look after their constituencies’s main concerns in exactly the same way. Thus in the US, the Democratic and Republican parties are largely based on looking after the concerns of the sum of various different groups and arrayed special interest lobbies who are likely to vote for them (albeit that they call this ‘serving the people’).

The difference in the Middle East—with the possible exception of Turkey, Iran and Egypt, which are too large—is that because of smaller populations, the key stakeholders of the socially powerful groups are still manageable through extended personal contacts. In other words, below the ceiling of religious sentiment, politics in the Middle East is neither fundamentally ideological nor impersonally institutionalised. It is based on benefits and access to them—and social ties. The late US Speaker of the House of Representatives Tip O’Neill once quipped: ‘All politics is local’. In the Middle East, ‘All politics is local *and* personal’.

I will just relate one piece of personal experience here—right or wrong: when I was the King’s Advisor for Tribal Affairs, part of my job was to personally know the three hundred or so tribal sheikhs and lords in the country and their genealogies. Indeed, I would have to confirm or veto their status whenever previous sheikhs died. I would also have to regularly meet and consult with the 3000 or so local clan or village chiefs and notables, and indeed had ‘open days’ for them. This meant that since everyone knew (and was somehow related to) their own local tribal or clan leader, I was (and was supposed to be) one degree of separation from every tribesman or woman in the country. The King was thus, through me,

two degrees of separation from every tribesman. Considering that Jordan is 60% tribal (with a population then of five million, now of seven million), that meant three million people. Thus, via 3000 people, I was only one degree away from three million people. This represents a degree of personal connectivity unheard of in the West for several centuries. Even Obama-style social media campaigning cannot replace this kind of connectivity. It also meant that injustices could be righted and social problems resolved through personal, non-state networks.

5. **Technological penetration** (albeit from the outside): Though there is very little technological invention in the Middle East, there is a continuing addiction to Western technology, in particular the internet, social media and smart phones. Relatively speaking, for example, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey are among the countries most obsessed with social media in the world.
6. **Environment:** Even though the environmental protection movement is not as advanced in the Middle East as it is in Europe, the environment—desertification notwithstanding—is not as bad as one might expect, compared to places like China and India or even the US. This is partly because of the sheer size of the Middle East and the relative lack of heavy industry in it. It is interesting to note that the carbon

footprint of the average person living in first-world democratic countries is 38 times that of the average Muslim consumer of medium- or low-income living in Muslim countries.

VI. WHY ARE THINGS BROKEN?

As Heraclitus observed, things are always in constant change. But neither this, nor outside political influences and new technology, explain why things have ‘broken’ so rapidly in the Middle East, sociologically, culturally and religiously. Rather, I suggest it is primarily ‘inside change’ that has led to things being broken sociologically, culturally, religiously and even politically. By ‘inside’ I mean psychological change.

I have already noted the cumulative effect of Western TV and popular culture. It remains to be said that in the Middle East—as in certain countries in the West—the average person now spends up to six hours or more a day—a quarter of their time alive; a third of their time awake—every day, on television or movies; internet surfing and chatting and arguing; on social media; video games; pornography; music videos or pop music or radio. That works out to more than 40 hours a week—which is the length of a full-time work week. That means giving a lifetime’s worth of work and consumption to Hollywood, media and internet giants for free. This represents a hidden opium-like general addiction to fantasy and unreality. This is bound to lead to more than just a change in social, cultural, religious and even political mores—because much of that same

time would have previously been spent on work; on personal growth; on reading; and on family and social interaction. It also seems to affect the very ability to concentrate for longer than a chicken—as I have noticed with certain young people—and even eats at physical health itself.

