

STIMSON

Seismic Shift:

Understanding Change in the Middle East

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May 2011

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The Henry L. Stimson Center

ISBN: 978-0-9845211-8-0

Cover and book design by Shawn Woodley and Lacey Rainwater

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Media

James C. Clad¹

Explanatory Note

This report primarily examines reportage and commentary about the Middle East during 2005-2010 by traditional print media and writers of trade (i.e., general market) books about the region. This explanatory note seeks to comment on two issues: one about changes in field journalism, and the other about gauging journalists' insights into unfolding Middle Eastern events.

For a variety of reasons, the upscale market for analytic, in-depth journalism has declined sharply since the 1990s. This has caused a drop in the number, age, seniority, and experience of foreign press residing abroad. Local contacts, and local context, aren't as easily obtained by 'parachute' journalists arriving in country, who lack an understanding of deeper realities behind surface turbulence. Indeed, some media we examined had changed or reduced coverage of Egypt in the year leading up to the events of 2011.

Analytic journalism needs a minimum word length, in articles or in broadcast and/or recording time to develop its material. In the past, resident correspondents submitted longer pieces to head office editors – who invariably had earlier experience in the same locations. For example, the Middle East Economic Digest provided regular, in-depth, and region-wide coverage to complement information gleaned from more narrowly focused risk assessment firms. Some of those publications that might have been included in a survey five years ago – such as US News and World Report – have gone, others like Newsweek have been drastically reshaped, and those that remain are under pressure to provide shorter, quicker, “buzzer” hits. But we found that a surprising amount of analytical journalism still exists in the Middle East, and that it often found its mark.

In what circumstances may we decide that some writers (in webcast, newsprint, or in books) or some broadcasters (on radio or television) can fairly claim predictive success,

¹ With special thanks to Andrew Marshall for his contributions to this chapter

or at least a shrewd prescience, with respect to Middle Eastern events unfolding after January 2011? In general, the media are not in the business of prediction, though they do express views about the world and where it is going. They are fortunate, compared to the other sectors in this report, in that they are rarely held to account for their forecasts, so this is an unusual exercise. The test applied here is recurrent, reasoned reporting, and analysis over time, in this case during 2005-2010, from a developing view based on evidence, not advocacy. Lucky prognostications or superficially prescient passages aren't enough.

This report searched both US-UK and continental European media covering the Middle East, as well as regional media. All have journalists (and quasi-journalistic academics) whose published and circulated work deserves mention. For anyone seriously following the region, extending the purview beyond Anglo-American media becomes essential. Even so, this report's main focus falls on the US and UK media, and within this focus, primarily on print journalism and on trade books published during the decade preceding 2010.

It was impossible to assess all of the many thousands of articles written about the Middle East in the time available for this study, or with the resources available. We limited ourselves to reviewing a selection of books with notable authors, interviewing leading journalistic figures, and assessing a slice of the English-speaking media (Time, the Washington Post, NPR, the Financial Times, the New York Times, and the Economist) in greater detail.

At the same time, the report also considers writers whose work may extend beyond the bounds of the traditional press as historically conceived. As press professionalization consolidated last century, so did various divisions of labor. These have now become archaic, as market pressures and technology obliterate distinctions between 'journalist,' 'stringer,' 'photo-journalist,' 'editor,' and 'commentator' in an age of immediate access by anyone to the entire world, and authors move from publishing in newspapers and journals, to perching in think tanks or academia, and back again.

