

Nehad Ismail takes a critical look at "Syria Burning - ISIS and the Death of the Arab Spring", by Charles Glass.

Since the eruption of the Arab Spring in 2011 a plethora of books flooded the scene. Most of them offered different analytical opinions to explain the reasons for the uprisings, citing the rise of the social media such as Facebook and Twitter as the motivating engine behind the uprisings. This suggests a strong secular movement by young people who are fed up with the status quo. But what happened in practice was the rapid rise of Islamic movements which hijacked the protests. Instead of demanding freedom and democracy they demanded the application of Sharia Law the Islamic penal code. The rise of DAESH/ ISIS has undermined the Arab Spring and tarnished the image of the revolution thus benefiting the Assad's regime at least temporarily.

The war the Syrian regime is waging against his people and the rebel groups not only destroyed the country, but caused the death of 250,000 and the displacement of millions of Syrians. It is estimated some 9 million Syrians have been uprooted. All the signs now are the regime is retreating and losing grounds to the rebels. The Assad regime is now appealing to Iran for military help to defend Damascus. The regime still hold large parts of the coastal areas, but has lost substantially in the north and the east of the country, now under the control of the Islamic fundamentalist groups ISIS and the Nusra Front.

Charles Glass's book "Syria Burning" is an eye opener for readers unfamiliar with the realities of Syria. The Levant that Charles Glass loved has gone for ever. He has known and reported from Syria for many years. This book is a timely reminder that the Arab Spring is still an unfinished business and Syria is its main focus.

Whilst Bashar al-Assad is desperately trying to cling to the remaining territories on the coast, the rebels seem to be having the upper hand in the rest of the country and Assad is retreating.

But we must not ignore the collusion that exists between the Assad regime and DAESH. This is most obvious in Raqqa, Deir Ezzur and at the time of writing this review in Aleppo. According to some reports even Palmyra which fell to ISIS in May 2015 was abandoned by the regime without a fight.

You can help noticing that Glass has some sympathy for the regime. For example Glass considers it a miscalculation by the US and European governments for making Assad's departure a condition of any negotiated settlement. Charles argue that was a miscalculation.

Never-the-less "Syria Burning" is a passionate study of the fall-out from the Arab Spring. Some observers refer to it as volcano. Glass writes as an insider in the middle of the unfolding tragedy unlike arm-chair observers doing their research on the internet. Glass is not new on the Syrian scene he wrote before about Syria, He wrote books and dozens of articles about the subject.

The Arab Spring in Syria turned sour right from the start. The regime resorted to military action against the demonstrators Assad himself admitted in a TV interview that the uprising was unarmed in the first 6 month.

I agree with Glass that the regime miscalculated thinking the security crackdown in the summer of 2011 would end the protests once and for all. The regime was wrong. On the other hand the rebels and their backers thought they would bring down the regime in months but after over 4 years of bloodshed the revolution has failed to shift it. What is clear in my view is that Bashar Al Assad is prepared to sacrifice 2 million Syrians to cling to power. The West and the Arab world have also miscalculated the regime's capacity to survive. The backing of Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and other militias have helped Assad to survive.

Even DAESH brutalities have helped Assad. It was fighting the rebels thus reducing the pressure on

Assad and its extreme brutalities have indirectly enhanced the image of Assad who exploited their practices to tell the world you can either have DAESH or me.

Bashar al Assad's use of chemical weapons (Sarin and chlorine gases) are well documented. President Obama's numerous redlines have been violated dozens of times and no action was taken. This has encouraged Assad to continue his military campaign against his own people. The dropping of barrel bombs on towns and residential areas has been a regime's favourite. The curious thing not a single barrel was dropped over DAESH positions.

No doubt Glass loves Syria and the Syrian culture. You can detect a strand of sympathy to Assad in his book. Glass is obviously against the toppling of Assad. In recent interviews discussing Syrian Burning Glass was critical of the roles of Turkey and Saudi Arabia in supporting the rebels. I wish he was equally critical of Iran, Russia and the Syrian regime itself.

As for DAESH there is strong evidence to suggest that the regime colluded with it. As recently as early June, the U.S. embassy in Damascus accused the Syrian regime of providing air assistance to DAESH through intensifying strikes on the areas held by Syrian rebel factions east and north of the city of Aleppo in the north of Syria.

As for the secular democratic opposition Glass laments the fact that extremists and Islamist hijacked the revolution. Yes Assad released hundreds of Al-Qaeda prisoners and other Islamic extremists at the beginning of the revolution knowing they will join the revolution so the regime could claim it is fighting terrorism.

The Obama administration refused to arm the FSA, blocked attempts by Turkey and Saudi Arabia to provide anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons, and refused the imposition of No Fly Zone.

I agree with the author completely that neither side is strong enough to defeat the other.

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