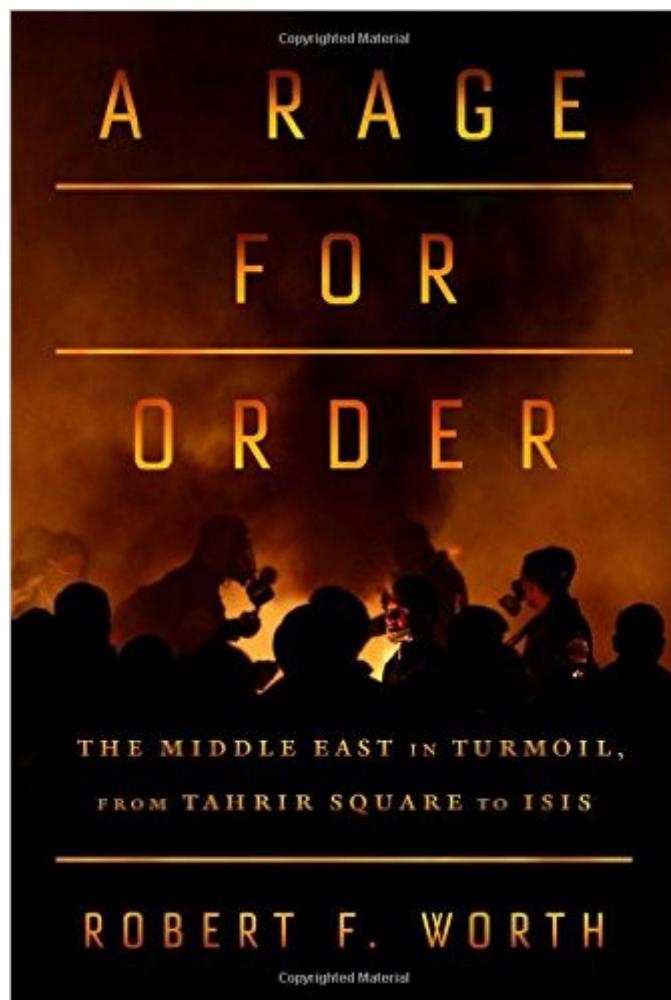


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# A Rage For Order: The Middle East In Turmoil, From Tahrir Square To ISIS



## **Synopsis**

The definitive work of literary journalism on the Arab Spring and its troubled aftermathIn 2011, a wave of revolution spread through the Middle East as protesters demanded an end to tyranny, corruption, and economic decay. From Egypt to Yemen, a generation of young Arabs insisted on a new ethos of common citizenship. Five years later, their utopian aspirations have taken on a darker cast as old divides reemerge and deepen. In one country after another, brutal terrorists and dictators have risen to the top. A Rage for Order is the first work of literary journalism to track the tormented legacy of what was once called the Arab Spring. In the style of V. S. Naipaul and Lawrence Wright, the distinguished New York Times correspondent Robert F. Worth brings the history of the present to life through vivid stories and portraits. We meet a Libyan rebel who must decide whether to kill the Qaddafi-regime torturer who murdered his brother; a Yemeni farmer who lives in servitude to a poetry-writing, dungeon-operating chieftain; and an Egyptian doctor who is caught between his loyalty to the Muslim Brotherhood and his hopes for a new, tolerant democracy. Combining dramatic storytelling with an original analysis of the Arab world today, A Rage for Order captures the psychic and actual civil wars raging throughout the Middle East, and explains how the dream of an Arab renaissance gave way to a new age of discord.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Worth is amazing. Great reporting, great storytelling. A true example of literary journalism at its best. Small quibble: the book picks up at the start of the Arab Spring without giving a lot of details as

to what caused it in the first place. Oh, sure, there were lots of people being repressed etc. but, you know, nobody complained before the downturn of the Middle Eastern economy. Start with the price of oil. We think it's repressive regimes versus Islamic fundamentalists and greater and greater factionalism, but these are symptoms. The area is an economic disaster. Petitt's book, "The Crucible of Global War: and the Sequence that is Leading back to It," covers this nicely in the chapter on the Middle East. Again, small quibble. I don't think it was Worth's intention to uncover the reasons so much as report on the effects. And in that, this book is priceless.

No one should venture an opinion about the Middle East until reading this book - and several others too. The complexities of the Middle East are such that it takes time and determination and access to journalists like Robert F. Worth to get the picture. I recommend this book in the hopes that it will inform and educate.

