

The Arab Spring and the World

By

Hal G. P. Colebatch

For a brief time it appeared that the Arab Spring might be something similar to the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, with a vague idea in some quarters that moribund tyrannies would be replaced by modern democratic States.

Unfortunately, nothing like this has happened so far. Although some nasty characters have been deposed, there is no particular evidence that the regimes replacing them are any better. It was not only tragic but also ominous to read that girls raped by Gaddafi's forces in Libya then had their throats cut by their own families – the forces of “liberation” – to expunge the “dishonour thus incurred.

We are seeing in a large number of countries, including Libya, Egypt, Afghanistan and Turkey a distinct possibility of secular dictatorships being replaced by Islamic ones, as happened previously in Iran (Remember how the liberal press greeted the overthrow of the Shah of Iran as a great triumph for liberal democracy? Today, the Shah looks like a comparatively enlightened and democratic ruler).

Of the world's 53 Muslim countries, none are democracies, and virtually all are either threatened by, or have already been conquered by, Islamism (It is splitting hairs to worry about whether to call this fundamentalism or something else).

This coincides with major troubles in America. Under a grossly inexperienced or perhaps deliberately destructive President, a run-of-the-mill recession is being converted into a catastrophe. We are seeing a potentially disastrous revival of neo-Keynesianism with the whole idea of the so-called stimulus and its flow-on. This will soon impact on US defence strength if it has not done so already. The US elections are still well over a year away and no-body looking like a President is on the horizon yet.

America has fumbled and bumbled the opportunities the Arab spring presented and there is no clear idea of what philosophy if any is driving it and where it is going. I have never seen so many predictions of a coming catastrophe as have been appearing in the US media recently. President Obama is masterful at disguising his real intentions if nothing else, and it is anybody's guess whether he is honestly struggling with the situation or has some secret agenda.

Obama's virtual cancellation of the manned space programme, or its transformation into an exercise to make Muslim nations feel better about their lack of scientific achievement, may look like a peripheral issue, but in the long term may be of the greatest importance.

Britain can be written off, at least in the short term. It also is suffering from a massive failure of leadership and has virtually destroyed its own ability to defend itself. Perhaps the British genius will once again produce leadership when all is apparently lost, but we cannot count on it. The one good thing to emerge from the recent British riots is that they may have shown how totally the nostrums of multiculturalism and political correctness have failed. President Obama has been fond of using the word "reset" and perhaps "reset" should be applied to the whole governance of Britain.

Things are looking a bit brighter in Canada. The new Government seems to understand the importance of cultural matters, and is making some efforts to undo the lingering, toxic legacy of Pierre Trudeau. But Canada is a long way away.

Meanwhile, China remains an enigma, and the signs can be read several ways. The fact that there have been reports of various riots, protests and dissention in China might mean the regime is losing its grip, or it might mean nothing at all. One thing that is unambiguous is that China is pushing ahead with building aircraft-carriers. India is building up its armed forces, according to some analysts, as a defensive measure against China.

Western Europe seems curiously paralysed: creating nothing, inventing nothing, its genius strangled in bureaucracy, and its population being replaced by massive third-world immigration, which is also destroying its cultural heritage. Yet I get the impression things are better in some parts of Eastern Europe, such as Poland and the Czech Republic, which thanks to their recent histories retain some cultural contract with reality.

I am writing at the moment on the late Bert Kelly, once notorious in Australia for his steady, caustic prose advocating economic rectitude, often in the face of powerful opposition, in "The Modest Member" and "The Modest Farmer" columns. How we miss Bert's wry good sense today!

None of the worst-case scenarios must inevitably come to pass. But Australia would do well to heed Cromwell's advice: "Trust to God and keep your powder dry."

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