



THE FRAILITY OF AUTHORITY

BORDERS, NON-STATE ACTORS AND POWER VACUUMS IN A CHANGING MIDDLE EAST

*edited by
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in collaboration with



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1.

Early Warning Signs in the Arab World That We Ignored – And Still Ignore

Rami G. Khouri

Never in modern history has the Arab world experienced such a wide range of jarring political developments as it is undergoing today. The region is riddled with worsening sectarian tensions and conflicts, fragmenting states, refugee flows, a terrorism export industry, stagnant or contracting economies, and long-running, devastating wars in which foreign parties actively participate. Arabs and their friends across the world wonder what can be done to reduce the violence and return the region to a normal state of affairs where men and women and their families live decent lives and countries get on with the business of promoting national development and social calm. Everyone asks how we reached this point. We all ask how and why the broad national developmental thrust of the entire Arab world in its first half-century of modern independent statehood – roughly from 1925 to 1975 – has been transformed in the past 40 years into the turbulent conditions we see today.

These conditions of warfare, terrorism, mass human displacement, and broken states did not suddenly emerge overnight. In retrospect, there were many early warning signs in recent decades that should have been appreciated as signalling structural problems and deep injustices in our political, economic, environmental, and social systems. Those signs were never recognized by the Arab ruling elites, or by the external and regional powers that supported them – the very same powers that are now actively engaged in warfare in several Arab lands (the United States, the UK, France, Russia, Iran,

Turkey, Saudi Arabia) and continue to bolster chronically autocratic Arab regimes whose people have already risen up against them in some cases. Others in society who did see the troubling early warning signs – political parties, social movements, activists, civil society groups – lacked the ability to do anything about them, because of the total control of power in their societies by the ruling elites.

It is important today to acknowledge those early warning signs for three reasons: we should recognize that the signs of our own discontent and occasional national frailty, and even some dismemberment, were there before our eyes all the time, so that we learn to look for them in the future; we should note the specific issues and underlying conditions that created the political, economic, and social stresses that came to the surface in the form of these signs of structural problems in our midst, and start working to address them seriously, since most of them still persist; and we should look around our societies today and ask if new indicators of social or national stress and fragmentation are appearing that we should recognize as yet another set of early warning signs that we should respond to in their earliest stages, before they lead to more problems like the ones the Arab region suffers from today.

We reached today's violent and troubling situation over a period of nearly a full century, divided into two very different phases: a period of broadly positive development from 1920 to 1975, followed by one of much stagnation and regression from 1975 until today. We need to see the genesis of our current malaise in the decades just before and during the formative years of Arab statehood, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Our problems were not entirely anchored in the abuses of post-1970 dictators and strongmen like Muammar Gaddafi, Hosni Mubarak, Hafez Assad, or Saddam Hussein. They started in the early years of the 20th century, as the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the first signs of Zionist-Arab tensions emerged, and the post-WWI period, beginning around 1920, launched the creation of the modern Arab world as we know it, eventually becoming 22 states that formed the Arab League. Most of these states have been remarkably stable; however, a handful have been brittle, and some are already fracturing and giving birth

to new states, like South Sudan and the Kurdish regions. During the period immediately before and after WWI the seeds were planted that a century later have resulted in much national fragility, widespread citizen discontent, and constant political violence by all leading local and foreign actors in the Middle East. The key defect at birth for modern Arab statehood was that it came into the world without any serious mechanisms to guarantee citizen rights or the application of the principle of the consent of the governed. One after another, independent Arab states were defined by rule by unelected and unaccountable elites and minorities, whether they were self-imposed through conquest or put in place by the colonial powers. Arab states became formally independent and sovereign, but the political behaviour of their ruling elites in many cases continued to reflect a mindset characterized by colonial dependency. Such governing systems persisted for decades throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. The climax of the Zionism-Arabism confrontation in the 1947-48 Arab-Israeli conflict and the creation of Israel introduced into the Levant what I believe has been the most persistent and destructive phenomenon in modern Arab history, and one of the greatest obstacles to good governance and stable, legitimate statehood: the capture of the state and permanent political rule by military officers. This has been a death knell for good governance, democratic transitions, citizen self-respect, political pluralism, and equitable and sustainable national development. These ailments continue unabated across most of the Arab world, which has been, and continues to be, completely and chronically undemocratic (with the recent exception of Tunisia since 2014).