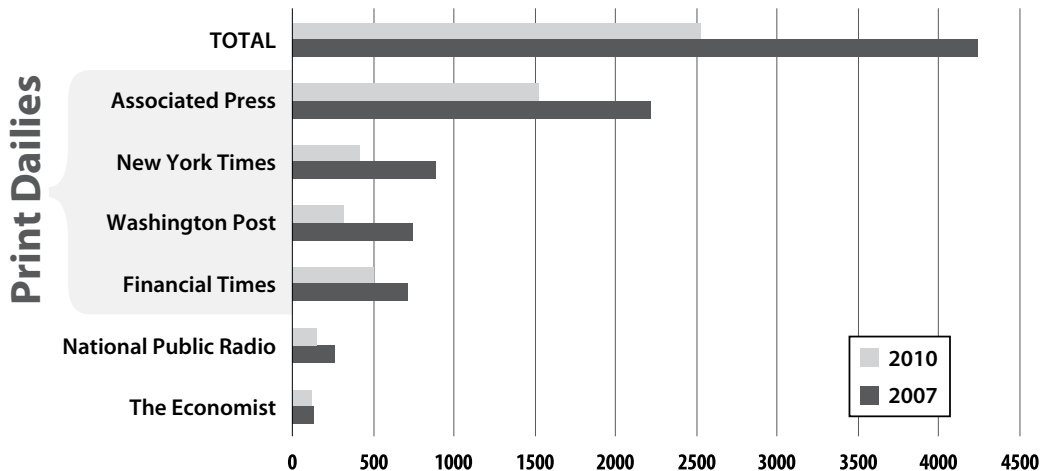
Two other observations about contemporary journalism should be noted that could well affect the profession's capacity to provide useful knowledge about the changes afoot in the Middle East:

First, and as a globally applicable proposition, the traditional print media now hold a smaller slice of the public domain. In market terms, print struggles while radio holds its own (indeed, privately owned radio may thrive in the Middle East in coming years). The region's television business has fragmented as cable, satellite, and internet streaming make continuing inroads. The resident foreign print and broadcast media of an earlier era provided a foundation of authority – in clips, recent analysis, or direct briefings to journalistic newcomers – but largely has disappeared. To some degree this has been supplemented by local coverage through new media, but there is a gap in authority and depth that is only being gradually filled.

Second, the earlier professional tenets for the craft of journalism no longer reflect reality. Owner-provided iPhones enable the industry to work on a shoestring, downloading no-cost digital pictures showing drama or uproar, but devoid of context. When anyone with a hand phone can play reporter, and editors have little background or experience, the ethics taught at journalism schools (fact-checking, multiple sourcing) take a back seat or

disappear altogether. The priority, instead, is rapid – almost instantaneous – turnaround, a flood of facts that can be exciting and inspiring, as it was during the Arab revolutions, but which can also drown out context. “Old media” also has a role to play.

Figure 1: Article Volume by Source



Number of articles searchable by LexisNexis containing the word “Egypt” or “Tunisia”
 * 2010 results from January 1st to November 1st

Analysis

Editors at leading American newspapers agreed that their daily reportage missed the recent events in any predictive sense. One prominent editor said, “no one, whether here, in the region, or in outer space, foresaw events working the way they did, pushing Tunisia’s Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak, Libya’s Muammar el-Qaddafi, Yemen’s Ali Abdullah Saleh and, soon perhaps, Syria’s Bashar al-Assad, into the dustbin of history.”

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With far fewer resident correspondents, and much less space devoted to foreign news than just a decade ago, major US newspapers and newspaper chains do what they can to follow major daily issues (Iran crisis, Arab-Israel, Palestine, Iraq, and Turkey), giving episodic attention to stories set in a region-wide context. None of the media we assessed in detail had regular correspondents in Tunis; most had correspondents in Cairo, but some had changed staffing in 2010.

A handful of US reporters and columnists identified the consequences for Middle East regimes if they continued to resist change. The *Washington Post*’s David Ignatius said he repeatedly had written about the Arabs needing to “write their own future” and he had done so by writing

about the region as a whole. Jackson Diehl, also of the *Washington Post*, had commented on both the Bush and Obama Administration's failure to support change, and about the growing role of independent media and activists. Others had written on similar themes. Yet neither they nor other columnists and writers saw the specific spark, or specific country disturbance, which might ignite epochal change. Beyond this hardly surprising factor, the storyline (i.e., 'the inevitability of democratic revolution') figured far less frequently than story-driven attention to the post-2001 news agenda. Egypt and Tunisia had both been seen through the prism of terrorism and counter-terrorism, which accounted for some of the coverage, and the peace process, which accounted for much of the reporting on Egypt especially. Local politics were reported and analyzed, but often were seen in these contexts.

Editors also said that the close identification of democracy advocacy with the former George W. Bush Administration had the effect of making coverage of Arab democratic change something of a partisan effort. Journalism about social change in the Middle East used this US policy bias as a foil when writing stories 'about the dog that didn't bark' – in this case, about the absence of democratic change in the region despite US rhetoric in favor.