Historians are fond of advancing the notion that no major event in human affairs can be fully understood until many years later, when the major actors have passed from the scene and long-suppressed archival records finally come to light. Journalists sometimes dispute this contention, citing their eyewitness accounts and face-to-face interviews with players large and small. Though I'm fond of history and read a good deal of it, I'm sometimes tempted to side with the journalists, if only because contemporary conditions may be best understood by contemporaries. Robert F. Worth's new postmortem on the Arab Spring, *A Rage for Order*, is a case in point. The Arab Spring and the disorder it spawned Shifting from Tunisia to Egypt to Libya, Syria, and Yemen, Worth's account of developments in the Middle East beginning in 2011 introduces us to a series of fascinating individuals whose stories illustrate the intimate realities that together comprise what we sum up in shorthand as the "Arab Spring." It's a finely textured portrait of the region, and profoundly sad. In *A Rage for Order*, you'll meet two Syrian women, one Sunni, the other Alawite. Close friends in their youth, they gradually grow apart under the pressures of the increasingly violent civil war. Worth sees the tragedy here and elsewhere in the region, explaining that this great battle between Sunni and Shiite was really just a cynical power struggle between the region's two biggest oil producers, Saudi Arabia and Iran, who fed their people sectarian slogans the way you might feed amphetamines to a tired boxer. You'll also meet the two remarkable old men, bitter enemies for decades in the turbulent opposition politics of Tunisia, who swallow their differences to force a moderate compromise on their followers, ensuring peace for their nation. You'll meet a defector from

ISIS and read his tale of favoritism and corruption within the Islamic State. And you'll learn the little-understood history of the Alawites who rule Syria under the iron thumb of their leader, Bashar al-Asaad. This is history in the making, well told. In summing up his story in the book's final paragraph, Worth writes: "The protesters of 2011 had dreamed of building new countries that would confer genuine citizenship and something more: karama, dignity, the rallying cry of all the uprisings. When that dream failed them, many gave way to apathy or despair, or even nostalgia for the old regimes they had assailed. But some ran headlong into the seventh century in search of the same prize." About the author Robert F. Worth's bio on his publisher's website reads as follows: "Robert F. Worth spent fourteen years as a correspondent for The New York Times, and was the paper's Beirut bureau chief from 2007 until 2011. He is a frequent contributor to The New York Times Magazine and The New York Review of Books. He has twice been a finalist for the National Magazine Award. Born and raised in Manhattan, he now lives in Washington D.C."

If you didn't know anything about the order of events that have led up to Isis and the craziness in the middle east, then this is the book to read. It was a recommend from Fareed Zakaria, and is well worth the read to fully understand the process that has led to the current debacle there. Highly recommend.

Trying to understand the conflicts going on in the Middle-East (from a conflict resolution framework) was my motive for reading this book. It was recommended by Fareed Zakaria on GPS. The style of writing is to cover the post-Arab Spring chaos by delving into the personal stories of a dozen or so main characters in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. The impression conveyed through the personal sagas is that, despite the differing histories of specific countries, these are societies that never developed a strong culture of conflict resolution. The tendency to amplify conflicts by "factionalizing them" is the constant pattern throughout. The factional boundaries can be tribal, religious, or political. It makes me very nervous to see the way modern news media (e.g., Al Jazeera) amplify conflict along the lines of race, ethnicity, religion or gender. Though Forest Worth doesn't dwell on the role of digital media in fanning the flames of conflict, a conclusion supported by the anecdotes supports the theory that unmoderated social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) are playing the role of flammable accelerant. Why? Partisans can use the power of social media to disseminate polemic information, much of it deceptive and propagandistic, as a token of factional allegiance. In the "old days" where news passed through a filter of professional journalistic