Long-serving Arab presidents like Muammar Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein, Ali Abdullah Saleh, Omar Hassan Bashir, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat, Hosni Mubarak, Abdelfatteh Sisi, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Hafez Assad and his son Bashar, Zein el Abedin Ben Ali, and others were all military or police officers. With their friends, business partners, fellow officers, and family members, they took power and kept it for decades on end, in some cases for more than 40 years. In Egypt, where this trend started in earnest in 1952, the country has been continually ruled by the military ever since, with

the exception of the brief one-year tenure of an elected president in 2012-13, until he was removed from power and jailed by the military.¹ The Egyptian military in 1952 introduced two debilitating legacies that still haunt and debase the region: the tradition of military officers who hold total executive power, and the creation of the “ministry of information” that determined what citizens were allowed to hear, say, and discuss in the public sphere. These two phenomena were followed by others, like unsustainable economic policies, inequitable social policies, and irresponsible environmental policies – all of which contributed to the mass distress that finally erupted in uprisings, rebellions, and revolutions in 2010-11.

That post-1950 legacy of military rule in many states had by the mid-1970s produced family-run, military-anchored security states. The bonanza of oil and gas income that spread across the region beginning in the early 1970s in the form of aid, trade, investments, and labour remittances helped to cement this reality; poor military-run Arab regimes coordinated closely with energy-rich Arab states to pursue policies that ensured calm and stability, at the expense of democracy and citizen rights. Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya perhaps were the most egregious cases, so it is no coincidence that some of the most violent examples of state fragmentation, government violence, ethnic tensions, and communal collapse in the Arab world today have occurred in those four countries. It is also no surprise that the 2011 uprisings started in those countries. The army officers who commanded the total power and resources of their states ran these countries for three or four decades in some cases, or handed power over to their children in others. They also ran their economies and societies into the ground. Where some Arab citizens sought a negotiated social contract between the people and their leaders, they met with total resistance from a ruling elite that refused to share power or be held accountable for its policies. This reality, over the course of a half-century or so, totally destroyed any possibility of a social contract by which genuine national develop-

¹ Yezid Sayigh, “Above the State: The Officers’ Republic in Egypt”, in *Carnegie Papers*, August 2012, <http://ceip.org/2kOD3lp>.

ment could take place on the basis of active citizen participation in anything, it seemed, beyond the buying and selling of consumer products and real estate.

The failures of military-run, family-based rule were camouflaged for many years by several factors. Early decades of genuine development and the oil-fuelled boom after 1972 were one key reason why uprisings against the prevailing order did not break out earlier in the region, with only one or two exceptions such as the rebellion against Jaafar Numeiri in Sudan. National development momentum in most Arab countries from the 1920s to the 1970s meant that schools, hospitals, and roads were built, along with telephone systems, housing, and other elements of genuine national development. Most Arabs, for most of the half-century to the mid-1970s, genuinely saw their lives improving at the material level, and they expected their children to enjoy even more fruits of national development. Politically, however, they had no rights, including no credible means to experience political participation, accountability, or redress of grievance. But they remained docile, because their housing and road systems were improving, their children went to school and then to university, new hospitals were built, water systems were upgraded and expanded, and the material side of life was constantly improving for a majority of citizens.

In addition, the Cold War between the Soviet- and American-led camps kept a lid on domestic Arab developments for 45 years, because both world powers actively supported the Arab security states run by families and military officers. The ongoing effects of the Arab-Israeli conflict also took their toll. They curtailed the democratic aspirations of many Arab citizens and cemented the rule of officers like Gaddafi, Assad, Nasser, and others, who justified their iron-fisted rule by arguing that only they and their militaries could promote brisk national development and defend their countries and Palestine against Israel. Democracy could wait. But the 1967 Arab-Israeli war showed that family-run security states were not able to defend against Israel or defeat it, could not build strong economies, and were totally incompetent before the challenge of promoting equitable and sustained socio-economic development.