Prospects for Political Change Seen by the Anglo-American Media

In the July 17, 2010 edition of the *Economist*, senior writer Max Rodenbeck wrote a highly prescient survey about political and social paralysis in Egypt. He said, "A new bitterness has crept in," defined by a "contrast between rising aspirations and enduring hardships; by a growing sense of alienation from the state; and by the unease of anticipation as the end of an era inevitably looms ever closer..."²

"The expectation of a seismic shift is almost tangible in the air," he wrote, "...the rising generation is very different from previous ones. It is better educated, highly urbanized, far more exposed to the outside world, and much less patient."³

"For some time," he continued, "Egyptian commentators have been noting resemblances between now and the years before Egypt's previous seismic shift. That happened in 1952..."

On this side of the Atlantic, Robin Wright also has regional reach, long experience, elite-level access, and knowledge of the local situation. Formerly with the *Washington Post* and now a fellow at the United States Institute of Peace and the Wilson Center, Wright also ranks at the top of those journalists managing to convey – in newspaper reportage or in books such as *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East* (2008) – a conviction that democratic change had become the principal item on the region's agenda. Her work in this vein covered a spectrum of "defiant judges in Cairo, rebel clerics in Tehran, satellite television station owners in Dubai, imaginative feminists in Rabat and the first female candidates in Kuwait, young techies in Jeddah, daring journalists in Beirut and Casablanca, and brave writers and businessmen in Damascus."

² Max Rodenbeck. "The Long Wait" *The Economist*. July 15, 2010.

³ Ibid.

In addition, Ms. Wright juxtaposed this impending change to other Middle East narratives, especially to the influence of Islamic jihadism, while also including other apparently overarching trends, such as the youth culture or consumerism. Her writing contrasted this yearning for and advocacy of an impending big change to a supposed US policy preferring ‘stability’ over real reform. [See Appendix V for more text from this book.]

In her reportage from Egypt, she also identified how, among the three ‘crats’ – theocrats, autocrats, and democrats – the latter were easily the weakest, but had been organizing quickly during the 21st-century’s first decade. In surveys of Morocco, she concentrated on the steady progress of popular representation while, in Syria, she noted that the prerequisite for any change, democratic or non-democratic, was the collapse of the Baathist regime. Throughout she posits democratic transformation as a continuum along which the region was already moving.

Journalist John Bradley’s Inside Egypt: the Land of the Pharaohs on the Brink of a Revolution (2008) predicted that a revolutionary uprising would happen in Egypt by describing a perfect storm strikingly similar to what has happened in Egypt today.

Bradley, who is fluent in Egyptian Arabic and resided in Egypt during the last decade, made a categorical prediction of imminent revolution. In addition to documenting torture and corruption, the book says a revolution would be sparked by a random event that no one could foresee, but that it would not come from the traditional Egyptian opposition political parties.

The book also says that the uprising would coincide with the final perceived push to transfer power from President Hosni Mubarak to his son, Gamal. Bradley also said that the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt’s largest and most disciplined opposition group, would never instigate such a revolution, but would try to ride the wave of popular anger once it got underway.

David Gardner for the London-based *Financial Times* had written in editorials and a book about the long-term crisis of political legitimacy in the region and Egypt specifically. “Unless the Arab countries and the broader Middle East can find a way out of this pit of autocracy,” he asserted in Last Chance: The Middle East in the Balance (2009), “their people will be condemned to bleak lives of despair, humiliation and rage for a generation, adding fuel to a roaring fire in what is already the most combustible region in the world.” But he was more pessimistic than hopeful for change.

Columnist and National Defense University professor Walid Phares comes close to meeting the report’s test of prescience even though his advocate’s role is never far away. In his 2010 book, The Coming Revolution: Struggle for Freedom in the Middle East, he writes that, in policy debate, “the real antidote to extreme Islamist ideologies was ignored: sound democratic cultures.”⁴ Phares didn’t sense the imminence of change, however, writing (at p. 343) that “the forces of change can eventually, decades from now, reach their goals by their own means.”⁵ [See Appendix V for text.]

