

to be ambushed and killed. Whatever the outcome of the current conflict, Brandt's blending of local and global considerations in analyzing the rise of the Houthis will remain a valuable resource.

As an anthropologist, Dr. Brandt was well-prepared to carry out this research based on her experience between 2003-2008, when she lived in San'a', Yemen's capital. Her work in development often led her as far north as Sa'da and in the process she established valuable contacts with shaykhs and tribesmen, many of whom have played major roles in the ongoing Houthi conflict. An advantage she has in writing this extraordinary account of the Houthi phenomenon is the ability to stay in touch with contacts through the use of social media. The fact that one of her nicknames was *al-akhtabūt* (octopus) because "she has her fingers in pies everywhere" (xi) explains how such an impressive account was possible. ✂

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STEVEN A. COOK. *False Dawn: Protest, Democracy, and Violence in the New Middle East.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). Pp. 317. \$27.95 cloth. ISBN 9780190611415.

Self-immolation of a Tunisian fruit seller. Protests in Tahrir Square. Death of an eccentric Libyan dictator. From 2010-2013, the world was captivated by uprisings across the Middle East, which became known as the Arab Spring, and the prospect of democratic transition across the region. *False Dawn*, written by Council on Foreign Relations scholar Steven Cook, is a detailed, thoroughly researched, highly readable discussion of these events and their aftermath. It is also deeply pessimistic, as signified by chapters entitled "Unraveling" and "What Went Wrong". The book grapples with why these uprisings failed to deliver anticipated change and argues the United States has limited ability to shape outcomes.

False Dawn focuses on Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. The title foreshadows the book's conclusion, with Cook arguing "The revolts of 2010 to 2013 were a false dawn" (7) as democratic transitions never materialized. It also features non-Arab Turkey. There were initially high hopes that Turkey, as a predominantly Muslim country with a secular democracy, could serve as a model in the region. Although the book treats Turkey as another failed revolution following the Gezi Park protests of 2013 and drift toward authoritarianism, its inclusion in this study is more compelling as a comparative example and

flawed standard. The book does not address other Middle Eastern countries or conflicts in depth (e.g., Gulf states, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry), although they appear in broader background discussions.

The book begins by exploring potential motivations for the uprisings. Although many observers assumed it was economic grievances, an examination of the countries' financial situations suggests they were enjoying relative prosperity. Yet Cook argues "what governments were telling their citizens about their lives and the way citizens were experiencing it were not the same" (84). He says economic grievances were connected to political grievances, as "demands for freedom, economic opportunity, and democracy" included "an embedded belief that the fundamental fairness of more open and just political systems would deliver . . . dignity". Although a compelling argument, the book would be strengthened by more evidence and deeper analysis to bolster such "implicit" explanations.

The book then turns to the question of why things went so wrong in these countries. One of its central assertions is that uprisings against an oppressive status quo did not constitute revolutions. Citing academic agreement that "revolutions have occurred when contenders for power displace present holders of power" (146), Cook argues that the revolts did not significantly displace elites, reform institutions, or change power structures. As a result, he writes: "The uprisings left some countries stuck between an old, discredited political order and a hoped-for, yet unattainable, democratic political system, with nondemocratic forces benefiting from the contested political space in between" (148).

Furthermore, the book suggests that "sticky institutions" and identity crises hindered the prospects for meaningful change. On the former, Cook asserts: "because institutions in any society reflect the interests of those who have political and economic power, leaders can be expected to leverage the prevailing rules of the political game to keep, maintain, and reinforce their privileged positions" (157). Here the book would have benefited from greater discussion of the role of civil society organizations, which have caused wariness within governments across the region given their tendency to challenge existing power structures. On the latter, Cook argues the instability resulting from the uprisings exacerbated identity politics. Although this varied by country, he says it led to tribalism, regionalism, and further conflict that undermined the prospect for reform.

The book concludes by examining American policy-making in the Middle East. Cook argues it was a "special conceit of the policy community . . . that the United States had a role to play in Arab efforts to build new societies and political systems after the uprisings" (203). It should be noted that this is not

a new instinct, as the United States was involved in democratization efforts in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere. Cook notes a particular challenge for U.S. officials in managing the shift from cooperating with stable authoritarian leaders to backing a faltering transition to democracy, which he says created wariness in the region about American democracy promotion efforts. He concludes that Washington has a limited role in shaping regional politics, with locals holding their countries' future in their hands.

Cook's argumentation is somewhat contradictory in the book's closing pages. He criticizes the Obama Administration for the failure of its actions to match rhetoric in Egypt and lack of sufficiently vocal messaging on democratic backsliding in Turkey, yet acknowledges that alternative actions would not have altered outcomes. He also argues that the United States can play a role in upholding democratic values and investing in technical assistance programs, yet notes the limited effect beyond avoiding the worst possible outcome of instilling mistrust on all sides. The United States should undoubtedly approach the region with humility about its ability to affect domestic politics. However, he fails to explain how best to achieve core American interests in the region (which he identifies as Israel, oil, counter terrorism, and non-proliferation) – especially during a time of transition.

Some may disagree with the author's analysis and conclusion. But the book will long serve as a useful reference given its detailed description of historic events. It would be a valuable text for an undergraduate or graduate course on Middle East history or politics. It has extensive footnotes, maps, a timeline of events (running from the death of the Tunisian fruit seller in December 2010 to Turkey's arrest of Kurdish politicians in November 2016), and a "cast of characters" from the four countries of study. Although the book was published in June 2017, it was completed before the 2016 election and does not address developments during the Trump administration. As a result, more remains to be written about the unfolding developments of a turbulent region that affects American interests. ✂

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JOSEPH R. FARAG. *Politics and Palestinian Literature in Exile: Gender Aesthetics and Resistance in the Short Story* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016). Pp. 304. \$135.00 cloth. ISBN 9781784536558.