The officers-turned-presidents-for-life ran these countries into the ground, to the point where millions of Arabs today are displaced internally or refugees abroad because of wars in their countries, and hundreds of thousands have fled. Many risk death in the sea or on the road, rather than stay in their societies, because the risk of death in the Mediterranean is less than the risk of continuing to live in one's own country. Three big issues over the last century were key factors that brought us to this point today: the Arab-Israeli conflict and its consequences, the mismanagement and corruption of incompetent militaristic Arab regimes, and the colonial legacy that includes continuous external militarism by foreign powers. All three of these factors persist today virtually unchanged, so it is to be expected that conditions will continue to deteriorate in many Arab lands.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is the oldest and most serious destabilizing force in the region, and has plagued us all since the 1930s. One of the reasons so many Arabs are critical of the USA and other Western societies is that foreign powers have seemed to pay more attention to the security and rights of Israelis than to those of Palestinians and Arabs. This chronic imbalance generated considerable anger and frustration because Arab governments were unable to do anything to rectify it. This tension built up over decades, and it was one important factor in the growth of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in the 1980s, and of Hamas and Hezbollah, who fought particularly against Israeli occupation of Arab lands. The Arab-Israeli conflict contributed to the frustrations of tens of millions of Arab citizens who were humiliated by their own governments' inability to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, either through war or peace. One reason for this was the post-1973 American commitment to always maintain Israel's qualitative military advantage over any combination of adversaries. Arab governments understandably could not defeat Israel militarily, because in fact they were also facing the military power and political will of the United States. In some cases Arab countries could not purchase military equipment from the United States because of Israel's veto. This further aggravated Arab citizens' disdain for their own governments, which con-

tributed to the lack of legitimacy of many Arab governments in the eyes of their own people; this was responsible in part for triggering the 2010-11 uprisings, when many Arabs challenged and sought to change their governments.

These and many other issues sparked the recent uprisings and the consequent turmoil that we have experienced across the Arab world. We have reached this point after a cumulative process of national autocracy and mismanagement, local and regional warfare, repeated external military interventions, an enduring Arab-Israeli conflict, and serious imbalances between populations and natural resources.

The last point regarding population/resource balances is striking, because the Arab world is still characterized by some of the world's most challenging population dynamics. During the first half-century of modern statehood from 1920 to 1970, economic growth generally was able to sustain high population growth rates and bring about steady improvements in living conditions for most people; but by the mid-1980s, populations had outstripped the ability of economies or government subsidies to keep providing all citizens with the basic services they expected from their government, like water, electricity, housing, jobs, education, and reasonably priced food. The Arab world's population growth has been phenomenal.² The 60 million Arabs in 1930 became 92 million in 1960, 313 million in 2010, and have reached some 400 million today.³ In just the six years following the uprisings, the Arab world's population grew by 52 million people (from 348 million to 400 million). Maintaining decent social services and promoting job opportunities for this fast-growing population has been impossible in recent

² Farzaneh Roudi, *Population Trends and Challenges in the Middle East and North Africa*, Washington, Population Reference Bureau, October 2001, <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Reports/2001/PopulationTrendsandChallengesintheMiddleEastandNorthAfrica.aspx>.

³ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), *Demographic Profile of the Arab Region. Realizing the Demographic Dividend*, Beirut, United Nations, 2016, <http://arabdevelopmentportal.com/indicator/demography>.

decades, and it is even more impossible today, especially in view of the contraction of state domestic spending and foreign aid due to lower energy income.

For nearly the past half-century since the 1970s, citizens across the Arab world who suffered political, social, economic, and environmental stresses lacked the opportunity to respond through organized political action that held power accountable. They responded in the few ways that were available to them, like emigrating, joining politicized religious movements, partaking in the corruption that distributed some wealth to a minority in society, and occasionally by using violence or terrorism. It was clear at the time that their behaviour and the actions they took were signs of dysfunction in the society and discontent in the lives of individual citizens and families; it is even more clear today in retrospect.

The behaviour of millions of citizens since the early 1970s should have been recognized for what it was: the desperate actions of ordinary people who were unable to care for their families, in an environment of increasingly stressful economic and political conditions. I suggest that the following ten significant developments across the Arab world since the mid-1970s should have been seen as early warning signs of problems in our societies. They offer some guidelines for citizen behaviour that we should look out for today and in the near future; they also challenge us to acknowledge and act on new early warning signs we may currently be witnessing in our societies, rather than repeating the mistakes of the recent past by ignoring those blatant signs.