The Oxford-based analyst Jeremy Jones’ 2007 book, Negotiating Change: the New Politics of the Middle East, offers a treatise favoring the notion that democracy can flourish in the Middle East, even though “there is no homogenous regional political space.” Completed

⁴ Walid Phares. The Coming Revolution: Struggle for Freedom in the Middle East (Threshold Editions, 2010). p. 2.

⁵ Ibid. p. 343.

by the middle of 2006, the book makes a country-by-country survey (Tunisia is omitted). It sees a process of societal ‘negotiation’ for more pluralism under way in most countries. But nowhere in the book does he identify the next few years as pivotal.

Few of the writers or broadcasters we addressed had paid much attention to Tunisia, with one exception: *Time* magazine had sent Vivienne Walt there in 2007, and she had written of the pressure for change under the heading “Tunisia: The Price of Prosperity.” Without coverage or understanding of this, it would have been hard to see the sparks that created the wider conflagration. There is a lesson here about the coverage of small, non-Anglosphere countries.

Pressures for Social Change Seen by the Anglo-American Media

Washington, DC journalist Mark Perry, who writes for *Foreign Policy* magazine, says his writing (and that of others) relied predictively on the 2002 UNDP *Arab Human Development Report*. “The uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and now in Syria correlate precisely to the 2002 UN report’s indices,” he said with deliberate emphasis. “Those states with effective governance for the most part have weathered the storm – Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.”

“In each, the ruling elites accommodated reform by providing a mix of economic and political compromises...the first demonstrations, in both [Tunisia and Egypt], were comprised of students, teachers, scholars, lawyers, office workers, young professionals, and the unemployed,” Perry continued. “In neither Tunisia nor Egypt were initial protesters recruited from the very poor, or the mosques. Both revolutions were secular, nationalistic, democratic, and organized by under-40 activists seeking a political voice.”

Jared Cohen’s 2007 book, *Children of Jihad*, is a good travelogue but its merit, for this report, comes from insights into the mindset and feelings of Arab and Middle Eastern youth. The text doesn’t focus on predictions of fundamental change in political systems, but stresses instead the ‘reachable-ness’ of the region’s huge under-30 generation, a group in tune with “a common set of norms and values characteristic of young people around the world regardless of religion, nationality, or ethnicity... they all want to feel as though they belong [and] have a purpose in this world, and can have a better life.”⁶

Prominent among those writers following labor activism in Egypt is Stanford University Middle East history professor Joel Beinin, the lead author of *The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt* (Washington, DC: Solidarity Center, 2010). Speaking at a February 17, 2010 Carnegie Endowment panel about the book, Beinin said that Egypt already had experienced more than 3,000 labor protests since 2004, the movement growing steadily as the result of “increased citizen access to a variety of independent media, which allow easier communication and disseminates information rapidly to potential protestors and supporters.” He said the labor movement, already in 2010, had “achieved concessions from the government unthinkable only decades ago,” describing it as the “the largest social

⁶ Jared Cohen. *Children of Jihad: A Young American’s Travels Among the Youth of the Middle East* (Gotham, 2007). p. 274-275.

movement in the Arab world since World War II.” Beinlin, however, did not forecast that this movement would coalesce in the very near term with other strands of social protest to evict the regime and usher in a democracy.

The phenomenon of Arab satellite news services, apparent before 9/11, prompted books focused on the topic, the best by many accounts being Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera and Middle East Politics Today (2006), by Marc Lynch.

Lynch delves into what he calls a “new Arab public,” which he sees as “palpably transforming Arab political culture [and] already conclusively shatter[ing] the state’s monopoly over the flow of information, rendering obsolete the ministries of information and the oppressive state censorship smothering public discourse well into the 1990s.”⁷ Writing five years ago, Lynch defined Arab satellite TV as dismantling in rapid order the region’s ossified “Arab identity discourse,” a sense of being Arab which produced “an identity-bounded enclave, internally open but externally opaque.”⁸

Written prior to a redoubled intrusion into that sphere by social media, the book describes a world in which, “by 2005, political talk shows had become an entirely normal and indispensable part of Arab political life, with dozens of such programs broadcast by a bewildering array of satellite television stations. Virtually any political trend or position could be found by channel-surfing Arab viewers.”⁹