Moreover, in those six hours a day people give free vent to whatever arises in their consciousnesses with less consideration or self-censorship than they would in real life. This makes them psychologically less restrained—to say the least—and more prone and more accustomed to buck every yoke and assail every border or limit. In other words, being a ‘lotus-eater’ for a third of your conscious time on earth—and indulging your every impulse without self-discipline—is bound to mean a loss of order in society at large. This is what I meant by ‘Hermetic theory’—the idea that ‘man is a small universe and the universe is a large man’—so that what people do habitually in their inner worlds is bound to lead to great changes in the outer world. Indeed God connects the two worlds in the Qur’an itself:

And in the earth there are signs for those who know with certainty, and in your souls. Will you not then perceive? (51:20–21)

This is not to say that internal or external economic, military, technological and demographic

changes have not *influenced* the political, sociological, cultural and religious changes in the Middle East in the last 25 years. They obviously have. But change has been determined and made possible primarily by the region's people themselves, and hence by their habits. And the cumulative effect of people's habits changes people's very natures. That is my contention here.

VII. HOW TO FIX THINGS

In order to keep things simple, I will suggest one simple and implementable ‘macro-panacea’, and one simple and implementable ‘micro-panacea’, both of which of course no one will heed.

1. The Macro-panacea: Consensus

Consensus is not the same thing as majority rule. In the Qur’an, God ﷻ makes it clear that the will or desire of a mere majority of people is not a principle upon which a state can be founded, or one that inherently signifies Truth. God ﷻ says:

If you obey most of those on earth, they will lead you astray from the way of God; they follow only supposition; they are merely guessing. (6:116)

Thus, during the first 1300 years of Islamic history, not a single Islamic scholar, as far as I know, suggested majority rule as the foundation for the social contract, instead of consensus. Rather, the basis of legitimate authority in Islamic political theory is unanimous—or near unanimous—consensus. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: ‘*Follow the overwhelming majority of people*’ (Narrated by Ahmad; 4/278, and by Ibn Majah; no. 3950.) ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab

interpreted this as five out of six people. ‘*Shura*’ (‘consultation’: see 42:38; 3:159) and ‘*bay’ah*’ (‘the pledge of allegiance’)—the two pillars of legitimate Islamic government—are founded on consensus.

Ironically, consensus is also the basis of democracy in the West (albeit not of ‘Western-export-democracy’). Most, if not every, democratic country in the West is founded on an original consensus in the national social contract or constitution, which thereafter agrees to elect—and periodically change—governments according to majority rule. In *The Social Contract*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778 CE) describes the situation as follows: ‘The law of majority-voting itself rests on an agreement and implies that there has been, on at least one occasion, unanimity.’ (Book I, Chapter 5). Indeed, in all Western democracies today there is an underlying and unspoken agreement between at least 90% of all people that their form of government is the only kind they will accept. The 1787 US Constitution was adopted and ratified more or less unanimously (only three out of 42 delegates did not sign, and all the states eventually ratified it). After a consensus is established on the basic constitution and on the parameters of the state, then individual governments can be changed by majority or plurality vote—according to the political system that best suits each country. Thus

elected governments may not and cannot alter the constitution without a new consensus, nor deprive any citizens of their inalienable fundamental rights. Other separation of powers can follow, but consensus is the ultimate ‘check and balance’.

Thus, although this represents the one area in which traditional Islamic political theory and Western democratic thought are in perfect accord, not one major Western newspaper or political figure has, to our knowledge, ever mentioned it during the turmoil of the ‘Arab Spring’ and the ten years preceding it. What they talked about—and astoundingly are still talking about for Syria, eagerly getting ready to make the same deadly catastrophic mistake again—are Carter-style ballot box-first, majoritarian constitutions (with all the ‘freedoms’ I mentioned earlier in tow). This is what I call ‘Western-export-democracy’. The West myopically or naively (I hope) presumes that this will work in every context where people can elect freely. It does not occur to them that other peoples—especially communities riven down the middle by identity crises or conflict—do not have an ingrained ‘democratic culture’ and do not assume that the ballot box is necessarily the sum of all good. Others still secretly think of the ballot box only as a new way to grab power and settle old scores. Both the US-managed Shi’a-biased Iraqi Constitution of

2005 and the Egyptian post-Mubarak Constitution of 2012 were of this kind. They were fêted by every major Western newspaper as watershed moments of democratic political enlightenment. No one—no Western government or even public intellectual—had the intellectual discernment to point out that neither were based on consensus, and so were bound to fail.