1. The first big sign of widespread Arab citizen discontent was the rapid expansion of popular support for the Muslim Brotherhood and other non-violent Islamists in the mid-1970s. This was due to multiple factors, including the humiliation of the June 1967 Arab defeat by Israel; the failure of socialism, Arab nationalism, Baathism, and other ideologies to meet citizen needs; the scourge of corruption; and the immediate added stresses of inflation and high living costs that resulted from the oil price increases in the early 1970s. The Muslim Brothers were the only

locally credible opposition groups that governments and their security agencies could not easily ban, and their focus on social justice at home and confronting Israeli aggression abroad resonated deeply with popular sentiments across society. It was no wonder that Muslim Brotherhood groups, often operating under different names, consistently did well in elections from the mid-1980s – and they continue to do so today.

2. Because all Arab electoral systems were configured to give the ruling power elite a built-in majority and permanent control of public life, frustrations with the inability of the Muslim Brotherhood to actually improve people's lives led to the birth of some smaller, more extreme Islamist groups that used violence against their governments. Such groups in Algeria, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia were quickly smashed by the state. Yet their very birth and expansion across the region should have been recognized as a sign of deep discontent that reached such an acute point among some citizens that they turned to violence against their own governments and economies. The Arab elite's refusal to recognize this or to address the underlying discontent that gave rise to popular resistance and armed action led to more severe forms of the same phenomenon years later, including Al-Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS).
3. A major sign of widespread personal discontent and societal dysfunction as of the early 1980s (and also continuing today) was the permanent emigration of tens of thousands of the Arab world's smartest and most dynamic young men and women. Millions of Arabs have emigrated from their home countries in recent years,⁴ but the loss of large numbers of educated, active young people has certainly deprived the region of one of its most important developmental assets. For various political, social, and economic reasons, these cohorts of talented and educated youth refused to put up with the restricted opportunities

⁴ Ibid., p. 14-17; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Arab Human Development Report 2016*, New York, United Nations, November 2016, Chapter 7, <http://www.arab-hdr.org/PreviousReports/2016/2016.aspx>.

- for personal and professional development, and the ignominies of harsh security states, that their parents had endured all their lives; instead, they left and found abroad the professional and personal development opportunities, and the political and cultural rights and freedoms, that their societies had denied them.
4. By the early 2000s, public opinion polls by reputable local and foreign companies repeatedly confirmed Arab citizens' low level of trust in most of their public institutions. In countries other than wealthy oil-producers, half or more of respondents routinely said they had no confidence in their government, courts, media, political parties, elections, or parliament. The gap between citizen and state that was repeatedly captured in such polls indicated that citizens not only lacked faith in their governments' and states' efficacy to deliver the services they wanted; they also doubted the very legitimacy of their own governments, and in a few cases of their own countries as well. This lack of trust in many Arab countries persists today, with the exception of the few wealthy oil-producing states, as well as trust in some institutions like the armed forces.⁵
 5. Simultaneously, large numbers of Arab citizens by the early 2000s were expressing pessimism about their future well-being, in terms of material needs (jobs, income, health care) or political rights and opportunities for self-improvement. These trends were in contrast to the early decades of Arab statehood and sovereignty, when most citizens felt that their lives were improving and that their children would enjoy even greater well-being and personal development opportunities. A combination of factors that evolved over time – and that are captured in part in the ten early warning signs presented here – slowly but steadily resulted in a significant percentage of Arab populations feeling pauperized, marginalized, powerless, vulnerable,

⁵ "Trust in Arab Government vs. Trust in Arab Armies", in *R - R blog*, 17 September 2016, <http://rnotr.com/chloropleth/plotly/r/barometer/plotly-facets>; Arab Barometer Online Data Analysis, <http://www.arabbarometer.org/content/online-data-analysis>.

and therefore hopeless. These factors included mismanagement and corruption due to incompetent rule by family- and military-based regimes, population growth that outpaced economic growth, the impact of recurring wars and civil conflicts, heavy reliance on foreign aid, severe socio-economic disparities, increased labour informality, declining educational standards, and – since the early 1990s – the cumulative impact on jobs, rural economies, and import costs of neo-liberal economic policies that were often required by foreign donors and international financial institutions as the price for bailing out distressed Arab economies.⁶ By the period 2000-10, more and more people were saying that they struggled to meet their families' needs, and also feared for their future well-being, as evidenced in polls by Gallup and others.⁷ As has often been the case, nationals of wealthy oil-producers who enjoyed welfare state benefits remained the exception to this trend – though this may also be changing today, as reduced oil and gas income causes many of these countries to radically reduce government spending and subsidies.