And yet, “for all its newfound prominence, the Arab public sphere remains almost completely detached from any formal political institution.”¹⁰ More tellingly, “ultimately the Arab public sphere lacked any mechanisms for translating its energy, its consensus, and its symbolic power into concrete political outcomes.”¹¹

The book doesn’t venture any definitive projections about the impact of satellite TV on regime durability, but the new satellite media’s disorienting effect on traditional structures seems obvious and, now in 2011, so does the implicit suggestion that satellite TV had, to some extent, paved the way for open challenges to the region’s regimes.

Books reflecting targeted polling efforts seeking to identify social trends missed the impending change altogether. In James Zogby’s Arab Voices: What They are Saying to Us and Why It Matters (2010), one searches in vain in this a compendium of extensive polling within the Arab world for explicit forewarning of the change to come. (Zogby is founder and president of the Arab American Institute in Washington, DC.)

Some of the closest analysis of the emerging issues that would come together to ignite a revolt came in the regular month-by-month journalism of resident correspondents working for daily or weekly publications. Magazines, in particular, lend themselves to the look backwards over the shoulder and forwards into the future, achieved through analysis and its extension. Rodenbeck fits into this category; so does Abigail Hauslohner

⁷ Marc Lynch, Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today (Columbia University Press, 2005) p. 2.

⁸ Ibid. p. 3.

⁹ Ibid. p. 5.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 25

¹¹ Ibid. p. 28

of *Time*, who in a series of dispatches looked at different aspects of the opposition – the Muslim Brotherhood, succession, technology, labor unrest – and how they fitted together in often unpredictable ways. For the dailies, the *New York Times* correspondent, Michael Slackman, also provided insightful analysis on the roots of the Egyptian crisis, though he left Cairo in 2010.

On the radio side of US journalism, *National Public Radio* broadcast reports by correspondents Deborah Amos (in 2005) and Peter Kenyon (in 2008), which explicitly mentioned the prospect of major social change. In 2008, *NPR* also interviewed a remarkably prescient Egyptian economist (Ahmed Galal), who accurately identified the progress of a scarcely noticed phenomenon, the democratic opposition. [See Appendix V for text.] (Kenyon, a veteran correspondent in Cairo, moved to Istanbul in 2010.)

A few comparatively unknown American journalists did prove prescient in linking larger, regional social unrest to specific grievances. During 2008, for example, the *Asia Times* online correspondent David Goldman predicted political unrest arising from food price increases, citing reporting from *Reuters* and the *New York Times* about that year's drought having exacerbated other water crises stemming from Syria's loss of the Golan Heights and Turkey's Anatolia Project (which diverts water from the Euphrates and Tigris). Major social unrest, coming "soon," also would result from rapid population growth and urbanization.

Views of European and Regional Media

Still within the Western world but much closer to the region, approaches to editorial staff in Italy and France, for the purpose of this report, identified a few journalists and commentators with prescience, including prominent Bologna University professor Marcella Emiliani, *Corriere della Sera*, journalist Guido Olimpio, and *Le Monde* correspondents Guillaume Perrier and Patrick Cazinboth.

On close examination, none of their printed analyses and reportage observations after 2005 amounted to an unambiguous forecast of revolutionary change. Their specific insights, especially into Libya and the Maghreb, were impressive, however, while Guido Olimpio's forecast (in June 2008) of impending social turbulence throughout the Middle East was prophetic. Similarly, Karim Mezran, an Italian-Libyan columnist (and Director of the Centro Studi Americani in Rome), for many years has also published views forecasting major social changes in the Maghreb.

Approaches via colleagues at *Haaretz* and other newspaper editors in Israel sought the names of journalists from that country, who in earlier years might have seen imminent, very large political change looming in their neighborhood. The prognostications coming closest to the mark appeared in several columns in *Haaretz* during 2010, by the venerable peace activist Uri Avneri.

In November of last year he wrote that "any young Egyptian, Jordanian, Saudi, or Bahraini... must be acutely aware that his country is led by a small group for whom the preservation of their personal power and privileges is vastly more important than the holy cause of Palestine."