objectivity, and came at a much slower daily pace (1 hour per day), it was much easier to maintain social and political cohesion. The internet turns out to be a polemecist's weapons vault. While I did get a more detailed "forensic" analysis of how conflict brews in this era, I believe Worth has largely downplayed the environmental and demographic root causes of turmoil in this region. I had studied the population pyramids for these countries in the CIA Factbook prior to reading this book. For instance, I was aware that overpopulation (6,7,8 children per family) still plagues much of the Arabian Peninsula. Syria has taken some steps to moderate family size, while Yemen has taken no steps and stuffs 28 million into a desert nation the size of Wyoming. The author seems aware of the water crisis in all Middle-East nations -- the underground aquifers are near exhaustion, and many farmers have given up and moved to the cities. Food prices are inflating rapidly. With half the population below the age of 27, these Arab societies are not able to offer young people life paths that lead to secure adulthood. Many teens go off the rails, and loss of hope is rampant. ISIS and the other militant factions are able to put these young men in situations where they are actually being counted on to do something, even if it means blowing themselves up. I didn't get any specifics from this book to indicate that Arabic culture is inherently conflict-prone. I wish he had covered this angle better. My conclusion on this question is that, a better root cause explanation is lack of effective rule-of-law-with-policing. In a peaceful society, the lid that keeps violence from igniting a forest fire of feuding is the law, effective policing and the judicial system. Now we're getting close to paydirt. It turns out that all these countries lack an independent law-enforcement and judiciary, i.e. the police and mukharabat (intelligence services) are extensions of the all-powerful leader, the sheik, or warlord. Injustice is therefore doled out on a wide scale. Indeed, something as unintentional as an auto-accident, or cattle jumping their fences can lead to nasty run-ins with the local strongman and his henchmen. There are no requirements that police be uniformed. There are no police reports. This makes possible "private security forces" with no legitimacy. You see now the elements lacking that fuel primate- instinctual rule-of-the-jungle social organization, escalating injustices, and revenge acts. You get a society where you can tell a man is lying when his lips are moving. There is no standard of objective truth. Information is that which it is in my interest for you to believe. Now, overlay instant publishing power in individual hands thanks to Silicon Valley, and you have the Arab Spring and its spiral of continuing disorder. As a systems analyst, I'd liken it to a nuclear reaction -- the individual particles keep colliding and there are insufficient absorbing materialsto put the brakes on. What about Islam? The book is fairly clear that the populations do not trust Islamists to dispatch the law enforcement responsibility. The aspect of Islamic orthodoxy that allows for demonization (labelling your adversary as kafir) leading to initiating violence is a very serious obstacle to conflict

resolution. It leads to the question: Can men and women schooled in orthodox Islam ever escape the scourge of polemical thought? Can the egocentric defensiveness be broken down? The Tunisia story paints a picture similar to Turkey, where European ideas of conflict resolution have semi-permeated the old feudalistic thought-patterns baked into Salafist Islam. If you know the story of Muhammed, then you know that he created the Moslem religion hoping to civilize behavior in 6th century Arabia, where feuding clans, sexual slavery of children, and murderous rampages were the societal norms he was trying to challenge. So, it's a mistake to think that sociopathic behavior in Arab culture comes from Islam. You get the sense from the characters in the book that, while Westerners might have a hard time sorting out benign Islam (versions that are compatible with Western notions of human rights), the secular people living in the Middle-East easily have the expertise to reform Islam -- and given the power to do so, they will. If I were a public policy designer, these would be my policy recommendations to gradually bring order to these nations:

- family planning - use PSAs and subsidized b.c. to convince people that peace and prosperity will elude them until family size is brought down to replacement level
- educate all youth for conflict resolution - internalize the skills and practices through group conflict exercises
- CJS development - adopt best practices of fair and honest policing & judiciary -- uniforms, badges and training, body cams, accountability systems
- Reformation of Islam - quash Salafist, Wahabbist, and other apocalyptic-paranoid strains. Secularize all mosques and schools.

It's not just the Middle-East...the exact same dystopia is metastasizing in Africa. The population pyramids are a dead giveaway. Internecine warfare and environmental collapse are entirely predictable. So, what are leading nations like the USA doing to prevent these future calamities? Why wait for things to go nuclear? Wouldn't it be humane to erect obstacles to out-migration now (via immigration policy unfavorable to overpopulating nations), so that leaders of these overpopulating nations know that the West will not open its arms to refugees resulting from irresponsible population and environmental policy? Small policy adjustments taken in the West in 2018 would seem to be cheap and effective means for preventing widespread disorder decades from now. Shouldn't we be smart enough to consider them? For, in the end, the people trapped in this cycle of despair want the same thing every person wants....order, predictability, justice, prosperity. "The Rage for Order" sets the table for serious discussion of how people in the developed nations can better design foreign policy to help our Arab friends (and African) evolve their way forward to a good life that they can sustain. To be successful at this, we have to get good at root cause analysis. This book is accurate and penetrating enough to advance that root cause search, when combined with other sources.

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