6. The slow but steady increase in families' negative perceptions of their socio-economic and political conditions reflected both the social and economic polarization that had started in the 1980s: larger and larger numbers of Arab citizens lived near or below the poverty line, while a small wealthy minority enjoyed luxury and opportunity.⁸ Governments did not have the resources to provide a social safety net for all the needy, and

⁶ Lorenzo Kamel, "Reshuffling the Middle East: a Historical and Political Perspective", in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (September 2016), p. 132-141.

⁷ Abu Dhabi Gallup Center, *Tunisia: Analyzing the Dawn of the Arab Spring*, Washington, Gallup, June 2011, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/157049/tunisia-analyzing-dawn-arab-spring.aspx>.

⁸ Jon Clifton and Lymari Morales, *Egyptians' Tunisians' Wellbeing Plummet Despite GDP Gains*, Washington, Gallup, 2 February 2011, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/145883/egyptians-tunisians-wellbeing-plummet-despite-gdp-gains.aspx>.

many simply slipped into abject poverty and chronic suffering and vulnerability.⁹ As some governments slowly retreated from certain sectors of society, the vacuum they left was replaced by a combination of local groups (including the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists) alongside some powerful non-state organizations like Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, and various Islamist, ethnic, and sectarian groups in Egypt, Iraq, and Yemen. It was clear that Arab sovereignty and state legitimacy were starting to fragment 30 years ago – but few people took notice, or action, as the trends of socio-economic polarization persisted, and in some cases worsened.

7. Alongside poverty and the polarization it caused, two other important indicators of serious structural problems in most Arab countries have continued to worsen during the past few decades, namely education results and labour force composition (two critical factors that determine a family's well-being and opportunities in society). International standardized tests of mid-primary and mid-secondary schooling show that an average of some 45 percent of Arabs in school are not learning to read, write, or do basic maths.¹⁰ Many of them will drop out, or if they finish school they will graduate with no usable skills. A total of nearly 25 million young Arab children who should be in school are not, due to the low quality of schooling they receive, gender issues, and the impact of recent wars. Perhaps as many as 40 percent on average of workers in Arab countries are in the informal sector, where menial labour is the norm and workers lack the protection provided by health insurance, minimum wages or maximum working hours, or social security.¹¹

⁹ Elena Ianchovichina, Lili Mottaghi and Shantayanan Devarajan, "Inequality, Uprisings, and Conflict in the Arab World", in *Middle East and North Africa Economic Monitor*, October 2015, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/251119063>.

¹⁰ Liesbet Steer et al., *Arab Youth: Missing Educational Foundations for a Productive Life?*, Washington, The Brookings Institution, 2014, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/arabworld_learningbarometer_en.pdf.

¹¹ Anthony O'Sullivan, Marie-Estelle Rey and Jorge Galvez Mendez, Opportu-

8. These trends in the three decades to 2010 meant that more and more people across the Arab world were feeling vulnerable and unable to improve their life conditions or meet the basic needs of their families. Unable to change things through political action, mass Arab frustration and humiliation culminated in the 2010-11 uprisings, the most dramatic sign of region-wide disconnect in modern Arab history. Millions of citizens who had reached breaking point spontaneously rebelled against their ruling elites; yet today those elites, along with their foreign supporters, continue to ignore most of the uprisings' underlying drivers of discontent and disparities.
9. The birth of Al-Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS) is the latest sign of deep distress in our societies. Such violent Salafist-*takfiri* movements did not suddenly emerge from a vacuum; they developed slowly over 25 years, and now find active support among hundreds of thousands of Arabs, and passive support or understanding among millions.¹² The relative support for ISIS among Arabs is low, but the absolute numbers in question are in the millions. Various published and unpublished polls suggest that some degree of support or empathy for ISIS among Arab populations ranges between 4 and 8 percent, which would translate into somewhere between 16 and 32 million people.
10. Arab governments, non-state militias, and foreign military powers are now coordinating to defeat ISIS and Al-Qaeda – the same combination of forces that in recent decades contributed to the chaos and massive citizen discontent that helped give birth to these groups in the first place. This trend is part of the reason political violence has been expanding across our entire region for the past 40 years or so and has become a common means of expression by the four major actors in our lands: na-

nities and Challenges in the MENA Region, in *The Arab World Competitiveness Report 2011-2012*, October 2011, p. 42-67, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/arab-world-competitiveness-report-2011-2012>.

