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An Earthquake is Coming in the Middle East and it'll be Bigger Than the Arab Spring

Dr. Amr Darrag

The [Newsweek](#) published on November 1 an article by Dr Amr Darrag, Chair of the Egyptian Institute for Studies and a former Minister under Egypt's first democratically elected Government in 2013, titled: "An Earthquake is Coming in the Middle East—and it'll be Bigger Than the Arab Spring", as follows:

Who was not heartened by the images of protests and demonstrations sweeping across the Arab world in 2011? Here, in the face of corruption and tyranny, was Arab civil society affirming the virtue of elective government in one of the era's most positive and hopeful displays of popular action. The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia sent millions to the streets and catalyzed successive revolutions that brought down four dictators.

But the consequences were not those that were intended. Without consensus, without the eradication of the old deep state, chaos prevailed, and a new order emerged—one defined by paranoia, repression and financial might. The traditional Middle Eastern powers of Egypt, Iraq and Syria were replaced by the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, whose regimes have long been defined by authoritarian politics and oil wealth. Today, while we are coming to terms with the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, we can clearly see how Saudi Arabia, at least, is willing to exploit its new position.

Democracy itself is now under threat. The Middle East, the cradle of civilisation, is where it is most at risk. And witness to the tyranny taking place or taking hold in the

Middle East, the West has failed to take proper action. President Donald Trump, in fact, lent vocal support to autocrats like Egypt's General Sisi and continues to insist on strategic ties with Saudi Arabia and its de-facto leader, Mohammad bin Salman. But this tolerance for autocracy will neither secure regional stability nor advance American interests.

Indeed, Trump has only weakened the moral authority of the U.S. and its allies at a critical time for them and for the Middle East, and condemned millions to the suffocating oppression of capricious tyrants. He has only showed contempt for democracy, and in so doing encouraged a wider belief—one peddled by the strongmen of the Arab world—that democracy is not always morally good or even desirable.

It is this support, as well as the unpredictability and sheer incoherence of the Trump administration, that have allowed Sisi and others to pursue increasingly repressive policies. Tyrants have taken control in Arab states enfeebled by revolution and exploited a world in turmoil and a West mired in populism to hound and put to death those who defy them. Sisi has enjoyed complete impunity already under the Obama administration, even after massacring over 1,000 Egyptians in Rabaa square in August 2013. Now, he punishes dissidents and activists daily; illegal arrests, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings have become routine, and his hidden war in the Sinai Peninsula threatens a humanitarian crisis.

This unravelling in the Middle East joins the increasing recklessness of North Korea, the rise of China and anger in Europe over immigration and low economic growth to amount to a world in turmoil—one that requires strong moral leadership and the upholding of absolute moral values such as democracy, freedom of expression and the principles underpinning international standards and law.

But we have reason to be hopeful. The disgust that followed Khashoggi's brutal murder proves there is still a line that best not be crossed. Mounting evidence indicates that Khashoggi was tortured, killed and dismembered by Saudi hitmen operating in a sovereign foreign state; such a crime violates every international standard, moral and legal, and threatens international security if its perpetrators are not brought to justice. Trump's threats against Saudi Arabia mutated into something approaching an endorsement, but the citizens he purports to represent do not share his indifference. The West on the whole realizes the significance of this crime and its implications for the international order and the story of the Arab Spring. But does the West also realize how much autocrats like bin Salman and Sisi rely on the international community's cover to continue to commit their crimes? How come Sisi still enjoys the red carpet reception he got this week in Germany while crimes are still being committed every day in Egypt on his behest? Of course, we should raise our voices demanding justice for Jamal; bringing the killers no matter how high they are to justice. But more importantly, we must say clearly that the world must not allow us to wake up in a few weeks or months to the news of the murder of another Jamal. Let us try not to waste Jamal's sacrifice.

The story is not over. An earthquake—one far larger than that which began in Tunisia—is coming. Democracy must be guarded and upheld as a moral virtue independently of any local form of culture or context. At the same time, a recalibration of diplomacy in regard of the Middle East, and a renewed focus on the region's repressive regimes, is vitally necessary if anything resembling a world order is going to be maintained—or indeed, restored. Deep and lasting changes have taken and are taking place in the Arab world, and we cannot simply return to the old order; and the West, however much it

strives to overlook the populist's surge signals for international involvement, cannot ignore developments in the region. They are not stabilizing: they're escalating.