“This is a deeply humiliating insight,” he continued. “When hundreds of millions of people feel humiliated, the effects are foreseeable. The older generation may be used to this situation. But for young people, especially proud Arabs, it is intolerable...” In another column, Avneri wrote that “sooner or later, the situation will explode – first in one country, then in many....” Again, no special foresight emerged beyond the expectation of an explosion, “sooner or later.”

Jerusalem Post journalist Barry Rubin’s *The Long War for Freedom: The Arab Struggle for Democracy in the Middle East* (2006) examined the composition of the Middle East’s liberal reform movement. He described an uphill struggle for democratic reform, saying “only Arab reformers [themselves] can win this battle and transform their own countries, [but] they still stand a distant third in their competition with Islamists and nationalist regimes.” He had few thoughts of rapid change: “ultimate victory” for reformers is a “process that will probably take an entire historical era.”¹²

Arab Media Insights

Within the Middle East itself, Egyptian novelist Alaa El-Aswany must count as having come close to predicting the imminence of the event itself, although neither he nor anyone else foresaw the Tunisian catalyst. El-Aswany wrote a stream of newspaper columns after the 2005 publication of his novel *The Yacoubian Building*. In 50 Arabic-language articles in the *Al-Dustur* and *Al-Shorouk* newspapers, he unequivocally and repeatedly predicted “revolution.” [See Appendix V for text.]

Egypt’s labor strife in April 2008 elicited unequivocal predictions of revolution from a few local journalists, and by people effectively ‘doubling’ as journalists. For example, labor activist Hossan El-Hamalawy routinely spoke on *Al-Jazeera* in terms of class struggle, and sequenced a middle class uprising following ‘working-class’ efforts. *Al-Jazeera* also made extensive use of Saad el-din Ibrahim, Director of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies, who wrote for publication predicting sweeping social change and the collapse of the regime. Saad’s Ibn Khaldun colleague, Ayat Abul-Futtouhm, did the same.

Among the most insistent Arab proponents of democratic change, Ayat combined advocacy with analysis over the last decade, setting out a view that that change was inevitable. Still, neither he nor his colleagues expected change to be so imminent. Written in 2010 and full of foreboding, Tarek Osman’s book, *Egypt on the Brink*, only appeared on January 21, 2011, after the Tunisian follow-on effect had begun.

Ayat’s most recent monograph in English (2008) hit a somber tone: “The long period of authoritarian rule has created a feeling of general apathy and cynicism demonstrated by extremely low voter turnout (18 percent) in the last [Egyptian] parliamentary elections. ...However, ‘Kefaya’ and similar fledgling movements indicate there is still considerable vitality in Egypt’s civil society.”¹³

¹² Barry M. Rubin. *The long war for freedom : The Arab struggle for democracy in the Middle East* (Wiley, 2005). p. 3

¹³ Ayat M. Abul-Futtouh. “Challenges to Democratization” *Dissent and Reform in the Arab World: Empowering Democrats*. (American Enterprise Institute, 2008). p. 25.

These slender examples aside, telephoned requests to the region elicited the same answer: Internal constraints and strictures had prevented Arab journalists from attempting reportage that analyzed the underlying unrest while linking it to the prospect for near-term, systemic change.

Hussein Amin chairs the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications at the American University of Cairo. He replied to an email question, saying that “no one predicted the events – neither the ‘hungry,’ nor those under the line of poverty, or frustrated. I’m not aware of any journalists, writers, or thinkers who predicted what happened.” In Tunisia, Mohamed Ali Kembi presides over the *Institute de Presse et des Sciences de l’Information (IPSI)*. He agreed. “No one saw it coming – not the Americans, and not even me... in Tunisia, there was no one who predicted this.”

Elsewhere in the region, informal approaches to prominent thinkers and writers revealed little correlation between pro-reform prominence, and published or broadcast beliefs that “big change” was coming soon. For example, Shafeeq Ghabra writes weekly columns for the Kuwaiti daily *Al Ra’y al Am*. Already in 2004, he wrote that Arabs were “looking for a third path, [and] are willing to defend their beliefs, take risks, and stand up for what is right.” Yet he foresaw a “long, violent, and complex [process], taking at least a decade.”