However, anyone familiar with the original texts of democratic theory—starting with Herodotus’s Persian conversation in Book II of his *Histories* and the eighth book of Plato’s *Republic*—should know that politically, no less than spiritually, ‘*every kingdom divided against itself shall be desolated, every city or house divided against itself shall not stand*’ (Matt. 12:25). In Iraq, this led first to a Shi’a sectarian power grab via the ballot box, alienating the Sunnis, and then to a long insurgency culminating in DAESH’s invasion of Mosul in June 2014. Equally, the 2012 Egyptian constitution was ratified with 64% of those who voted, who were themselves less than half the registered voting populace—and thus with less than 32% of possible voters. This was always going to lead to one of three things: a counter-revolution (which is exactly what happened), a civil war or regional secession—or any combination thereof. And this, I argue, is the inevitable result of any new

constitution—or even far-ranging constitutional change—that is not based on overwhelming consensus. And every revolution that does not immediately rush to find a consensus is going to lead to a period of ‘*La Terreur*’, and then (in the words of The Who) to: ‘meet the new boss—same as the old boss’.

By contrast, in an overwhelming consensus, no minority (no matter how secular or how religiously radical; no matter what religion, race or ethnic group) is excluded; everyone has a say; everyone has a veto; everyone is protected; everyone is respected; everyone is taken into consideration; everyone is safe; there can be no tyranny of the majority; no populist demagoguery can lead to the majority infringing upon or victimising a minority, and thus everyone is forced to compromise.

Of course finding a consensus may take years. In the new South Africa negotiations went on for six years and stopped and stalled through two temporary constitutions. So rather than each new regime imposing a new constitution with a managed populist majority, why not keep the old constitutions temporarily and start a long and universally inclusive national dialogue? Or at least why not designate all constitutions not based on near-unanimous consensus as ‘temporary’? This may at first also seem to stifle change or favour existing regimes, but in the

end all things will be clear. God willing, people will, in the end, be swayed by reason and goodness, and will compromise. Indeed, consensus is the only morally legitimate way forward. It combines the stamp of religious authority with universal satisfaction. Over the long term, it makes a nation out of a country. It is the only cure to the political ills of the Middle East.

2. **The Micro-panacea:** The Micro-panacea is much simpler to understand. It is contained in the following message:

‘Wake up!—as Pope Francis’s new pop song says. Get off social media! What do you care what celebrities known for their looks, voices or athleticism have to say, or ate for lunch?; or what a thousand people whom you would not take time to meet in real life are fussing about? Reclaim your lives! Limit the internet to e-mail, news, research, shopping and perhaps activism—not more than an hour a day (unless you work online, in which case limit ‘surfing’). Read some real books; spend time with family; do charity work (real charity work, not ‘causes’). Work more; exercise more; pray more; help around the house more; and play with real people more. Use the five hours a day you will save by doing this in a positive, productive and edifying manner. Give more

to others, and stop indulging yourself.

Simple enough to understand, and doing it will help to rebuild communities and the re-establish social equilibrium wrecked by the mad fraud of virtual living.

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude by quoting the beginning of William Butler Yeats's 1919 poem, *The Second Coming*:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

These lines, written after World War I, reflect something of the trends of the Middle East today, after the last 25 years of turmoil culminating in the so-called 'Arab Spring'. The last lines sum up many of the religious groups in the region. What we have today is a *gradual, but vast, trend of breakdown of both inner and outer borders*. This situation is then capitalised on by the most ruthless, lawless but organised elements of society, as Ehud Barak predicted in 2011.

In order to rectify and stabilise the situation, the people of the Middle East must come together and re-establish limits and control through *consensus*. Existing governments must take the lead politically, but everyone must re-examine their own lifestyle and daily rou-

tines, and re-establish order and then harmony through self-discipline. Otherwise the 'blood-dimmed tide' may be 'loosed ... everywhere'.

But God is the best Guardian, and He is the Most Merciful of the merciful (12:64).

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