¹² Michael Kaplan, "Arab Views on ISIS: Support for Islamic State Group in Middle East, North Africa Is Low and Dropping, New Poll Suggests", in *International Business Times*, 22 December 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/node/2236993>.

tional governments, opposition and sub-state organizations, foreign governments, and small terrorist and criminal groups. Along with our polarization and fragmentation has come our continued militarization.

Our ruling establishments and their foreign backers consistently ignored these and other glaring signs of social disequilibrium and mass citizen discontent across the Arab region in the past half-century. The most dangerous consequence of this has probably been the chaos that allowed ISIS to arise. Now that it is being fought and will likely be broken up, this may be a good time to look back and consider the underlying discontent and disparities that caused so many Arabs to join or support it. The ISIS “state” may soon be broken, but those underlying factors that gave birth to it remain untouched; in fact, they are likely worsening across the region, especially sectarian tensions and the lack of economic opportunities.

The many and varied reasons why tens of thousands of people from the Arab world joined ISIS,¹³ while millions of others looked on it with some tacit approval, provide a fairly accurate agenda for the political, social, and economic reforms that we must undertake in our Arab societies to finally overcome this continuing phase of violence, fragmentation, warfare, and extremism. The broad categories of reasons people join or support ISIS include: lack of jobs and economic opportunity; lack of citizen rights to participate politically in society; ordinary people feeling they are mistreated by their own power structure, and that poor and rich people live according to different rules; a sense among many that their societies are lawless and corrupt, and therefore people can be robbed, exploited, jailed, or beaten up at will in their own country; the rising cost of living that allows only the wealthy to live a normal life; lack of bread, water, electricity, and other basic services; people feeling their societies do not respect Islamic traditions and values; and many other political, social, and economic grievances that have only increased in recent decades.

¹³ Rami G. Khouri, “Military Responses Alone Will Not Defeat ISIL”, in *Al Jazeera America*, 15 November 2015, <http://alj.am/gy3l>.

In the eyes of desperate young men, the ISIS experience often seems to solve all their problems – getting work, living in a safe environment, joining a stable social order and a community of people who think like them, and being part of a group of companions who work and live together for a common cause, all in the service of God’s command. The many different political, social, and economic reasons people join or support ISIS underscore the legacy of mismanagement, inequity, and deprivation in the Arab world that we need to address in order gradually to fix the problems in our societies and return to a normal condition of statehood – where citizens matter, and the governed and the governing agree on a rule book for managing statehood and sovereignty via a social contract to foster the sustained economic growth, opportunity, and stability desired by all.

ISIS will only disappear when the driving forces in society that have generated support for it are reformed and removed, which will take decades. The tragic irony today is that the current drive to defeat ISIS in Mosul and Raqqa is being conducted by the same two forces that inadvertently created ISIS – autocratic Arab conservative regimes with their armies, and Western militarism. American and British militarism in Iraq and radicalized Arabs in Arab government jails were critical factors that helped to create ISIS; they fostered mass discontent and resentful, radicalized individuals who sought revenge and created other Islamist militant groups in the decades before ISIS, like Al-Qaeda, Gamaa Islamiya, Al-Shabaab, and a dozen others. Ending this ugly recent legacy requires that we start acknowledging and redressing the many imbalances and deficiencies in the Arab world that are captured both in the ten early warning signs I mentioned above and in the many factors in people’s lives that have led them to join or at least appreciate ISIS.¹⁴

This effort will require decades to reach fruition. Unless we start

¹⁴ Kourosh Ziabari interview with Rami G. Khouri, “ISIS, An Important Wake-up Call about Arab World’s Problems and Deficiencies”, in *Iran Review*, 15 June 2016, <http://www.iranreview.org/content/Documents/ISIS-An-Important-Wake-up-Call-about-Arab-World-s-Problems-and-Deficiencies.htm>.

on this path, we will only find ourselves in a few decades noting many more than these ten early warning signs in modern history that I suggest we either ignored or failed to effectively address; if that happens, the Arab region will probably continue to rip itself apart through violence, extremism, intolerance, and foreign militarism. We reached the difficult condition in which we find ourselves today largely due to the poor decisions of intemperate Arab and foreign officials, combined with the inability of activists, social movements, civil society, and other political and social forces in society to address the problems and threats that repeatedly reared their heads. We can exit this situation by making better policy decisions, respecting the equal rights of all citizens, and allowing those same citizens to participate meaningfully in the daily activities and occasional shared decisions that define the direction of our national path.