Conclusions

The journalism and books surveyed for this report revealed no instances of outright prediction that regimes would topple one after the other in early 2011, although John Bradley’s book and Max Rodenbeck’s *Economist* articles came closest to describing a set of circumstances that might ignite revolution in Cairo. Vivienne Walt for *Time* came close to predicting change in Tunisia, probably a tougher call, and she did so in 2007 (though as *Time*’s subsequent coverage of Tunisia was scant, this may not fit the test of recurrent, reasoned reporting and analysis over time). The best of the rest identified the democratic opposition as the unknown but growing presence, an analysis best fleshed out by Robin Wright, who added up the factors combining to form a comprehensive challenge to the status quo, and by David Gardner’s *Financial Times* editorials and book. *Time*’s Abigail Hauslohner followed events closely and assessed them correctly as they unfolded throughout 2010, linking the social, political, economic, and technological strands of a revolution in the making.

Other books or reportage cited above captured one or more of these factors – Jared Cohen’s views on the under-30 generation, Marc Lynch’s fine depiction of the transformative impact of satellite TV, Walid Phares’s documentation of the strength of democratic opposition, or David Ignatius’s frequent accounts of long-ruling elites under stress.

If there is an analytic take-away from this survey, it lies in the need to aggregate a clutch of seemingly disparate factors, all of which cannot be found in one source. The people best trained to aggregate are journalists, although the nature of the business is trending against the type of contemplative, in-depth analysis that print journalism used to provide.

In interviews and extended discussions with journalists, editors, academics, and press institute personnel, the conversation turned repeatedly to broader questions about trend identification, and the need to do this in ways that didn't succumb to the special agendas of advocates and advocacy groups, no matter how appealing their message might be.

In this regard, they stressed the interrelationship between well-rounded coverage and continuity of coverage, best achieved in resident journalists' regular dispatches or in visits to the region over many years (as with Robin Wright's and David Ignatius's careers). They stressed the vital need to get outside capital cities, mix with different social classes, acquire language fluency, and ask counter-intuitive questions (such as whether abrupt democratic freedoms will imperil social order). Several mentioned the rocky democratic transitions that Spain and Portugal experienced in the 1970s, and when each witnessed domestic conservative reaction and even revulsion against what was perceived as 'excessive freedom.' Those coming closest to predicting the general outline of the changes churning throughout the Middle East (though, again, no one predicted either the immediate cause or the progression of the changes after January), used arguments turning on the question of the direction towards which the aggregated unrest was heading. After all, labor strife, urban poverty, impatience at static political establishments, and the suffocating ubiquity of secret police have been 'givens' in repeated accounts of dissatisfaction in the Middle East.

The analytic string that drew them together was the impatience of youth or the rising generations, plus the politically sensitized nature of the urban middle class and educated unemployed, and their awareness of a wider world with wider liberties. In this regard, the outcome of the impending changes anticipated by Brandon, Wright, and El-Ansary was in a sense 'conventional' – i.e., a turn away from autocracy towards genuine, democratic choice and a climate of freedom, and not toward an Islamist alternative.

Those concentrating on social consequences of labor unrest in Egypt discerned an irreversible empowerment of hitherto voiceless or passive segments of society, and not an unfolding Marxist tableau; they couldn't quite see the movement as springboard for near-term, comprehensive, systemic change involving other segments of society. Finally, no one connected all the dots between increasingly mobilized factory labor, popular unrest over rising prices, or pan-Arab satellite TV, and the largely bloodless, non-ideological, and non-sectarian eviction of old regimes that loomed just around the corner. They guessed it was coming, but had no idea it would happen so soon, and so quickly. Even the *Economist*, which came close, was equivocal in its July 2010 articles, and afterwards (including during the early days of the protests in Cairo).

Finally, and despite exceptional prescience by Arabs such as the Egyptian columnist El-Aswany, regional and nearby European journalism seems to have had no special advantage in foreseeing the systemic, copycat changes rolling through the region after January 2011. The European advantage came after the movement had begun, in the provision of details more readily perceived by an ex-colonial perspective (France, Italy, or Britain), or as academics sensing unavoidable change, but without guessing at its near-term manifestation.