Book Review

The 2011 Libyan uprisings and the struggle for the post-Qadhafi future

Jason Pack (ed.)
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Libya experienced a bumpy regime change during the Arab Spring. Qadhafi's rule was ended solely with an external intervention. *The 2011 Libyan Uprisings and the Struggle for the Post-Qadhafi Future*, edited by Jason Pack, searches the dynamics of the 2011 Libyan Revolution. The book consists of an introduction, seven chapters and an afterword. Each chapter in the book deals with a different dimension of the 2011 Revolution. Libya, an interesting country in many respects, witnessed a unique revolution and transition process in the Arab Spring. Jason Pack presents a new explanation of the Libyan Revolution in the introduction of the book. According to Pack, although the revolts and reform originated from the centre in the other Middle Eastern and North African cases, 'the Libyan 2011 uprisings witnessed two such cycles, as "peripheral" Benghazi temporarily conquered the center' (p. 10). During Qadhafi's rule, the Libyan distribution of power was unbalanced and shaped within Qadhafi's inner circle at the centre. The discontent at the periphery led to a revolt and the toppling Qadhafi.

In Chapter 1, George Joffé analyses the roots of the Libyan Revolution in terms of the political *Jamahiriyya* system since the 1969 military coup. He also draws attention to the role of Qadhafi's family, tribal and religious practices to provide the background to the 2011 Revolution. Chapter 2, by Yousesef Mohammed Sawani, offers a 'continuity and change' explanation of the Revolution based on 'perpetual dynamics' such as tribalism, regionalism, religion and oil. In Chapter 3, Ronald Bruce St John introduces the economic opportunities of the post-Qadhafi era. He emphasises the importance of the hydrocarbon sector in addition to oil and gas revenues for Libya. Qadhafi's regime used brutal repression against protestors during the revolt. In this sense, the Libyan Revolution was only achieved through an external intervention. Richard Northern – British Ambassador to Libya between the years 2010 and 2011 – and Jason Pack survey the effect of external powers and actors (for example, NATO, Western powers and non-NATO member Arab states) on the Libyan Revolution in Chapter 4. They analyse the diplomatic attempts in the early phase of intervention, UN Security Council resolutions and coalition forces' attacks.

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They especially highlight the importance of military intervention in toppling Qadhafi, and the challenges to state building efforts in the post-Qadhafi era.

The last three chapters of the book (5, 6 and 7) display a valuable analysis of dynamics in terms of tribalism, the role of the Southern part of country, and Islamism for the Libyan Revolution. These chapters explore the unique Libyan structure that is based on tribes, religion, localism and their roles in terms of political mobilisation and decision-making processes. In the afterword, Lisa Anderson argues that Libyan politics can be understood as being performed within old-fashioned practices of 'local, tribal, ethnic, and religious struggles' rather than a process of democratisation and institutionalism in the post-Qadhafi era (p. 231). The book puts forward an effective explanation of the 2011 Libyan Revolution in all its dimensions that is accessible to both scholars and students. As the book rightly argues Libya suffers from a weak, un-institutionalised legal central authority. Moreover, Libya's failure in state-building in the post-Qadhafi era led to a *de facto* two-government state structure involving uncontrolled rebel groups.

As mentioned above, Libya is the unique example that experienced an external intervention during the Arab Spring. In this sense the book also examines the external actors' roles in the Libyan Revolution. In terms of the United Kingdom (UK), the book illustrates the Libyan case as the 'first series of international crises' for the Cameron government because it was more complicated issue than the cases of Egypt and Tunisia (p. 119). The book claims that contrary to the Blair and Brown governments' approach, 'the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government adopted a firm line with the Libyan regime, when it came to power in May 2010. It made warmer diplomatic relations with Libya conditional on progress in outstanding bilateral disputes dating back to the 1980's' (p.119). While the book empathizes that the 'economic considerations did not drive the UK government's interest in intervention' (p. 120), it also stresses two lessons for British politics following the Libyan uprising. First, policymakers should be more careful about the statements in terms of unconfirmed information (the UK's foreign minister William Hague's statement about Qadhafi's left Libya in spite of the lack of real). And second, as the UK's liaison team was arrested and detained in Libya in March, the government and security planners should coordinate more with local authorities on deploying a liaison team or military force (the National Transitional Council – NTC – in Libyan case).

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